

NATURALISM IN THE NOVELS
OF THEODORE DREISER

By

CAROLYN FRAZIER BLAKELY

Bachelor of Arts
Arkansas A. M. and N. College
Pine Bluff, Arkansas
1957

Master of Arts
Atlanta University
Atlanta, Georgia
1964

Submitted to the Faculty of the
Graduate College of the
Oklahoma State University
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for
the Degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
May, 1984



NATURALISM IN THE NOVELS
OF THEODORE DREISER

Thesis Approved:

W. M. ...

Thesis Adviser

...

Thomas H. Ward

Jessamine Lecker

Neil R. Luetke

Norman J. Durham

Dean of the Graduate College

PREFACE

This study is primarily an examination of six novels by Theodore Dreiser in an attempt to assess his importance to the naturalistic movement in America. I contend that he is significant to the movement and that he is unique in his optimistic and sensitive renditions of the human condition.

I examine the changes in Dreiser's naturalism from positions of identification, sympathy and bewilderment about the meaninglessness of life, to belief in the power of the superman to exert his will to combat the ills of society, to a final indictment of the whole of American society and show that the individual's ultimate satisfaction is in inner, spiritual beauty and peace.

I extend my sincere gratitude to everyone in the English Department at Oklahoma State University who helped to prepare me to do this study. I am especially grateful to my major adviser and thesis director, Dr. Mary Rohrberger, for her encouragement, expert guidance, and faith in me.

I also appreciate the efforts and advisement of the other committee members, Dr. Janemarie Luecke, Dr. Tom Warren, Dr. Edward Walkiewicz, and Dr. Neil Luebke.

Further, I am extremely thankful to Shirley Jacob and

Celeste Oliver Nichols for their friendship and assistance.

Special thanks and love are extended to my grandmother, Mrs. Dossie Howard, my children Karen and Kevin, and particularly to my husband, Neal, without whose love, patience, understanding and support I could not have completed this study.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. INTRODUCTION	1
II. TWO FORERUNNERS OF AMERICAN NATURALISM: FRANK NORRIS AND THEODORE DREISER	22
III. DREISER'S USE OF THE SUPERMAN	62
IV. <u>AN AMERICAN TRAGEDY</u> : AN ACCOUNT OF ONE MAN'S FUTILE PURSUIT OF THE AMERICAN DREAM	91
V. SUMMARY	119
WORKS CONSULTED	127

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

When Theodore Dreiser died in 1945 at the age of seventy-four, his contemporaries whose audience he had helped to create in writing saluted him as the father of American naturalism. His career illustrates not only the slow emergence of naturalism in American fiction but also the impact of this new trend on the established form of the novel. The earlier novel, portraying high born characters possessing refined traits, had presented, heretofore, only a partially accurate account of reality as permitted by the moral canons of the early part of the century. The coming of naturalism, then, was certain to affect that tradition in the novel and to redirect the progress of contemporary literature.

Scholars seldom agree wholeheartedly on definitions for the term "naturalism" and include in the varying definitions references to its artistic technique and its intellectual content. Referring to naturalism as either a literary group, school, movement, period, method, technique, or style, Haskell M. Block describes naturalism in Naturalistic Triptych:

As an attitude, naturalism may be considered a constant element in human experience, free of dependence on any particular time and place, and asserting a view of both art and life that may be held not only by writers but by anyone. As a method, naturalism is generally regarded as an instrument and a procedure derived from the natural sciences and applied to literature Finally, as a literary technique or style, naturalism may be viewed as a distinct way of ordering the elements of an art form.¹

Naturalism, as a literary concept, pertains to a method of literary composition that aims at a detached, scientific objectivity in the treatment of the individual. It is more inclusive and less selective than realism and holds to the philosophy of determinism. It conceives of the individual as being controlled by instincts and passions or by social and economic environments. Because, in this view, one's free will is limited, the naturalistic writer does not attempt to make moral judgments and, as a determinist, tends toward pessimism. M. H. Abrams contends that naturalism stems from mid-nineteenth century Darwinian biology, and says in A Glossary of Literary Terms that it places the individual, a creature void of a soul or any other link with a religious or spiritual world, totally in the order of nature. A person, then, is nothing

more than a higher form of animal whose destiny is determined by two natural forces, heredity and environment.

Abrams continues:

He inherits his personal traits and his compulsive instincts, especially hunger and sex, and he is subject to the social and economic forces in the family, the class, and the milieu into which he is born. . . . Naturalistic writers tend to choose characters who exhibit strong animal drives . . . and who are victims both of their glandular secretions within and of sociological pressures without.²

Although many scholars describe naturalism as a celebration of the gross and brutal aspects of the individual, many of the paintings and books of the early naturalists in America portray young people obsessed with ideals and visions who are terrified by the fear that those ideals are unattainable in a modern world. They struggle with the recurring image of the unknowable and struggle to humanize a strange world. As an outgrowth of nineteenth-century scientific thought, the naturalistic movement follows in general the biological determinism of Darwin or the economic and historical determinism of Marx. It is also influenced by French naturalism in which Emile Zola emphasizes biological determinism and Flaubert stresses economic determinism.

Although Zola denies having invented the term

"naturalism" and even denies that there is a naturalistic school, any attempts at a critical analysis of the naturalistic novel must start with him. With the publication in 1880 of his "Manifesto of Naturalism," Le Roman Experimental, Zola underscores his interest in naturalism. Later, in Therese Raquin, he insists that his aim is a scientific one:

In the preface to Therese Raquin, he describes his central figures as 'human beasts,' totally devoid of free will, 'dragged along each act of their life by the fatalities of their flesh.' From the beginning of his theoretical formulations, the analogy between the novelist and the scientist and the insistence on a thorough-going biological and social determinism in human events are the foundations of Zola's naturalism.³

Block argues here that perceiving his treatment of reality in a vein different from that of other French novelists, Zola reinforces the influence of milieu by stressing the austere determinism of the rules of heredity as held by contemporary biologists.

Naturalistic philosophy, then, takes many of its characteristics from Zola and embraces a pessimistic outlook on human fate. According to Malcolm Cowley in The Literary Situation, it holds, in its pessimism, that there is no earthly or heavenly reward for moral actions, nor any

punishment for sin or vice. It is rebellious and defiant at the same time that it professes to be objective in that the author is at liberty to choose a subject deliberately, observe it, and present the results in a dispassionate manner. Being inclusive, naturalism attempts to present the whole panoramic view of life. It appeals to the senses of sight and smell rather than to the sense of hearing. As a result, the philosophy does not stress sound or style but stresses visual and odoriferous things rather than the writer's impression of these things. Finally, it magnifies forces, crowds, and conditions, and diminishes persons.⁴

Norman Foerster, in American Poetry and Prose, suggests that the naturalist, in his scientific objectivity, is expected to "operate on the characters, the passions, the human and social data in the same way that the chemist and physicist operate on inanimate beings and as the physiologist operates on living beings"⁵ in order to give the reader a scrap of human life in an impersonal way.

Naturalism, including in its subject matter the primitive, the instinctive, the ugly, the mean, and the vicious, entered the American literary stream with the publication in 1893 of Stephen Crane's Maggie: A Girl of the Streets and in 1899 of Frank Norris's McTeague. Norris expands on Zola's de-emphasis of the single individual by underscoring his belief that no one is important in the total scheme of things and that only force exists and is consequential. In novels of this type the principal characters are usually

either very simple and non-intellectual or sophisticated and neurotic. The techniques include the use of impressionism or expressionism, objectivity or autobiography through self-analysis, a slice of life, and stream-of-consciousness in the naturalist's attempt to render the human being faithfully. One of the objectives of naturalism is an examination, from a scientific perspective, of human nature and actions in both pleasant and unpleasant circumstances.

Earlier American writers had been affected by the prevailing influence of French naturalism and had already begun to experiment as early as the 1890s. Yoshinobu Hakutani, in Young Drieser: A Critical Study, credits Stephen Crane and Frank Norris as numbering among those experimenters but explains that earlier than that even Oliver Wendell Holmes had written Elsie Venner (1816), a novel that was an inquiry into the pathology of the human will. That novel revealed Holmes's uncertainty about the theory of heredity. A little later, Richard Dugdale's The Jukes (1877) examined the environmental and hereditary conditions that shaped the will and suggested that if the laws of behavioral causation were known, then human destiny could be controlled. Therefore, there is evidence that writers were concerned, even before the 1890s, with the limits of the individual's capacity to make moral choices and to control his life. Although there have been varied "visions" of this literary technique, they have a genuine vitality and a particular legacy that are inherent in their

specific depictions of the individual's personal relationship to environment and heredity. All of these writers attempt to reflect the concrete and observable diffusions of the individual and society by translating data about human nature and conduct into a comprehensible and observable form.⁶

Against this background of literary revolution stands Theodore Dreiser who belongs to this changing world, but who also stands apart from it. He has been characterized by Vernon L. Parrington in Main Currents in American Thought as "the most detached and keenly observant of all our writers, a huge figure of ungainly proportions--a heavy-footed peasant with unslaked curiosity and a boundless pity, who is determined to examine this animal called man and portray him truthfully."⁷ His work exemplifies various moods which begin in awe and wonder and end in compassionate acceptance of the forces of nature.

Dreiser trudges straight to his objective, destroying the established traditions and conventionalities of American society, delving into secret places, hiding nothing, ashamed of nothing, apologizing for nothing, and offering no justifications nor judgments. He possesses a profound imagination that allows him to face things as they are without seeking shelter within the realm of the ideal. His frank revelation of the hypocrisy of people does not make a cynic of him, for he does not judge, praise, or condemn. He is content to permit the characters to develop without

criticizing their actions and without teaching a moral lesson. William Hastings states that this type of naturalism "has the merit of breaking with outworn shibboleths and taboos"⁸ and therefore offering a new method of representing reality.

A study of naturalism as Dreiser subscribes to the concept could be approached through an examination of the kinds of experiences that he had in his formative years, the philosophical speculations that grew from his experiences and reading, and his ability to turn autobiography into fiction. According to Henry Hardwick in The Foregrounds of American Literature, Dreiser illustrates the tendency in literature for writers to use their books as mirrors in which to dramatize themselves, whether out of conceit or to achieve, in defiance of the machine age, a definite individuality.⁹

Haskell Block points out that the plot of Dreiser's first novel, Sister Carrie, seems patterned on the elopement of his own sister Emma in 1886 with L. A. Hopkins, a cashier who stole money, as Hurstwood did, from his employer's safe. Block contends further that the story of Jenny Gerhardt is based on the experiences of two of his sisters, and that the hero in The Financier has an actual business tycoon as a model, and finally that Dreiser himself is the model for the character in The Genius:

In addition to employing particular models for

his characters and events, Dreiser based all his books on careful and extensive research. In the course of his long career, he accumulated immense files of materials for his memory and power of recall seem to have been extraordinary.¹⁰

Like others of the many young novelists who were affected by the emphasis on candor and exactitude in art, Dreiser had a newspaper background, and it seems probable that this experience could have affected his concern for delineating facts in his works. He worked for numerous newspapers and magazines, and, noting his naturalistic bent, H. B. Wandell, the editor of the St. Louis Republic, suggested that the young Dreiser read Balzac and Zola. Following that advice, Dreiser delved into Balzac's novels around 1894 and became quite familiar with Zola's philosophy. At this time he may even have read Herbert Spencer's First Principle that discussed the "laws" of nature and Charles Darwin's principles of the struggle for existence and survival of the fittest. He is affected by Balzac, however, and says in A Book About Myself:

Here was one who saw, thought, felt. Through him I saw a prospect so wide that it left me breathless--all Paris, all France, all life through French eyes. Here was one who had a tremendous and sensitive grasp of life, philosophic, tolerant, patient, amused I

knew his characters as well as he did, so magical was his skill. His grand and somewhat pompous philosophical deductions, his easy and off-hand disposition of all manner of critical, social, political, historical, religious problems, the manner in which he assumed as by right of genius intimate and irrefutable knowledge of all subjects, fascinated and captured me as the true method of the seer and the genius. (Book, pp. 411-412)

Dreiser is impressed by Balzac's portrayal of Paris life but more by his insight and skill in conveying life experience.

Dreiser's encounter with Balzac and Zola revealed a number of factors with which he could relate. In his reading of Balzac's Human Comedy Dreiser found that Balzac argued that the individual is the product of his surroundings and developed personal characteristics accordingly. He found too that in his fiction Balzac described in detail externalities such as food people ate, furnishings of houses, and architecture, not to establish reality, but to establish the surroundings as both an extension of personality and a controlling force. He aimed to represent all ranks, professions, arts, and trades, and all phases of manners in the city as well as in the country; he, like Dreiser, exhibited an overinsistence on detail. Dreiser

found, too, in works like Zola's Therese Raquin that Zola also studied the individual in relationship to environment and heredity, but his distinction is that although he professed to be scientifically objective, he also argued that his ultimate intention as a novelist was to correct conditions under which the individual suffered.

Although Dreiser's reading was quite extensive, I find that the literary influences on him were not significant, for he says that the direction of his thinking and theory had already been determined by his earlier experience. His observations of the world were painful but he could not avoid them. At one point, for instance, he reproached Frank Norris for failing to continue with the technique that he used in McTeague. In his Letters he says "Norris wrote McTeague and The Octopus. Then he fell into the hands of the noble Doubleday who converted him completely to The Pit, a bastard bit of romance of the best seller variety."¹¹ He states further that the many writers that he read could not be called influences because "They came too late. Actually though I should put Hardy and Balzac first in that respect for in St. Louis (1892) I was already building plays of a semi-tragic character. My mind just naturally worked that way."¹² Even of Norris he denies any influence: "Sister Carrie was written in the fall, winter, and spring of 1899-1900. I never saw or heard of McTeague or Norris until after the novel had been written and turned in to Harper and Brothers who promptly rejected it with a sharp

slap."¹³

Dreiser's determinism is not violent, for he emphasizes more the cruelty of fate than its ruthlessness. A review of his works reveals that he views people as helpless rather than brutal and believes that they are obsessed more with the complicated power of social and economic machinery than with sheer animal power. In Sister Carrie he comments that the individual is a mere "wisp in the wind" of forces in the universe and that he is frozen in a middle stage in the development of civilization, being part beast no longer completely guided by instinct and part human not yet completely guided by reason:

We see man far removed from the lairs of the jungles, his innate instincts dulled by too near an approach to free-will, his free-will not sufficiently developed to replace his instincts and afford him perfect guidance. He is becoming too wise to hearken always to instincts and desires; he is still too weak to always prevail against them. As a beast, the forces of life aligned him with them; as a man, he has not yet wholly learned to align himself with the forces. In this intermediate stage he wavers--neither drawn in harmony with nature by his own free-will. He is even as a wisp in the wind, moved by every breath of passion, acting now by his will and now by his instincts, erring with one,

only to retrieve by the other, failing by one,
only to rise by the other--a creature of in-
calculable variability.¹⁴

The conclusion of this passage illustrates what helps to distinguish Dreiser's form of naturalism from that of the earlier naturalists for he does admit free-will, although it is limited and frequently suppressed. Dreiser closes on a clear note of optimism:

We have the consolation of knowing that evolution is ever in action, that the ideal is a light that cannot fail. He will not forever balance this [sic] between good and evil. When this jangle of free-will instinct shall have been adjusted, when perfect understanding has given the former the power to replace the latter entirely, man will no longer vary. The needle of understanding will yet point steadfast and unwavering to the distinct pole of truth. (p. 71)

In delineating his own particularized naturalism, Dreiser uses the city rather than the wilderness as his background, and his characters pit their strength against the cunning, greed, and hardness of heart of their fellow beings. Although they face constant adversity, they generally remain dreamers. Both characters in Sister Carrie, Hurstwood and Carrie, are held in a grasp that is more

powerful than their families, and they respond to the lure of the city, a worldly domain to which all dreamers are enticed. Carrie is especially affected:

The approach to the great city for the first time is a wonderful thing. Particularly if it be evening--that mystic period between the glare and gloom of the world when life is changing from one sphere or condition to another. Ah, the promise of the night. What does it not hold for the weary! What old illusion of hope is not here forever! (p. 9)

Dreiser's novels furnish an extensive commentary on the social implications of determinism. Although many critics note the parallels between Dreiser's characters and actual people whom he had known, Henry S. Commager says in The American Mind that

His stories were all morality plays, his characters all but allegorical figures representing not virtue but power and weakness. From Sister Carrie to An American Tragedy the moral is the same: men and women are poor creatures driven by chemical compulsions to act out their folly, fulfill their desires, satisfy their mental and physical appetites.¹⁵

As Charles C. Walcutt indicates in his essay, "The

Three Stages of Theodore Dreiser's Naturalism," Dreiser's awareness of the unstable aspects of human and natural affairs seems to result as much from experience as from his contiguity with literary models or scientific thought. Walcutt contends further, justifiably, that Dreiser's determinism is less forceful because he concentrates more on the enigma, fear, and bewilderment of life than on searching for meanings that might explain and destroy the seemingly inexplicable. He states that Dreiser views science negatively, not as the beneficent guardian of nature, because he has seen too many of the ills of industrialism and the virulence of natural forces. Instead, "life is eternally seeking, striving, throbbing . . . and the pathetic fortunes of people in this cosmos of purposeless change are the main concern of Dreiser's novels."¹⁶

Because of Dreiser's intense concern about life and because he was so persistent in scrutinizing the nature of the individual in his struggle to survive, Dreiser continues to command the interest of many critics. Jack Salzman indicates in his preface to a special issue of Modern Fiction Studies that criticism on Dreiser is "about to open itself to several new approaches" and that "there is indeed a future for Dreiser criticism."¹⁷ Recent scholarship indicates that revived interest in Dreiser by the number of dissertations in the last three years that have either focused on Dreiser specifically or compared him to other American writers and by the number of articles in the

scholarly journals. These accounts are either negative or not related to the thesis of this paper. For example, some of them examine the role of money and wealth in the American novel by using Dreiser's novels as some of the illustrations; another traces the development of the innocent criminal in American fiction; still another looks at Dreiser's novels as the products of a "mature transcendentalist." Worthy of note also is Salzman's earlier thesis in "Dreiser Then and Now" that "Dreiser has become an established academic figure. His literary talent is still a matter of debate, but not his importance in the history of American letters."¹⁸ Previously, many critics have paid tribute to Dreiser as being one of the innovators of American naturalism which gained momentum in the development of the American novel about 1890, but few of these critical examinations have attempted to trace the aspects and elements of Dreiser's adherence to an optimistic form of naturalism through an analysis of a number of his novels.

The basis of this study, then, will be the proposition that Dreiser believes in the power of exterior sociological, mechanistic, behavioristic, and fatalistic forces, as well as internal urges, over human desires. Through an examination of six novels and an explication of naturalistic trends that are in evidence in them, this work will attempt to estimate and assess Dreiser's importance in the naturalistic movement in America by showing that he contributes significantly to this movement through his faithful

renditions of the human condition in a mildly optimistic way and through his sensitivity to the individual. Further, the study aims to pursue the growth of, and changes in, Dreiser's naturalism through those six novels from a position of identification, sympathy, and bewilderment about the meaninglessness and purposelessness of life, to one of belief in the power of the strong or superior being to exert his will to act and combat the ills of society, to one of an indictment of the whole of American society. The final decision is that one must abandon the pursuit of the material in favor of a more fulfilling search for inner, spiritual beauty and peace. It will demonstrate these alterations as they occur in his naturalistic philosophy as he advances to different levels of his literary career and as he contributes a new dimension to American naturalism.

Chapter two will compare Frank Norris's McTeague (1899) and Dreiser's first two novels, Sister Carrie (1900) Jennie Gerhardt (1911). The aim will be to show that initially both Dreiser and Norris were particularly affected by the belief that life is meaningless. Having this basic assumption, Dreiser portrays people as being buffeted about in their attempts to conform to traditional rules of what is proper or fitting which hold them captive while disregarding the value of any extenuating circumstances or conditions. Norris examines people from the same frame of reference, but he offers only an inconsequential amount of alleviation of the distress and adversity. One major

difference between the two novelists seems to be that Dreiser's ultimate outlook is somewhat more optimistic than Norris's.

Through an analysis of The Financier (1912), The Titan (1914), and The Stoic (1947), chapter three will explain Dreiser's apparent portrayal of Nietzsche's idea of the superman and his belief that there are two fundamental ethical types: the weak and the inferior among people and the strong who stand superior to the common masses. Only these strong people, the few rather than the masses, can rise to higher stages and attain the state of the "superman" through their will to obtain power. Oscar Levy contends in The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche that "the Will to Power was the fundamental principle of all life. . . . Nietzsche was struck with the thought that the highest will to live could not find its expression in a miserable 'struggle for existence' but in a will to war, a Will to Power, a will to overpower!"¹⁹

Richard Schacht, in Nietzsche, says that although human beings may have a common human nature they differ in other substantial ways:

Some . . . have it in them to surpass others in various respects, and so constitute at least potential exceptions to the human rule Those endowed with certain capacities others lack . . . represent potentially 'higher' types

in relation to the rest and to the extent that these capacities are cultivated, developed and manifested in their lives, they are held actually to be 'higher' than others.²⁰

Chapter four will deal specifically with An American Tragedy (1925), written after Dreiser embraces the doctrine of socialism. Here he abandons the concept of the superman and criticizes the ills of society and their effect on individuals. It is at this point in his career that he seems to imply that society is culpable because it offers people the illusory dream and denies them the means by which to attain it.

Finally, chapter five will contrast the aspects of naturalism in Dreiser's novels with other selected aspects in Zola and Norris. Here an attempt will be made to assess Dreiser's value to the naturalistic movement in America and to elucidate, not only the differences between his American naturalism and that of the Europeans, but also the distinction between Dreiser's form of naturalism and that of another American writer, Frank Norris.

NOTES

¹ Haskell M. Block, Naturalistic Triptych: The Fictive and the Real in Zola, Mann, and Dreiser (New York: Random House, 1970), p. 4.

² M. H. Abrams, A Glossary of Literary Terms (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1971), p. 142.

³ Block, pp. 6-7.

⁴ Malcolm Cowley, The Literary Situation (New York: The Viking Press, 1955), p. 76.

⁵ Norman Foerster, American Poetry and Prose (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin Company, 1947), p. 1158.

⁶ Yoshinobu Hakutani, Young Dreiser: A Critical Study (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1980), pp. 22-25.

⁷ Vernon L. Parrington, Main Currents in American Thought (Atlanta: National Library Binding Company, 1940), p. 354.

⁸ William Hastings, Syllabus of American Literature (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1941), p. 95.

⁹ Henry Hartwick, The Foreground of American Fiction (New York: American Book Company, 1934), p. 85.

¹⁰ Block, pp. 56-57.

¹¹ Robert Elias, ed., Letters of Theodore Dreiser

(Philadelphia: n.p., 1959), 1, 329.

¹² Letters, 1, 215.

¹³ Letters, 1, 210.

¹⁴ Theodore Dreiser, Sister Carrie (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1957), pp. 70-71. Subsequent references to this work will be to this edition and will be noted parenthetically within the text of this chapter.

¹⁵ Henry S. Commager, The American Mind (Connecticut: American Book Company, 1950), p. 113.

¹⁶ Charles C. Walcutt, "The Three Stages of Theodore Dreiser's Naturalism," PMLA, 55 (1940), 267.

¹⁷ Jack Salzman, ed., Modern Fiction Studies, 23 (1977), 339-40.

¹⁸ Jack Salzman, "Dreiser Then and Now," Journal of Modern Literature, 1 (1971), 422.

¹⁹ Oscar Levy, ed., The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche: The Will to Power, trans. Anthony M. Ludovici (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1909), pp. ix-x.

²⁰ Richard Schacht, Nietzsche (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983), p. 327.

CHAPTER II

TWO FORERUNNERS OF AMERICAN NATURALISM: FRANK NORRIS AND THEODORE DREISER

In its developmental stages, the American novel tended to appeal to a society that stressed good taste and morality, particularly as exhibited in those who were financially secure and who were socially prominent. Anyone who presumed to deviate from this conventional concept of the novel was considered ignoble.

According to Joseph Warren Beach in his essay "The Realist Reaction: Dreiser," wealth and social position are taken for granted by Dreiser's readers. Accompanying these traits are

a certain degree of refinement, an ordered social status and a fixed standard of personal conduct. And all that remains is to plan out the social comedies and sentimental dramas suitable for production on the narrow stage. But Mr. Dreiser was born into a world in which none of these things was established. He was born into it and was himself a part of it.¹

Beach continues to describe the world into which

Dreiser was born as peopled with two kinds of inhabitants: the strong but poor, vulgar, ignorant, and emotionally starved who were bent on earning wealth, culture, love and social esteem; and the weak who desired the same ends but who were less imaginative, less persevering, and less ruthless. He argues further that Dreiser takes issue only with the premise in the genteel novel that there exist in society certain standards which are dominant.²

In 1891 Stephen Crane had dared to confront, in a straightforward manner, the sordid side of life in the slums in Maggie: A Girl of the Streets. Later, and perhaps important in terms of Theodore Dreiser's position as a novelist of the naturalistic mode, Frank Norris wrote McTeague (1899), a novel which dealt with an animalistic and non-intellectual hero upon whom heredity and environment operated mercilessly. A year later, Theodore Dreiser published his first novel, Sister Carrie, in which he too portrayed life as characterized by aimlessness and an absence of discrimination. In this novel, Dreiser exhibits traits of a naturalism that anticipates opposition to the earlier novel of the genteel tradition.

Prior to Dreiser's entrance onto the novelistic scene, Norris was already exhibiting the influence of naturalism. In his attempt to define naturalism, Norris not only experimented with some new ideas but also elucidated some of the basic features of the naturalistic movement in America. In "Frank Norris's Definition of Naturalism" Donald Pizer

argues that Norris grouped realism, romanticism and naturalism into a single realm where naturalism serves as the "transcending synthesis." Norris believed, Pizer continues, that realism did not delve into the innermost depths of life but was the "literature of the normal and representative." On the other hand, romanticism could go beyond the obvious surface of experience itself and arrive at broad generalizations of the essence of life.

Naturalism, as conceived by Norris, resolved the conflict between realism and romanticism by selecting the best from these two modes and by adding one constituent ignored by both . . . a distinction between Accuracy and Truth. Accuracy is fidelity to particular detail; Truth is fidelity to the generalization applicable to a large body of experience. Since a novel may therefore be accurate in its depiction of a segment of life and yet be untrue, Norris inquired what is the source of truth in fiction, if a literal transcription of life itself is inadequate.³

In this discussion of Norris's definition of naturalism, Pizer concludes that those American writers so influenced by such European writers as Zola concentrated more on the contemporary, low, and sensational within an elaborately documented and large thematic framework than did

the Europeans. Although the Americans shared basically the same philosophy, the central ideas were as different from work to work as was the temperament of each author.⁴

While in "Naturalism As Expediency in the Novels of Frank Norris" Bryant N. Wyatt concurs in part with Pizer's conclusion, he does admonish the student of naturalism to be aware of the inconsistencies that appear in Norris's literary tenets. His argument is that Norris produced his critical and theoretical writings while he was also striving to meet journalistic deadlines, thereby accounting for some of the inconsistencies which in no way, however, completely invalidate the worth of his professed artistic beliefs to an understanding of his actual fictional practice.⁵

Stanley Cooperman in "Frank Norris and the Werewolf of Guilt" contends that the scientific determinism attributed to Norris, and to others of the American naturalists, has been too highly praised and that in Norris's case specifically "it is the imposition of Calvinist determinism on the newer scientific material that produced the unique coloration of American naturalism in patterns of romance and brutality, degradation and purity, realism and rhetoric."⁶

Pursuing a different idea, Don D. Walker, in "The Western Naturalism of Frank Norris," examines the notion of "human reversion." Walker believes that nature is in the process of being transformed from the beneficent, benign, good nature known to Cooper and Emerson into the more indifferent nature as conceived by Darwin and Spencer in which

there is no inherent increase in goodness; conversely, a return to nature is a reversion to one's brutish part, and Norris's favorite theme seems to have been "the presence of the brute beneath the veneer of civilization."⁷

Like Dreiser, however, Norris followed the central naturalistic assumption that the individual is an animal who has evolved into some refinements. Whereas Dreiser seems to be more optimistic in his ultimate outlook by allowing some of his characters to succeed to a degree through their own exertions of will, Norris offers little relief from the tragedy surrounding the lives of the major characters in McTeague.

Norris's McTeague portrays in a rather pessimistic, base, and grim manner the deterioration that occurs in the lives of McTeague, the dentist, and his parsimonious wife, Trina. In "The Old Folks of McTeague" William B. Dillingham suggests that the theme of the novel illustrates Norris's belief that chance and instinct are the primary catalytic forces in people's lives. The characters act from instincts which surface and are sharpened by chance happenings. For example, McTeague and Trina meet for the first time because she seeks treatment after accidentally breaking a tooth; they are drawn together by uncontrollable sexual instincts; Trina wins \$5,000.00 in the lottery--chance again--and her instinctive greed is incited, causing her to hoard money without purpose; and McTeague finally yields to the animal instincts awakened within him by the unbearable life that

he is forced to live as he watches Trina succumb to greed. Dillingham argues further that the most significant incident in the novel is Trina's winning the lottery, which incident sets off the decline of Trina and McTeague. This one instance of chance seems to be the nucleus of all of their misfortune. It stimulates the greed in Trina by affording her a brief contact with "wealth" and ultimately provokes the beastly nature of McTeague.⁸ Hence, both characters are doomed to a tragic end.

Although Dreiser stresses the importance of chance and internal urges in the affairs of people, unlike Norris he allows for some relief for some of his characters. They may not be totally fulfilled in the final analysis, but if they are strong, they can achieve some of their goals. Sister Carrie, Dreiser's first novel published in 1900, illustrates his apparent belief that life is without meaning and purpose. He allows his major character, Carrie Meeber, to enjoy fame and comfort. On the other hand, he sentences the other major character, George W. Hurstwood, to suffer the loss of social position, money, self-respect, and even his life. Through Dreiser's handling of the events in which chance rules, these characters are driven by vast inner and outer compulsions over which they have no control, though Carrie proves to have more "strength" than Hurstwood does.

Dreiser's dominant ideas are established in his first two novels. To him, the individual is a mere mechanism not

to be held responsible for overt behavior because of so many forces which affect it. He says in Jennie Gerhardt:

There are natures born to the inheritance of flesh that come without understanding, and that go again without seeming to have wondered why. Life, so long as they endure it, is a true wonderland, a thing of infinite beauty, which could they but wander into it wonderingly, would be heaven enough.

Caged in the world of the material, however, such a nature is almost invariably an anomaly. That other world of flesh into which has been woven pride and greed looks askance at the idealist, the dreamer. If one says it is sweet to look at the clouds, the answer is a warning against idleness. If one seeks to give ear to the winds, it shall be well with his soul, but they will seize upon his possessions. If all the world of the so-called inanimate delay one, calling with tenderness in sounds that seem to be too perfect to be less than understanding, it shall be ill with the body.⁹

A person is only a chemical compound, ignorant and futile in an intricate net of natural forces which are both good and evil. Because conduct is something for which one cannot be held responsible, and since nature itself frowns

upon every human effort to confine it to moral codes, conventions are absurd. Dreiser envisions the universe as a mass of shifting atoms where good and bad exist but where they are, at times, replaced by strong and weak. He attempts to perceive in its emptiness a glimpse of truth; and, failing, he comes from every experience of life with the impression that the world is an insane, elusive, hazy, and mysterious thing where one generates all mischief by vain attempts to tag and restrict the flow of nature by assigning moral codes to it. Coming from poverty, Carrie is not likely to be embraced by an established family; therefore, she must struggle in the realm of an amoral public and take her chances at succeeding in the more fluid world of entertainment where talent is more important than good morals. She learns that lesson early when she, like Trina in *McTeague*, yields to the force of money: "Ah money, money, money! What a thing it is to have" (p. 63).

Dreiser's only conclusion, therefore, is that no conclusions exist for his philosophy, as he states it in Hey-Rub-A-Dub-Dub, is "All we can know is that we cannot know."¹⁰

Dreiser is drawn to life, however, even in its sordidness, dirt, and poverty; he sees it as vibrant, even with the ruthlessness, conflicts, and defeats. The significance that life holds for Dreiser seems not to be the final goal or destination, but rather the magnificence and hugeness. What he sees dazes him because he refuses to use the labels that make life endurable for other people. He stringently

resists the moral classification of life. He believes that people cannot alter their emotions, which are primitive and animal in nature; therefore, "Dreiser dwells on the unhappiness of life; there is little joy . . . and there is little comedy either of ironic tone or eccentric character. But the sources of man's unhappiness are permanent: his conflicting desires, his limitations in power and understanding, the injustice of his sufferings, the apparent meaninglessness of his life, his mortality."¹¹

Sister Carrie reflects Dreiser's own personal experiences with a life of poverty and deprivation, as do a number of his works. Thomas P. Riggio, in Theodore Dreiser: American Diaries 1902-1926, suggests that one of Dreiser's sisters was the model for Carrie Meeber in Sister Carrie and that beyond that

Jennie's tale combined the adventure of more than one Dreiser sister. And Mrs. Gerhardt introduced memories of his mother One of the most memorable characters, Old Gerhardt, is modeled on John Paul Dreiser, the German-born father who, as Dreiser emphasized in his memoirs, instilled in him a lifelong fear of failing and of being poor.¹²

Not without commiseration Dreiser portrays the "rise" and "fall" of Carrie and Hurstwood without presuming to pass any moral judgments. He follows Carrie into Chicago

where she is unsuccessful in acquiring and maintaining a job and depicts the dire circumstances which eventually lead to her moving in with Drouet, a salesman whom she meets on the train as she first enters the city. Although Drouet is characterized as showy, gaudy, uncouth, and rather superficial, he is basically well-intentioned. Dreiser says that "Drouet all the time was conducting himself in a model way for one of his sort" (p. 88). He is further portrayed as

that worthy [who] had his future fixed for him beyond a paraventure. He could not see clearly enough to wish to do differently. He was drawn by his innate desire to act the old pursuing part. He would need to delight himself with Carrie as surely as he would need to eat his heavy breakfast. He might suffer the least rudimentary twinge of conscience in whatever he did, and in just so far as he was evil and sinning. But whatever twinges of conscience he might have would be rudimentary . . . (p. 72)

Drouet is charitable toward Carrie and professes good intentions about marrying her, though he never quite gets around to fulfilling that promise. Carrie becomes, then, a kept woman--a character type certainly not sanctioned and condoned by the writers and readers of the earlier genteel novel. Hence, Malcolm Cowley says in "The Slow Emergence

of Sister Carrie" that readers and critics of Dreiser's day experienced particular aversion to the characters, especially Carrie, not simply because they were "cheap" but also because Dreiser seemed to admire them. This reading audience was accustomed to the attitude that a woman treasured her virtue as she would any jewel and that the punishment for sin was death.

Yet Carrie let herself be seduced without a struggle, yielding first to a traveling salesman, then to Hurstwood, and instead of dying in misery she becomes a famous actress. . . .

Sister Carrie is a direct affront to the standards by which respectable Americans had always claimed to live.¹³

Obviously, the real issue between Dreiser and his critics was not the mere content of Sister Carrie. It concerned, rather, the philosophy of life which the novel implied and the interpretation of human nature which he seemed to portray. Moral and social controls have little or no weight with Dreiser's characters. Ambition, altruism, and other so-called "higher" qualities of humanity are not even tacitly acknowledged as ideals in this novel. Instead, people appear to be moved as automations by some inner compulsion, such as sexual desire or the will to survive. Sister Carrie appears, then, to be a thoroughly naturalistic novel interpreting life rigidly in terms of

biology. The tone used to describe Carrie's departure from home is especially significant:

When a girl leaves her home at eighteen, she does one of two things. Either she falls into saving hands and becomes better, or she rapidly assumes the cosmopolitan standard of virtue and becomes worse. Of an intermediate balance, under the circumstances, there is no possibility. The city had its cunning wiles, no less than the infinitely smaller and more human tempter. There are large forces which allure with all the soulfulness of expression possible in the most cultured human. The gleam of a thousand lights is often as effective as the persuasive light in a wooing and fascinating eye. Half the undoing of the unsophisticated and natural mind is accomplished by forces wholly superhuman. (pp. 3-4)

In "Sister Carrie and the Pathos of Naturalism" Mary A. Burgan agrees that Dreiser approaches the depiction of his characters objectively and asserts that the problems that he had with the critics and Sister Carrie stem from the author's pity for such an unlikely and unacceptable heroine:

. . . his intention in making Carrie the heroine

of his first novel is formed by his concern for his audience's conventional expectations about heroines: his primary purpose as the conscious author of a new kind of novel is to present the figure of a naive girl from the country--a common type in naturalistic fiction--in a way which will explain her downfall to an audience which does not realize the significance of its own wealth and privilege for one who has neither.¹⁴

Although the lives of Carrie Meeber and George Hurstwood are treated too frankly for the times during which Dreiser wrote, Sister Carrie was honest and powerful. In this novel it becomes apparent that in Carrie's desire to move upward socially and financially away from the degradation which predominates the household of the sister with whom she has been living, Carrie Meeber begins to discern class differences and to yearn for a better way of life. For her Drouet even becomes less than she desires: "She really was not enamoured of Drouet. She was more clever than he. In a dim way, she was beginning to see where he lacked" (p. 89). On the other hand, Hurstwood symbolizes for Carrie a more admirable example of good bearing, worldly wisdom, and intelligence.

Similarities and differences are apparent between Norris's treatment of Trina and McTeague and Dreiser's handling of Carrie and Hurstwood. Like Dreiser, Norris

offers numerous details in the descriptions of his characters. Wyatt observes that Norris

takes pains to detail his characters' physical appearance (usually endowing them with some conspicuous mannerism) and their dress, continually splicing a series of modifiers in the process and insisting that practically everything is a 'veritable' something or other.¹⁵

The changes that occur between the members of the two couples of the two books are apparent in the descriptions provided by each author; however, these changes are in reverse order. Norris allows McTeague, the original brute whom Norris repeatedly uses animal imagery to describe, to rise from his brutish state to a level more compatible with that of Trina before he sinks finally to the depths of despair. Initially McTeague was

a young giant, carrying his huge shock of blond hair six feet three inches from the ground; moving his immense limbs, heavy with ropes of muscle, slowly, ponderously. His hands were enormous, red, covered with a fell of stiff yellow hair; they were hard as wooden mallets, strong as vises, the hands of the old-time car-boy. . . . His head was square-cut, angular; the jaw salient, like that of the carnivore.

McTeague's mind was as his body, heavy, slow to act, sluggish. Yet there was nothing vicious about the man. Altogether he suggested the drought horse, immensely strong, stupid, docile, obedient.¹⁶

Dreiser's description of Hurstwood early in Sister Carrie is opposite to Norris's description of McTeague. Unlike McTeague, Hurstwood has a good position, creates a good impression, is shrewd and clever and is ambitious. For the most part Hurstwood is quite a leisurely person, lounging around, dressing in imported tailored suits, and sporting diamonds and the fanciest watch and chain. He is well acquainted with hundreds of successful characters and considers his acquaintance with them a part of his own personal success. With the exceptionally rich and famous class, he is "professionally tactful" and refrains from being too familiar. At the same time, he manages a degree of dignity, giving them their expected respect yet avoiding compromising his own position. For the personal and social comfort of his wife and two children he maintains a fashionable horse and buggy and an impressive home on the North Side near Lincoln Park. Generally speaking, Hurstwood is "altogether a very acceptable individual of our great American upper class--the first grade below the luxuriously rich" (pp. 42-43).

As the plots advance, the status of each of these two

characters changes. In an attempt to solve many of the complications, Trina manages to instill within McTeague a desire to rise to her level instead of her sinking to his level.

For one thing, the dentist began to dress a little better, Trina even succeeding in inducing him to wear a high silk hat and a frock coat of a Sunday. Next he relinquished his Sunday afternoon's nap and beer in favor of three or four hours spent in the park with her . . .
(p. 187)

Conversely, near the end of the novel Hurstwood yields to the pressures of his day-to-day existence. In his weakened state he concludes that life offers him little.

Several times, when fortune pressed most harshly, he thought he would end his troubles; but with a change of weather, or the arrival of a quarter or a dime, his mood would change, and he would wait Bad and irregular eating was weakening every function of his body. The one recourse left him was to doze when a place offered and he could get the money to occupy it. (p. 443)

With regard to the two female counterparts of the couples, the same observations may be made. Trina and

Carrie, though opposite in temperament and character, undergo the same kinds of reversals. At the beginning of the book Trina is described as

very small and prettily made. Her face round and rather pale; her eyes long and narrow and blue, like the half-open eyes of a little baby; her lips and the lobes of her tiny ears were pale, a little suggestive of anaemia; while across the bridge of her nose ran an adorable little line of freckles. But it was to her hair that one's attention was most attracted. Heaps and heaps of swarthy bands, a veritable sable tiara, heavy abundant odorous. (p. 23)

Near the end, however, Trina

has lost her pretty ways and her good looks. The combined effects of hard work, avarice, poor food, and her husband's brutalities told on her swiftly. Her charming little figure grew coarse, stunted and dumpy. She who had once been of a cat-like neatness, now slovened all day about the room in a dirty flannel wrapper, her slippers clapping after her as she worked. At last she even neglected her hair, the wonderful swarthy tiara, the coiffure of a queen, that shaded her little pale forehead. In the morning she braided

it before it was half combed, and piled and coiled it about her head in haphazard fashion. It came down half a dozen times a day; by evening it was an unkempt, tangled mess, a veritable rat's nest. (pp. 335-336)

Carrie, at the outset of Sister Carrie, is described as having self interest as her motivating force. She is pretty, shapely, and intelligent, yet, she is deficient in one aspect.

In the intuitive graces she was still crude. She could scarcely toss her head gracefully. Her hands were almost ineffectual. The feet, though small, were set flatly. And yet she was interested in her charms, quick to understand the keener pleasures of life, ambitious to gain in material things. A half-equipped little knight she was, venturing to reconnoitre the mysterious city and dreaming wild dreams of some vague far-off supremacy, which should make it prey and subject--the proper penitent, grovelling at a woman's slipper. (p. 4)

Later, after becoming a famous actress, Carrie

had attained that which in the beginning seemed life's object, or, at least, such fraction of it as human beings ever attain of their original

desires. She could look about on her gowns and carriages, her furniture and bank account. Friends there were, as the world takes it--those who would bow and smile in acknowledgment of her success. For these she had once craved. Applause there was, and publicity--once far off, essential things, but now grown trivial and indifferent. Beauty also--her type of loveliness--and yet she was lonely. (p. 452)

Both writers are aware of and depict the changes in fortunes in the lives of their characters, but their treatments of those changes differ. Norris ultimately portrays a brutish, crude, boorish couple while Dreiser depicts characters who are either innately or extrinsically refined in *Carrie* and *Hurstwood*. Norris's vision is gloomy, despondent, and desolate; whereas Dreiser's vision is fatalistic but somewhat optimistic in his constant searching for some answers.

The differences between Dreiser's naturalism and Norris's continues in the way they handle the plots and resolutions in these two novels. As noted earlier, Cooperman suggests that Norris, too, adhered to the philosophy of scientific determinism, but that this determinism was presented and developed in keeping with previously established religious beliefs and that Norris was inspired more by Calvinist-Christian guilt than by scientific naturalism in

writing McTeague. Cooperman asserts that Norris approaches nature not scientifically but in terms of original sin and that Norris explains that his characters fail because of the original sin (the beast in all flesh as flesh) which cannot be controlled by either hard labor, individual will, or personal faith. Further, Norris is also torn between an affirmation of "purity" and a fascination for the physical. In his conclusion, he sets up a duality between "nature" (evil) and "spirit" (good). He finally identifies "nature" as the deadly sins of sloth, gluttony, wrath, avarice, envy, and--most animal and destructive of spirit--lechery.¹⁷

Thus, for Norris, when disaster or tragedy strikes, it is the result of the human "evil instinct." On the other hand, Philip Gerber says in Theodore Dreiser that for Dreiser life is basically a tragedy and is governed by "chemisms," "magnetisms," and other invincible forces among which the individual is cast up or down depending on sheer accident, good or bad luck, and fortune.¹⁸ For Dreiser, however, there is a chance for one's survival, though that chance is not always determined solely by free will. Frequently, good luck, good fortune, and strength in exerting one's will are the elements involved in one's attaining some small satisfaction out of life.

Chemisms and workings of chance are especially apparent in Dreiser's treatment of the vicissitudes of fortune in the lives of Carrie and Hurstwood. As a prosperous family man who holds a respected position as the manager of a

popular saloon, Hurstwood is stricken by one of those chemisms--love--when he meets Carrie. Gerber asserts that of all the drives operating in the lives of people, "the drives for power, money, and sex were primary,"¹⁹ and all three affect Carrie and Hurstwood. Their relationship advances to a point where Hurstwood is anxious to abandon his wife, family, and job for the love of an inexperienced but innately refined young girl. It is here, too, that the element of chance enters into Hurstwood's life and helps to govern his actions. After accidentally finding the door open to his employer's safe, he takes \$10,000 from the safe during a moment of weakness and at a time when he seems to lose complete control of his actions as these mysterious outside forces step in. Finally, Hurstwood lures Carrie away with him. This single incident of the open safe seems to signal the decline of Hurstwood and possibly the ascent of Carrie. In a characteristically scientifically balanced digression during the scene in which Hurstwood wrestles with his conscience about whether or not to take the money, Dreiser discusses the evil side of one's nature; but, unlike Norris, he concludes that the instinct for what is right serves as one's salvation.

The dullest specimen of humanity, when drawn by desire toward evil, is recalled by a sense of right, which is proportionate in power and strength to this evil tendency. We must remember

that it may not be a knowledge of right, for no knowledge of right is predicated on the animal's instinctive recoil at evil. Men are still led by instinct before they are regulated by knowledge. It is instinct which recalls the criminal--it is instinct (where highly organized reasoning is absent) which gives the criminal his feeling of danger, his fear of wrong. (pp. 237-238)

Hence, chapter 27, in which the theft scene occurs, serves as the real turning point in the novel since it does contain the significant event of chance. The "accidental theft" is parallel with the "accidental murder" which occurs some years later in An American Tragedy and with the "accidental windfall" of the winning lottery ticket in McTeague. Each event sets into motion succeeding complications in each of the novels. More than once Dreiser allows chance to alter the course of people's lives; here, in Sister Carrie, Hurstwood is "forced" to steal the money, although he had decided against the idea, when the door to the safe suddenly closes. In An American Tragedy, Clyde Griffiths changes his mind about killing Roberta Alden at the last minute only to be "forced" into the murder by an instinctive reflexive action and a paralyzing of the will into inaction at the crucial point of her drowning. In a statement in Theodore Dreiser: His World and His Novels describing the changes which Dreiser made in the original manuscript in an

attempt to make both Carrie and Hurstwood less offensive characters, Richard Lehan asserts that Carrie and Hurstwood become tied together as innocent victims of an accident that thrusts Carrie upward at the same time that it plummets Hurstwood downward toward "final defeat and death."²⁰

Although Hurstwood eventually returns most of the money that he had taken from the safe, he never fully regains his own self-respect. As long as the little money that he keeps holds out, he moves from one unrewarding investment and job to another until finally he ceases all pretense at finding financial security for Carrie and himself and sits idly from day to day in the hotel lobbies or in his room clinging to his little remaining money. The tragic change in his circumstances and in his personality is pitiable. In a digression on the parallel or balance between material progress and bodily growth, Dreiser says that the individual is either "growing stronger, healthier, wise, as the youth approaching manhood, or he is growing weaker, older, less incisive mentally as the man approaching old age" (p. 295). Although Hurstwood cannot isolate the reasons causing his mental and physical changes, he feels the sadness which results from them, and Dreiser says that

some men never recognize the turning in the tide of their abilities. It is only in chance cases,

where a fortune or a state of success is wrested from them, that the lack of ability to do as they did formerly becomes apparent. Hurstwood, set down under new conditions, was in a position to see that he was no longer young.
(p. 296)

The themes developed in the novel are exemplary of Dreiser's anxiety about one's changing status. One of these themes with which the novel seems to be concerned is that of youth and age. The young look forward expectantly to a bright future but the aged view the future with a foreboding and declining sense of hope. The book covers a span of eight years during which time Carrie's mental attitude is generally one of excitement about what the future holds and Hurstwood's (after the theft) is one of reminiscence about the past. Parallel with the theme of youth and age seems to run also the balanced "rise and fall" of Carrie and Hurstwood. As time passes, Carrie becomes stronger, more vital and energetic, but Hurstwood loses his strength and vitality, deteriorating into a weak degenerate who is unsuccessful at warding off the destructive effects of his declining circumstances.

These levelling forces eventually take their toll on Carrie as her patience begins to wane. Ultimately she leaves Hurstwood and takes a room with a young lady with whom she dances in the chorus, but only after she obtains

a part in a stage chorus. Her move signals for her the beginning of a new way of life as she blossoms into a rising star of the stage. Hurstwood, on the other hand, falls into poverty, despair, and eventual suicide. Of Carrie, however, the stage critic of one of the newspapers observes that

Miss Madena [Carrie's stage name] presents one of the most delightful bits of character work ever seen on the Casino Stage. . . . It is a bit of quiet, unassuming drollery which warms like wine. . . . The little Quakeress was marked for a favourite the moment she appeared, and thereafter easily held attention and applause. The vagaries of fortune are indeed curious. (p. 402)

Indeed, Dreiser does seem to consider "the vagaries of fortune" to be enigmatic; for, although Carrie's rise from her original low level of despondency is unaccountably rapid while Hurstwood's decline is just as unreasonably rapid, Carrie is seen at the end of the novel as a woman who has reached a plateau in her life which far exceeds her most fantastic dreams but who also is yet unfulfilled. The final scene of the book shows her still alone, in her rocking chair by the window, dreaming dreams of happiness which she might never experience:

Sitting alone, she was now an illustration of

the devious ways by which one who feels, rather than reasons, may be led in the pursuit of beauty. Though often disillusioned, she was still waiting for that halcyon day when she would be led forth among dreams become real.
(p. 454)

Governed by forces much larger than any single individual, a person becomes a composite of two worlds, as Lehan contends. Dreiser's characters, therefore, are neither purely animal, stimulated by animal appetites and instincts, nor completely civilized and guided by reason. In Dreiser's novel, as is true in Norris's McTeague, a person is subject to both biological urges and environmental conditions and wishes to satisfy both physical needs and aesthetic ideals. As a result, the individual is "in motion, in a half-way house between what he was and what he might become, dissatisfied with his condition, no longer at one with himself."²¹

The influence of the scientific method on Dreiser is apparent in his descriptions of the characters and their actions and in the balance of two life cycles which seem to take opposite poles. Of particular import is the use of terms in chemical analysis as Dreiser describes Hurstwood's mental condition during his decline:

Constant comparison between his old state and his new showed a balance for the worse, which

produced a constant state of gloom or, at least, depression. Now, it has been shown experimentally that a constantly subdued frame of mind produces certain poisons in the blood, called katastates, just as virtuous feelings of pleasure and delight produce helpful chemicals called anastates. The poisons generated by remorse inveigh against the system and eventually produce marked physical deterioration. To these Hurstwood was subject. (p. 297)

In language that suggests his awareness of the scientific method, Dreiser underscores here the degree to which one can become the victim of internal chemical changes that are caused by one's mental state. Just as the subject of the scientific experiment has no control over the scientist, so individuals have no control over the makers of their destiny.

Structurally, the novel follows Carrie's ascent and Hurstwood's descent, but there seems to be little moral drawn. While both characters are guilty of a sin, one profits and the other suffers, and Dreiser seems to create a balanced, mechanistic, amoral world in which there is no relationship between the virtuous life and earthly reward. As a novelist, Dreiser was simply observing life and reporting his findings--much the same as a chemist does in his laboratory--without attempting to draw a moral or pass

judgment. Granville Hicks in The Great Tradition labels Dreiser's novel as the product of an admittedly bewildered man who is curious and confused but resigned to the outcome of his story:

one feels his honesty, his determination to present life exactly as he sees it. He may not approve of the needs he describes; often he expresses his disapproval in ways that show how imperfectly he has conquered the prejudices of his boyhood; but the desire to understand triumphs over conventional morality.²²

Although Carrie is left at the end of the novel still hoping to attain some fleeting goal, life, as Dreiser portrays it in Sister Carrie, is essentially purposeless and meaningless. No one is fully capable of fathoming the external and internal forces which operate in thwarting one's will, the presence of which Dreiser does not deny.

Dreiser shows his characters thrown into various situations where they must follow the course that is necessary for survival. Many times, though those courses may not be considered moral ones according to conventional standards, they are economically feasible. With regard to Carrie's actions especially, money is indeed a motive as she finds herself constantly in need of protection and some means of survival. James T. Farrell says in "Dreiser's Sister Carrie" that money is important in the development of the

novel. Without it, he believes, the story is without meaning and the "tragedy is forced." Money is also a mystery to the characters. As an affable salesman, Drouet realizes that money comes easily to him and also that he spends it just as easily and effortlessly as he earns it. On the other hand, Carrie, a poor girl moving from the country to Chicago, thinks of money as the means of getting everything she desires. Initially, money is of no concern to Hurstwood. Later, however, it is the instrument that allows him to satisfy his need for Carrie and finally it becomes a necessary means to keep him functioning physically and spiritually.²³

Herein, then, lies the real tragedy of the novel. In spite of acquiring all the money that she had even hoped for, Carrie remains disillusioned at the end of the novel. Her despair and loneliness are inherent in her demeanor as she rocks dejectedly in her chair. In this scene Dreiser illustrates one of the many ironies of life. Even though people succeed in reaching some of their goals, they will still never really find complete contentment. In spite of the fact that Carrie succeeds materially, she has no inner peace and, therefore, no personal fulfillment.

Nature, not society's definition of success or "the American Dream," is what takes on significance for Dreiser; and Carrie finds no real happiness because the goals she seeks to attain are not worthy because they are fixed for her by a society which stresses materialism too greatly.

Dreiser, however, seems to differ from other naturalists such as Frank Norris in the kind of concern for inner fulfillment which is apparent in the pathetic closing scene of the book. Although Carrie is alone, she recognizes the void in her life which money cannot and does not fill, and she continues to dream for that "beauty" that will make her life meaningful. Norris provides us with no such concern, for McTeague ends abruptly, shockingly, and brutally with no future vision.

It seems appropriate that a study of Jennie Gerhardt should be included with that of Sister Carrie, for this second novel also continues Dreiser's queries about one's illusions and extends them beyond the individual to embrace the family unit. In Jennie Gerhardt Dreiser continues his examination of the dilemma of the individual whose life is so drastically affected by chance, fate, environment, and heredity. In this novel, Dreiser presents two families, the Kanes and the Gerhardts, and portrays them as being lured astray, as Carrie and Hurstwood were, by superficial desires. Once the children of these families break away because of their dissatisfaction with their orientations, then confusion abounds.

Burton Rascoe in Prometheans suggests that Jennie Gerhardt is superior to Sister Carrie because of the "imaginative nature of the heroine, and her quiet self-sacrifice for others."²⁴ This assessment may have some validity because this second novel was somewhat more

acceptable to the expectations of Dreiser's straight-laced reviewers than Sister Carrie was. As a female character Jennie would have been more appealing than Carrie because of Jennie's gentleness, sympathy, tenderness and charity. Carrie, on the other hand, is ambitious, a trait that was not at that time attractive in a female protagonist. Finally, Jennie is punished for her sin, but Carrie is not.

Dreiser was acquainted with many women, as one can see in A Gallery of Women, and he attempts to tell their stories with sympathy and understanding. He describes Jennie as the daughter of a rigidly devout German family that finds much difficulty surviving. Jennie, like Carrie and many other women in Dreiser's novels, is a person of feelings and emotions rather than intellect, but both find beauty in life and in nature. Their responses to that beauty differ, however. Jennie is a giver, whereas Carrie is a taker. Dreiser characterizes Jennie in the second chapter of the novel as the type of person who has always given of herself to and for others. She is her mother's "right hand"; she is her siblings' mainstay; she is her father's support--all rendered without complaint.

From her earliest youth goodness and mercy had molded her every impulse No one had ever heard her rudely complain, though she often thought of the hardness of her lot. She knew that there were other girls whose lives

were infinitely freer and fuller, but, it never occurred to her to be meanly envious; her heart might be lonely, but her life continued to sing . . . Nature's fine curves and shadows touched her as a song itself No artist in the formulating of conceptions, her soul still responded to these things, and every sound and every sigh were welcome to her because of her beauty. (p. 16)

In Jennie Gerhardt Dreiser creates another naturalistic novel in which forces seem to conspire in the destruction of Jennie's dreams--forces of circumstance, such as Senator Brander's untimely death and Lester Kane's yielding to the pressure exerted on him by society and the lure of economics. Although Jennie is only a child of poverty, Senator Brander is stricken by her beauty and seduces her after promising to marry her. His promises are comparable to Drouet's promises to marry Carrie. But, as fate or chance would have it, the senator dies before keeping his promise and leaves Jennie pregnant. Attempting to avoid the shame attending Jennie's condition, the family moves to Cleveland where Jennie eventually meets the next man in her life--Lester Kane--who is the product of a wealthy family of carriage makers. Jennie's story may logically be divided into two parts. The first part depicts the relationships of Jennie with each of the two

lovers in her life and their seductions of her. The second part portrays Jennie's life with Lester at first happily and finally sadly when they separate and both her daughter, Vesta, and Lester die.

Jennie and Lester begin a relationship in which he becomes her very generous keeper, again like Drouet, always promising marriage, but never getting around to it; and she becomes his loving mistress who accepts his generosity but guards her secret--the existence of Vesta. When he finally learns about Vesta, he is unable to abandon Jennie, though he considers it, and stubbornly sets her up in a very comfortable home without regard for his family's objections. When all seems to be going well, the forces of a world without meaning unite once again to separate them: Lester's father dies and stipulates that Lester can receive his inheritance only if he gives up Jennie, and Lester becomes enamoured of a wealthy, respectable widow who loves him and who has money and social position. Characteristically unselfish, Jennie declares that Lester must follow the course which would serve his own best interests. In essence, he should leave Jennie.

But he did not want to do this. The thought was painful to him--objectionable in every way. Jennie was growing in mental acumen. She was beginning to see things quite as clearly as he did. She was not a cheap, ambitious,

clinging creature. She was a big woman and a good one. It would be a shame to throw her down, and besides she was good-looking It is an exceptional thing to find beauty, youth, compatibility, intelligence, your own point of view--softened and charmingly emotionalized--in another. (pp. 290-291)

In the final analysis Lester bows to the will of society because so many external influences operate to paralyze his own will. A marriage to Jennie would not be approved; therefore, it cannot take place. When he capitulates to social ostracism and family pressures, the balance finally turns against Jennie and he yields to the lure of the American dream for success. The compulsion for material success, which is a component of that American dream, really draws him from her; and it is only after he leaves that he comes to a rather tardy realization of his dissatisfaction with that dream. At a later meeting with her, Lester tries to explain his feelings in a passage which seems to be an explicit statement. Though coming from Lester, this statement also seems to be representative of Dreiser's own attitude and could very well be considered the thesis of the novel.

I was just as happy with you as I ever shall be. It isn't myself that's important in this transaction apparently; the individual doesn't

count much in the situation All of us are more or less pawns. We're moved about like chessmen by circumstances over which we have no control

After all, life is more or less of a farce It is a silly show. The best we can do is to hold our personality intact. It doesn't appear that integrity has much to do with it. (p. 401)

It goes without saying that this was quite an unusual novel for 1911, not only because of the fact that once again a mistress was the heroine, but also because that mistress was treated as an admirable character, as was true in the case of Carrie Meeber. In fact, Jennie ascends to a plateau approaching the angelic. She has an acute sensitivity that is greatly illustrated through her generosity. She is willing to give of herself for others in the first parts of the novel; however, by the close of the book she has become a more complex figure--less of a paragon of goodness and more of an emotional woman who is not above deceiving Lester about Vesta and attempting to force him to marry her. Generally, however, Jennie is a "good" mistress, and, in spite of the unusual twists and turns in her life, she is basically virtuous. Those aspects of her life to which one would take exception are due mainly to her unsound economic situation. Whatever

the case may be, Jennie is true to Lester and is his wife in every way except legally.

Both Dreiser's portrayal of a kept woman of Jennie's stature and his enumeration of the many forces which operate on her help to illustrate his philosophy that life is meaningless. People seem to be incapable of understanding the events of their lives as they are laid out for them. Although Jennie possesses the moral trait of goodness, that quality is of no value in the outcome of the events of her life. Yielding to the force of poverty, she is prevented from achieving happiness. Burton Rascoe says that

in the Gerhardt family two things were paramount--piety and poverty. The Gerhardts were used to computing favors in terms of money and, because money was a terrible and insistent problem to them they were in the habit of overestimating the value of it. Had Jennie been brought up in the comfortable gentle surroundings, unused to the pressures of poverty, protected against the harsh contacts of the outside world, sheltered in refinement, the practical terms of the proposal might have outraged her sense of taste and delicacy. But reared as she was . . . the practical details of her lover's terms would be just the thing to inspire her trust and reliance.²⁵

According to Walcott, Dreiser recognizes the human will which is prevented from operating independently by all of these dominating forces. The impulses of the will are prohibited from attaining fruition by social and economic forces: "One can wish freely, but one cannot freely carry out one's wishes."²⁶ This philosophy is apparent in both of Dreiser's novels and in Norris's novel, McTeague. Both writers, as followers of naturalism, view the paradox of existence and see the world as "going steadily forward of its own volition" (p. 404) where individuals count for very little.

Dreiser and Norris showed evidence of developing the feeling that moral disciplines are powerless to control the flux of impulses, temperament, and passion. Certain viewpoints pervade their works and influence them deeply. The most fundamental of these is their interpretations of human life in terms of biology or of behavioristic psychology. They regard a person exclusively as animal, governed by automatic, uncontrollable impulses which are probably chemical in origin; however, Dreiser seems to be more optimistic in his outlook than Norris. The substance of their philosophies, therefore, can be succinctly stated in one word--skepticism. The world is without meaning or reason. Why one is here and to what end is unknowable. The individual is a chemical compound existing in a world which suffers one indifferently for a time. Such an attitude maintains, then, that nothing is positive.

Everything is doubtful. There are no conclusive facts in life. In spite of the similarities in their philosophies, Dreiser's optimism is evident in his constant search for avenues to happiness for the individual beyond the world of the material.

NOTES

¹ Joseph Warren Beach, "The Realist Reaction: Dreiser," The Twentieth Century Novel (New York: Century, 1932), p. 322.

² Beach, pp. 323, 324.

³ Donald Pizer, "Frank Norris's Definition of Naturalism," Modern Fiction Studies, 8 (1962), 409-410.

⁴ Pizer, p. 410.

⁵ Bryant N. Wyatt, "Naturalism as Expediency in the Novels of Frank Norris," Markham Review, 4 (Feb. 1968-Oct. 1975), 84.

⁶ Stanley Cooperman, "Frank Norris and the Werewolf of Guilt," Modern Language Quarterly, 20 (1959), 258.

⁷ Don D. Walker, "The Western Naturalism of Frank Norris," Western American Literature, 2 (1967), 15.

⁸ William B. Dillingham, "The Old Folks of McTeague," Nineteenth Century Fiction, 16 (1961-62), 170-171.

⁹ Theodore Dreiser, Jennie Gerhardt (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1911), p. 15. Subsequent references to this work will be to this edition and will be noted parenthetically within this chapter.

¹⁰ Theodore Dreiser, Hey-Rub-A-Dub-Dub (New York: n.p., 1919), p. 21.

¹¹ William C. Vance, "Dreiserian Tragedy," Studies in the Novel, 4 (Spring 1972), 45.

¹² Thomas P. Riggio, ed. Theodore Dreiser: American Diaries 1902-1926 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982), p. 7.

¹³ Malcolm Cowley, "The Slow Triumph of Sister Carrie," New Republic, June 23, 1947, p. 25.

¹⁴ Mary A. Burgan, "Sister Carrie and the Pathos of Naturalism," Criticism, 15 (1973), 337.

¹⁵ Wyatt, p. 86.

¹⁶ Frank Norris, McTeague (New York: Doubleday, Page and Company, 1924), p. 3. Subsequent references to this work will be to this edition and will be noted parenthetically within the text of this chapter.

¹⁷ Cooperman, pp. 253-254.

¹⁸ Philip L. Gerber, Theodore Dreiser (New York: Twayne Publications, Inc., 1964), pp. 51-52.

¹⁹ Gerber, p. 51.

²⁰ Richard Lehan, Theodore Dreiser: His World and His Novels (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1969), p. 64.

²¹ Lehan, p. 70.

²² Granville Hicks, The Great Tradition (New York: n.p., 1933), p. 288.

²³ James T. Farrell, "Dreiser's Sister Carrie," The Stature of Theodore Dreiser, ed. Alfred Kazin and Charles Shapiro (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1955),

p. 185.

²⁴ Burton Rascoe, Prometheans (New York: n.p., 1933),

p. 260.

²⁵ Burton Rascoe, Theodore Dreiser (New York: Robert M. McBride and Company, 1925), pp. 54-55.

²⁶ Charles C. Walcutt, "The Three Stages of Theodore Dreiser's Naturalism," PMLA, 55 (1940), 277.

CHAPTER III

DREISER'S USE OF THE SUPERMAN

Following his exploration of an experimentation with the theme of a meaningless and indiscriminating world in which people find the governing of their lives to be beyond their control, Dreiser launches into a new phase of naturalism. In his early development as an advocate of naturalism he studied women and employed them as his major characters. While some critics yet contend that he never really matured in his attitude toward women, he was one of the American writers most intrigued by the feminine mystique. Personally acquainted with many women, he attempted to treat his female characters with sympathy, understanding, and compassion, and he seemed amazed at the fact that life goes on the way it does in spite of the odds which fate stacks against those individuals. Considered to be a lady's man personally and artistically in his treatment of female characters, he expressed a kind of curiosity and wonder at their conditions.

In his next stage of development, however, he turned to the treatment of men as his protagonists. Dreiser's shift from the female to the male protagonist is a change of interest which probably appears abrupt on first inspection;

however, noting Dreiser's progression to another stage of his growth in naturalism, one can accept this shift as not only plausible but also as inevitable. In his later novels, Dreiser chose men as his main characters and seemed to write more profusely about them. Just as he modeled Carrie Meeber after one of his own sisters, he uses himself and other males as models for such characters as Eugene Witla in The Genius and Frank Cowperwood in what he calls his "Trilogy of Desire," The Financier, The Titan, and The Stoic. James Lundquist believes that Dreiser sees life in these later novels as in the earliest ones as "a symphony made up of many movements, produced by disparate forces, and traceable only to the mind of the composer, which is in itself a mystery."¹ With this philosophy in mind Dreiser seeks insight into his world and himself, and it seems that these later novels reveal more about the male ambience, signaling his attempt to compose and conduct another version of this "symphony."

Since there were numerous accounts and exposes of the activities of various Robber Barons in the current newspapers and magazines, and since earlier novelists such as Frank Norris, Jack London, Robert Herrick, and Upton Sinclair had portrayed this corruption in their works, it is not surprising that Dreiser, too, would be attracted to such an intriguing subject. With the writing of the "Trilogy" and with the shift to the male protagonist, Dreiser examines the Nietzschean idea of the superman which purported that

when one found that life was meaningless and morals absurdly inadequate, then the next alternative was to determine that the only good lay in the ability to force one's will to surface and become dominant. Henri Lichtenberger defines and explains Nietzsche's "superman" idea in The Gospel of Superman as

the state to which man will attain when he has denounced the present historical values, the Christian, democratic, or ascetic ideal [in order] to return to the table of values drawn up by noble races, by the Masters who themselves create the values which they recognize instead of receiving them from an outside source Man must give birth to the Superman by self elevation Nietzsche . . . desires an aristocratic society divided into well-defined castes, each having its own privileges, rights and duties: the lowest caste is that of the small and mediocre men, all those whose natural vocation it is to be a cog in the great social machine They are clearly slaves or . . . "exploited men," since at their own cost they maintain the higher castes to which they owe obedience Just above them comes the caste of those who direct, the guardians of the low, the preservers of order and the warriors Finally, we have the premier caste, that of the Masters, the "creators of values."

It is for the Masters . . . that the morality of the superman has been made.²

Nietzsche's philosophy was most certainly available to Dreiser at this time of his career, for Nietzsche, as a well-known philosopher, began to have a major impact on American thought around 1908 when his ideas became the topics of serious discussions and disputes. It was that year that H. L. Mencken published The Philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche, an examination of Nietzsche's thought, and sent a copy to Dreiser. Nietzsche and Dreiser shared the beliefs that life is a struggle; that the struggle to live is essentially the struggle for power; and that the masses with their "slave morality" were deserving of contempt. It is difficult, however, to ascertain the extent to which his reading of Nietzsche influenced the overtones of these novels since Dreiser insisted that life and experience were his teachers more than his reading of any book. Nevertheless, he ultimately wrote these three novels about the activities of a superman in the modern world, using the concept of the servitude of the masses in The Financier and The Titan.

Beginning with the first of these novels, The Financier, Dreiser apparently patterned his protagonist, Frank Algernon Cowperwood, after a well-known financier, Charles T. Yerkes, who had become renowned for his dealings in Chicago gas and traction affairs in the 1880s. It seems that Dreiser had lived in Chicago for four years during the late 1880s and

early 1890s and had undoubtedly followed Yerkes' many financial battles since they were exhaustively chronicled in the local papers. John McAleer notes that when Dreiser first envisioned his "Trilogy" in December 1911, his "first step toward writing the opening volume was to go to Philadelphia and pore over newspaper files on Charles Tyson Yerkes, prototype of his financier, Frank Algernon Cowperwood."³

Too, the economic climate in America after the Civil War was characterized by a giant power struggle where big money and big business thrived as never before. Large corporations, industries, and utility combines were formed, all characterized by concentrated wealth, excessive power gained by governmental corruption, and deafness to public opinion. The little man was totally ignored in the great struggle for power among these supermen.

Recognizing too that Dreiser believed that nature was the master composer of the symphony of life, one can readily understand his perception of nature as being "inscrutable" in its divine plan for the world. In that plan nature has established a safeguard in the system through a series of "checks and balances" which make allowances for change and progress. Philip Gerber says in Theodore Dreiser that it "was invariably the right way; the difficulty came always in perceiving amid the confusing welter of human activity what Nature's way might be--and then ridding one's self of emotional involvements sufficiently to adapt."⁴

Dreiser had long considered these checks and balances

and mused over a character who would be strong and uninhibited by society's rules and regulations. It might be argued that he had made earlier attempts at creating such a male character in the novels which highlighted the female protagonist. These characters, however, did not quite meet the qualifications. Drouet, the drummer in Sister Carrie who was totally unmindful of society, had few aspirations on a grand scale. He was pacified by a mediocre existence as a titan or superman would not have been. Hurstwood possessed possibilities of becoming that strong male force, but his fear of society's disdain dwarfed him. Lester Kane, on the other hand, was successful for a time in fighting society in his efforts to keep Jennie Gerhardt, but he, too, was foiled by his own lack of ambition, stamina, and gentility.

Richard Lehan sees a clear juxtaposition of Hurstwood and Cowperwood and even suggests that Dreiser used names to portray opposite traits just as Hawthorne did with some of his characters. Cowperwood possesses determination, perseverance, and strength; whereas Hurstwood is self-defeating, inconstant, and weak. Each man possesses a certain capacity, but the difference lies apparently in Cowperwood's capacity for success in the face of adversity and Hurstwood's capacity for defeat under similar circumstances. Hence, Hurstwood remains the "minnow" and Cowperwood the "whale." In any event it seems obvious that Dreiser intends us to see that in addition to chance, destiny plays a mighty role.

Whether a character be weak as Hurstwood was or strong as Cowperwood was, "he becomes what he was meant, conditioned, and . . . had the capacity to be."⁵

Cowperwood becomes the first strong male force in Dreiser's novels for this character is not limited in his ambition, desire, and strength. He is unafraid of taking risks and he is willing and ready to face his opposition.

The character of Cowperwood, then, reflects this dominant, magnetic individual's predatory quest for power in American business that is characteristic, as Dreiser sees it, of the time-spirit. Though not exactly a rake or philanderer, he does love women, but he also loves wealth, power, and art. F. O. Matthiessen declares that Cowperwood is no reader. Instead, he is "Dreiser's version of the 'survival of the fittest' intermingled with traits of Nietzsche's 'Superman,' and possessing also what Dreiser calls a 'Machiavellian' brain."⁶

Since Dreiser was acquainted with Nietzsche's philosophy, especially from Mensken's interpretation, he probably began The Financier with the intention of using the Nietzschean superman as a model for his protagonist, Cowperwood. Although his father, Henry Worthington Cowperwood, was ambitious but lacking in "magnetism and vision,"⁷ the son is described as being a "financier by instinct, and all the knowledge that pertained to that great art was as natural to him as the emotions and subtleties of life are to a poet" (p. 8). Even his physical description suggests

a man who is not of the ordinary ilk but one who is destined to be an indispensable agent in the development of a capitalistic society. Dreiser comments on the "prepossessing" appearance of a stocky body enhanced by square shoulders and a shapely head crowned with thick, crisp, dark brown hair. The intriguing aspect about him seemed to be his eyes which reflected an inscrutability that comes only with time and experience (p. 25).

Later Dreiser also describes Cowperwood as possessing a humane and democratic spirit but one who is mainly an egoist and an intellectual.

We think of egoism and intellectualism as closely confined to the arts. Finance is an art. And it presents the operations of the subtlest of the intellectuals and of the egoists. Cowperwood was a financier. Instead of dwelling on the works of nature, its beauty and subtlety, to his material disadvantage, he found a happy mean, owing to the swiftness of his intellectual operations, whereby he could, intellectually and emotionally, rejoice in the beauty of life without interfacing with his perpetual material and financial calculations.

(p. 134)

In "The Libidinous Lobster: The Semi-Flaw in Dreiser's Superman," Robert Roulston asserts that he fails to attain the stature of the tragic and does not quite evoke one's

admiration.

He is always strong, always egotistical, and always resourceful. He acquires his philosophy at the age of ten and adheres to it unswervingly for most of his long life. Indeed, for all the minute thoroughness with which Dreiser recounts his thoughts and documents his milieu, there is something unreal about him and psychologically untrue. Any man, even in nineteenth century America, as obsessively acquisitive as Cowperwood would be not simply a superior man but an abnormal man⁸

The Financier takes Cowperwood from boyhood up to the panic of 1873. A superman devoid of ethical restraints, he goes from business to business, gaining control of the Philadelphia street-railway network, and buying cooperation from the politicians. He becomes a millionaire and is in the process of planning to make a billion dollars when the Chicago fire of 1871 causes a panic and wipes out his fortune. Because he has heedlessly tampered with Eileen Butler, the daughter of a political boss, he is abandoned in his time of real need by those in control and forced to face an indignant public. After serving thirteen months in prison for his indiscretions and misdeeds, he is pardoned just in time to regain his fortune by selling short in the panic of 1873. Here The Financier ends, but the novel

illustrates the career of a man who acknowledges no limitations but one who represents at the same time the restrictions placed on all people.

Characterized as a natural born leader, Cowperwood attached his interest not to books, as Matthiessen noted, but to politics, economics, and whatever makes the world run. In an attempt to understand the peculiar workings of the world he decides:

There were just two faces of the shield of life . . . strength and weakness. Right and wrong? He did not know about these Good and evil? Those were toys of clerics, by which they made money. And as for social ostracism which, on occasion, so quickly followed upon the heels of disaster of any kind, well, what was social ostracism? Morality and immorality? He never considered them. But strength and weakness--oh yes! If you had strength you could protect yourself always and be something. If you were weak--pass quickly to the rear and get out of the way of the guns. He was strong, and he knew it, and somehow he always believed in his star. Something--he could not say what--it was the only metaphysics he bothered about--was doing something for him. It made things come out right at times. It put excellent

opportunities in his way Life was a dark, insoluble mystery, but whatever it was, strength and weakness were its two constituents. Strength would win--weakness lose. (pp. 271-272)

An example of this "truth" was disclosed to Cowperwood earlier when he was but a boy. As he watches a lobster gradually devouring a squid in a tank at a fish market, he observes that lobsters live on squids, men live on lobsters, and men even live on one another. Ultimately "that's the way it has to be, I guess" (p. 4). People who are driven by self-interest and self-aggrandizement exhibit the prime law of life. The romanticized notions of law and justice are fraudulent, for somewhere submerged underneath the deluding idea of democracy is the real truth of life.

As a result of these observations, Cowperwood learns to make money quickly and grows to regard life in the stock exchange as the whole world unmasked. He then begins to view life in terms of force:

Quickness of mind, subtlety of idea, fortuitousness of opportunity, made it possible for some people to right their matrimonial and social infelicities; whereas for others, because of dullness of wit, thickness of comprehension, poverty, and lack of charm, there was no escape from the slough of their despond. They were compelled by some devilish accident of birth or

Lack of force or resourcefulness to stew in their own juice of wretchedness . . . (pp. 134-135)

He further realizes that mental force and physical force are the answers to problems and obstacles encountered in the financial world. He believes that the giants of commerce and money could do whatever they liked but that the newspapers, the preachers, the police, the public moralists who saw themselves as the guardians of some superficial law and morality were quick to denounce evil in low places, whereas they dared not attack the same conditions in high places. They were either too afraid or too hypocritical to speak out against any of these giants unless their opposition posed no danger to them. Cowperwood viewed this as the way of the world and believed that it was not for him to correct it. He had to get rich, make his own way, and build up a semblance of dignity and virtue. The way to accomplish that feat was through force and wit, and he had his fair share of those. His motto was "I satisfy myself" (p. 135).

Having recognized the use of force by others, Cowperwood adapts this tactic to his own lifestyle and uses it as the avenue through which to attain his own desires: success, wealth, prestige, beauty, and women. After observing the lobster and the squid, he reasons that if anyone, and especially if he, is to be successful in fulfilling these desires, then he must be willing to use force in order to

be rid of all obstacles. Cowperwood cannot afford to be weak and must not yield to sentimentality which is not compatible with success.

Cowperwood believes that those values upheld by orthodox religion and society are aspects of a sentimentality used by selfish people to exploit the masses. He is impatient with the person who fails to reach a potential level of accomplishment because of moral or social inhibitions. He is even more disdainful of one who lacks the courage to be open and truthful about personal beliefs and actions and who hides behind false morality. Cowperwood openly acknowledges his ambition and rejects anything that might prevent his exerting it.

With this attitude, Cowperwood rises in the world of finance. Yet by the end of the novel, like so many of Dreiser's characters before Cowperwood, he too succumbs to those environmental forces which prove to be more overwhelming than his will and intelligence. A survivor, however, Cowperwood manages to regain some of his assets and determines to maintain some semblance of control of his fate. As a matter of fact, Pizer says, "deceit, surprise, and strength are sources of power and thus of survival in every range of life, from the struggle in the fishmonger's tank to the conflicts of men."⁹ One of Cowperwood's sources of strength seems to be his moral detachment, and he evaluates others whom the world might label as immoral as simply weak persons.

Indeed, notwithstanding Roulston's objections to the characterization of Cowperwood as that of an "abnormal man," it seems that as a character he is presented effectively. His life is a portrayal of both human weaknesses and strengths and superhuman standards, with the greater portion of the novel after the Chicago fire and panic emphasizing his problems, obstacles and defeats. In essence, he is a forceful, energetic, clever young businessman who has the desire to succeed in the world, and he forges ahead, using whatever techniques may work for him--especially deception and bribery.

The analogy of the Black Grouper at the end of the novel underscores, in a biting way, Dreiser's depiction of the irony in the use of deception as a means of survival:

. . . would you say that subtlety, chicanery, trickery, were here at work? An implement of illusion one might readily suspect it to be, a living lie, a creature whose business it is to appear what it is not, to simulate that with which it has nothing in common, to get its living by great subtlety, the power of its enemies to forfend against which is little. The indictment is fair.

Would you say, in the face of this, that a beautiful, beneficent, creative overruling power never wills that which is either tricky or

deceptive? (p. 502)

The obvious answer to this last query, in Cowperwood's case especially, is negative, for he is just such a creation of the overruling power and as such his existence and his actions are justifiable. Dreiser does not make him a deliberately cruel man, but one whose instincts prevent him from being conquered in the struggle for survival. As a result, at the end of the novel, we tend to empathize with him, to wish him well, and to anticipate his maneuvers and machinations in the next volume of the "Trilogy," The Titan.

The second novel in Dreiser's "Trilogy" is more extensive and intricate than The Financier. The novel begins with Cowperwood's flight from Philadelphia to Chicago where Aileen Butler marries him as soon as his first wife agrees to give him a divorce. Cleverly amassing new allies and sources of power, he uses bribery and chicanery to begin new operations in public utilities, especially a number of franchises for the distribution of suburban gas. First gas then traction once again multiply his wealth. His efforts to gain control of all Chicago street-railways are enduring and intensive. Through keen foresight and sheer nerve he eventually becomes a national power, and, as W. M. Frohock in Theodore Dreiser says he "squeezes adversaries, bribes politicians, and buys elections until he seems ready to get control of all the surface transport of Chicago."¹⁰ It is here that, as a character, Cowperwood changes from the

worthy object of compassion that he appeared in The Financier to a ruthless, selfish, and invulnerable being. We no longer wish him well and are inclined to speculate that imprisonment has destroyed his earlier humaneness. Now, he projects a cold self-sufficiency that defies sympathy.

The novel presents a great complex struggle in which Cowperwood attempts to manipulate banks, local politicians, legislators, governors, and newspapers in his efforts to buy or control the entire state legislature and obtain from them a fifty-year franchise on Chicago street-railway transportation. In the true naturalistic tradition, Dreiser presents details authentically, vividly, and realistically. Although Cowperwood functions in a society populated to a large degree by hypocrites, puritans, and weaklings, he is too gifted not to succeed financially. Roulston says that, unlike others in his society, Cowperwood has seen the truth about life and acts consistently with that truth--that "the rich are powerful, and they become rich not merely through hard work but by being clever and by exploiting opportunities, legal or otherwise."¹¹

Early in The Titan Dreiser compares the personalities of Judah Addison, a Chicago banker, and Cowperwood and concludes that they are similar in some ways but dissimilar in more significant ways. Addison immediately determines that Cowperwood's eyes were "soft and springlike at times, glowing with rich, human understanding which on the instant

could harden and flash lightning. Deceptive eyes, unreadable, but alluring"12 In spite of this early evaluation, Addison is attracted to Cowperwood. Dreiser accounts for differences, however:

Both men were ruthless after their fashion, avid of a physical life; but Addison was the weaker in that he was still afraid--very much afraid--of what life might do to him. The man before him had no sense of fear. Addison contributed judiciously to charity, subscribed outwardly to a dull social routine, pretended to love his wife, of whom he was weary, and took his human pleasure secretly. The man before him subscribed to nothing, refused to talk save to intimates, whom he controlled spiritually, and did as he pleased. (p. 9)

Thus Cowperwood continues to follow his creed of satisfying himself only, and here he continues to display his strength and power more widely because of the broader setting of Chicago.

Although a harsh change occurs in Cowperwood from the first novel of the "Trilogy" to the second, he also takes on another dimension. In the first novel he seems bent on benefitting only himself; however, in The Titan Cowperwood's enterprises will also enhance life for mankind because this better and more expanded city transportation system is a

good thing in spite of the fact that it was established by undesirable methods. It is here that Cowperwood sheds his mask and openly acknowledges his dishonesty and his true nature and "thus achieves a kind of Satanic magnificence which to Dreiser is a heroic magnificence."¹³

Among all of Cowperwood's speculations in the world of high finance are his numerous love affairs and domestic problems. They create any number of obstacles for him and have traumatic consequences on his various business transactions, for invariably the women with whom he becomes enamoured are associated in some way with the men with whom he has connections in politics and finance. His attraction to women and his inability to resist their charms may be comparable to the tragic flaw in the Greek heroes. The superman, too, is vulnerable. Stuart P. Sherman described The Titan as a "huge club-sandwich composed of slices of business alternating with erotic episodes."¹⁴

Cowperwood's amorous affairs in The Titan begin with his growing discontent with Aileen Butler whose earlier youth and vigor had somewhat camouflaged her lack of refinement. Although Cowperwood's affairs are basically sexually motivated, there are indications that Dreiser wishes the reader to conclude that Cowperwood is also in search of some aesthetic beauty. It seems that in endowing Cowperwood with the desire for some form of aesthetic, spiritual beauty, Dreiser displays his own feelings that the individual must find contentment in the world of spiritual beauty

rather than in the physical world. That is Dreiser's distinction. He never ceases the search. Therefore Cowperwood engages in numerous love affairs to create a personal ideal. Each woman possesses some aspect which he can use subconsciously to form into his own vision of spiritual beauty. For the most part, the women and girls with whom he has relations are vulnerable, and the fact that Cowperwood succeeds with them may be attributed to his knowledge that these kinds of women are readily accessible and to the fact that he is bold enough to take advantage of the situations. Pizer says

he was also suggesting both the now accepted but then radical idea that behind the late nineteenth century facade of the upperclass woman as a monument of purity was a core of sexual frustration and the still radical notion that sexual diversity is as much an aspect of the 'braided symphony' of life as any other pleasurable activity.¹⁵

In the first two of his novels, which portray women, Dreiser acknowledges the operation of the will in a deterministic environment, but he does not profess to understand all of the conditions and constraints under which it functions. He makes no attempt to establish any explanation of free will and its causes, but he does indicate that the will is affected and directed by external deterministic

forces, rendering it essentially powerless. On the other hand, Cowperwood, in the "Trilogy" novels, changes the impression that one had of the ineffectiveness of the will because he is a stronger character than the two female protagonists, than Hurstwood and Lester Kane. He is a winner who enjoys a degree of confidence never before felt by these earlier characters; therefore, he forces his will to work. Although he is temporarily a victim of external forces when The Financier ends and although he loses his money and liberty, he has exerted himself more than those weaker characters and has more "control" over his future actions than they can anticipate. We are not surprised, therefore, when he regains his power in The Titan.

By the time Cowperwood reaches his end in The Titan Dreiser concludes that his activities "illuminate the terrors and wonders of individuality" (p. 551). In a section called "In Retrospect" he asserts that the great "life force" expresses itself through the generation of the individual and moves on to the complexities of the masses. Ultimately a balance is struck in which either the mass overwhelms the individual or vice versa, temporarily. Whereas the strong cannot be too strong, the weak also must not be too weak. Variation helps to maintain the balance. For Cowperwood the realization comes that although he has lived a powerful, influential, wealthy life, "even giants are but pygmies, and . . . an ultimate balance must be struck" (pp. 550-551).

These ideas seem to reiterate the basic philosophy developed in Sister Carrie and Jennie Gerhardt. The action in all the novels involves the same wondering uncertainty, the same vision of life as purposeless and unpredictable, the same denial of ethical codes, and the same recognition of external pressures which determine the courses of the lives of the protagonists. Of course, the difference between the two apparent phases of Dreiser's life which these four novels represent is that Cowperwood seems to be a greater force than the earlier characters. His position in the order of nature seems to be the same, however, since he too is subject to the same great "life force." His ability to fight it, bargain with it, and maneuver it is remarkable.

Although one may not view Cowperwood's morals as worthy of emulation by the average person in a society which dictates policy to the individual and the masses, there does exist a rather strong fascination for a person of his character who has the power to affect the lives of so many people. His ethics leave much to be desired, but Christian ethics are deceptive in that they seem to establish some sort of code for living which, if adhered to, would leave the individual incapable of surviving the struggle of life. In The Financier Cowperwood argues in a discourse on monogamy that such Christian morals are inadequate:

It is a curious fact that by some subtlety of logic in the Christian world, it has come to be believed that there can be no love outside the conventional process of courtship and marriage. One life, one love, is the Christian idea, and into this sluice or mold it has been endeavoring to compress the whole world. . . . That the modern home is the most beautiful of schemes, when based upon mutual sympathy and understanding between two, need not be questioned. And yet this fact should not necessarily carry with it a condemnation of all love not so fortunate as to find so happy a denouement. Life cannot be put into any mold, and the attempt might as well be abandoned at once. (p. 146)

Robert Elias contends that Dreiser believes that one should not be so naive as to think that any one way of living, or any one kind of individual, is to be favored. He argues further that for Dreiser all people are completely ignored by the forces of life, and the individual is to be compared with an innocent fly caught in the strands of a horrible spider's web. Although Elias reaches these conclusions, he does not feel that Dreiser was arguing against effort but that he was emphasizing and magnifying certain elements of life. By taking note of the inevitable tragic irony of life, Dreiser reaffirms the values of being

sufficiently life's observer to recognize and be aware of illusion.¹⁶

What consolation there is for one, then, seems to exist in viewing everything as an inevitable process within which the "titans" and "supermen" are the only things that matter. It is not in the actual struggle or illusion that value resides, but rather in the awareness and appreciation of what struggle, illusion, and equilibrium mean. Dreiser does not use conventional ethical codes further than to show that they are incapable of equipping one to cope with modern problems, that most successful people disregard them, and that their application to the human animal under any conditions is a questionable procedure. On the other hand, it seems that he does not suggest that modern society is perfect nor that one can do nothing to improve it. Although he appears to hope for social improvement, as becomes more apparent in the later novels, his purpose here is to treat life as it is lived under modern social and economic conditions. His art is devoted, at this point, to a study of things as they are.

Published posthumously, The Stoic, the third component of the "Trilogy," delineates a character who is supposedly bigger than life but who also succumbs eventually to some higher creative force. A mere tool, Cowperwood is used by this force in a way that the individual is not capable of understanding. His attempt to take over the London underground is thwarted by Bright's disease and he returns to

New York to die, not having realized his dream of constructing a museum and a hospital to his memory and leaving his fortune to be destroyed by a number of legal elements.

Although the novel was not published until after Dreiser's death, he had worked on it intermittently throughout the 1920s and 1930s. He put it aside after the poor reception of The Titan in order to work on some projects that would reward him more substantially financially. It is quite possible that, having stayed away from it for so long, Dreiser lost his taste for some of the values which Cowperwood has represented throughout the "Trilogy."

In the first two novels, Cowperwood is portrayed in the Nietzschean sense as a product of nature, one of the strong who push about the little people at will. His dividends from his public transportation systems come from the pockets of the little people who pay more than the ride is worth to get back and forth between home and work. The social damage that this situation causes is unnoticed by Cowperwood. That self interest is carried over into the first part of this third novel: "For Cowperwood was not one to make friends of those less forceful, subtle, or efficient than himself. It smacked too much of meaningless self-depreciation and was, at best, in his opinion, a waste of time."¹⁷ Cowperwood, himself, says, "'I have no excuses to offer for the way I am Intelligently or unintelligently, I try to follow the line of self-interest, because, as I see it, there is no other guide!'"

(p. 4).

As the novel progresses, Cowperwood begins to undergo a change, especially after he is convinced that he was found a "soulmate" in Berenice Fleming, a beautiful, educated, charming, clever young girl whom he has desired since she was just a child. He now decides that Berenice is "the one great dream of his life come true. What of defeat?: There was no defeat! It was love that made life, certainly not wealth alone" (p. 12). It is in this novel too that we find that a superman such as Cowperwood is also vulnerable, for before he can complete his London dealings and before he can resolve his personal problems with his wife Aileen, his health fails and he dies rather suddenly. His accumulations and fortune are soon dissolved as they are dragged out in the intricate court proceedings:

Cowperwood had failed to take into consideration, however, the workings of the American courts throughout the nation: the administration of justice or the lack of it; the length of time American lawyers were capable of delaying a settlement in many of these courts. (p. 278)

As a result of these delays in settling his estate, his fortune is destroyed, Aileen is reduced almost to poverty, the hospital in his memory is never built, his art collection is sold, and the last of his mansions is stripped bare. At Cowperwood's funeral, Reverend Hayward Crenshaw

verbalizes this superman's mortal end:

We brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out For a man walketh in a vain shadow and disquieteth himself in vain: he heapeth up riches, and cannot tell who shall gather them. (p. 273)

Dreiser actually worked on the novel until the day before he died, and although it was slightly unfinished, he did sketch enough to make it clear that Berenice was to become a nurse, working to help others and to raise the money for the hospital. In the end, she becomes Dreiser's voice, it seems, heralding the changes that had possibly occurred in him:

Her entire life, as she realized--with the exception of the past few years--had been spent in the pursuit of pleasure and self-advancement. But now she knew that one must live for something outside one's self, something that would tend to answer the needs of the many as opposed to the vanities and comforts of the few, of which she herself was one. (p. 306)

Thus ends the concept of the superman, for it is in The Stoic that Dreiser seems to comment on the possible failure of that concept and of the great American dream to satisfy the needs of the human spirit. Here the material

goals so emphasized in American life are no longer fulfilling. Cowperwood has, in fact, embraced these goals in an attempt to fulfill his spiritual needs, and they have failed him. As long as obstacles stand between him and the attainment of these goals he feels unfulfilled and challenged, but when he is able to attain many of his successes, and as he experiences some failures, he comes to realize that his self-realization will come in that part of his being which responds to beauty, not only in women but also in art objects, music and nature.

Having completed the "Trilogy," Dreiser seems to have proven two theses which Philip Gerber asserts were the governing factors in the three books. The first thesis (apparent in The Financier and The Titan) suggests that nature is the creator of special supermen who rule and dictate the ways of the world in spite of all resistance by society; and the second thesis (apparent in The Stoic) supposes that nature disposes of her human "tools" once they have achieved the ends for which they were designed. At any rate, nature is always in control.¹⁸

Chance operates in the "Trilogy." Even Dreiser's superman becomes its victim as is evidenced by the many oddities which affect the course of Cowperwood's life: The Chicago fire prevents the accomplishment of his dream to conquer Philadelphia and his own untimely death destroys his empire.

NOTES

¹ James Lundquist, Theodore Dreiser (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Company, 1974), p. 57.

² Henry Lichtenberger, The Gospel of Superman: The Philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche, trans. J. M. Kennedy (London: T. N. Foulis, 1918), pp. 169-172.

³ John J. McAleer, Theodore Dreiser: An Introduction and Interpretation (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1968), p. 103.

⁴ Philip L. Gerber, Theodore Dreiser (New York: Twayne Publishing Company, 1964), p. 92.

⁵ Richard Lehan, Theodore Dreiser: His World and His Novels (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1969), pp. 110-111.

⁶ F. O. Matthiessen, Theodore Dreiser (Canada: George J. McLeod Ltd., 1951), p. 132.

⁷ Theodore Dreiser, The Financier (Cleveland: The World Publishing Company, 1946), p. 2. Subsequent references to this work will be to this edition and will be noted parenthetically within this chapter.

⁸ Robert Roulston, "The Libidinous Lobster: The Semi-Flaw in Dreiser's Superman," Rendezvous: Idaho State University Journal of Arts and Letters, 9 (1974), 35-36.

⁹ Donald Pizer, The Novels of Theodore Dreiser: A Critical Study (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1976), p. 166.

¹⁰ W. M. Frohock, Theodore Dreiser (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1972), p. 25.

¹¹ Roulston, p. 38.

¹² Theodore Dreiser, The Titan (Cleveland: The World Publishing Company, 1946), p. 7. Subsequent references to this work will be to this edition and will be noted parenthetically within this chapter.

¹³ Pizer, p. 190.

¹⁴ Stuart P. Sherman, On Contemporary Literature (New York: Peter Smith Company, 1917), p. 98.

¹⁵ Pizer, pp. 191-192.

¹⁶ Robert N. Elias, Theodore Dreiser: Apostle of Nature (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1947), p. 165.

¹⁷ Theodore Dreiser, The Stoic (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1947), p. 1. Subsequent references to this novel will be to this edition and will be noted parenthetically in the text of this chapter.

¹⁸ Gerber, p. 96.

CHAPTER IV

AN AMERICAN TRAGEDY: AN ACCOUNT OF ONE MAN'S FUTILE PURSUIT OF THE AMERICAN DREAM

Continuing with his treatment of men as protagonists in his novels, Dreiser enters into a final phase of his naturalism in which he attempts to develop the theme of the inevitability of one's downfall in a society which dangles before a person the bauble of the American dream but provides one with no means by which to grasp that bauble. It is during this final phase of his development as a naturalist that Dreiser continues, and stresses even more, his concern with his materialistic view of the physical world--facts, events, and things that are verifiable. For him, whatever is "real" or "natural" is material or physical and capable of being experienced by the senses. From this perspective every occurrence is indicative of some causal pattern, and even mental and emotional sensations, aspects of the spiritual, result from physical causes. People cannot be held morally responsible for their actions because in this view there is no morality.

In An American Tragedy a contrast exists between Clyde Griffiths' parents who represent the early tradition of

American evangelicalism and the disappointments of Clyde who represents twentieth century materialistic desires. When Dreiser endeavors to explain Clyde in this novel, he looks for the causes of this particular type of personality. For him Clyde becomes the verifiable product of a precise set of causal conditions and he even "justifies" his character by using as the basis of his story verifiable newspaper accounts of similar cases. He seems to be attempting to prove that what happens to Clyde is credible because it has happened before. Clyde follows a course effortlessly, offering little resistance to any lures that seem to offer momentary sensory pleasures. His story moves beyond the level of the narrative of an individual to that of the capricious nature of personal urges and outside forces which sway and condition human destiny.

The novel seems to belie the prevalent dream of material success by stressing the protagonist's constant failures and attributing those failures to certain illusive elements of society: power, love, wealth, and religion. Although those elements are intangible, some of them often originate in the physical world, for money is frequently the basis for power, wealth, and love. Those failures may also be attributed to one's believing in any kind of solution to society's ills. The protagonist's tragedy is his eagerness to believe in solutions and his unwarranted hopefulness; he is deceived and operates under blinding delusions.

Although the earlier novels addressed rather limited aspects of American life, An American Tragedy, which is immensely wide in range and very ambitious in its examination of society's faults, must be regarded as more than a single study of American lower middle class life during the early twentieth century. It warrants review as an example of the futility of misplaced desire in a society that offers little that is ennobling in the way of human potentiality. Looking at the outline of the story, one can detect the enormous amount of futility exhibited: a likable but weak young man is elevated, purely by chance, from poverty to the possibility of obtaining pleasure and wealth. He represents a credible American boy who embodies the emptiness of our social aspirations. Clyde is portrayed as a youth who grows up in a materially and spiritually poor family, reaches out early for the small pleasures and desires, makes his way into sanctioned American society through working in hotels where he learns about status and sin, but who becomes the prisoner of his culture by experiencing its hungers and emptiness. In order to achieve his ends, Clyde has to abandon the devoutness of his religious upbringing and betray the only young woman who has ever given him a taste of real affection. He is deluded by society into thinking that his goals are worthy, and he observes that there are many others, no more gifted than he, who reap the benefits of having money as if it were natural for them to do so.

This young man, however, is hampered by past indiscretions that now prevent him from realizing his dreams, and in order to rid himself of these barriers he must resort to criminal means. It seems clear that he has no choice in the matter, for he has become the pawn of external forces and his internal desires. As a matter of fact, he does not commit a crime, but that fact is of no consequence for he is trapped by the machinery of social punishment and is finally destroyed. In this boy there is assembled the tragedy of human waste--all unused energies, talents, and affections--a powerful representation of our unstressed values.

The Darwinian struggle for survival creates the conflict between the rich and the poor. Clyde, who is not effective in his dealings with life, dreams of wealth and all the pleasures which it presumably brings. This desire sets the literally poor and figuratively little man in a perpetual struggle to attain supremacy. Dreiser, at this stage of his development, begins to show some signs of sympathy for people in this fate-directed world where they are engaged in futile struggle that yields only fleeting sensory enjoyment. It is this view of sympathy that distinguishes this older Dreiser from the younger detached reporter. His scientific outlook may continue to be detached and objective, but his heart is warm. For this reason, the cruelty of fate is reduced by Dreider's deep and pervasive compassion for the pain and suffering of his

victims in his novels. There is no doubt that Dreiser cares deeply about the victims of social processes; however, his condemnation of the jungle of American society is a means by which he can refuse to accept the brutalization of the weak and the helpless and point toward the need for a new, more humane order of social values and relations. Toward the end of the novel, Dreiser becomes angry and even strikes out against institutional abuses similar to what one sees in the social novel of the nineteenth century. Specifically, he criticizes the judicial system which can convict and execute an innocent man.

Although the type of tragedy exhibited in his novel is certainly not restricted to the American environment, it is more likely and common in our own society with its overpowering enticement of the value of money and the promises that it holds. What Dreiser's character is guilty of is believing what he has been taught to believe and wanting what he is supposed to want. Dreiser succeeds, then, in reducing the American dream to an American tragedy by reporting what he sees rather than what he is supposed to see.

During this era of Dreiser's life he becomes a convert to socialism which may be significant to an understanding of An American Tragedy. Although he does not explicitly offer socialism as a new solution, he does present this American tragedy as the tragedy of life itself. It is conceivable that Dreiser was deeply involved with his new interest in socialism and that he exhibited that concern in

An American Tragedy, for he considers this work to reflect the problem of human responsibility. The unusual way in which Roberta's death is treated is especially important to the impact of the novel, for Clyde is too weak a character to kill her in cold blood. Clyde plans the crime very carefully, but the death itself is an accident for which Clyde is responsible only because he could not come to Roberta's rescue. The paradox of his inability to act stresses Dreiser's conviction that a person is not really in control because all that we do is dictated by intricate internal urges and external social pressures.

The epic quality characteristic of great tragedy is accomplished in this novel because Dreiser is successful in making this tragedy stand for that of a whole society. The financial and social stratification of American civilization was firm enough to prevent Clyde from realizing the goals which were presented to him as the right of every free democratic individual. The 'success' formula, so deeply imbedded in American traditions, no longer worked.

In A History of American Letters, W. F. Taylor discusses a definition of tragedy used by naturalistic writers such as Dreiser. Taylor says that Shakespearean and Greek tragedy dealt for the most part with the great and the powerful of the earth and with a human nature that was basically good or most assuredly great. From this perspective the individual is important in the universal scheme of things.

Naturalistic tragedy, however, deals often with the obscure, the weak, the helpless; with those who from heredity or from circumstances are unable to cope with life. Moreover, the Nemesis which pursues these weaklings is not some external Fate, as in Greek tragedy, or some equilibrium inherent in the moral order, as in Shakespearean; it is rather a certain stupid blundering in the universe itself, which creates desires without the ability to gratify them, which blindly destroys with its left hand what it builds with its right, and whose automatic mechanisms are quite oblivious to the sufferings of the human mites within their cogs. Naturalistic tragedy, therefore, assumes not the importance but the insignificance of man; hence the scheme of life it portrays is bleaker and more depressing than that of Shakespearean tragedy.¹

The tragedy in Dreiser's novel then is quite bleak and depressing for it lies in the loneliness of young men and women in American cities and in the extremes of poverty and wealth that tempt them to disaster. Throughout the novel Dreiser presents an atmosphere of social protest and a mood of despair.

Numerous critics have acclaimed An American Tragedy as Dreiser's most representative and best work. Stuart

Sherman calls it "a massive 800-page American tragedy which makes the performance of most of his rivals and successors look like capering accomplishments of rabbits and squirrels"; Julia Collier Harris calls it "one of the most powerful and moving stories ever given to American readers by an American"; Sherwood Anderson calls Dreiser "the most important American writing. More than that--the most important man writing English"; Burton Rascoe calls it a "novel of such breadth, depth and significance as only Dreiser could write"; and Joseph Wood Krutch refers to it as "the greatest of its author's works and . . . the greatest American novel of our generation."² While the majority of those critics consider this work worthy and representative, just as many critics continue to condemn Dreiser's lack of writing skills. They point to his cumbersome use of the language and to what Stuart Sherman succinctly describes as "scraps of all technical jargons, all varieties of journalese, French tags, queer coinages, and long wallflower words of Greek and Latin origin, serving purely decorative purposes."³ Although this indictment may be accurate, these defects do not detract from the estimated value of this novel because Dreiser succeeds in producing a work which is touching, provoking, and lasting.

It is a well-documented truth that Dreiser's protagonist, Clyde Griffiths, is based on one Chester Gillette who was accused of committing the same kind of murder that is the basis of the general plot of Dreiser's novel. Before

focusing on this one, Dreiser had reviewed as many as fifteen cases, and he had collected many newspaper accounts of similar cases involving the crime of a man's murdering his mistress when her claims upon him threatened his prospects for an ambitious marriage.

Dreiser chose the Gillette case sometimes in 1920 because it seemed right for his purposes. Murder by drowning seemed to Dreiser more exciting than some of the dreamy cases which recounted the stories of death by some other means. The lake provided an appropriate setting for dramatic handling. The Gillette case probably appealed to him also because the Gillette parents, like the Griffiths parents, were very religious and preachers of the word.

It is to Dreiser's credit too that in addition to seeing the possibilities of the Gillette case, he was also capable of recognizing his early experiences as a child in the Dreiser family as additional material for this novel. These experiences provided the framework for his characterization of a confused boy who was at the same time someone's son and brother. The subject and tone of a song entitled "The Path That Leads the Other Way" and written in 1898 by Dreiser's brother, Paul Dreiser, seem to anticipate what is to come in this novel and to echo some of Dreiser's own childhood lessons, feelings, and rebellions, such as his religious upbringing, his ambivalent feelings about his family, and his personal desire to be rich and famous.

A mother spoke unto her boy, and told him many
 things
 Would happen in the years to come, the years
 that manhood brings;
 She told him of the trials that his pathway
 might beset,
 And said, 'My boy, the lessons of your mother
 don't forget.'

The youth he coldly listened just because he
 tho't that he
 Was far beyond advising, as boys sometimes
 will be,
 In anger then he left her, there in the old,
 old home,
 Without a friend or helping hand while he
 went forth to roam.

The years passed by and things had changed;
 the boy of yesterday
 Grew on to flush of manhood, went to cities
 far away,
 He found that friends were few and far between
 tho' all seemed gay,
 While he was wand'ring down the path that leads
 the other way.

I saw him in his prison cell, how bitterly
 he cried,
 When told that father, mother, both were sleeping
 side by side.
 Upon the hill not far from where he spent his
 boyhood's day,
 The words intended for his good, came back too
 late they say.

REFRAIN

One day he wandered down the path that leads
 the other way,
 He simply drifted from the fold, poor lad and
 went astray,
 The Shepherd tho' may find him yet and bring
 him back some day
 While wand'ring down the path that leads the
 other way.⁴

Dreiser gives Clyde Griffiths a very distinctive start
 in life, for he too is the son of simple, unworldly parents
 who provide him with a fine home and train him in the word

of God but warn him against straying from it. When he goes against his parents' training, he does so helplessly and inevitably. He cannot help but respond to the call of the American dream which becomes inevitably the American nightmare. John McAleer says in Theodore Dreiser that the conventional people in society probably viewed the novel as subversive because it calls to issue the foundation on which their prosperity rests and it contends that that prosperity is possible for a few because it is impossible for so many. The fact that Dreiser gives Clyde a good and pure early environment, rather than a sordid one, makes his fall so much more emphatic. McAleer further suggests that in creating such an environment Dreiser

thus affirms that the custom-decreed American way of life is Clyde's undoing, not some bizarre exception to it. Hereby he underscores the failure of conventional American morality, as promulgated by church and state--the handmaiden of an impossible idealism.⁵

An American Tragedy outlines the life of Clyde Griffiths from the time we first meet him in Kansas City until he is finally executed for a crime which technically he did not commit. As the son of a father who is a street preacher teaching his children to praise God and trust their fate to Him, Clyde resides in a mission house with his siblings and parents. He accompanies this family along the

streets as they pray and sing hymns. Having no education, but being innately proud, he soon becomes ashamed of these daily excursions and of his family, leaves home, and acquires a job as a bellhop in a hotel.

A poor, simple boy who pursues neither honor nor glory, Clyde strives to achieve the goals set before him by society: pretty girls, nice clothes, sweet foods, good times, and the money and leisure to achieve them. Dreiser does not hesitate early in the novel to make explicit the gaudiness of Clyde's desires as he strives to be "somebody" like the young men he observes coming and going in the drug-store where he works:

And very often one or another of these young beauties was accompanied by some male in evening suit, dress shirt, high hat, bow tie, white kid gloves and patent leather shoes, a costume which at that time Clyde felt to be the last word in all true distinction, beauty, gallantry and bliss. To be able to wear such a suit with such ease and air! To be able to talk to a girl after the manner and with the sang-froid of some of these gallants! What a true measure of achievement! No good-looking girl, as it then appeared to him, would have anything to do with him if he did not possess this standard of equipment. It was plainly necessary--the thing. And once he

did attain it--was able to wear such clothes as these--well then was he not well set upon the path that leads to all the bliss?⁶

When Clyde goes to work in the hotel, he is a young, uneducated, and inexperienced, but impressionable, sensitive, and attractive bellhop. He gets his "education" from the other bellhops and the people whom he meets in the hotel rooms. His social life is restricted to his friends, their sisters, and shopgirls, but it is a fast life which keeps him in debt. He also contributes financially to his mother's protection of a sister who has been left abandoned, with a baby, by a lover with whom she had sought refuge from a strict and dull home life.

Clyde's education continues when a major complication occurs on a picnic that he attends with some of his friends. He cannot resist the lure of a fine car that one of the boys has borrowed, and he goes along for the ride even though he is apprehensive about the outcome. The conflict of his parental training and his present need to be a part of this peer group is apparent as he thinks about the situation:

The only one, apart from Sparser, who suffered any qualms in connection with all this was Clyde himself. For to him, the first, the fact that the car to be used did not belong to Sparser, but to his employer, was disturbing, almost

irritatingly so. He did not like the idea of taking anything that belonged to any one else, even for temporary use. Something might happen. . . . It might not work out right; he might lose his job through a thing like this. But so fascinated was he by the thought of riding in such a fine car with Hortense and with all these other girls and boys that he could not resist the temptation to go. (pp. 138-139)

On their return trip to the city they increase their speed because they have been delayed and are late returning to work at the hotel. Their carelessness results in the accidental killing of a young girl and Clyde's fleeing the city on a freight train only to turn up two or three years later in Chicago working as a waiter in the Union League Club.

One day, as chance would have it, Clyde meets his uncle who is a collar manufacturer in Lycurgus, New York. This uncle, Samuel Griffiths, is favorably impressed by Clyde and offers him a job at his factory. On returning home Mr. Griffiths describes Clyde to his family as looking a lot like Gilbert, Samuel's son. As a model for Clyde to emulate, Gilbert becomes just another of the shallow and superficial goals which Clyde seeks constantly. While Gilbert is the undisputed heir to the Griffiths' wealth, he immediately senses in Clyde, even before he meets him,

a threat to his stable and safe way of life:

At the thought of a cousin who looked like him--possibly as attractive in every way as himself--and bearing his own name, Gilbert chilled and bristled slightly. For here in Lycurgus, up to this time, he was well and favourably known as the only son and heir presumptive to the managerial control of his father's business, and to at least a third of the estate, if not more. And now, if by any chance it should come to light that there was a relative, a cousin of his own years and one who looked and acted like him, even--he bridled at the thought. Forthwith (a psychic reaction which he did not understand and could not very well control) he decided that he did not like him--could not like him. (p. 176)

Accepting his uncle's offer, Clyde arrives at the factory and is sent to his cousin who gives him the hardest tasks around the factory, but his uncle intercedes and assigns him as foreman over the marking room which is managed entirely by women. Among these women, one impresses Clyde more than the others, and since he is lonely he begins seeing her against factory rules. In the meantime he meets Sondra Finchley, a young socialite who is a friend to his uncle's family, and is attracted to her beauty and

wealthy habits. Clyde's clandestine meetings with the factory girl, Roberta Alden, continues as he gets more and more involved with Sondra and her social circle. His involvement here seems forced and improbable, for Dreiser has him adapt too easily to Sondra's world of college students and social butterflies. Clyde is much too unsophisticated to ease so smoothly into that environment.

Roberta's pregnancy occurs at the same time that Clyde becomes more a part of Sondra's life. Dreaming of marriage to Sondra, Clyde must contend with Roberta's condition which becomes a major complication to his plans. He agonizes over the complexity of the situation:

For after all, who was she? A factory girl! The daughter of parents who lived and worked on a farm and one who was compelled to work for her own living. Whereas he--he--if fortune would but favor him a little--! Was this to be the end of all his dreams in connection with his perspective superior life here? . . . she was not of his station, really--at least not of that of the Griffiths to which still he most eagerly aspired.

(pp. 330-331)

Searching for a solution to his problem, Clyde begins a long series of appeals to doctors and druggists, none of whom has a successful solution to the impending disaster as Clyde now thinks of the situation. His dreams of attaining social

position and wealth are coming closer to fruition each day through his affair with Sondra; therefore, he is driven almost to madness because of the seeming futility of his condition.

Feeling that everything is completely hopeless and experiencing a sense of total helplessness, Clyde happens to read a newspaper story describing the drowning of a young man and woman, neither of whom was recovered from the waters. The darker side of his nature eventually fastens onto the notion that this could be the solution to his problems. The idea is repulsive to him initially, but as things worsen it seems to be the only way out. He devises a plan to take Roberta on a quiet pre-marital retreat to a secluded spot on a northern lake.

Taking Roberta out onto the lake in a canoe, Clyde concludes at the last minute that he cannot kill her, but a fateful quarrel ensues and in the process Roberta accidentally drowns because Clyde accidentally strikes her and his frozen will prevents him from coming to her rescue once she topples into the lake. Clyde listens to some "outside" voice in his ear:

And then the voice at his ear! . . . An accident--an unintentional blow on your part is now saving you the labor of what you sought, and yet did not have the courage to do! But will you now, and when you need not, since it is

an accident, by going to her rescue, once more plunge yourself in the horror of that defeat and failure which has so tortured you and from which this now releases you? You might save her. But again you might not! (pp. 531-532)

The plan is carried out after all, and when the authorities begin the investigation and pursuit, all of the pieces of the tell-tale puzzle come together to indict Clyde for a crime which he did not actually commit.

An ambitious young prosecutor is relentless in his efforts and Clyde is apprehended and charged. His uncle hires a lawyer to defend him but he is no match for the prosecutor who sees this case as his chance to advance his efforts toward an eventual appointment to the judicial bench. The resulting trial is long and the result inevitable--Clyde is convicted and sentenced to death in the electric chair. Dreiser leads us, along with a dazed Clyde, through all of the intricacies of this process: waiting agonizingly for a Supreme Court decision; waiting in the death cell; meeting the kindly minister; watching the heart-rending weariness of a pathetic mother and her efforts to save her son; and finally observing Clyde's last walk and disappearance into the inevitable death chamber.

About all of the tragedy, Clarence Darrow declares in his essay "Touching a Terrible Tragedy" that

One who knows Dreiser's work could almost see the end from the beginning. One's feelings of resentment are almost turned from Clyde to Dreiser, who, with the relentlessness of fate and the logic of life, takes Clyde step by step from the city mission to the electric chair, and Roberta from the factory to the embraces of the deep, cold waters of the lake; and still it is a true story of countless victims of fate.⁷

Clyde is generally considered a weak character who is restless and never quite satisfied with his station in life. He is constantly in search of a higher plateau for himself and Dreiser describes him as

. . . vain and proud as he was poor. He was one of those interesting individuals who looked upon himself as a thing apart--never quite wholly and indissolubly merged with the family of which he was a member, and never with any profound obligation to those who had been responsible for his coming into the world. On the contrary, he was inclined to study his parents, not too sharply or bitterly, but with a very fair grasp of their qualities and capabilities. And yet, with so much judgment in that direction, he was never quite able--at best until he had reached his sixteenth year--to formulate any policy in regard

to himself, and then only in a rather fumbling and tentative way. (p. 27)

Dreiser explains Clyde's restlessness and lack of purpose mainly in terms of heredity, but as a naturalistic writer he seems to be yet bound to the belief that the whims of fate are too complex ever to be fully understood by any one person. In Clyde's case, Dreiser also believed that Clyde's undoing could be attributed to a failure in the American economic system, for if Clyde had possessed the privileges of wealth and social position, he would never have been tempted to perform an act that would lead to his consequent ruin. The novel is a powerful document on the theme of social inequality and lack of privilege.

In spite of Clyde's weakness and confusion, or maybe because of these things, An American Tragedy is Clyde's story. Although Dreiser develops the other characters very well, they do not evoke the reader's sympathy for one who is destined to be a victim of his uncontrollable urges and influences as Clyde does. Roberta, for example, is a credible character created to suit the purposes of the story, but Clyde's lack of strength and his lack of control of his own life help to arouse the reader's sympathy. James Lundquist sees these traits as qualifications for considering Clyde's story a truly classic and tragic one. He compares Clyde to a few of Shakespeare's tragic heroes: Clyde is

indecisive like Hamlet. Like Lear he is blind to his own self. And like Othello he is uncertain of his own self-definition . . . Like all tragic heroes his fight is against the illusions Dreiser attacks: wealth, power, love, and most tragically, the self.⁸

Clyde's effectiveness as a character is enhanced by the good structure of the novel. It is generally agreed that the book is better developed than Dreiser's previous novels probably because of the way he thrusts the reader from one to the other of its three books. Each of the books exhibits a different stage in Clyde's development and awareness, and each begins with the possibility of hope and ends in tragedy and despair. Book one, an account of Clyde's early years as a youth in Kansas City, ends with the tragic car accident that forces him to flee from home. Book two opens on the optimistic note that Clyde may find refuge and solace here with his relatives, the Lycurgus Griffithses, but ends again tragically with Roberta's death and Clyde's flight. Book three describes the county in which Clyde will be tried--including pictures of the lovely, inviting lakes--and progresses to an account of his capture, trial and execution.

The entire book is framed by two similar scenes, opening with Clyde and his missionary parents preaching on a summer's night in a city street and closing with an almost

identical scene in another city, where Clyde's nephew, Russel takes his place in the family picture. The obviously elaborately worked out envelope effect of this structure is used by Dreiser to show the continuous nature of the tragedy, in a sense to justify the novel's title. The similarities between the two scenes are more than obvious. The novel opens with the following description:

Dusk--of a summer night.

And the tall walls of the commercial heart of an American city of perhaps 400,000 inhabitants--such walls as in time may linger as a mere fable.

And up the broad street, now comparatively hushed, a little band of six,--a man of about fifty, short, stout, with bushy hair protruding from under a round black felt hat, a most unimportant-looking person, who carried a small portable organ such as is customly used by street preachers and singers. And with him a woman perhaps five years his junior, taller, not so broad, but solid of frame and vigorous, very plain in face and dress, and yet not homely, leading with one hand a small boy of seven and in the other carrying a Bible and several hymn books. With these three, but walking independently behind, was a girl of fifteen, a boy of twelve and another girl of nine, all following obediently, but

not too enthusiastically, in the wake of the others.

It was hot, yet with a sweet langour about it all. (p. 15)

The closing scene reflects as in a mirror the opening one and serves to reiterate the futility of one's thinking that circumstances can be improved by an exertion of one's will.

Dusk, of a summer night.

And the tall walls of the commercial heart of the city of San Francisco--tall and gray in the evening shade.

And up a broad street from the south of Market--now comparatively hushed after the din of the day, a little band of five--a man of about sixty, short, stout, yet cadaverous as to the flesh of his face--and more especially about the pale, dim eyes--and with bushy white hair protruding from under a worn, round felt hat--a most unimportant and exhausted looking person, who carried a small portable organ such as is customarily used by street preachers and singers. And by his side, a woman not more than five years his junior--taller, not so broad, but solid of frame and vigorous--with snow white hair and wearing an unrelieved costume of black--dress,

bonnet, shoes. And her face broader and more characterful than her husband's, but more definitely seamed with lines of misery and suffering. At her side, again, carrying a Bible and several hymn books--a boy of not more than seven or eight--very round-eyed and alert, who, because of some sympathetic understanding between him and his elderly companion, seemed to desire to walk close to her--a brisk and smart stepping--although none-too-well dressed boy. With these three, again, but walking independently behind, a faded and unattractive woman of twenty-seven or eight and another woman of about fifty--apparently, because of their class resemblance, mother and daughter.

It was hot, with the sweet langour of a Pacific summer about it all. (pp. 871-872)

This envelope effect indicates Dreiser's concern with the numerous material, religious, and economic conflicts that one faces in society and the individual's inability to deal with them. The phrasing of the prologue and the epilogue suggest the possibility of the same things happening over and over again, only the picture in the final scene is more dismal in the descriptions of the "unrelieved costume of black" and the woman's face "seamed with lines of misery and suffering."

A final aspect of the structure of the novel is the doubling related to Clyde. He has an inner double, or inner self, which propels him toward the attainment of his dreams. He also has a cousin, Gilbert, who is so much his physical double that even intimate friends sometimes confuse them. Gilbert is the person Clyde might have been or might become if he had been exposed to the same background and environment as Gilbert. The prosecuting attorney, Orville Mason, can also be considered Clyde's double, for both come from the same background of poverty and have the same drives. The one difference is that Mason has a different and more significant psychological motivation in his facial scar. Because of that distracting mark, Mason has developed a rather warped personality. He is zealous in his determination to prove himself superior to the "Clydes" of the world in spite of his physical flaw. All of these reflecting images of the inner ego that desires material and social prosperity, the socially prominent rich boy (Gilbert) who already possesses those things that Clyde lacks but wants, and the frustrated and ambitious prosecuting attorney present different and possible, if not probable, aspects of Clyde's personality. They also make his image more universal and extend his tragedy beyond the personal, individual realm.

This novel, then, is Clyde's own tragedy as well as the tragedy of his own particular class, of everybody in the book, and of everybody in America. The characters who

are the apparent victors and who are obviously responsible for Clyde's ruin are at the same time not much better off. They are without wit, or morality, and they seem to have as their only purpose in life a meaningless display of wealth and power. Clyde has more of an impact on the reader because his entire being is a product of and related to the world which ruined him.

The title of the novel suggests that the most common thing that happens to a person in this society is self destruction in the pursuit of wealth. No one understands and can explain how Clyde's fate comes to be--not society, not his parents, not even Clyde himself. Although the novel leaves the reader with the feeling that one must continue through life repeating the same mistakes and lamenting the sorrows of a hard and cold destiny, Dreiser implies optimistically that some relief is possible through a change in some of the social institutions, a restructuring of the stratification of society, and an emphasis on more rewarding and attainable desires and values.

NOTES

- ¹ W. F. Taylor, A History of American Letters (New York: American Book Company, 1936), pp. 373-374.
- ² Stuart P. Sherman, "Mr. Dreiser in Tragic Realism," New York Herald Tribune Books, January 3, 1926, pp. 1-3; Julia Collier Harris, "Dreiser's Long Expected Novel Depicts the Turmoil and the Tragedy of Youth," Columbus [Ohio] Enquirer Sun, January 3, 1926, n.p.; Sherwood Anderson, "Dreiser," Saturday Review of Literature, 29 (January 1926), 475; Burton Rascoe, "An American Tragedy," New York Sun Saturday Book Reviews, January 9, 1926, p. 10; Joseph Wood Krutch, "Crime and Punishment," Nation, 122 (February 1926), 152; comp. Jack Salzman, Theodore Dreiser: The Critical Reception (New York: David Lewis Company, 1972), pp. 440, 445, 447, 450, 469.
- ³ Sherman, rpt. in Salzman, p. 440.
- ⁴ Ellen Moers, Two Dreisers (New York: The Viking Press, 1969), p. 209.
- ⁵ John J. McAleer, Theodore Dreiser: An Introduction and Interpretation (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1968), p. 128.
- ⁶ Theodore Dreiser, An American Tragedy (New York: The World Publishing Company, 1948), p. 38. Subsequent

references to this work will be to this edition and will be noted parenthetically within the text of this chapter.

⁷ Clarence Darrow, "Touching a Terrible Tragedy," in The Merrill Studies in An American Tragedy, comp. Jack Salzman (Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Company, 1971), p. 9.

⁸ James E. Lundquist, Theodore Dreiser (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Company, 1974), p. 97.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY

It is evident that Dreiser's greatness as a novelist and as a naturalist can be accounted for by his insight, his sympathy, and his tragic view of life. He promises to present his vision of life as he sees it, and in each of his novels he has touched the fundamental forces that shape American life. Whether he deals with millionaires who dominate cities, poor girls who stray from the path of conventional virtue, or the tragedy of a factory hand, he makes his readers feel the impact of these forces on the lives of his characters by allowing them to visualize the determining influences of these forces.

Dreiser was a determined and realistic recorder of the conduct of life as he had the insight to perceive it. Furthermore, he was intensely saddened by the faithless war the strong of "supermen" waged against the weak, and hopeful that, through some miracle of fate, some type of system could be formulated in a newly organized economic world that would destroy the power of the strong to inflict misery on the rest of the world.

As a youth, he possessed a monomania to seek a purely materialistic fortune in a country where he felt that the

acquisition of money and wealth insured one of success in life. As a means of reaching this end, he dedicated himself to literature. From this career he received only poverty and violent opposition from critics until he was well past middle life. These critics, he believed, were bound to the policy of denying the truth of life and as an individualistic man of relentless energy, he was a courageous and unyielding crusader against the social misuses of energy and will.

From an analysis of Dreiser's naturalistic novels, one could gather that his very aim was to give the whole of the lives of his main characters, and in this respect, he was one of the first American novelists to portray men and women undergoing the hazards of earning a living under industrialism. Before his time, novelists had, on the whole, busied themselves with people who lived upon incomes, and who, because of this outlook, were concerned only with smoothing out the surface of life while they ignored what was going on beneath it.

Previously, the novel of the genteel tradition had been considered a form of culture, and culture was a level reached only by the right people. These people were, of course, mainly women in society who were able to attend operas and symphony concerts and donate masterpieces to art galleries. They were the ones who determined what the subjects of novels should be, and they set the standards of literary taste. Since they prohibited novelists from

writing about drummers, factory workers, politicians, actresses, and bellhops, Dreiser was definitely out of step with the times. It shocked them that he would have the audacity to bring this vivid and throbbing life into his pages, and they labeled his novels as indecent, corrupting and immoral. They objected to the appearance of profanity in his books and protested that he devoted a "disproportionate and disgusting number of pages to the pursuit of the female by the male."¹ It appears that they were actually shocked more by his depiction of the vulgar or lowly aspects of society, such as the factory worker at his job, than by his treatment of sex in his novels.

Certainly, Dreiser's novels provide no definite answers to individual societal problems. What seems to interest Dreiser, according to George Becker, is the "phenomenon of social adaptation"² whereby all of his characters seem to be striving for better and higher things without really evaluating what the end result will be. Society shapes one into one of two molds--the exploiter or the exploited, and Dreiser portrays these two modes in the characters of Frank Cowperwood and Clyde Griffiths, respectively. The former is a forceful person, but the latter is one of society's predestined weaklings.

Commonalities between Dreiser's naturalism and that of some of the French novelists do exist. The French writers consider social ideals as useful forces for coercing people and subjecting them to the collective will

of society which is necessary for society's existence. Dreiser shares in common with these writers his fearlessness and his honesty.

On the other hand, Dreiser differs significantly from such European writers as Emile Zola to whom the origin of literary naturalism is generally attributed, in his treatment of the concept and in his approach to his material. Whereas Zola approaches his art scientifically and objectively, using the experimental method (Le Roman Experimental), Dreiser approaches his work with a tempered kind of objectivity. There are times when Dreiser's subjectivity is apparent, though not necessarily intentional, such as when he utters some strong invective against the unfairness and meaningless nature of established conventions. Because of this tendency toward occasionally exposing his personal feelings, Dreiser reveals that dim ray of optimism that is absent in Zola and in Frank Norris who is more greatly influenced by Zola than Dreiser is.

Norris believed, as Dreiser did not, that in order to be true to the naturalistic tradition, the novelist had to deviate from the ordinary and treat the terrible and the formidable. He displays this belief in McTeague where terrible things happen to the characters and where the plot works itself out in passion, violence, and sudden death. Dreiser is not so much concerned with portraying these elements in his novels. Although his characters experience many uncontrollable hardships, they generally do not meet

violent, tragic (except for Clyde Griffiths), and bloody ends.

Norris also placed a great deal of emphasis on heredity. It is heredity that he frequently uses to explain the animal brutality in McTeague. Dreiser, on the other hand, is also concerned with heredity, but he stresses more the influence of environment and social conventions and values in the portrayal of his characters. In Sister Carrie and Jennie Gerhardt, for example, heredity hardly plays any part, but environment and social values are of utmost importance.

In American Fiction: The Intellectual Background, David Maxwell discusses the aesthetic and philosophical bases of naturalism, and it seems that Dreiser's form of naturalism adheres more closely to Maxwell's description than Norris's does:

Aesthetically, it demanded . . . the admission into the novel of all aspects of experience, particularly the . . . socially unjust. Philosophically, it depicted man as largely the product of his environment For the outright naturalist, man was the helpless plaything of impersonal economic forces and life a struggle for existence which only the strongest survive. This did not, however, prevent his [Dreiser's] believing that humanity might

somehow rise against these forces and direct them to beneficial ends.³

Dreiser believes that humanity is capable of assisting itself, but he is not sure of how it is to be done.

What differentiates Dreiser from European naturalists and other American naturalists, especially Frank Norris, is his constant implication that even if one were strong and able to succeed materially, he might not find inner contentment. Those very goals that society set for the individual, when attained, quite frequently fail to be personally fulfilling. It is Dreiser's concern in all of these novels with this inner fulfillment that distinguishes him from the other naturalists and gives him distinction in the naturalistic movement in America. And it is his compassion that dominates in his novels, not the naturalistic elements so generally stressed by many scholars in accounting for his importance. Certainly the force of the environment and the influence of biological needs are quite prominent in all of these novels, but his significance to American naturalism cannot be explained solely by these uncontrollable powers. For Dreiser, life is something very different from what other naturalistic writers perceive it to be; he remains endlessly open to experience. He seems torn and divided between his own personal pursuit of material success (and that of his characters) and the pursuit of some inner beauty and peace. In that role, he is alone

as he seeks to know the unknowable, and in his continuous seeking lies his optimism.

NOTES

¹ Burton Rascoe, Prometheans (New York: G. P. Putnam and Sons, 1933), p. 252.

² George J. Becker, "Theodore Dreiser: The Realist as Social Critic," Twentieth Century Literature, 1, No. 3 (1955), 120.

³ David Maxwell, American Fiction: The Intellectual Background (London, n.p., 1963), p. 294.

WORKS CONSULTED

- Abrams, M. H. A Glossary of Literary Terms. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1971.
- Adams, Donald J. "The Heavy Hand of Dreiser," The Shape of Books to Come. New York: The Viking Press, 1944.
- Ahnebrink, Lars. "Dreiser's Sister Carrie and Balzac." Symposium, 7 (1953), 307-322.
- Anderson, Sherwood. "Dreiser," Saturday Review of Literature, 2, January 9, 1926, 475.
- Beach, Joseph Warren. "The Realist Reaction: Dreiser," The Twentieth Century Novel. New York: Century, 1932.
- Becker, George J. "Theodore Dreiser: The Realist as Social Critic," Twentieth Century Literature, 1, No. 3 (1955), 117-127.
- Block, Haskell M. Naturalistic Triptych: The Fictive and the Real in Zola, Mann, and Dreiser. New York: Random House, 1970.
- Burgan, Mary A. "Sister Carrie and the Pathos of Naturalism," Criticism, 15 (1973), 336-349.
- Butler, Robert James. "Movement in Dreiser's Sister Carrie," The Dreiser Newsletter, 11, No. 1 (Spring 1980), 1-12.
- Calvert, Beverlee. "A Structural Analysis of Jennie

- Gerhardt," The Dreiser Newsletter, 5, No. 2 (Fall 1974), 9-11.
- Commager, Henry S. The American Mind. Connecticut: American Book Company, 1950.
- Cooperman, Stanley. "Frank Norris and the Werewolf of Guilt," Modern Language Quarterly, 20 (1959), 252-258.
- Cowley, Malcolm. The Literary Situation. New York: The Viking Press, 1955.
- . "The Slow Triumph of Sister Carrie," New Republic, 116, June 23, 1947, 24-27.
- Dance, Darryl C. "Sentimentalism in Dreiser's Heroines Carrie and Jennie," College Language Association Journal, 14 (1970), 127-142.
- Darrow, Clarence. "Touching a Terrible Tragedy," in The Merrill Studies in "An American Tragedy", comp. Jack Salzman. Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Company, 1971.
- Demarkowski, Carl John. "Theodore Dreiser's Novels: Caveats of a Mature Transcendentalist." Diss. University of Toledo 1980.
- Dillingham, William B. "The Old Folks of McTeague," Nineteenth Century Fiction, 16 (1961-62), 169-173.
- Dowell, Richard W. "Sister Carrie Restored," The Dreiser Newsletter, 12, No. 1 (Spring 1981), 1-8.
- Dreiser, Theodore. An American Tragedy. New York: The World Publishing Company, 1948.
- . The Financier. Cleveland: The World Publishing

- Company, 1946.
- . The Genius. Cleveland: The World Publishing Company, 1946.
- . Hey-Rub-A-Dub-Dub. New York: n.p., 1919.
- . Jennie Gerhardt. New York: Boni and Liveright, 1911.
- . Sister Carrie. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1957.
- . The Stoic. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1947.
- . The Titan. Cleveland: The World Publishing Company, 1946.
- Elias, Robert. Theodore Dreiser: Apostle of Nature. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1949.
- Epperson, Martin Barry. "Frank Norris and the Heroic Tradition," Diss. University of Southwestern Louisiana 1981.
- Epstein, Joseph. Ambition: The Secret Passion. New York: Dutton, 1980.
- Fadiman, Clifton. "Dreiser and the American Dream," Nation, 135 (1932), 365.
- Farrell, James T. "Dreiser's Sister Carrie," The Stature of Theodore Dreiser, ed. Alfred Kazin and Charles Shapiro. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1955.
- Feldman, Leonard Mark. "A Matter of Money: Money and the World of the American Novels, 1893-1940." Diss. University of California at Los Angeles 1981.

- Foerster, Norman. American Poetry and Prose. Boston: Houghton, Mifflin Company, 1947.
- Frohock, W. M. Theodore Dreiser. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1972.
- Gallagher, Mary Kathleen. "From Natty to Bigger: The Innocent Criminal in American Fiction." Diss. University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill 1981.
- Geisman, Maxwell. "Dreiser and the Dark Texture of Life," American Scholar, 22 (1953), 215-221.
- Gerber, Philip L. "Dreiser's Financier: A Genesis," Journal of Modern Literature, 1 (1970-71), 354-374.
- . Theodore Dreiser. New York: Twayne Publications, Inc., 1964.
- Gogol, Miriam Sahatdjian. "The 'Americanization' of Naturalism in the Novels of Theodore Dreiser." Diss. Columbia University 1982.
- Hakutani, Yoshinobu. Young Dreiser: A Critical Study. Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1980.
- Harris, Julia Collier. "Dreiser's Long Expected Novel Depicts the Turmoil and the Tragedy of Youth," Columbus [Ohio] Enquirer Sun, January 3, 1926, n.p.
- Hartwick, Henry. The Foreground of American Fiction. New York: American Book Company, 1934.
- Hastings, William. Syllabus of American Literature. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1941.
- Hicks, Granville. The Great Tradition. New York: n.p.,

1933.

- Huddleston, Eugene L. "Herndon's Lincoln and Theodore Dreiser's An American Tragedy," Midwest Quarterly, 22 (1981), 242-254.
- Hussman, Lawrence E., "A Measure of Sister Carrie's Growth," The Dreiser Newsletter, 11, No. 1 (Spring 1980), 13-23.
- Huth, John F., Jr. "Theodore Dreiser: 'The Prophet,'" American Literature, 9 (Mar. - Jan. 1937-38), 208-217.
- Kaplan, Amy Beth. "Realism Against Itself: The Urban Fictions of Twain, Howells, Dreiser, and Dos Passos." Diss. Johns Hopkins University 1982.
- Katz, Joseph. "Dummy: The 'Genius' by Theodore Dreiser," Proof, 1 (1971), 330-357.
- Kehl, D. G. "Dreiser and the Winebrennarians," The Dreiser Newsletter, 5, No. 2 (Fall, 1974), 5-8.
- Kern, Alexander. "Dreiser's Difficult Beauty," Western Review, 16 (Fall 1950 - Summer 1952), 129-136.
- Klopf, Dorothy. "Theodore Dreiser's The Genius: Much Matter and More Art," Modern Fiction Studies, 23 1977, 441-448.
- Krutch, Joseph Wood. "Crime and Punishment," Nation, 122, February 10, 1926, 152.
- Leaver, Florence. "Theodore Dreiser, Beyond Naturalism," Mark Twain Quarterly, 9 (Winter, 1951), 5-9.
- Lehan, Richard. "Assessing Dreiser," The Dreiser Newsletter, 1, No. 2 (Fall 1970), 1-3.

- . Theodore Dreiser: His World and His Novels.
 Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1969.
- Levy, Oscar, ed. The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche:
The Will to Power. London: George Allen and Unwin
 Ltd., 1909.
- Lichtenberger, Henri. The Gospel of Superman: The Phil-
osophy of Friedrich Nietzsche, trans. J. M. Kennedy.
 London: T. N. Foulis, 1910.
- Lindberg, Mary Anne. "Dreiser's Sentimental Heroine,
 Aileen Butler," American Literature, 48 (Mar. - Jan.
 1977), 590-596.
- Linn, James Weber and Houghton Wells Taylor. A Foreword
to Fiction. New York: D. Appleton-Century Company,
 Inc., 1935.
- Loving, Jerome M. "The Rocking Chair Structure of Sister
Carrie," The Dreiser Newsletter, 1, No. 2 (Fall 1970),
 7-10.
- Lundquist, James. Theodore Dreiser. New York: Frederich
 Ungar Publishing Company, 1974.
- Lyndenberg, John, ed. Dreiser: A Collection of Critical
Essays. Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall,
 Inc., 1971.
- Martin, Susan Caroline Ham. "The Image of Chicago in its
 Fiction of Late Nineteenth Century," Diss. University
 of Michigan 1982.
- Matheson, Terence J., "The Two Faces of Sister Carrie:
 The Characterization of Dreiser's First Heroine,"

- Ariel: A Review of International English Literature,
11 (October 1980), 71-86.
- Matthiessen, F. O. Theodore Dreiser. Canada: George J. McCleod Ltd., 1951.
- Maxwell, David. American Fiction: The Intellectual Background. London: n.p., 1963.
- McAleer, John H. Theodore Dreiser: An Interpretation and Introduction. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1968.
- McDonald, Edward D. "Dreiser Before Sister Carrie,"
Bookman, 67 (1928), 369-374.
- Michaels, Walter Benn. "Sister Carrie's Popular Economy,"
Critical Inquiry, 7 (Winter 1980), 373-390.
- Micklus, Carla Mulford. "An American Tragedy; of the Tragedy of the Adamic Myth," American Literary Realism, 14, No. 1 (Spring 1981), 9-15.
- Moers, Ellen. Two Dreisers. New York: The Viking Press, 1969.
- Mookerjee, R. N. "Dreiser's Ambivalent Naturalism: A Note on Sister Carrie," Rajasthan University Studies in English, 5 (1971), 36-48.
- . "The Literary Naturalist as Humanist: The Last Phase of Theodore Dreiser," Midwest Quarterly, 12 (1970), 369-381.
- Mukherjee, Arun Prabha. "Pursuit of Wealth as A Quest Metaphor in the American Novel: A Study of Dreiser and Some of His Contemporaries." Diss. University

- of Toronto 1981.
- Norris, Frank. McTeague. New York: Doubleday, Page and Company, 1924.
- Parrington, Vernon L. Main Currents in American Thought. Atlanta: National Library Binding Company, 1940.
- Pizer, Donald. "Frank Norris's Definition of Naturalism," Modern Fiction Studies, 8 (1962), 408-410.
- . "The Masculine-Feminine Ethic in Frank Norris's Popular Novels," Texas Studies in Language and Literature, 6 (1964-65), 85-91.
- . The Novels of Theodore Dreiser: A Critical Study. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1976.
- Quinn, Arthur H. American Fiction. New York: n.p., 1936.
- Rascoe, Burton. "An American Tragedy," New York Sun Saturday Book Reviews, January 9, 1926, p. 10.
- . Prometheans. New York: n.p., 1933.
- . Theodore Dreiser. New York: Robert M. McBride and Company, 1925.
- Recchia, Edward. "Naturalism's Artistic Compromises in Sister Carrie and The Octopus," Literature in Wissenschaft Und Unterricht, 5 (1972), 277-285.
- Riggio, Thomas P., ed. Theodore Dreiser: American Diaries 1902-1926. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982.
- Ross, Woodburn O. "Concerning Dreiser's Mind," American Literature, 18 (Mar. 1946-Jan. 1947), 233-243.

- Roulston, Robert. "The Libidinous Lobster: The Semi-Flaw in Dreiser's Superman," Rendezvous: Idaho State University Journal of Arts and Letters, 9 (1974), 35-40.
- Salzman, Jack. "Dreiser Then and Now," Journal of Modern Literature, 1 (1970-71), 421-430.
- . Modern Fiction Studies, 23 (1977), 339-340.
- . The Merrill Studies in An American Tragedy. Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Company, 1971.
- . Theodore Dreiser: The Critical Reception. New York: David Lewis Company, 1972.
- . "An Unpublished Chapter from An American Tragedy," Annual of American Cultural Studies, 1 (1975), 1-6.
- Schacht, Richard. Nietzsche. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983.
- Sequiera, Isaac. "A Note on the Influence of Dreiser's Tropistic Theory of Life on the Naturalistic Fiction," Osmania Journal of English Studies (1971), 30-35.
- Shapiro, Charles. Theodore Dreiser: Our Bitter Patriot. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1962.
- Sherman, Stuart. "Mr. Dreiser in Tragic Realism," New York Herald Tribune Books, January 3, 1926, pp. 1-3.
- . On Contemporary Literature. New York: Peter Smith Company, 1917.

- Spiller, Robert E. The Cycle of American Literature. New York: The New Library of World Literature, Inc., 1959.
- Stern, J. P. A Study of Nietzsche. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979.
- Swanberg, W. A. Dreiser. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1965.
- Taylor, Walter F. A History of American Letters. New York: American Book Company, 1936.
- Trilling, Lionel. "Dreiser and the Liberal Mind," Nation, 162 (1946), 466, 468-472.
- Vance, William C. "Dreiserian Tragedy," Studies in the Novel, 4 (Spring 1972), 39-51.
- Wagenknecht, Edward. Cavalcade of the American Novel. New York: n.p., 1952.
- Walcutt, Charles C. "The Three Stages of Theodore Dreiser's Naturalism," PMLA, 55 (1940), 266-289.
- Walker, Don D. "The Western Naturalism of Frank Norris," Western American Literature, 2 (1967), 14-29.
- Warren, Robert Penn. Homage to Theodore Dreiser. New York: Random House Publishing Company, 1971.
- Watt, Ian. The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957.
- Wyatt, Bryant N. "Naturalism as Expediency in the Novels of Frank Norris," Markham Review, 4 (Feb. 1968-Oct. 1975), 83-87.

VITA

Carolyn Frazier Blakely
Candidate for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Thesis: NATURALISM IN THE NOVELS OF THEODORE DREISER

Major Field: English

Biographical:

Personal Data: Born in Magnolia, Arkansas, February 13, 1936, the daughter of Mary E. Brewer and James D. Frazier. Married to Neal N. Blakely on June 7, 1959.

Education: Graduated from Columbia High School, Magnolia, Arkansas, in May, 1953; received Bachelor of Arts degree in English from Arkansas A. M. and N. College, Pine Bluff, Arkansas, in May, 1957; received Master of Arts degree in English from Atlanta University, Atlanta, Georgia, in July, 1964; completed requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree at Oklahoma State University in May, 1984.

Professional Experience: High school instructor of English in Marianna, Arkansas, Magnolia, Arkansas, and Hot Springs, Arkansas, 1957-60, 1961-62, 1966-67; Assistant Professor of English, Department of English, Grambling State University, Grambling, Louisiana, 1963-66; Assistant Professor of English, Department of English, Arkansas A. M. and N. College (Now University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff) January, 1967, to the present.

Professional Affiliations: National Council of Teachers of English, Arkansas Teachers of College English, Arkansas Philological Society, South Central Modern Language Association.