

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1. Background of the Study

Before reading the novel by James Bradley entitled Flags of Our Fathers, I did not know the meaning and the story behind the United States famous photograph, which is the symbol of courage and indomitable will of America. However, I realize that this novel not only tells about the photograph and the war but it also elaborates much broader topics on the photograph. This novel tells about the life of six brave marines who raised the United States' flag in Iwo Jima and also the aftermath of their actions. This novel is also a tribute from the author to his father as one of the flag raisers. It is a novel that many teachers in the United States encourage their students to read because it "is a part of our history few of us who grew up in the post-war years truly understand" (Osier).

This novel has a special place among the hearts of the Americans, but it is not reclusive for the outsiders to read this novel because it is still worth reading. As a reader, one can see human experience of the war and its effects on human beings. The readers can see how war results in a bad effect to the marines; especially to the three flag raisers who survive from the bloodiest war ever

happened in this world. The readers are encouraged to read this novel “for the sake of the six flag raisers, the families left behind in all wars and the whole human race” (DaKay). James Bradley, the author of this novel, is surely one of the best historical writers. He not only has done some research for this novel for many years to be accurate, but “he is the perfect person to introduce the next generation to a small fraction of heroes of WW II” (Catherman). This novel will never be forgotten because history cannot be erased and more importantly, it is the part of people’s lives although there is a nightmare behind the glory of America in World War II. It is the bad result of war which leads the three survivors of flag raisers into their tragic moment of life. On the other hand, this novel has a major issue that is “uncommon valor was a common virtue” (Bradley 494) which is related to the term of a true hero. In the end of the story, the author gives a brief conclusion by saying “And I think you are gratified that I wrote of you and your fellow flag raisers as ordinary guys, not bronzed warriors of “uncommon valor” ” (Bradley 537). The author defers to what his father said that “People refer to us as heroes. We certainly weren’t heroes. And I speak for the rest of the guys as well” (Bradley 533). It is obvious that the author wants all people to honor and respect not only the three major characters of this novel named John Bradley, Ira Hayes, and Rene Gagnon as they are captured in the photograph, but people should also honor those who never come back from the war.

In order to understand more about the major characters in this novel, it is proper for me to use an appropriate approach. I think naturalism will be the right approach because it can explain almost everything that happens to the major characters. The characters in naturalistic text, “[f]requently but not invariably ill-

educated or lower-class characters whose lives are governed by the forces of heredity, instinct, and passion” (Campbell) and “[t]hrough this objective study of human beings, naturalistic writers believed that the laws behind the forces that govern human lives might be studied and understood” (Campbell). For instance, one can find out that people go to the war because there are things that make people decide to go to the war.

It also happens that in naturalism, “even life and death are determined by fate” (High 89). Therefore, the characters’ lives in naturalistic text are often determined by fate. Naturalist believes that “people were not really “free”” (High 88); on the contrary, naturalist believes that people are governed by the laws of nature. Besides, it is important to know that war novels usually belong to the naturalistic tradition “because they study the effect of war on soldiers and on ordinary people” (High 175) and “[u]sually they show the ugliness and horror of war in a realistic manner” (High 175). The focus of my analysis is to take a look in a particular moment that people go to the war because they are forced to do so by nature and to analyze the result of the war itself.

Finally, I will use a modified definition from Donald Pizer on Naturalism which is, “[t]he naturalist often describes his characters as though they are conditioned and controlled by environment, heredity, instinct, or chance” (Campbell). Therefore, the characters’ fates in this particular novel are determined by these elements which I will elaborate in my analysis.

2. Statement of the Problem

1. What is the theme of naturalism of the novel?
2. How do the major characters help reveal the theme of naturalism?

3. Purpose of the Study

1. To show the theme of naturalism of the novel
2. To show how the major characters help reveal the theme of naturalism

4. Methods of Research

The method I use is library research. I begin by reading James Bradley's Flags of Our Fathers, and several books which are relevant to the topics to be discussed. After that, I analyze the primary text by using some theories from some references and materials from the Internet that can support the analysis and can help me in writing a good thesis. Finally, I draw some conclusions of what has been discussed.

5. Organization of the Thesis

I divide the contents into three chapters, which are preceded by the Acknowledgments, the Table of Contents and the Abstract. In the first chapter, I present the Introduction, which contains the Background of the study, Statement of the Problem, Purpose of the Study, Methods of Research, and Organization of the Thesis. In the second chapter, I analyze the way the author portrays the major characters in James Bradley's Flags of Our Fathers to reveal the theme of this novel by using Naturalism approach. In the third chapter, I draw conclusion of my analysis. The thesis ends with the Bibliography and the Appendices.