

# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### **Background of the Study**

Naturalism is a popular movement in American literature from the 1890s to the 1920s. Naturalism is the outgrowth of realism; the literary movement that tries to portray life as the way it is by stressing more on the humans' struggle to make ethical choices which are accepted by the environment. In contrast with realism, in naturalism, it is believed that humans have no choices as they are the product of nature ("American Realism, Naturalism and Regionalism 1865-1914"); their lives have been decided by fate and they have no power to change it. Naturalistic writers believe that:

*individual human beings are at the mercy of uncontrollable larger forces* that originate both within and outside them. These forces might include some of our more "animal" drives, such as the need for food, sex, shelter, social dominance, etc. Or, in a more "external" vein, these forces might include the natural environment, the man-made environment, or finance, industry, and the economy. Something, though, is always beating down

and controlling the lives of lowly individual humans in naturalist works (doCarmo).

Based on the theory above, in brief, there are two particular forces that determine one's life; the force that comes within and outside an individual. In my analysis, I will use the term internal force for the force that comes within an individual and external force for the force that comes from the outside.

Furthermore, among American naturalistic writers, two notable ones are Theodore Dreiser and Frank Norris. Both of them have written many naturalistic books which became famous in their time. Theodore Dreiser “. . . view[s] people as helpless victims of indifferent natural forces” (Riggio), as many naturalistic writers do. In his novels, his protagonists are completely helpless toward the natural forces. They are dragged to a certain unfortunate life which the natural forces design. The protagonists are usually ended with a pathetic life, and not able to change anything about their life. Moreover, many famous writers praise Theodore Dreiser for dealing with such a topic, such as Sherwood Anderson, H. L. Mencken, and Randolph Bourne, who “were also seeking to cast Dreiser in the symbolic role of the trailblazer whose willingness to challenge the conventional beliefs and genteel codes of American life has opened a way for others” (Pizer). Furthermore, his several novels are successfully adapted to film, and gain equal success for both the novel and the movie. These include *Sister Carrie* and *An American Tragedy*.

Frank Norris (1870-1902) is also a famous naturalistic writer. “He is among the important exponents of American literary naturalism at the end of the nineteenth century, whose number also included Stephen Crane and Theodore

Dreiser” (“Frank Norris (*Benjamin Franklin Norris*) Biography”). His life was very short: only 32 years. However, people cannot deny that through this short period of writing/life, he has written many remarkable books. His books, *McTeague*, *A Man’s Woman*, *The Octopus*, and *The Epic of the Wheat*, were famous in their time. Not only were they famous, but they were also considered very qualified by the critics. Because of his stunning writing quality, he is called “the American Zola” (Hanson); Emile Zola is a French writer who is known as the pioneer of the naturalism school. Zola is extremely popular for his dedication to naturalism; perhaps Zola is also the most distinctive naturalistic writer.

In this thesis, I have chosen to analyze Theodore Dreiser’s *Sister Carrie* and Frank Norris’ *McTeague*. *Sister Carrie* is commercially successful when it is adapted to a movie. This novel is extremely famous for its “. . . ‘extraordinary power’ and that its story ‘has all the interest of fact, and the terrible inevitableness of fact’ . . .” (Pizer). The element of naturalism is clearly seen through the way Theodore Dreiser describes the conflicts which happen in Carrie’s attempt to survive in big cities. There are so many conflicts which indirectly force Carrie to fling herself to the men of fortune, Drouet and Hurstwood.

Like *Sister Carrie*, *McTeague* is also a successful naturalistic novel. In *McTeague*, it is clearly seen through the conflicts that humans are fully controlled by nature. In particular, a good character, McTeague, turns into a bad one when his life is ruined by the natural forces. The natural forces come in the form of his ex-best friend and miserly wife, as well as the animal instincts inside him; “*McTeague*, a story of San Francisco (1899), shows how a man's long-suppressed

animal instincts break through his outwardly civilized wrapper, with dramatic and devastating results” (“The American Novel”).

Based on the stories of *Carrie* and *McTeague*, I see that there are many confrontations between what the characters expect to happen and reality. For this reason, the literary element I will analyze is conflict. According to Shaw, conflict is “the opposition of persons or forces upon which the action depends in drama and fiction” (91). Moreover, “dramatic conflict is the struggle which grows out of the interplay of opposing forces (ideas, interests, wills) in a plot; conflict may be termed the material from which a plot is constructed” (91). Basically, there are three types of conflict in literature: inner, social, and physical conflict. However, in this thesis, I will only discuss inner and social conflicts. Furthermore, inner conflict is “a struggle between desires within a person. External forces may be important and other characters may appear in the narrative, but the focus is upon the protagonist’s inner turmoil” (92). On the other hand, social conflict is “a struggle between man and man” (91).

### **Statement of the Problem**

In this thesis, I will analyze:

1. What social and inner conflicts are experienced by the protagonists in Theodore Dreiser’s *Sister Carrie* and Frank Norris’ *McTeague*?
2. What are the causes of the social and inner conflicts in these novels?
3. What are the resolutions of the social and inner conflicts in these novels in relation to naturalism?

## **Purpose of the Study**

The aims of analyzing this novel are:

1. To analyze the social and inner conflicts that happen to the protagonists in Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* and Frank Norris' *McTeague*.
2. To analyze the causes of the social and inner conflicts in these novels.
3. To analyze the resolution of the social and inner conflicts in these novels in relation to naturalism.

## **Method of Research**

I use the library research, in which I first read the primary texts, Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* and Frank Norris' *McTeague*. In addition, I get some data from the Internet. I also use the theory of naturalism to analyze the inner and social conflicts in the novels. Finally, I draw some conclusions from my analysis.

## **Organization of the Thesis**

This thesis consists of four chapters. Chapter One is the Introduction, which consists of the Background of the Study, the Statement of the Problem, the Purpose of the Study, the Method of Research, and the Organization of the Thesis. In Chapter Two, there will be the analysis of the inner and social conflicts in Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie*. In Chapter Three, there will be the analysis of inner and social conflicts in Frank Norris' *McTeague*. Chapter Four is the Conclusion, followed by the Bibliography and Appendices, which consist of the summary of *Sister Carrie* and *McTeague*, and the biography of Theodore Dreiser and Frank Norris.