

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Naturalism had its origin in Europe and it became an important movement in American literature from the 1890s until the 1920s (“1890s-1920s NATURALISM”). The term naturalism was created by the French novelist, Emile Zola (High 87). In naturalism, one’s actions and behaviours were not the result of exercising free will for according to Emile Zola, human beings were “not really free” (88).

Naturalism was the successor of realism movement in America; hence, it is common for people to associate naturalism with realism because naturalism and realism sought to represent human lives as they “actually lived” (Douglas). However, naturalism is different from realism. Naturalism goes “further and is more explanatory than realism by identifying the underlying causes for a person’s actions or beliefs” (Rahn). In addition, naturalist authors believe that “the laws behind the forces that govern human lives might be studied and understood

through the objective study of human beings” (Scheidenhelm). It means that one can discover and get the explanation why the main character in a naturalistic novel acts in a certain way.

In a naturalistic novel, there is a dominant theme, which is that people are “fated” (Rahn) in their lives and even their deaths are also “determined by fate” (High 89). It implies that in a naturalistic novel fate determines the character’s life and death; moreover, he or she cannot avoid and escape from it. Charles Darwin's Theory of Evolution is “a basis” (Scheidenhelm) for the naturalist writers in writing their novels. The survival of the fittest shows “the struggle against nature as a hopeless fight” (Scheidenhelm). The character in a naturalistic novel surely cannot win against the power of nature.

In naturalism, if a writer wishes to depict life as it really is, he or she must be rigorously deterministic in the representation of the characters' thoughts and actions in order to show forth the causal factors that have made the characters inevitably who they are (Douglas). In addition, according to Scheidenhelm, naturalist writers use a version of the scientific method to write their novels: they studied human beings governed by their instincts and passions as well as the ways in which the characters' lives were governed by forces of heredity and environment. The next two paragraphs will deal with the four naturalistic forces in detail.

In “Dr. doCarmo’s Notes on REALISM & NATURALISM”, Stephen N. doCarmo states that human beings are at the mercy of uncontrollable larger forces that originate both within and outside them. These uncontrollable larger forces might include some of our more “animal” drives – the need for food, sex, shelter,

social dominance, etc. In “Animal Instincts in Human Interactions”, Zane says that human beings are not exempted from animal instinct, which is the standard behaviour of all animals in order to fulfil their own basic needs. Some of the basic animal instincts identified in human beings include safety, food, sleep, and the emotions of love, pleasure, anger, and fear.

According to Campbell, passions are strong emotions, such as lust, greed or the desire for dominance or pleasure. The definition of heredity is “the process by which mental and physical characteristics are passed by parents to their children; these characteristics in a particular person” (“Heredity”). The environment refers to “the conditions that affect the behaviour and development of somebody or something; the physical conditions that somebody or something exists in (“Environment,” def. 1).

I am going to analyse two novels which deal with naturalism: Theodore Dreiser’s *Sister Carrie* (1900) and Edith Wharton’s *The House of Mirth* (1905). Theodore Dreiser (1871-1945) was an outstanding early America twentieth century writer and “one of America’s greatest writers” (High 113). Among many naturalist writers in America, he was considered America’s “greatest naturalist writer” (113). As an excellent novelist, Theodore Dreiser received many literary awards: in 1990, his name was “engraved on the frieze of the Illinois State Library” (“Theodore Dreiser”) and in 2011, he was “inducted into the Chicago Literary Hall of Fame” (“Theodore Dreiser”). *Sister Carrie* (1900), his first novel, is considered “a masterpiece” (High 113) although it was suppressed until 1912 for the reason that the characters in the novel “did not attack the nation’s puritanical code: the characters simply ignored it, which shocked the reading

public” (113). Recognizing the excellence of the novel, William Wyler adapted it into “a 1952 film which starred Laurence Olivier and Jennifer Jones” (“Theodore Dreiser”).

Edith Wharton (1862 – 1937) was a significant naturalist writer of the early twentieth century. Although she was frequently grouped together with American realists, Edith Wharton wrote novels that just as rightly belong to the category of naturalism (Rahn). She was highly regarded as one of the major figures of American literature and “the first woman to win the Pulitzer Prize for fiction” (Merriman). *The House of Mirth* (1905) was her first important novel and when it was published, it became that “year’s best-seller” (Merriman). It was also “an immensely important novel in her portfolio” (Davies). There was even a film version of the novel which was “written and directed by Terence Davies” (Null).

In order to understand and discover more about Theodore Dreiser’s *Sister Carrie* (1900) and Edith Wharton’s *The House of Mirth* (1905), I will analyse the theme of these two novels. According to Perrine, theme is the “controlling idea or its central insight” (105) of a literary work. By analysing the theme of the two novels, I am sure I will be able to find out more about each writer’s idea and perception about the world in each novel. I will analyse the theme through the portrayal of the protagonists considering that the protagonist, which is defined as “the central character” in a literary work (42), plays an important role in each novel. Moreover, owing to the fact that both Theodore Dreiser and Edith Wharton are naturalist writers and both novels were published in the years of naturalism movement in America, I will use naturalism approach in analysing the themes. By using naturalism approach, I believe I will be able to know how the characteristics

of the protagonist in the novel are affected by naturalistic forces and how the protagonist with those characteristics reveals the theme of naturalism.

Statement of the Problem

The problems I am going to discuss in this thesis are:

1. What is the theme of naturalism of each novel?
2. How does the protagonist help to reveal the theme of naturalism of each novel?

Purpose of the Study

Based on the problems above, the purposes of this study are:

1. To find out the theme of naturalism of each novel
2. To show how the protagonist in each novel reveals the theme of naturalism of each novel

Method of Research

The method of research that I use is library research. I begin my research by reading Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* and Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth*. After that, I analyse the primary texts by using some theories from some references and materials from the Internet that can support the analysis. Finally, I draw some conclusions of what has been discussed.

Organization of the Thesis

This thesis consists of four chapters, preceded by the Table of Contents and the Abstract. 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, I analyse the Theme of Naturalism in Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* through the Portrayal of the Protagonist. In Chapter Three, I analyse the Theme of Naturalism in Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth* through the Portrayal of the Protagonist. Chapter Four is the Conclusion. This thesis ends with the Bibliography and the Appendices, consisting of the Synopses of the Novels and the Biographies of the Authors.