

CHAPTER FOUR

CONCLUSION

Having analysed Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* and Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth*, I would like to draw some conclusions. I want to point out that both novels deal with naturalism. In addition, the naturalism in both novels does not give positive effects to the protagonists because it makes them unable to gain their goal in life.

The protagonist of *Sister Carrie*, Caroline "Carrie" Meeber, is depicted to have certain characteristics which are ambitious, immoral, discontented, and selfish because the naturalistic forces that are the social environment and passion affect her. The naturalistic forces also make Carrie lead an unhappy life. Hence, the theme of naturalism of *Sister Carrie* is one's characteristics that are determined by passion and social environment can make one live an unhappy life.

The protagonist of *The House of Mirth*, Lily Bart, is portrayed to be manipulative, extravagant, moral, and dependent. The naturalistic forces that are the social environment and instinct influence her. In *The House of Mirth*, the naturalistic forces make Lily end her life tragically. Thus, the theme of naturalism

is one's characteristics that are determined by social environment and instinct can hinder one to gain happiness.

I find the two novels share some similarities. Carrie and Lily are both female. They struggle to improve their condition in their society because they want to live in luxury and do not want to worry about money. They are also poor and it makes them regard wealth highly.

Both of them are controlled by naturalistic forces which are their social environment and inner force so that they behave in certain ways and have certain characteristics. They are both helpless against the naturalistic forces that govern their lives. They do not have the power to fight against them. They cannot escape from the naturalistic forces either and have to deal with them to the end. Furthermore, they both experience an unhappy ending.

Above all, both *Sister Carrie* and *The House of Mirth* share a similar theme of naturalism: one's characteristics that are driven by inner forces (passion or instinct) and outer forces can lead to an unhappy life. The theme is in accordance with the background of the authors. Both Dreiser and Wharton are naturalists who believe that naturalistic forces are inevitable for the powerless.

Besides similarities, I also found some differences. The protagonists come from different classes of society. Carrie comes from the working-class society while Lily is born in the upper-class society.

Although both are governed by the naturalistic force which is their inner force, the inner force itself is different. The inner force that shapes Carrie is passion whereas the inner force that shapes Lily is instinct. In addition, the inner force works differently in causing the unhappy ending. The inner force makes

Carrie always dissatisfied with her condition so she is far from being happy and it makes Lily unable to marry the rich and to secure her position in the upper-class society.

What both struggle for is also different. Carrie struggles to gain material things while Lily struggles to stay in the upper-class society. Carrie is like a usual naturalistic character because she comes from the working-class society whereas Lily is unlike a usual naturalistic character for she comes from the upper-class society. Yet, Wharton's portrayal of her character, who comes from the upper-class society, is with a reason. She wants "to show the unforgiving nature of life at the top of the class structure" (Rahn).

In my opinion, naturalism has a more negative influence on Lily, who is poor but has to maintain her high social status than on Carrie, who is poor and has no high social status. I agree that Lily seems to be trapped in the upper-class society because of her high social standing. Her being poor is a tragic thing because one must be rich if one has a high social status, or else one will find it really hard to survive in the rich society. Carrie is not burdened with her social status because her social standing does not demand and require her to be rich to be accepted as a member. She is controlled by her passion to gain wealth to be happy though as the story progresses, she is also driven by her social environment.

I argue that Dreiser's portrayal of Carrie and Wharton's portrayal of Lily are both lifelike. However, Dreiser's portrayal of Carrie is more helpful in revealing the theme of naturalism. I argue that it is because Dreiser creates Carrie as poor and has no high social standing. By doing so, the naturalistic aspect in the novel is clearer.

Lastly, I think the theme of naturalism in both novels is universal for it can be related to any period and any place. It is possible for people to be influenced by naturalistic forces in their daily life and to develop some characteristics that lead them to a certain kind of life. It seems that by writing naturalistic novels Dreiser and Wharton want to show that naturalistic forces usually have negative effects on one's life, especially one that is poor and has lower status in the society.