

CHAPTER TWO

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

II.1. RELATED THEORIES

This study is an attempt to analyze the psychological and social conflicts of *Clyde Griffiths*, the main character in *An American Tragedy*. Both conflicts are inseparable and related to each other. In analysing Clyde's conflicts, the writer will use the intrinsic approach, which means that the writer will have to make an elaborate explanation about the intrinsic elements of the novel, namely *characterization, plot and setting*.

To have a deeper and clearer insight about Clyde's psychological conflict, the writer will use the psychological approach supported by some concepts of Freud. Considering that this thesis is a study on literature, the usage of Freud's concept will be limited to a considerably proportional usage to keep the analysis from bending to another subject of study.

To analyze his conflict with the society, the social forces of the society Clyde could not resist, the writer will employ the usage of the social approach.

also functioned to give an effective setting for the story.

The most significant element, the essence of plot is conflict. In conflict, human responses are brought out to their highest degree. The reason that a conflict is the major ingredient in a plot is that once two forces are in opposition, there may be doubt about the outcome. The emergence of the doubt element in a well plotted story, in turn will create curiosity and tension on the part of the readers. The establishment of these contrasting or conflicting situations and responses is the element that produces the interest of the story. (Roberts, 1989:100)

The conflict eventually will reach the climax -- the major turning point in the whole action of the plot. The conflict's climax is reached when the character takes a fatal step, or makes an essential decision which will result in the action concluding the conflict one way or another.

Suspense continuous from the point of climax to the end of the plot. The resolution is the rounding off of the action, the conclusion of the conflict. (Little, 1966: 83)

Analysing the plot, the writer is attempting to trace out Clyde's development -- the process of how he comes to what he is, the circumstances, forces and influences surround him that eventually raise the conflicting situation, mentally and socially.

II.1.1.2. C H A R A C T E R I S A T I O N

Character is an extended verbal representation of human being, the inner self that determines thought, speech and behaviour. (Roberts, 1989:143)

The book *Literature, An Introduction to Reading and Writing* says that in literature, however, all actions, interactions, speeches and observations are arranged to give us the details needed for the conclusion about the character. In relation to plot, it is obvious that the best plot arise naturally out of character is action, gaining in credibility and a sense of natural growth from this fact.

The basis of a literary work is definitely out of an infinite range of human relationships. Conflict, contrast and misunderstanding are but few obvious relationship between character.

Depth of characterisation means the degree of richness or completeness of presentation of character. A deep portrayal of characterisation takes into its account the fact that human mind is a complex thing of so many traits, qualities, motives, desires and conflict. (Little, 1966:91) An important feature of deep characterisation is the presentation of development and change, and here we will encounter two types of character which E.M Forster calls 'round' and 'flat'.(Roberts, 1989:143)

A round character is one major figure in the work who profits from experience and undergoes change of some sort. A round character usually has many realistic traits and are relatively fully developed. Many major character acted as the protagonist -- the center of attention -- moved against the antagonist, and usually exhibits the human attributes we expect of round character.

A round character with its many individual and unpredictable human traits, also because of the changes or growth they undergo as the result of their experiences, therefore can be considered dynamic character. Round character are just as complex and as difficult to understand as living people and therefore totally identifiable within the class, occupation or circumstances of which he or she is a part.

Contrasted to the round character is the flat character. Unlike round character, a flat character is undistinguishable from other persons in particular group or class. The flat character is representative and usually minor character. Flat character do not change or grow, and therefore they are static and not dynamic like round character. (Roberts, 1989:145-146)

Clyde is a round - dynamic character. Although throughout the story his basic traits remain unchange, and that only the surface changes, nevertheless, his unprofitable traits of character change near the end of the story. The analysis on his

character will be made based on how Clyde's character undergoes some changes that eventually it is developed socially and mentally.

II. 1.1.3. S E T T I N G

Setting refers to the natural and artificial scenery or environment in which characters live and move, together with the things they use. (Literature, An Introduction to Reading and Writing, 1989:229) Setting is the place where events occur and the time or age of the action.

Nevertheless, setting means more than just that, because it establishes the atmosphere which helps create the mood. (Guches, 1980:68)

Setting may also reveal something about the personality of the character in the story. Detailed description on setting may reveal the character's personal traits, personal habits, social status or interests.

The development of characters through setting can be considered effective because the traits and interests are implied rather than explicit. Profound characterisation can be achieved then, because this can make the characters seem more real. In real life, however, we do make opinions about other people's character and habits through impressions.

Setting, then, may be simply where the story takes place, or may be related to characters, plot or the ideas on symbolic levels. (Guches, 1980:68)

Setting plays an important part in Clyde's development. His early environment in the Kansas City's poorest area, his moving in various cities, and finally in Lycurgus where his major changes take place, each contributes to his conflict and conduct.

It is obvious that every place and circumstances where Clyde lives influence his reasons, reactions, conduct and development.

II.1.3. Psychological Approach

Psychology has long been recognized as having certain important values to writers and critics of literature. Although characters in the story are after all nothing but a fictional individual, it is unavoidable that these characters behaviour is human behaviour who has in it certain forces, drives or needs that are significant motivators of human nature. (Guches, 1980:114)

Primarily, this study deals with the inner conflict of the main character. Even if the writer uses psychological approach, this does not mean that this study tends to bend to other field or study. The psychological approach is used only to support the revealing of Clyde's inner conflict. The psychological

approach applied to clarify the situation or conflict where the main character is drawn into and what kind of consequences he have to deal with.

A psychological conflict may occur when the character is encountering choices and alternatives, and consequently the character must also encounter and deal with desirable or undesirable result. (Munn, 1962: 54)

In this case, the psychological approach is meant to clarify the mental processes of Clyde's mind. It serves to reveal how he comes to what he is, to give description of his mind, the process of how Clyde's consciousness and unconsciousness have lead to what he has done personally and socially that evidently has lead him to his grave.

Here, the writer is seeking help and support from some concepts of Freud about human mind.

II.1.3.1. The usage of Freud's concept about human mind in the character of Clyde

Sigmund Freud is one of the most influential psychologist in psychoanalysis approach in literature. (Guches, 1980: 144) Within *An American Tragedy*, obviously, the author -- Dreiser has built Clyde's character based on Freud's concept.

Freud divided human mind's structure organization into three psychic zone: id, ego and superego. Id or the pleasure principle is the source of human energy (libido), aggression and desires. Id knows no ethics,

logic or value and considered amoral, devil - even, if we refers to theological terms. Ego or the reality principle functioned to regulate id's drives, to govern and channel it into a socially acceptable outlets. Ego postpones or alters the demand into something realistically obtainable. Superego or the morality principle is the source of conscience and pride. If the ego can not divert or postpone the id's illogical demand, superego blocks the fulfilment by forcing it back into unconsciousness then repressing it. Superego can also creates what is generally termed as a guilt complex; an unconscious, brooding sense of guilt.

Dreiser had obviously built his character -- Clyde's character on the model of Freudian id, ego and superego. Clyde -- especially in the scene where he contemplating of killing Roberta -- that he has two 'selves'--perhaps on the model of Freud's id and superego. The devilish thought -- 'genie of his darkest and weakest side' -- is the id's impulse, it is irrational, obviously self destructive, nevertheless, the id's demand can not be altered or postponed by the ego as there is no reasonable and logical way out for the predicament he and Roberta were in -- the abortion pills does not work and the doctor does not want to do the abortion. Although, based on moral and social abstration he was so long accustomed to -- his superego -- Clyde was at first rejected this idea of killing

Roberta, moment by moment, his rejection grows weaker and weaker for eventually ceased and at the end the self destructiveness of the id makes its way in killing Roberta -- the barrier to his happiness.

Here obviously we can see that Clyde's repressed id from the very beginning of his restrained childhood until he comes to what he is, does not go in harmony with his ego, not to mention his superego.

II.1.4. Social Approach

Using a social or sociological approach on a piece of literary work means that the analysis will be made based on social viewpoint. It is possible to view a certain system of society or changes happened in it through literature.

Clyde Griffiths was brought up in 1920s American society. At that time, the American society is in the early phase of capitalism where many changes has taken place. The society at that time is a society which deifies material and worldly success -- the American Dream myth believed by most Americans -- as the result of capitalism on one hand and still holds tightly the strict moral conventions on the other hand.

The American Dream myth as stated by Horton et al., holds true for most Americans believing that man constantly desires to better his lot, spiritually as well as materially, and that he is almost equally

desirous of the welfare of his fellow man.

Thus these arose a great tradition, a *mystique* which inspired many thousands of young men for three generations and which seemed to be cast in the best spirit of democracy. Taught from childhood, immortalized by the avidly read novels of Horatio Algers and his imitators, the tradition exalted the virtues of pluck and luck, of relentless industry, of the boundless ambition and self reliance which, in a world of ever-increasing opportunity, would carry the worthy from rags to riches, from humble (though never disgraceful), povert to the peak of wealth, power and universal acclaim, (*Background of American Literary Thought, 1974:158*)

As a son of a poor street preacher, Clyde who could not block the temptation of beauty and luxury of life, had determined at any rate to admit himself into this grandeur of American Dream. He suffered a lot to win a foothold in the slippery social world, exhaust himself to gain success despite his lack of education and training. Money, worldly success, sensual gratification were the only end he knew or could name.

A greedy opportunist and intense social climber, Clyde could not help himself when he got involved into an illicit relationship -- a break in the society's conventioned norms.

Emile Durkheim had suggested in Dreiser's days that when men speak of force external to themselves which they are powerless to control, their subject is not God, but social organization. Norms ... what happened when they are violated, norms developed outside the individual consciousness and exist prior to it, we internalize them and are fully aware of their grip only when our behaviour is deviant, (*An American Tragedy, Afterword, 1964:818*)

When eventually Clyde committed a crime of killing his pregnant lover, he could not be blamed entirely. The society with its glimpses of beauty, wealth and luxury had also erred Clyde, who had remained hopeful for some unexpected sign to release his hunger and craving for a state of grace.

American society places great emphasis on individual success, but excludes some of its members from the possibility of achieving the goal; hence, it follows that those caught in this trap choose crime as a way out, (*The American System of Criminal Justice, 1983: 38*)

Clyde's conflict here can be considered his conflict with the society. He could not and did not dare to resist the force of society, therefore he had chosen crime as his way out instead of holding fast to his road in grasping the grace of life.

II.2. RELATED STUDIES

H.L. Mencken in his commentary in the Introduction to *An American Tragedy* simply commented that this book was Dreiser's greatest success.

He said that as a 'matter-of-fact' novelist, Dreiser had depicted all characters in his novel as people he had known, man or woman alike -- for example, Clyde Griffiths is not just a prototype from the real Chester Gillette. he is also a bell boy encountered in Chicago, his impractical father is an actual street preacher Dreiser found back in 1891 in Kansas City. Mencken also commented upon Dreiser's usage of Freudian concept in the novel -- the imbecility of judges and the district attorney in terms of infantile suppressions. Nevertheless -- he said -- that this book is much more heavily marked by the 'chemic' theory of human behaviour that entertained him during the twenties. The theory that has made Dreiser a complete fatalist and a nihilist in the domain of morals.

H.L. Mencken stated that although he did not think that *An American Tragedy* was obscene or pornographic, he regarded the novel as profoundly immoral. If it teaches anything at all, it is that committing a murder is sort of a biological accident, like breaking a leg or becoming a father.

An American Tragedy offers a picture of profound

tragedy through a suitably melancholy temperament. The author's brooding, noted by so many critics incapable of inventing a better world, is all over it. It is not only a minutely detailed picture of one unhappy young man's life, it is a commentary upon human life in general. Dreiser saw that within the days the story was written, life was predominantly hopeless and meaningless. In the novel, Dreiser is saying that the agonies of mankind are essentially irremediable and to lay them not to the sins of economic royalist, but to the blind blundering of the God responsible for its complexes, suppressions, hormones and vain dreams.

Other interesting commentary on *An American Tragedy* is Irving Howe's afterword for the novel. Irving is agree with Mencken that this novel is indeed Dreiser's major achievement. The novel is more consistent in tone and less adorned with 'literary' paste gems. Eventhough Dreiser still toying with his known enormous mistakes in grammar, pretentiousness and gaucherie, it has at least the negative virtue of calling less attention to itself.

An American Tragedy itself is not like Dreiser's other earlier novels which dealt with somewhat limited aspect of American life. The novel, enormous in scope and ambition, requires to be judges not merely as an extended study of the American lower-middle class during the twenties, but also a kind of parable to the American national experience. The bare outline of the story can

show how much American desire (dream) involves : an obscure youth, amiable but weak, is lifted by chance from poverty to the possibility of winning pleasure and wealth, even if he must abandon the piety of his fundamentalist upbringing and sacrifice the tender young woman who has given him the taste of pure affection. Howe remarked that in this case, society also conspires to persuade him that his goals are admirable, even sacred. He notices that others no better endowed than himself enjoy the privileges of money as if it were in the very nature of things they should, but entanglements of his past now form a barrier to realizing his desires and to break through this barrier he must resort to criminal mean. Clyde may not necessarily commit the murder he had planned, but might as well have, nevertheless, he is trapped in the machinery of social punishment, and destroyed.

Clyde Griffiths, the novel's main character, according to Howe is not in any traditional sense heroic or tragic. A character without any assertive will, lacks any compelling ideas, and also in endurance of pain. In his puny self, Clyde is just a little more than a clouded reflection of the puny world about him. Clyde is significance in the way he represents not our potential greatness but our collective smallness, equal to our foolish tastes and tawdry ambitions. He is the part of ourselves, a settled residence in which we take no

pride. Clyde' weaknesses are the essential shoddiness of mortality, the embodiment of the nothingness in our heart of our scheme of things, of our social aspirations.

He is the representation of our unacknowledged values, powerful especially because Dreiser keeps a majestic balance between sympathy and criticism. Clyde is a character -- as Howe saw it -- of concentration of the tragedy of human waste, energies, talents, affections, all unused -- the essential meaning of the tragedy itself.

The writer believes that there are more studies on this novel. Nevertheless, there are always lacks in the process of doing this analysis that the writer finds it quite difficult to find other sources. On the other hand, the study on this particular novel conducted by the writer will be based on a different view in order to make variety in the researches of this novel.