

CHAPTER FOUR

THE INTRINSIC ELEMENTS OF "AN AMERICAN TRAGEDY"

This chapter is the analysis on the intrinsic elements of *'An American Tragedy'*. In the first part of this chapter, the writer is making a table on setting, plot and conflict in a chronological order according to the development of the story. The novel itself is divided into three books, therefore the table is made into three parts according to each book its represented. Using this table it will be easier to grasp in chronological order the enormous details of the novel. The table is the guide to make a clear and sound analysis about the subject of this chapter.

The analysis about the novel's intrinsic elements; plot, character, and setting -- is made in the second part of this chapter. This analysis is made to see how these elements are inseparable, and how they always make contribution to each other. Due to this fact, eventhough the writer divides them into sub-chapters, it is only to make the analysis technically easy to follow and brief. Since conflict is the main subject of this thesis, the writer decides to put the analysis of conflict in a separate chapter.

Note :

All italics found in the quotation of the analysis are the author's own italics.

IV. 1. CHARACTER

The main character of this novel is Clyde Griffiths, son of a poor street preacher in Kansas City. Physically, he is a good looking young man, tall and rather slight in figure with a straight, well-cut nose, high, white forehead, wavy, glossy black hair, and liquid black eyes that are melancholy and appealing at times. (p.18)

Born out of such a trivial family like his, Clyde is characterized as a 'sensitive and observant youth', 'plainly pagan rather than religious' (p. 8), 'emotional and romantic', shy and frustrated -- he felt ashamed, dragged out of normal life, to be made a show and jest of' (p.10). An authoritative voice over Clyde presented him as 'vain and proud as he was poor' (p. 11), that 'evasion and concealment were nature to his disposition' (p.92), that 'he had soul that was not destined to grow up' (p.169), that 'he had an immature, physically unilluminated mind' (p.188) and that his was 'a naturally selfish and ambitious and seeking disposition' (p.296).

All of these editorial comments, though a devastating picture of a protagonist, shock us less than what Clyde does in action, or how he thinks about himself.

In the early stage of his development, there is always a painful collision between a character so lack in everything, so illy-formed by the family so impoverished mentally and materially with the surrounding society. Poor as he is, Clyde can not bring himself interested in the type of work that is purely manual -- he is too proud to be the one; 'he felt himself above the type of work which was purely manual' (p.18). He desires to have something more -- 'wasn't it menial, as miserable as the life he has thus far been leading, to wear old clothes and get up so early in the morning and do all the commonplace things such people had to do?' (p.18).

To understand this attitude, one must trace it back to his character. Besides arrogant and proud, Clyde was one of those interesting individuals who *looked upon himself as a thing apart -- never quite wholly and indissolubly merged with the family of which he is a member, and never with any profound obligations to those who had been responsible for his coming to the world'* (p.18)

On the other hand, he is indeed lacking in education and practical training. The same attitude is later reflected in his first job in his uncle's company.

The poverty of the family together with his eagerness for anything in life that spelled 'pleasure'

streets -- evidently proves to give nothing to the benefit of his own development.

The hotel life is in fact his college, the miniature of the Lycurgus' social elite he will later break into.

This stage of life, instead of giving him the 'pleasure pursuit' principle that will always slant his conduct in later stage, is also giving him reason to make a false breakaway from it. Self delusionment like this, has long characterized him in conducts and conflicts.

When everything turns into a mess and danger to his presence in Kansas City; the car accident, Clyde runs away and wanders from town to town before eventually secures a job in the Union League Club in Chicago. It is a hotel mostly attended by America's richest, most influential and most refined men.

During his phase of working in this hotel, Clyde is able to develop new traits in his personality -- more gentlemanly, reserved and less romantic, also the determination to give away all the elements of misguided sex which evidently has become one of the elements that had brought his downfall back in Kansas City.

These new traits, however, are just on the surface. His basic and most persistent traits are still within him unchange -- evasiveness, unawareness, self delusion -- to name a few. Clyde deludes himself to

abandon his former 'cheap desire and false gratification' only to create a new one in a different manner. This devastating circle of life -- no matter how much Clyde deludes himself that he has changed to be a better man -- will happen again since his basic characteristics are never changed.

During the early phase of his Lycurgus life, Clyde suffers a lot from the indifference and negligence from his uncle's rich family, and from the menial job he supposed to work for here. Being a proud man and always underestimates menial works, Clyde has made the situation more or less the same with the former miserable one in Kansas City. Only this time it is added to the fact that here he is a Griffiths for something he can really proud of, while in Kansas City, there is nothing to be proud of being a Griffiths.

When his condition has a tendency to return to his wretched early life, Clyde is also back to his former attitude that has coloured most of his days back there -- rebellious, yet lethargic at times. For this is a slap to his ambitions, dispositions and desires.

Meeting and falling in love with Roberta Alden at this crucial time, due to his loneliness and frustration, Clyde gives up to her maternal solicitude. Happily in conventionalized love at first, with the 'pleasure-principle' still dwells within him unchange, Clyde forces Roberta to establish an illicit relationship with him.

From the very beginning, Clyde has played a very cunning and sly politics of sexuality between these two opposite sexes. It is true that he realizes the danger and difficulty this relationship will lead, nevertheless, his ego and ambitions will never permit him to pull back his demand to Roberta:

For, as he now darkly and vaguely thought, if he sought a relationship which her prejudices and training would not permit her to take upon as anything but evil, was not thereby establishing in some form a claim on her part to some consideration from him in the future which it might be not so easy for him to ignore? For after all, he was the aggressor, not she. And because of this, might not she be in a position to demand more from him than he might be willing to give? ... Therefore, should he proceed to demand -- or should he not? And if he did, could he avoid that which would preclude any claim in the future? (p. 295-296)

This terrible game of sexual politics and calculation -- the sexual economics, has unconsciously played by Clyde and Roberta. On part of Roberta, Clyde is much more than a superior and a lover, he is also a Griffiths, which means a lot. A Griffiths means a representative of a much higher social class, the higher world so different from her own 'basement world' (p.190). Roberta does yield to Clyde's blandishment as the result of her pathetic effort to escape from this world. Ironically, her position is very much similar with Clyde's position with Sondra. Besides that, the yielding is also caused by the natural 'overmastering urge of repressed and

feared desire now knocking loudly for recognition' (p.289).

Being a character so crippled in any appealing quality, Clyde has long tasted the negligence and ignorance of the society. Combined with his basic trait as a proud and arrogant young man, this condition has suppressed his desires to overcome and to have a prominent affirmation from the others. Roberta is the one woman he can conquer. That is the cause why Clyde will never allow Roberta to reject any of his will, and has slyly and cunningly played the game of sexual politics and economics.

Other side of this clandestine relationship is served to be the reflection of Clyde's rebellious mood toward the ill-treatment of his high class relatives especially and generally toward the neglect and suppression of the society toward him which has slanted his life from the beginning.

The nature of the relationship itself -- a clandestine one since the time it is established and never became an open one until the death of Roberta -- is due to his basic and persistent traits -- that once again 'evasion and concealment were nature to his disposition'. It is also due to Clyde's fear, cowardice and calculation toward the social force and convention. Clyde rebels, but he is also afraid of the society's force.

By a twist of fate, Clyde once again meets the beautiful, rich and alluring Sondra Finchley, the girl he has always dreamed of.

With his unchanged traits, and the desire for pleasure still loudly knocking and flaming for recognition, Clyde begins to fold himself into the excruciating and harrowing moments with Roberta.

For here is Sondra, who seems to be very interested in and attracted to him, the emblem and symbol for everything he has ever dreamed of, the symbol for anything spelled 'pleasure', the glittering worldly success and materialism, 'girl of this upper level who had most materialized and magnified for him the meaning of that upper level itself' (p.308). And who is Roberta? A girl who so closely identified with the poverty he is always long to escape from. A girl to whom he has not been able to say for the time being that she is not worthy of him, or that he might not happy in case it is possible or advisable for him to marry her' (p.288)

Nevertheless, as previously described -- Clyde is sensitive. He has enough conscience and sensitivity in him -- first it shows when Clyde feels that he has treated his mother badly at the time she really need his help, and later when he deals with Roberta after he begins to develop a keen interest in Sondra.

So thrilled was he at the possibility of re-encounter with Sondra, he decided to that he would cancel this last evening engagement with Roberta, although not without some *misgivings as to the difficulty as well as the decency of it.* (p.330)

When he decides to leave Roberta for good, he feels that he is indeed a sly, cruel and shameless person who took an undue advantage of a girl who never troubled him (p.368).

Of course the outcomes of these sympathy and sensitivity -- judging his character -- are always the logical ones, for evasiveness and self delusion have become so permanent settler in his personality to ever come up with a moral solution to these problems.

His sensitive sympathetic approach to Roberta, more to console her because he realizes that he can no longer care for her in the same light, proves fatal. This sympathetic approach can not develop itself to retain any kind of emotion once occurred between him and Roberta, Clyde's self delusion and evasiveness overpowering, and later turn the sympathy quickly into a self-enclosed sympathy.

For Clyde 'can almost see himself in Roberta's place' (p.332), he can see the similarity between Roberta's life experience and his, also the similarity with his position in regard of Sondra. Roberta's emotional rendering has after all reached Clyde, and this has made him felt sorry for her. But, selfish as he is, the emotion, though vivid was of brief duration' (p.360). Why should he pity Roberta more than he pities himself when he can see her as the reflection of his own self? However, this sympathetic approach proves fatal,

because Clyde, thinking that he has enough feeling for Roberta, has made love to her -- a stupidity of undisciplined desire -- that leads to pregnancy.

Roberta, who becomes dependent on Clyde is pregnant right at the time Clyde decides to end the relationship.

Ironicly, the pregnancy, which supposed to link Clyde permanently to her, on the contrary, has brought him to the furthest distance of emotion from her. The crisis of the novel visualized clearly here. Clyde can not accept this and treats the pregnancy as the barrier which blocks his way to a grandeur world.

The circle of seduction scene happens again in this stage -- the first time when, Clyde forces his will toward Roberta, she denies and rejects painfully and futilely only to find her yield to his blandishment.

This time, Roberta demands Clyde's responsibility -- but evasiveness has long became his persistent trait -- and Clyde tries hard to deny and even reject the demand.

Once again, as in the seduction scene, both characters are unconsciously playing the painful game of sexual politics and economics. For both Clyde and Roberta become intensely cautious, suppress strong feelings and making false excuses to secure their own interest as both realize, one false move will be harmful to their position in regard of the other's benefit.

And while she might urge, in the last analysis she could not force him to do anything. He might just go away alone, as he had once said in connection with inadvertently losing his job because of her. And how much greater might not his impulse in that direction now be, if this world here in which he was so much interested to were taken away...and to face the necessity of taking her and a child too. It made her *more cautious and caused her to modify her first impulse to speak out definitely and forcefully, however great her necessity might be.* (p.414)

Clyde also has the same reason to do the same thing like Roberta, for he is afraid that if Sondra finds out about Roberta, or if Roberta ever realizes the real nature of his relationship with Sondra and out of resentment chooses to reveal anything, that will be the end of everything. Also the contrasting condition between Roberta and Sondra, has made him more 'cautious'. For the first time in his life it has caused *tact and cunning* to visualize itself as a profound necessity' (p.414).

Nevertheless, it has previously explained about Clyde's self delusionment and this particular trait visualized itself clearly when he tries to delude Roberta to delay this marriage idea, while he is trying to find a way to postpone it once and for all. Unavoidably, Clyde also deludes himself, a delusion which comes out of his evasiveness and desperate state.

It was true that from moment to moment -- arguing with himself as he constantly was -- sweating mental sweats and fleeing from moral and social terrors in connection with it all, he was thinking from time to time that he might go to Big Bittern in order to quiet her in connection with these present importunities and threats and hence (once more evasion--tergiversation with himself) give himself more time in which to conclude what his

true course must be.(p.486)

Clyde is not a 'man of consequence' (p.431) as Roberta still sees him -- purely a self delusion on her part -- Clyde's 'mental and material weakness before pleasures and dreams' and that he has 'unstable and highly variable will' (p.467) will never allow him to marry her -- 'the promise of a restricted and difficult life' (p.472).

Here, his persistent traits have once more created the devastating circle of life which has eventually folded himself in a shearing strength. Clyde can not neglect the surrounding society whose force is very frightening for him. Once again the painful collision occurs between such an ill-formed character with the surrounding society, a tendency that has always slanted his life from the very beginning -- 'Then again his more cowering sense of what *society* would think and do if it knew, what he himself would be compelled to think of himself afterwards ...' (p.468)

Clyde finds an item about the double drowning and this has given him the idea of killing the annoying Roberta. For Clyde's temperament is characterized 'as fluid and unstable as water' (p.309), the assertion and rejection to this whole killing idea grow weaker and weaker -- 'he was not a murderer and never could be' (p.451), after that 'He was not like that ... He was no such person' (p.461) and finally with the impending edge

also for the power of life and fate that have restrained him in this way. Previously, Clyde has changed Roberta into 'a shadow or thought, really, a form of illusion more vaporous than real' (p.489), so, in a sense, he strikes Roberta as a rejection of this 'vaporous -- fantasy image' of her as embodiment of the 'basement world', of constriction and restriction.

At the same time he is also rejecting her unwanted sympathy :

And then, as she drew near him, seeking to take his hands in hers and the camera from him in order to put it in the boat, he flinging out at her, but not even then with any intention to do other than *_free himself of her -- her touch -- her pleading -- consoling sympathy, her presence forever -- God!* (p.492)

After that, Clyde's sympathy reasserts again -- just like the consoling sympathy in the beginning of the pregnancy scene -- only to cause her death.

...rising and reaching half to assist or recapture her and half to apologize the unintended blow, yet in doing so, completely capsizing the boat, *_himself and Roberta being as instantly thrown into the water_* (p.493)

Obviously, Clyde fails to help her, intentionally or not, and thus recapitulates the pregnancy scene.

In the pregnancy scene, Clyde rejects, nevertheless, due to his moral sensitivity and sympathy, tend to console her agony caused by the rejection only to find his sympathy has lead to disaster. The self-enclosed sympathy occurs again -- in the death scene, it is visualized when Clyde refuses to assist the

drowning Roberta. The feeling or reason underlies this is more-or-less the same with the reason of the previous one -- why should he pity Roberta, if she has not pitied him a little to let him go his way, and when she is the cause of his misery and the barrier to his happiness. As in the pregnancy scene, Clyde's responsibility is to be evasive, in denying the responsibility.

Nevertheless, being common to his most persistent traits and character, Clyde's concept of responsibility is arbitrary and ambiguous. He can not decide for himself whether he has really killed Roberta or not (and a careful reading will make this same impression on the readers). For even if Clyde has premeditated the scheme and details for the killing of Roberta, still the death itself is not caused by his carrying out his plan, but because of a sudden impulse of rejection and ironically, sympathy.

He is responsible -- as his trial later tries to prove this -- for the thing he does not do, that is aiding the drowning Roberta.

The trial itself is an agony and torture to his 'unstable temperament'. For earlier Clyde has been characterized as having the temperament that is 'as fluid and unstable as water', nevertheless, the prosecutor has made this 'fluid' temperament placed in to a frame as 'an unmitigated villain -- a reptilian villain' (p.502), or how his cold and cynical cousin

Gilbert has characterized him as 'the little beast, the little devil' (p.586).

A more sympathetic view comes from his uncle Samuel -- who previously has thought favorably of his character -- that perhaps there are other factors that have helped in creating this terrible tragedy, being ignored by the family, 'left to his own devices for fully eight months, might not that have been at least contributing cause to all this horror? And then being put over all those girls. Was it not a mistake?' (p.586).

Sondra's opinion toward him has been more indifference -- despite the fact that Clyde has done all of these for her -- a spoiled opinion of a girl who knows quite nothing about human pains and limitation. She simply regards Clyde as 'a murderer. And in addition, that miserable western family of his, pictured as a street preacher -- and he, too -- or as a singing and praying boy from a mission' (p.628). A more or less usual opinion of a higher social class toward its lower.

Roberta's family's opinion to him -- having no choice within their range of convention and religious abstraction -- simply characterized him as the 'city seducer and betrayer' who has been able to seduce her by a promise of marriage. (p.513)

Clyde's mother, who believes his innocence based on his insistence that he is, unavoidably is doubting Clyde as well, eventhough because of her continuous love

and devotion have been able to suppress this feeling and continues to support him.

Actually, Clyde is so lack in character in making any solid statement of his personality. He is too 'unstable and fluid' a temperament. He has been a self-centering man, the while he has so little self to center.

This is true that before the execution takes place. Clyde feels so lonely, that he feels not even his mother or the Reverend McMillan, his religious advisor who has turned him at last to religious can understand him -- he was alone. He had no one who believed in him. *No one*. He had no one, whom in any of his troubled and tortured actions before the crime saw anything but the darkest guilt apparently' (p.788). Clyde can not bring himself to feel as guilty as it supposed to be, because after all 'he had a feeling in his heart that he was not as guilty as they all seemed to think' (p.788)

Here Clyde recapitulates all of his former conducts and feeling which make him feels that the whole trial is unfair and everything. It is Clyde himself who feels the torture of Roberta's demands and threats and it is him who feels the unquenchable dream of Sondra and it is him who has had the degrading experience and ill-training of his early life the while his soul cries out for better things.

How could they judge him, these people, all or any one of them, even his own mother, when they did not know what his own mental, physical and spiritual suffering had been?

...oh, these evasive, tangled and torturesome thoughts... (p.798)

Near the end of the story, there is a kind of realization in Clyde, a change that makes the story does not end with a pervading purposelessness. He realizes the un-profitable traits in his character, but still there is no one to understand him. This serves only to sharpen the human tragedy of the story;

She would never understand his craving for ease and luxury, for beauty, for love -- his particular kind of love that went with show, pleasure, wealth, position, his eager and immutable aspirations and desires. She would look on all of it as sin -- evil, selfishness. And in connection with Roberta and Sondra, as adultery, unchastity, murder, even. (p.806)

Clyde's traits has made a development -- quite a profitable one -- at the end of the story, at the end of his life and this change does not come up just at the surface. It is however, changes his -- at least -- self delusion that has long characterized him

In short, Clyde is a dynamic character. Even if throughout the story, his basic characteristics likely remains the same. At the end he eventually changes as the consequence of events derives from his former traits -- that has folded him painfully since the beginning.

IV.2 SETTING

The setting in *An American Tragedy* plays an important role in the development of Clyde's social and psychological conflict.

The story begins with an introduction to Clyde's family background in Kansas City, physically and socially. The story's earliest scene -- the indifference among the people about the street life -- has given the basic background for the story's further development :

As they sang, this *nondescript and indifferent street audience* gazed, held by the peculiarity of such *unimportant looking family* publicly raising its collective voice against the *vast skepticism and apathy of life.*(p.8)

The passage above gives enough information about the Griffiths' poor and unimportant condition. These have unavoidably cast the effect on (at that time) the twelve-year-old Clyde, an 'observant, sensitive boy, suffers and resents this strange profession'(p.9).

The description about the Griffiths home -- ironically called "The Door of Hope" -- with its dreary neighborhood, combined with that street mission work was dreary enough in most of its phases to discourage the average youth or girl of any spirit' (p.15).

This early setting tends to complicate Clyde's conflict and resentment toward religion, especially when he is in prison.

The description of the wall mottoes -- quotation of verses from the bible -- seems like a mockery to

Clyde's later conduct and conflict, which proves to be the opposite.

The scene of the luxurious Green Davidson after the dreary Door of Hope, is given to shape and sharpen Clyde's craving and dreams toward luxury. This has given him enough reason to escape from the hands of the poverty which has so long strangled him. The paralellism between the scene of the Green Davidson with the brothel scene is an example of how significant the effect of setting in this story to build Clyde's character. As it has been confirmed that the hotel life is a place where anyone can easily 'go wrong', the brothel scene is only another stack in the accumulation of Clyde's experience and attitude toward sex. At least, it makes him a person who can be easily tempted by beauty and sex appeal.

When Clyde finds out about Esta's miserable condition, living in a slum and dreary neighborhood, he longs and desires to escape from the poverty as soon as he can. This has evidently sharpened his opinion about life, which has never treated him or his family right -- 'what a rough world it was anyhow (p.99)'

Having escape and securely made his way to Chicago after the car accident in Kansas City, Clyde works in the Union League Club in Chicago. The setting here gives an effect to Clyde's character for sure, as now, in this particular hotel, Clyde has the opportunity to view at

close range, the type of life that most affected, unfortunately, his bump of position and distinction. (p.168)

The type of people attending this hotel are particularly people of reserved manner, America's most successful persons -- representative of the refined world he always dreamed to aspire someday.

There is a fact here that tends to impress and startle him not a little -- there are no sex elements like he always encounters in his former hotel jobs as in Green Davidson, the sex element that has brought his downfall back in Kansas City.

Moving in this particular social surrounding that obviously has effected his personality, Clyde is able to develop a most gentlemanly and reserved air, more subdued, less romantic and practical (p.169). Here we can see that Clyde has an interesting opinion about success for himself -- 'somebody might take a *fancy* _ to him and offer him a connection with something important..' (p.169). This proves that rather than trying his best with his own ability, Clyde tends to plant his hope of a successful life in a vain hope and unexpected sign.

The next important setting is the city of Lycurgus, particularly the Griffiths Collar Company. By observing this small but beautiful, luxurious and prosperous city, together with his uncle's big factory, Clyde's self delusivement has built within him a

romantic - great dream in connection with it. Nevertheless, the reality is different from his dreams. Clyde is obviously being sent to the lowest level of the company, the shrinking room. He feels very dissatisfied as here -- the social background of the shrinking room itself is very much different with what he has seen and dreamed of -- 'their spare and practical manner of dressing struck dead at one blow any thought of *refinement in connection with the work here*' (p.187)

The following scenes, however, have their relationship in establishing Clyde's character and personality, beside, it also gives him the atmosphere to seek a reason and justification for his later conducts.

Eventually he is invited to his uncle's grandeur house in a particular Wykeagy Avenue, the description of *the very large dining room, which was very impressive to Clyde even after Green Davidson and the Union League. it seemed a very beautiful room*' (p.214), he is very impressed by this scene and social position of the Griffiths family here that he inclines to exaggerate this blood relationship, giving him somekind of pride of being a Griffiths. With this, once again, the dream flares -- 'the luxury and charm as opposed to this of which he was a part' (p.224)

After that, Clyde is promoted as the head of a particular stamping room, a department entirely attended by female workers. The new job, however, has in it some

particular restrictions. Gilbert has personally warned him that he can not have any relationship with the women workers here, a warning Clyde at first accepted without complain.

However, the setting of this stamping room itself is very tempting ; see at this quotation :

'...a practical indifference not remote from languor and in some instances sensuality, seemed to creep over the place' (p.237).
'Again the air within the place was nearly always heavy and physically relaxing, and through many open windows that reached from floor to ceiling, could be seen the Mohawk swirling and rippling, its banks carpeted with green grass and in places shaded by trees. Always it seemed to hint of pleasure which might be found by idling around the shore' (p.237)

This room is evoking a romantic mood, warm and sensual. In it constantly recurs human patterns -- passion and sensuality, for the women themselves are tempting -- and by the actions and approaches of each in turn, he was surely tempted at times, especially in these warm and languorous summer days' (p.239).

So, it is very understandable that when Clyde meets the beautiful Roberta Alden, he is very much tempted by her by her charms.

Due to his loneliness, Clyde often visits Crum Lake -- one of the best and most reserved of all the smaller watering places about here' (p.255) The place's atmosphere is 'airy, fairy quality especially with a summer cloud or two hanging above in the blue'(p.255). By wandering in such a place like this, he is day-

dreaming about how pleasant it will be to be a member of one of the wealthy group, the rich of Lycurgus with their summer time activities.

For a man as romantic as Clyde, this loneliness is harrowing, for he has no intimate friend or girl to share this awful loneliness :

...and in the distance would be other canoes and other dreamers, *happily in love*, as Clyde invariably decided, that being to him the *sharpest contrast to his own lorn state...*(p.255)

Along with this scene -- the representation of his loneliness and rather neglected state here -- Clyde begins to think favorably of Roberta. He is wondering the unfairness of the company policies for not letting him to have a relationship with a girl as nice as Roberta.

The setting at this time can also be related to action. The beautiful lake and its rowing boat and water lilies, is the cause, or inspiration for Clyde's action. He admits that he really likes Roberta, and then begins to seduce her. It is this setting that Clyde will remember when he rows about in Big Bittern, contemplating on how he should deal with the execution of Roberta, -- looking like that other boat house and pavilion on Crum Lake *the day he had first rowed there*, and when he had been wishing that he might come to such a lake as this in Adirondack, .. and *wishing to meet such a girl as Roberta--then ----- And overhead was one of those identical woolly clouds that had sailed over him*

*at Crum lake on that fateful day'*_(p.486)

During the courting scene with Roberta, it can be seen how different the use of setting is, the changing usage of setting due to the changing of events or actions.

...against an old wooden fence that enclosed a five-acre cornfield, he was leaning and looking back toward the *interesting little city*, the lights in so many of the homes of which were aglow through the trees. The air was laden with spices -- the *mingled fragrance of so many grasses and flowers*. There was a *light wind* stirring in the long swords of the corn at his back -- in the leaves of the trees over head. And there were *stars* ... (p.272)

The passage above shows the different use of the words compared to those used to describe the *nondescript and indifferent street audience back in Kansas City*. The setting here used to evoke the mood of hilarity, vivacity and passion.

Nevertheless, this happy summer setting which comes along with the bright and pleasant love spell to both change drastically when it comes to the description of the fall, the time Clyde begins to seduce Roberta to establish an illicit relationship. In this particular setting, 'that was fall with its *chilling winds and frosty nights was drawing near*' (p.288), and '*the stars were sharp*. The air cold. The leaves beginning to ___turn' (p.288).

The description of fall when Clyde and Roberta begins their illicit relationship, is very much

contradictive with the summer setting when they first met. The wind is no longer light, the weather is chilling and frosty, the stars are no longer glowing tenderly, and the leaves are no longer muffled by the wind, they turns colour and started to fall.

The setting here obviously evokes a mood of something more gloomy, secretive, the oncoming misery and dread -- just like the nature of the illicit relationship itself. The love between Clyde and Roberta is no longer bright as the summer sun, it becomes dark and gloomy just like fall.

As the story progresses, Clyde meets Sondra Finchley in Wykeagy Avenue. The street itself has long being admired by Clyde as the street where the elite society of Lycurgus resides, the world in which the beautiful and rich Sondra Finchley lives.

'It was all so starkly severe, placid, reserved, beautiful as he say it, that he was quite stirred by the dignity and richness of it' (p.303). This setting is not only enhancing Clyde's desire and dream, but the meeting with Sondra Finchley in her '*closed car of great size and solidity*'_has proved the usage of setting in relation with Clyde's later action. He feels that he can not see Roberta with a same light as before since the night he met Sondra Finchley. He can not compare Sondra's luxurious and warm car with Roberta's '*old, faded and somewhat decrepit overstuffed chair which stood in the center of the room beside a small table whereon lay some __nondescript book and*

magazines (p.294). Although only imagining being in that room, Clyde can now see and feel the chilly atmosphere he has not experienced before. Everything has changed -- the warmth of Sondra's car has wiped out the memory he has when he was in Roberta's room.

Here it can be seen the comparison between the 'great car' and the 'old, faded and decrepit overstuffed chair' does not only functioned as the irony for Clyde's desire and dream. He has already taken proud of himself being a member of the Griffiths family. Nevertheless, it is also served as a pathetic and unwittingly comparison between Sondra and Roberta.

Obviously, the setting of Wykeagy Avenue with Sondra in her car is an important scene for the story's organization as this scene is the turning point where Clyde begins to be trapped in the dilemma, a real class conflict and a bitter choice between the rich, beautiful Sondra and the pathetic, poor Roberta.

The next scene is important for the development of Clyde's dilemma. It is the setting of the Alden farm, Roberta's home, which is placed before the scene of the Finchleys residence where Clyde admits his adoration to Sondra.

The Alden farm can be regarded as a live illustration of the 'basement world' (p.190) in which Roberta -- and also Clyde, evidently -- belongs to. It is also served to convey and enhance Roberta's sadness and uncertainty concerning the bleak future with Clyde.

At this time Clyde has already developed that indifference and cooler mood toward Roberta .

'Biltz and the *fungoid farm land* after Clyde and Lycurgus was depressing enough to Roberta, for all there was too closely identified with *deprivation* and *repressions* which discolor the normal emotions centering about old scenes' (p.341)

Roberta's description about her old home is in lthe pathetic and hopeless tone -- '*the north chimney was still impaired*', '*the furniture remained jumble*'. (p.342)

This depressive farm home also served to evoke the gloominess of Roberta's feelings .

'The scene was miserably *bleak and bare*. The thin, icy arms of the trees -- the gray, swaying twigs -- a *lone, rustling leaf somewhere*. And *snow*. And *wretched outbuildings* in the need of repair. and Clyde becoming *indifferent to her*' (p.350).

The setting here implies, Roberta's feeling at that time can be considered as 'bleak and bare, alone and miserable' just like the scene that described the setting of her home.

On the other hand, the contrasted scene between the Alden farm with the Finchleys kitchen, tends to sharpen the ironical side of these two different poles. Employing the benefit of setting to evoke this 'luxury and social supremacy' mood within Clyde, the illustration of Sondra preparing the chocolate in a 'heavily chased silver service' and presented it in 'a highly ornamented urn' compared to the Aldens' 'jumbled furniture', tends to prepare readers to see Clyde's

reaction when he sees the farm himself. The scenery plainly explained about his dread and misfortune that will come by marrying Roberta.

In Lycurgus, the setting when Robert tells Clyde about her pregnancy -- although it is conveyed with just a sentence -- '*leaning disconsolately against a tree in the shadow*' (p.371) has succeeded in evoking the intended effect.

The scene in Schenectady when Clyde is looking for a medicine that can cause Roberta a miscarriage, does not only show the atmosphere of confusion and fear, it also describes Clyde's character.

'...walking up and down the one very long main street still brightly lighted at this hour, looking now in one drug store and another, he decided for different reasons that each particular one was not the one..' (p.376)

The setting of this passage shows Clyde as an ignorant, and a coward, as well as doubtful youth.

As the story moves on, there is evidently no help for Roberta. Eventually she demands Clyde to marry her at once. Nevertheless, Clyde inclines to delay if not to postpone all this marriage idea, when he gets the chance to see the scene of the Alden farm himself -- '*the mere identification of this lorn, dilapidated realm with Roberta and hence himself, was sufficient of cause him to wish to turn and run*' (p.427). This scene is not only reminding Clyde about the basement world -- the poverty -- he's been trying to escape from, it also sharpens

his resentment, that it is really unfair of Roberta to demand him to marry her with her wretched state like that, whereas on the other hand, here is Sondra and the smart society of Lycurgus he will soon have the opportunity to become the active member of it, if it is not because of her.

Another important setting occurs when Clyde reads about the double drowning in the newspaper. Here the physical object figures into the story as the cause of an inspiration. After reading that particular item, Clyde contemplates to kill Roberta, and can not dismiss the thought of it from his mind since then.

The contrast between this present predicament and the wonderful scenery of the Twelfth Lake where he persuades Sondra to elope with him, but fails.

And then this scene, where a bright sun poured a flood of crystal light upon greensward that stretched from tall pines to silver rippling water of the lake. And off shore, in a half dozen different directions, the bright white sails of small boats -- the white and green and yellow splashes of color where canoes paddled by idling lovers were passing in the sun. *Summertime-leisure-warmth-color-ease-beauty-love- all that he had dreamed of the summer before, when he was so very much lonely* (p.445)

Here the setting functiones as an irony -- the bright sun, the crystal light, silver rippling water, and colorful sails of canoes in the lake -- compares to his last summer when he was lonely and very much longing for Roberta's love. The irony is about the similar atmosphere thic summer had with that of the last

marriage idea -- by contrast with Sondra, how *illegally dressed* in the blue traveling suit and the small brown hat with which she had equipped herself for this occasion -- the promise of a restricted and difficult life as contrasted with that offered by Sondra' (p.472).

It is the usage of the same 'blue traveling suit and the small brown hat' that evokes ironic contradictory, the artifact pathetically used to sharpen the silent conflict between Clyde and Roberta -- 'had he noticed her blue suit and little brown hat? And had he thought she looked at *all attractive compared to those rich girls...*' (p.479)

The death scene itself mostly occupies the setting to enhance the gloomy, dark state of Clyde's mind. See at the following passage :

The stillness of these pines lining this damp yellow road along which they were traveling; the cool and the silence, the dark shadows and purple and gray depth and nooks in them, even at high noon. (p.482)
 'The quiet, glassy, iridescent surface of the lake', 'the lightness, freshness and the intoxication of the gentle air' (p.482)

This passage enhance the dark and bitter feelings, the secrecy and the mystery of the intended crime. In fact, the description of the lake itself is very different with the description of Crum or Twelfth Lake. The mood evokes by this setting is hopelessness and the gloomy reality of Clyde and Roberta's life.

To enhance the mystery and the hideous plan of

murder, there is a combination between beautiful, serene and peaceful landscape with the horrible thoughts of death and destruction.

Fate !

Destruction !

Death ! Yet no sound and no smoke. Only -- only -- these tall, dark, green pines -- spear shaped, and still with here and there a dead one, ashen pale in the hard afternoon sun, its gaunt, sapless arms almost menacingly outstretched.

Death !

And the sharp metallic cry of the blue jay speeding in the depths of these woods. Or the lone and ghostly tap-tap-tap of some solitary woodpecker...

"Oh the sun shines brightly in my old Kentucky home",

It was Roberta singing cheerfully, one hand in the deep blue water. (p.488)

The deep irony of the intended murder has been conveyed with a mastery in this scene. The mockery of the crime that holds Clyde tightly in its fist is also described in this following passage :

'The insidious beauty of this place ! Truly it seemed to mock him -- this strangeness, this dark pool, surrounded on all sides by those wonderful, soft, fir trees. And the water itself looking like a huge black pearl...seemed bottomless as he gazed into it. And yet, what did it all suggest so strongly ? Death ! Death ! More definitely than anything he had seen before. Death ! But also a still, quiet, unprotesting type of death...' (p.488)

The last book of *An American Tragedy* which is mostly dominated by the courtroom scene, does not spare much for any usage of setting. Near the ending of the story, the setting only used mainly to describe the devastating irony of Clyde's last day in the Death Rows.

As stated in this quotation :

'...past these waiting throngs and over winter

sunlit fields and hills of snow that reminded him of Lycurgus, Sondra, Roberta, and all that he had so kaleidoscopically and fatally known in twenty months just past, *the gray and restraining walls of Auburn itself...* (p.755)

The final scene of this novel, after Clyde's execution -- the late winter day, only serves to enhance the deep tragedy and misery befalling on Clyde, the tragedy of human waste and failure.

IV. 3. PLOT

The main character of this story is Clyde Griffiths, the son of a street preacher in Kansas City. His earliest background -- being the son of a poor and unimportant family combined with the indifference of the street where the father conducts a mission, will immediately emerge a curiosity about what will happen to this main character in his later conduct. From this exposition, the readers have learned that Clyde tends to suffer and hate this profession, 'cheap' as he refers it to himself, and that he is far from any terms of religious dogma -- 'the remote and cloudy romance which swayed the minds of his mother and father'. (p.9) He is plainly 'pagan' rather than religious, and is more responsive to life with its phases that spells beauty and pleasure.

This fact is an irony to the family's (supposedly) religiosity, both in its background and profession. When the story moves to describe the Griffiths home -- a contrasting name to their hopeless state -- called "The Door of Hope", the suspense created in the first stage of this story increased. Here it can be seen the conflict between the romantic dreamer Clyde versus the parents' impracticality along with Clyde's frustration for being always looked down by people. The irony is that somewhere in the east, there lives a rich branch of the Griffiths family, as Clyde pictures himself as a kind of Croesus, living in ease and luxury there in the east

The acquaintance with more experienced hotel friends has become the guide into the glittering world of material success, in fact, this stage serves as his role or model world when later he breaks into the social world of Lycurgus elites.

The following events of Clyde in Ratterer's home, Clyde in a brothel and Clyde's meeting his sister, Esta -- pregnant, deserted, with no husband and no money are events that not only enhance his distrust for any religious teaching, and his eagerness to worldly things lay within his reach, but it also served to explain his later attitude toward his pregnant lover, toward love relationship and toward sex.

The exposition continues with Clyde's troubled and frustrating pursue of the sly and experienced Hortense Briggs -- which can be reflected toward his seduction to the self-sacrificing Roberta.

After he manages to escape from Kansas City due to the accident that killed a little girl, Clyde wanders around in many cities before he finally secures a place in a rich-men club in Chicago, the Union League Club. It is out of this club -- where most of the richest, powerful and reserved men from all around America gather -- that Clyde develops a new traits in his character -- more refined, gentlemanly, more subdued and less romantic. Also to the fact that startles and awes him not a little, that surrounded by these luxury of life, however, there are no sex elements whatsoever that

smearred these men -- a new way of viewing sex for Clyde as beforehand, his former downfall in K.C is also brought by this misguided sex element.

By a twist of fate, Clyde meets his uncle in this club. Interested by his refined manner, the uncle permits Clyde to come to Lycurgus and trying his luck to make a start in his collar factory.

Following this, Clyde comes to Lycurgus, a small nevertheless prosperous and luxurious city. The suspense created when a series of events happen around Clyde which cast over him some effects that influence his later conduct.

While admiring his uncle's big factory, Clyde inclines to be dissapointed when he meets Gilbert, his cold and cynical cousin who resents and looks down at him. Coupled with this, the fact that he is placed in the company's lowest position, the menial job with minor pay also the wretchedness of his boarding house, with no friends and being neglected by this wealthy family, has became an irony to his great dreams concerning the nature of his uncle's industry here.

Eventhough this condition has somehow weakened him, still Clyde, a natural proud from the beginning, even if he is poor, feels elated and uplifted by this important blood relationship. People respects him because of his family name, -- the enormous different between the Griffiths here and in Kansas City -- which

caused him to develop an air of aloofness, superiority and cautiousness.

In the mean time, he has already made a friend with an eager Walter Dillard, a clerk who is very much impressed by his name, also with Dillard's friends -- Zella and Rita, who have been very interested in him. Nevertheless, Clyde tends to put this new relationship into an end when he receives a dinner invitation from the Griffiths. Proud as he is, Clyde sees no benefit for him to continue the relationship with Dillard or Rita, people 'so far below his position' (p. 224)

During the dinner, however, Clyde feels how much he has been neglected there, so much out of place. Meeting the beautiful Sondra Finchley, Clyde places his utmost adoration, the representative of the social and beauty supremacy over her. He can never forget Sondra even when he is involved with Roberta later.

Nevertheless, although he feels that he is just permitted to look into this high social world, he still eagerly hopes that he can make his way into this grandeur world, and tends to exaggerate the import of this connection.

Following this event, Clyde is promoted to be the head of the stamping room on account of Samuel Griffiths feeling sorry for him -- looking so much like Gilbert -- working in the company's basement world. The stamping room itself is a particular room in which all the employees are women. Gilbert personally warns him about

this unusual fact and and state he will soon get into. Grateful for this sudden promotion, at that time, at least, Clyde is determined to be a good worker.

The stamping room is indeed having its particular atmosphere, that due to his character which is easily tempted by beauty and sex appeal, proves to be something really tempting him to 'play around with the girls here, if only nobody discovers about it'. (p.239)

Eventually he meets this particularly charming Roberta Alden, a poor, lonely country girl, with whom he becomes very interested in. However, it is a wonder that a man as proud as Clyde can be very interested in Roberta -- who is poor even if she is beautiful.

Roberta herself is aware to this fact, that Clyde is above her in social stratification. Nevertheless, it must be due from his loneliness here in Lycurgus -- never having any intimate friends after dropping Dillard on account of his 'exclusive' family name -- that Clyde eventually yields to Roberta's maternal solicitude.

Ironically, since the dinner invitation, Clyde has been sadly neglected by the rich Griffiths, left on his own devices for months, and since that invitation, there has been no important contact made for him. Clyde himself is aware to this irony. On one hand, he has carefully limited himself from any careless contact, on the other hand, the family has choosen to ignore him.

This, and added to the company's rule that no head

of department can have any relationship with any employees -- that has restrained him from making a relationship with a girl as nice and attractive as Roberta, have made Clyde 'rebellious and lethargic at times'. (p.18)

In this rebellious mood, Clyde finds Roberta, a simple, obedient and adoring woman. With Roberta he gets a lot of attention and affection, happily in love, if only he is not obliged to marry her. So, due to this fact, Clyde is able to forget the Griffiths indifference for the time being.

Clyde and Roberta get into a clandestine relationship. This relationship has resulted in Roberta's moving to another boarding house because Grace Marr, her room-mate has discovered Roberta's lies about her relationship with Clyde.

However, the relationship tends to go wrong. As the summer changes to fall, Clyde wants something more, a greater intimacy to stop by Roberta's room at night. Roberta refuses this proposal -- very indecent for her training and religiousity -- although in her there was 'that overmastering urge of repressed and feared desire now knocking loudly for recognition' (p.289).

Clyde, on account of his sexual timidity against the sly Hortense who has used him in Kansas City, and his sudden abandonment of Rita for nothing, determined that he must not be rejected by her. For Clyde, Roberta is the surface to bounce off his revenge, frustration,

timidity, resentment and repressed disposition. For after all, he is Roberta's superior in the company, and here in Lycurgus he is a Griffiths for something, while in Kansas City, Hortense sees him as a Griffiths for nothing. Even if he realizes how dangerous this demand for his future is, still he can not abolish the overmastering desire.

On the part of Roberta, besides from her love for Clyde overmastering her previous training and conventions, still, she sees him as a Griffiths -- the representation of the grandeur world very much contrasted with the poverty she belongs to.

The class conflict establishes between Clyde and the society reaches its most solid and real form when eventually Clyde is trapped in its dilemma.

It all begins when he meets Sondra Finchley once again, by accident. Sondra, who hates Gilbert, feels that using Clyde she can irritate Gilbert. Of course, Clyde is not aware of this fact, he only feels so much in paradise when Sondra treats him with interest and courtesy he always dreamed of. Basically, Clyde never forgets his dream and aspiration to get into the circle of Lycurgus' smart society, thus in this way, Sondra's affection to him is just like a gift from heaven.

Clyde is invited to many parties of Lycurgus' exclusive circle because eventually, Sondra really is fascinated by him.

So, this development is really his major step in breaking to the society's indifference -- especially the Griffiths indifference.

All of these events will not be such a problem if only Clyde is not involved so deeply with Roberta. It does not take long for Roberta to reveal Clyde's lies and absence which caused her to begin to regret her yielding to Clyde, especially when she realizes how trivial and unimportant their relationship compared to his relationship with the Griffiths and Lycurgus high society.

It is quite ironic, though, that although in Roberta's eyes, Clyde can show himself as a masterful youth, with Sondra, his position is just like Roberta's to him. Regarding her relationship with Clyde, Sondra realizes that there are many obstacles between them -- her state, her parents and the family's social position -- that will not permit her to do more than a clandestine relationship with him. Although Clyde is a Griffiths, still he is poor. How strange it is to find this ironic similarity with Clyde and Roberta's relationship, a class conflict between the higher social position and its lower.

The class conflict tends to become very harrowing and excruciating when on top of this, Roberta finds herself pregnant, just when Clyde decides to end their relationship. Sensitive as he can be, although he feels that he is a cruel, sly and shameless person, still

Clyde does not know what to do when it comes to this predicament. He is trapped in conflict he can not solve, as leaving Sondra for Roberta will only mean an end to the dream he is always cherished, a damaging threat and destruction unfortunately comes right at about time he is going to make a major break into the society.

Coming from a very religious family who hold tightly to the sanctioned meaning of marriage, and will never tolerate any form of adultery, Roberta demands Clyde to marry her when their efforts to have an abortion failed. Clyde's rejection to this idea can be traced back to the seduction and desertion of Esta back in Kansas City.

Learning from what has become of Esta and the unhappy result of her sexual adventure, Clyde learns that nothing is wrong with sex relation, which is also proved by his visit to the brothel.

Even if he is so much touched and sorry about Esta's condition, he still can not think for himself that she is entirely blameless. Was she not the one who runaway and willingly gave herself up to the man? For Clyde, the cause and effect of a sexual relationship is partial. Each person involves in a sexual relationship must be considered as a separate element. Esta does not demand the man responsible to marry her and this way he considers Roberta's demand as an 'illogical demand'. Why could not she act like Esta, leave him alone and make

pher own way like Esta ? Clyde does not think that it is fair for Roberta to be in his way when he is on the highway to reach his American dream. This feeling is so strong in him that eventually it evokes in him a hatred and bitter resentment for Roberta.

The climax is increasingly created step by step starting when Clyde reads about the double drowning in a lake. Desperate as he is, Clyde begins to contemplate the idea of killing Roberta. At this point, first he inclines to reject this idea, nevertheless, this assertions gets weaker and when at last Roberta's final and threatening letter arrives, '... and the world will know how you have treated me...' (p.469), Clyde thinks that 'now decidedly he must act' (p.469).

In the death scene, Clyde strikes Roberta as the response for his unconscious hatred and resentment for her authority and demand. His sympathy for Roberta after the strike only causes her death (p.492-493), that when he and Roberta are thrown to the water, he can not bring himself to help her.

The death scene is the climax of the novel. Reaching the shore after Roberta is drowned, Clyde is uncertain whether he has or has not killed Roberta. A careful reading to this particular scene will also bring the same uncertainty. For although he has contemplated to kill Roberta to the very details of its scheme, nevertheless, Roberta's death is not by his original plan, but rather from his repulsion, hatred and

frustration with a mingled sympathy. When he is brought to trial, the prosecution is focused in what he does not do -- that is to assist the drowning Roberta.

The whole courtroom scene and Clyde's being in the 'death rows' before the execution takes place, are the steps toward the story's resolution or denouement.

It is interesting to be noted here, that the author by contrast has put himself in a distance from Clyde during his trial. Obviously, here he wants to signify about how trivial Clyde's fate is in front of the legal system. Also, it is an irony that Clyde and Roberta's pathetic tragedy has become something as though it is not a real event committed by real persons. The prosecution and the defense treats the tragedy as though it is just a story arranged in order to manipulate each other.

Coming closer to the end of the story, the oncoming electrocution for Clyde, the irony of this novel is still perfectly within the plot. Facing his electrocution, Clyde finds that eventually he gets nothing from the Lycurgus' smart society, not pity or sympathy. Not a word comes from Sondra, the girl for whom he has done all these. Eventhough Sondra realizes this fact, because of the immense prejudice and horror, she does not have any intention to make any communication with Clyde. Furthermore, as she can now see, compared to her rich background, Clyde is just a

poor son of a nondescript street preacher, an extreme difference with her own class. Although the Griffiths of Lycurgus is willing to pay for his lawyers, still they remain aloof and silence, not a word for his defense or favor. In fact, it is in his poor family and exhausted mother that Clyde is now hanging to.

The uncertainty of his guilt, is still there at the end of the final scene, the execution. This coupled with his uncertainty to religion in which at last he turns to. Is he really saved, is a question not easy to be answered, just like the question whether he is really guilty.