

## CHAPTER I

### I N T R O D U C T I O N

#### I.1. Background of the Study

According to Richard Gill in his Mastering English Literature, setting of a novel covers the places in which characters are presented; the social context of characters, such as their families, friends and class; the customs, beliefs and rules of behavior of their society; the scenes that are the background or the situation for the events of the novel; and the total atmosphere, mood or feel that is created by these (106). In Edith Wharton's The Age of Innocence, the setting of the story is the social condition of New York society during 1870s, which includes a complete picture about society's so strict customs, beliefs and rules of behaviour and its strong control over its member.

The setting in The Age of Innocence has an important role in building the story. It suits the criteria of a successful setting which is stated by Richard Gill: "a successful setting is one which is appropriate to the section of the novel in which it appears and also, possibly, to the book as a whole" (106). The detailed description about society's customs, beliefs and rules of

behaviour is successful in creating believable and reasonable conflicts of the character; in this case of Newland Archer, the main character of the story.

In real life, it is true that we can not escape ourselves from the influence of the society, although maybe we do not realize it. In the story of The Age of Innocence we can also find the influence of New York society towards its members. The most interesting thing found in the story is that the society does not only influence, but also control its members in such a way that it makes everyone its victim. Ironically, not everyone realizes that actually they are the victims of society. Only those who have broad mind and experiences know what is wrong with the society and they will be the ones who suffer from this. It is interesting to analyze why such thing happens in that particular society, because it is hard to imagine this could happen in our time now. Although it is generally true that as a member of a society we must follow its norms and tradition, but we still have the possibilities in choosing what to be followed and what not to, based on our logic, beliefs and also experience.

Robin Mayhead in Understanding Literature says that "a book will be praised because its characters are 'lifelike', because 'we come to know them as though they were real people in our own lives'" (63). As if in

contrast with Mayhead's statements above, the character's conflicts in this novel seem to belong to that particular time and place, but seldom to be found in our lives now. But somehow Edith Wharton is successful in presenting such "lifelike" character and conflicts that we can understand why such conflicts could happen. The social setting in The Age of Innocence is so fascinating that for this novel Edith Wharton was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in 1921.

In The Edith Wharton's Reader, Luois Auchincloss gave a comment that The Age of Innocence could almost be called an historical novel, because it is set in the early 1870s when Mrs. Wharton was still a child. Moreover, the true life of Edith Wharton is also clearly represented through the character of Ellen Olenska. In her real life, Mrs. Wharton had to suffer from an unhappy marriage for 28 years, which according to her biographer R.W.B. Lewis is more because of her moral conservatism and her devotion to family ties and the sanctities of tradition than of personal affection. In the story, this matter is shown from Ellen's giving up her idea to get divorced from her husband which is explicitly explained to spare her family from notoriety. It can also be found in Mrs. Wharton's other works that her main interest was in her personal tension upon divorce and her exploration about how the social values and gender roles can subtly corrupt consciousness and threaten a woman's identity. In

The Age of Innocence this matter is clearly represented through May Welland's character.

Compared with our lives now, the story of The Age of Innocence can make us feel that we are lucky enough to live in this modern age which permits us to have our own free-will, follow our imagination and to look for as broad experiences as we want to.

### I.2 Statement of the Problem

Based on the background of the study above, the most interesting point found in The Age of Innocence is the description of New York society during 1870s, and its influence towards its member, especially towards Newland Archer, the main character of the story. The problems to be analyzed are formulated into these following questions:

- a. What is unique in the society in which Newland Archer lives?
- b. What are the causes of Newland Archer's conflicts in his relation with the society?

### I.3. Objective of the Study

The analysis is aimed to get complete descriptions about the uniqueness of the society that has been created by Edith Wharton in The Age of Innocence. Also, the analysis will try to find explanations about the possible causes of the main character's conflicts, as the result of

his relation with his society.

#### I.4. Significance of the Study

In this thesis, the significant point lies in reasonable impacts which can emerge from the relation between character and society. From the conflicts of the character which are caused by his relation with his society, we may learn that conflicts which occur in our social life are natural. It needs our wisdom to face them so that we can create a harmony between our necessities and the society's demands on us, as decent members of the society. Hopefully this study can enlarge our experience and our sense of what life can be.

#### I.5. Limitation of the Study

The setting of the novel to be analyzed is emphasized on its social setting, which means to concern about the social context of characters, such as their families, friends and class; the custom, beliefs and rules of behaviour of their society. In other words, the setting to be analyzed is one which is appropriate to the book as a whole "in terms of the traditions and customs of society" (Gill 236).

The character to be analyzed is only the main character, Newland Archer, because he is the only one in the story whose character is rich and deep. He is the only

character who experiences development and changes and whose inner self are shown to the readers. Other characters are only used as the representatives between the conventional and the unconventional, so that they remain that way from the beginning until the end of the story.

#### I.6. Theoretical Background

To analyze The Age of Innocence the intrinsic approach is used, which means only to concern about the intrinsic elements of the novel, by concentrating on what Edith Wharton has put on the novel. The emphasis is on the social setting and character, and the conflicts of the character.

Because this thesis concentrates on the society in the novel, sociological approach is also used to support the analysis, especially to show the possibility of the relation between an individual with his society and the reasonability of the character's conflicts as the impact of that relation.

#### I.7. Method of the Study

In the analysis, the writer uses the *descriptive-analysis method*, that is the descriptive explanation of the problems through dialogues, events and actions. This method applied based on the work itself and supported by

other information about this work.

The writer needs to do the *library research*, that is a process of finding information which are useful in helping the writer to arrange the research. The writer collects data and informations from various books, articles, encyclopedias and all kinds of related materials.

#### 1.8. Organization of the Study

This thesis is devided into five chapters. Chapter one is the introduction, which consists of the background of the study, the statement of the problem, the objective of the study, the significance of the study, the limitation of the study, the theoretical background, the method of the study, and finally the organization of the study. The second chapter is the theoretical framework, consists of theories which will be used to analyze the problems. The third chapter is the analysis of the society in the novel, consists of general views about society used in literature and specifically society in The Age of Innocence. The fourth chapter is the analysis of the relation between the main character and the society in which he lives; and his inner conflicts as the result of that relation. The last chapter is the conclusion of this thesis.

