

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### A. Background of the Study

Largely, literature is made up of three different genres, which are: poetry, play, and prose. In the genre of prose, novel has become the most popular and widely read work of literature since the modern era. When someone reads a novel, he/she might not realize that it actually deals with human life. Most novels tells about people's life from the time they were born until the time they die, and about how they associate with other people in the society and how the society affects their way of thinking. By reading a novel, the reader can see a lot of social reality of a time when the story is written.

The thesis writer finds reading novel is interesting, because through it the thesis writer may learn a lot about life, the particular society of a certain age, the moral conventions, the culture, and how these aspects influence the mind, feelings, and behavior of the characters. Literature can also be seen as the author's thoughts and ideas. Dealing with the author's thoughts and ideas, psychology of literature is used since according to Wellek and Warren "psychology of literature" can be understood as the psychological study of the writer (1978: 81). By seeing the character's thoughts and ideas, the thesis writer may conclude that it is actually the reflection of the author's thoughts and ideas.

The novel to be discussed in this thesis is *My Mortal Enemy*. It is written and published in 1926 by one of America's foremost novelists, Willa Cather.

Willa Sibert Cather was born in Back Creek, Virginia in 1873, and grew up in Nebraska. She graduated college at nineteen and became a teacher in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Later on she became a journalist for *McClure's Magazine* in New York. In 1912, Cather decided to give up journalism to pursue her career as a novelist. She devoted the rest of her life to producing novels, short stories, essays, and poetry. She later on became one of America's great writers of the twentieth century. The theme of her works mostly conveys the life of pioneers, immigrants, and people in the Western prairies—the fact that she grew up in such territory and society gives a dominant color to her work. She is most praised for her skills in evoking the pioneer spirit. In many of her works, Willa Cather contrasted the life of the urban society with the struggle of the pioneers. She also developed strong, independent female characters, many of whom face difficulties in standing up against society which expected women to be dependent on others. Miss Cather remained unmarried and died in New York in 1947.

As in her other novels, *My Mortal Enemy* conveys the idea of pioneer traits and characteristics – though not so explicitly portrayed as in *O! Pioneers* or *Alexander's Bridge*. Willa Cather centers the story more on the two dominating female characters in the novel. From the novelist's depiction of the characters, the thesis writer notices that there are many similarities between the life of the characters and that of the novelist, for example: both characters used to belong to a rural society before they venture to move to the big city and struggle for success there, and it is similar to the novelist's own life experience. One of the characters is exposed to the options between choosing the career in teaching or in journalism,

as the novelist once confronted in her real life. The other character values friendship above marriage, as does the novelist (which is the reason she remains unmarried). Seeing the many similarities between the characters and novelist, the thesis writer finds that the characters in the novel reflect the mind, ideas, life experience, and values of the novelist. They are the representation of the novelist in the form of fiction.

*My Mortal Enemy* is a story divided into two parts and centered on two women: Myra Henshawe and Nellie Birdseye. In the first part, the readers are taken to perceive the splendid life of Myra Henshawe through the eye of Nellie Birdseye, who was fifteen at the time she first met the forty-five year Myra. It was a popular story among the people in Nelly's hometown that Myra Driscoll was once the richest young lady in Parthia, Illinois. Nevertheless, she forsook her estate and eloped with Oswald Henshawe, a man she was forbidden to marry. The couple moved to New York and never came back but once, when Myra visited Nellie's aunt, Lydia. Afterward, Nellie and her aunt went to New York to pay Myra a visit and there Nellie learned about the high-class life of Myra and her husband. She got to know Myra in person and developed a sort of admiration for her due to her personality and social circles. In the second part, the readers are informed that Nellie had never seen Myra again since the last time she visited her ten years before. After ten years had passed, Nellie returned to New York for her study. She was very poor at that time and earned her living from teaching. She occupied a room in a lousy apartment, in where she found out that Myra and Oswald were then her neighbors. She then learned that fate had gone ill against

the Henshawes and that they had become very poor. Myra was then seriously ill and had only few months to live. During the last few months, Nellie nursed Myra and shared many thoughts with her. It was during these moments of approaching death that Nellie learned of Myra's perception of life, romance, friendship, religion, and self. The dialogues between the dying Myra and young Nellie reflect the search for the spiritual way every person should find in life. In the end, Myra passed away, and Nellie lived on with valuable lesson she had learned from her late friend.

In this novel, the thesis writer sees how the novelist tried to pour her ideas into her characters. The thoughts and ideas of the characters cannot be separated from the novelist. Willa Cather represented herself in her characters, Myra Henshawe and Nellie Birdseye, both of whom came from a town in the rural area, moved to a big city, and had to struggle for living in the urban society. It is obvious that the atmosphere of the society, whether rural or urban, brings great impacts on the mental condition of people. In this novel, Willa Cather wants to reflect the contrast of the rural soul when it is challenged to the urban society, as she had experienced as a Nebraskan girl who had to make her living in New York. The search for the spiritual way in this novel depicts Cather's own insight in understanding life and the elements of life after she had spent many years living in the city.

The thesis writer finds that the interconnection of the novelist's ideas, the characters' thoughts and search, and the influence of the society to the psychological state of both the novelist and characters are interesting to discuss.

Thus, in this thesis, the thesis writer focuses his discussion in understanding the reflection of the novelist in her characters and the psychological effect the society brings upon the novelist and her characters.

## **B. Statement of the Problem**

The problems to be discussed in this thesis are formulated as follows:

1. How do the characters, Myra Henshawe and Nellie Birdseye, represent Willa Cather, the novelist, in expressing her ideas and thoughts?
2. How do the characters reflect the society's influence on the psychological condition of the novelist?

## **C. Objective of the Study**

The objectives of the study are:

1. To find out how do the characters, Myra Henshawe and Nellie Birdseye, represent Willa Cather, the novelist, in expressing her ideas and thoughts.
2. To find out how do the characters reflect the society's influence on the psychological condition of the novelist.

#### **D. Significance of the Study**

The thesis writer hopes that through this study the readers will get knowledge in understanding how the society plays an important role in shaping up the psychological condition of the people living in it. Hopefully, this research may also give valuable inputs for other students who are interested in studying the aspect of psychology in literary works. The thesis writer also expects this thesis to be able to serve as an example of the application of psychology in literary analysis, and thus bridges the field of psychology and literature.

#### **E. Scope and Limitations**

The thesis writer focuses the analysis in this thesis on the reflection of the novelist in the characters in the novel. Therefore, the thesis writer finds it important to make this thesis as a biographical study. It means that the thesis writer intertwines the work of art with the novelist as the creator of the work. Thus, in the discussion, the thesis writer will relate the analysis with the life, way of thinking, and ideas of the novelist.

The thesis writer also applies Sigmund Freud's theory of psychology in analyzing the novel. In the analysis, the thesis writer discusses how the society influences the psychological state of the novelist – in this case, her superego, as opposed to her id and how the superego controls the ego. The novelist's psychological state is then reflected in the depiction of her characters. There are times when the characters are controlled either by their id, ego, or superego, but as

they are living in the society they are demanded to follow what is morally good according to the society, and that concerns most with the superego

Although there are other characters in the novel, the story circles around Myra Henshawe and Nellie Birdseye as the pivot characters of this novel. The thesis writer discusses only these two characters because they stand as the representation of the novelist. Thus, the thesis writer omits any discussion concerning other characters in *My Mortal Enemy*.

#### **F. Theoretical Background**

The thesis writer applies the Freudian theory of psychology concerning individual's id, ego, and superego, which exist in every person's mind. Together with this theory, the thesis writer also applies biographical approach as proposed by Rene Wellek and Austin Warren in order to connect the life, ideas, and way of thinking of the novelist with the characters in the story. The thesis writer analyzes the psychological state of the characters as the representation of the psychological state of the novelist and hence sees the interrelation between the novelist as the creator of the work and the characters as the product of her thoughts.

The biographical approach serves as a supporting material in studying or analyzing a literary work, since the primal cause of a work of art is the creator – in this case, the author. From the biography of the author, we can observe the creative process in writing a literary work, including the author's moral, intellectual, and emotional development. Nevertheless, we cannot take the work of art as the exact portrayal of the author's life. A work of art may represent the

author's idea, dreams, expectations, opinions, message or even a masquerade behind his/her true character, but it is not necessarily a true story of the author's life. The author may describe his/her real experience in the work. Nevertheless, it is already influenced by the artistic traditions and preconceptions. Therefore, the biographical approach only serves as a guide in our interpreting the meaning of the events and the depiction of the characters in the novel as the representations of the mind and life experience of the author, and not the real story of the author's life itself.

#### **G. Method of the Study**

The method of data collection used in writing this thesis is library research. The thesis writer collects the information he needs by searching for books in the library and browsing in the on-line library. The sources are Willa Cather's novel: *My Mortal Enemy*, theories of literature, Freud's theory of psychology, and other supporting data concerning the novel, the author, and the theory applied. The thesis writer also downloads some data from the on-line library concerning Willa Cather and her works, and also about Sigmund Freud's theory concerning the division of mind into the id, ego, and superego. All the data collected are then classified and selected for the analysis



**H. Definition of Key Terms**

- Id** : The most primitive of motivational forces comprised of drives or instincts which is generated by the urges to satisfy the individual's pleasure or desires.
- Ego** : The conscious self, which bridges the id and the real world, and is governed by the reality principle.
- Superego** : The internalized values and understanding of right and wrong implanted in the mind of an individual by the society in which he/she lives in.

# **CHAPTER II**

# **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**