CHAPTER 0NE

INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The first thing that comes to people's minds when they talk about the American Dream is the fulfilment of one's dream. For that reason the American dream has many interpretations because there are no actual proofs of the existence of the American Dream. The World Book Dictionary Volume One A-K defines the American Dream as: 'the American way of life, especially as expressed in expectation of achievement.'(1996), whereas according to Dictionary of Literary Terms by Harry Shaw: 'perhaps to most authors and readers, the phrase has connotations of "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness". The American Dream, like all dreams, is a succession of images, emotions, and thoughts passing through the mind when one is either asleep or awake.' (1972: 15).

The term the American Dream often confuses people. For some people the American Dream is to gain a better life and happiness or simply just to seek for freedom, but for others the American Dream can mean materialism.

The American Dream started when the Puritans came to America from England in search of freedom and a better life. These Puritans also sought for new land where they could purify the concept of Puritanism, which they thought, had been contaminated. America then becomes "the land of hope" where people who go there will be able to "fulfill their dreams".

The success of the Puritans in gaining their freedom later on transformed the idea of the American Dream. There was a time when lots of immigrants came to America to fulfill their American Dream. For the immigrants, the American Dream was not about searching for freedom but more about: '…the idea that the United States is a place where anyone can become successful if they work hard enough.' (Macmillan, 2002:42).

In the late 19th century and the early 20th century America was in the era of industrialization, which made America prosperous. The condition at that time made a number of people succeed in becoming wealthy; it changed the concept of the American Dream for the rest of the American people and also for the immigrants who came to America. For them, the American Dream means what is stated in The Norton Anthology of American Literature: '…the idle may be employed, the useless become useful, and the poor become rich…' (Baym 1986:206).

Francis Scott Key Fitzgerald, an early-twentieth-century writer, and Edgar Lawrence Doctorow, a late-twentieth-century writer, are two American writers who take the American Dream as the topic of their novels. Even though their novels tell about the same period of time, there are differences in their concept of

the American Dream, which are shown by the differentiation of the characters' goals and ways in fulfilling their American Dream.

F.S. Fitzgerald is one of the prominent American writers in the early twentieth century; He is the one who uses the term "Jazz Age" to represent the "Roaring Twenties". His novel, The Great Gatsby, is one of the greatest literary documents at that period; the setting of time was in the "Roaring Twenties", when the economic situation collapsed. Prices and taxes were so low that people with a small amount of money were considered wealthy.

E.L. Doctorow, is also one of the prominent American writers in the late twentieth century. He is of Hispanic-American descent. 'In his identification with certain oppressed populations such as African Americans and immigrants, he demonstrates compassion and social awareness' (http://cgi.sparknotes.com/ hlite.mpl?words=ragtime&pd=0&page=context.html&guide=%2Flit%2fragtime). Ragtime received the first National Book Critics Award for fiction in 1976, and: '…Ragtime also brought [Doctorow] enormous commercial and popular success, and later became a movie and a Broadway musical' (http://cgi.sparknotes.com /hlite.mpl?words=ragtime&pd=0&page=context.html&guide=%2flit%2fragtime).

The present writer will analyze the concept of the American Dream in both F.S. Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby and E.L. Doctorow's Ragtime through the portrayal of the major characters, and with the help of some historical facts related to the concept of the American Dream. The present writer will analyze how the society at that time influences the major characters in fulfilling their American Dream.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

1. What is the concept of the American Dream presented in F.S. Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby and E.L. Doctorow's Ragtime?

2. How do the characters help reveal the concept of the American Dream?

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This study is done to show

1. The concept of the American Dream which is presented in F.S. Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby and E.L. Doctorow's Ragtime.

2. How the characters help reveal the concept of the American Dream.

METHOD OF RESEARCH

In analyzing the concept of the American Dream through the portrayal of the major characters, the present writer uses library research.

Firstly, he reads F.S. Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby and E.L. Doctorow's Ragtime. After that he reads several books dealing with the topic he is going to discuss. Besides library research, he also uses some information from the Internet, and finally he draws some conclusions.

ORGANIZATION OF THE THESIS

The present writer divides the thesis into five chapters, which are preceded by the Preface and Abstract. Chapter One is the Introduction, which consists of Background of the Study, Statement of the Problem, Purpose of the Study, Method of Research and Organization of the Thesis. Chapter Two is the analysis

of the concept of the American Dream in F.S. Fitzgerald's <u>The Great Gatsby</u>. Chapter Three is the analysis of E.L. Doctorow's <u>Ragtime</u>. In Chapter Four, the present writer draws his conclusion. Then he ends the thesis with the Bibliography and Appendices. The Bibliography contains the titles of the novels and of the books the present writer has consulted, and the Appendices contain the synopses of the novels and the biographies of the authors.

Maranatha Christian University