

# **CHAPTER ONE**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY**

During the past three centuries, millions of people throughout this world regard America as a symbol of plenty, wealth and abundance of goods (Datesman, et al., 1997: 83). Moreover, those living in America are in fact competitive, ambitious people; besides, they are upwardly mobile people who have a strong sense of self-reliance (Velardi, 1987: para.7). These descriptions about America and American people have made American cultural values very interesting to learn. As a matter of fact, the Americans' spirit of competition becomes one of the supporting factors in the formation of their prominent trait, which shows their willingness and eagerness in facing challenges. American people are always ready for challenges, especially in accordance with gaining betterment.

People may often wonder what makes this particular nation very fond of challenges and why the Americans are confident in facing the challenges. By learning frontier spirit, which is an important product of the American cultural values, the

questions can be well explained. Frontier spirit itself has been defined as “a psychological orientation toward the frontier on the part of the people engaged in conquering those frontier situations” (Elazar, n.d: para.11). It is a term relating to the mind or mental activity of those who lived in the frontier and it enabled them to have an interest in conquering the situations at the frontier.

In their writings, Daniel J. Elazar (n.d), Patrick A. Velardi (1987), and Jackson Turner (n.d) argue that the term “frontier spirit” originated from the American westward expansion in order to find and conquer the wilderness for settlement; from then on, the term has been commonly used among the Americans. The three authors explain that the term first emerged when the expansion to the west was conducted among the first settlers who lived in the relatively densely populated area at an eastern part of America. Living under the hard frontier situations where they had to fight against the cruel winter, hard land, and the wilderness, those people, according to Elazar, were then endowed with the spirit of working hard in conquering such hard situations and challenges.

From all the information, it can be concluded that frontier spirit enables and encourages its owner to cope with and overcome whatever challenges to be faced. In addition, Maryanne Kearny Datesman et al. (1997: 64) states that frontier spirit includes the basic American values such as self-reliance, competition and hard work. In sum, the concept of the frontier spirit appears to become an American trait which is intriguing enough to analyze. By analyzing the concept or the general idea of frontier spirit, I also come to learn the significance and the development of frontier spirit among the Americans.

The portrayal of frontier spirit can be obviously seen in the two novels that deal with the great American west. The first novel, O Pioneers!, is a novel written by Willa Cather. Her outstanding talent in writing good novels about the pioneership of the Americans –which is proved by her winning the Pulitzer Prize in 1923– is worth tributes. The second novel, All the Pretty Horses, was written by Cormac McCarthy. By becoming the winner of The National Book Award and a New York Times bestseller (McCarthy, 1993), the novel was soon loved by all American people.

From both novels the readers are able to learn and see the idea and the concept of frontier spirit which is shown through the protagonists, who possess and share the same trait derived from the frontier life and experience in early stage of the expansion to the west. The frontier spirit soon becomes a strong unifying element of the two novels. However, both novels have differences which come from the fact that the novels were written in different periods: Cather's O Pioneers was written at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and McCarthy's at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Apparently, the different periods have caused some modification in the practice and application of frontier spirit.

This thesis uses sociological approach to analyze the frontier spirit in the two novels. According to X. J Kennedy (2002: 646), “sociological criticism examines literature in the cultural, economic, and political context in which it is written or received.” Kennedy also suggests three points related to the concentration of the approach. The first point is more to the use of sociological approach to explore the relationships between the artist and the society. The second point shows the use of

sociological approach to examine the social content of literary works, which include the cultural, economic or political values a particular text implicitly or explicitly promotes. Finally, the third point states the use of sociological approach to examine the role the audience has in shaping literature. I choose the second point, which uses the sociological approach to analyze the social content, and I particularly focus on the cultural and the economic values found in both novels.

### **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

I formulate the problems of this study as follows:

1. What is the concept of the frontier spirit found in Willa Cather's O Pioneers! and Cormac McCarthy's All the Pretty Horses?
2. How is the portrayal of the protagonists help reveal the concept of the frontier spirit?

### **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

Derived from the statement of the problems above, the purposes of this study are

1. to reveal the concept of frontier spirit found in the two novels.
2. to show how the authors of O Pioneers! and All the Pretty Horses portray the protagonists and how does the portrayal help reveal the concept of frontier spirit;

## **METHOD OF RESEARCH**

The method I use in analyzing both novels is the library research. I began by reading Willa Cather's O Pioneers! and Cormac McCarthy's All the Pretty Horses as the primary texts. Then I read some textbooks and also materials from the Internet which deal with frontier spirit, e.g. the history, the characteristics and the practice —among the Americans— of frontier spirit. Eventually, I collected, selected, and classified some data to endorse my analysis, from which I drew some conclusion.

## **ORGANIZATION OF THE THESIS**

This thesis consists of four chapters as a whole. Chapter One is the Introduction, which includes the Background of the Study, Statement of the Problem, Purpose of the Study, Method of Research, and Organization of the Thesis. Chapter Two provides the discussion on the concept of frontier spirit in Willa Cather's O Pioneers!, whereas the same concept found in Cormac McCarthy's All the Pretty Horses is discussed in Chapter Three. The final chapter, Chapter Four, presents the Conclusion. The thesis ends with the Bibliography and the Appendices, which consist of the synopses of both novels and biographies of the authors.