

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

In this major thesis, I intend to discuss Willa Cather's The Song of the Lark (1915) and Howard Fast's The Immigrants (1977) because the novels have the same subject matter about how the traditional American values help the protagonists in struggling to get success by overcoming many obstacles. I will focus on both the protagonists and the values they imply which help them to achieve their dreams in America as the representation of American Dream.

The Song of the Lark is a novel by Willa Cather, a Pulitzer prize winning novelist and short story writer. In her novels, she created strong female characters, who had the courage and vision to face all obstacles in their difficult lives ("Writer Hero: Willa Cather"). Katherine Anne Porter in "Lesbian and Bisexual Fiction Writers" said

"Cather was a good artist, and all true art is provincial in the most realistic sense: of the very time and place of its making, out of human beings who are so particularly limited by their situation, whose faces

and names are real and whose lives begin each one at an individual unique center. Indeed, Willa Cather was as provincial as Hawthorne or Flaubert or Turgenev, as little concerned with aesthetics and as much with morals as Tolstoy, as obstinately reserved as Melville. In fact she always reminds me of very good literary company, of the particularly admirable masters who formed her youthful tastes, her thinking and feeling.” (Will(ea) (Sibert) Cather 1873-1947)

Fast’s The Immigrants has the same subject matter as in Cather’s The Song of the Lark. In The Immigrants, Dan Lavette, who is born in poverty battles his way to success as a founder of a vast shipping empire and he becomes the head of a wealthy and powerful family.

“With The Immigrants Howard Fast definitely re-establishes his standing as one of our best story tellers. It is an extraordinary mixture of toughness and tenderness, terrifying and touching, one of the most absorbing narratives I've read in years. More penetrating than most novels, it presents a sweeping vision of a widening America in a series of interrelationships among the aliens who become the builders of a nation. It is truly an unfolding historical saga.” (Untermeyer)

Since both novels have the same subject matter about achieving the protagonists’ dreams, I am going to analyse the portrayal of protagonist and the concept of the “traditional American values”. This concept is considered as the reflection of American identity. Through the portrayal of the protagonists’

characteristics in the novels I think I can show the reality of American life, perspective, character and their own identity in general.

In Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, portrayal is defined as “the fact of showing or describing somebody or something in a picture, play, book, etc” (Hornby 1172). By portraying the protagonist's characteristics, personalities, and developments in the process of achieving their dreams, I think the concept of the traditional American values can be revealed.

Statement of the Problem

1. How is each protagonist portrayed in the novels?
2. How does the portrayal of each protagonist reflect the traditional American values?
3. What are the authors' purposes of creating the protagonists who reflect the traditional American values?

Purpose of the Study

1. To figure out how the protagonist is portrayed in the novels.
2. To find out how the protagonist reflects the traditional American values.
3. To point out the authors' purposes of creating the protagonists who reflect the traditional American values.

Method of Research

The method I used is library research. First of all, I read Willa Cather's The Song of the Lark and Howard Fast's The Immigrants. Afterwards, all the data related to the portrayal of the protagonists are collected. Then, I analyse the texts by referring to literary theories and using sociological approach. I gather some resources and references from the Internet and books that are able to support the analysis and help me write the major thesis. Finally, I draw some conclusions of what has been discussed.

Organization of the Thesis

I divide the major thesis into five chapters, which is preceded by the Preface, Table of Content and Abstract. In the first chapter, I present the Introduction which contains the Background of the Study, Statement of the Problem, Purpose of the Study, Method of Research and Organization of the Major Thesis. In the second chapter, I present the theory of the “traditional American values”. Chapter three and four present the portrayal of protagonist in Willa Cather's The Song of The Lark and Howard Fast's The Immigrants. In the fifth chapter, I draw a conclusion of my analysis. The major thesis ends with Bibliography and Appendices.