

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Society is defined as “people in general, living together in communities” (“Society”). However, as a society, people need to create rules that bind them together and make it possible for them to live side by side. Thus, every society will come up with social conventions. According to *Oxford Advance Learner’s Dictionary*, social convention is “the way in which something is done that most people in a society expect and consider to be polite or the right way to do it” (“Social Convention”). This social convention prescribes how people should and should not behave in a certain situation. Without social conventions, the society will not be organized well; “our world would be in chaos, and we wouldn’t know how to navigate it” (Cole). Regardless of its important function, sometimes there will be people who disagree with the social conventions in their society. They have their own opinions about what they feel is right. Thereby, those different opinions can create conflicts, both within the individual himself and between the individual and the people around him.

Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter* and Edith Wharton’s *The Age of Innocence* are two literary works that show the occurrence of conflicts caused by

some individuals who disagree with the social conventions where they live. Both novels can be considered as literary works that have successfully depicted the very problems in the society at their time.

Nathaniel Hawthorne was one of the prolific 19th century American novelists and short story writers. Hawthorne “is seen as a key figure in the development of a distinctly American literature” (“Nathaniel Hawthorne”). Many of Hawthorne’s works depict New England and show his thoughts about his own background, which is Puritanism. Hawthorne describes the Puritan “as narrow and relentless” (Ballin). His works usually deal with themes of sin and morality.

The Scarlet Letter is one of Hawthorne’s works and is considered as Hawthorne’s masterpiece. This work also gains him popularity as a novelist. Hawthorne successfully criticizes the Puritan society through the story and receives much praise; one of it comes from D. H. Lawrence, another prolific American author, who said “there could not be a more perfect work of the American imagination than *The Scarlet Letter*” (“The Scarlet Letter”). *The Scarlet Letter* is a story based on Hawthorne’s Puritan background, and it shows an issue about some individuals who are not always in agreement with the social conventions in their Puritan society. It tells about Hester Prynne, who has a love affair, and how the Puritan society plays a role in Hester’s life. Because there are Puritan social conventions, Hester must suffer some consequences because of her action. Hawthorne created this novel in such a great way that *The Scarlet Letter* is “hailed as original, touching, deep in thought and condensed in style” (Chen).

Meanwhile, Edith Wharton, who lived in a period known as the Gilded Age, was a prominent American writer of the 20th century who wrote novels, short stories, and poems. Born in an upper-class society of America, Wharton usually depicts and satirizes New York upper-class society in her works. She is considered

as the greatest novelist as she is “the first woman awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction, an honorary Doctorate of Letters from Yale University” (“Edith Wharton: A Biography”).

One of Wharton’s works, *The Age of Innocence*, is the first book written by a woman writer who won the Pulitzer Prize Award for Fiction, and it is also Wharton’s most famous work. The issue about how some individuals are sometimes not in agreement with social conventions in the Gilded Age is very obvious in *The Age of Innocence*. It is a story about Newland Archer, who has a love affair, and how the society affects him and makes Archer choose to sacrifice his love. The success of *The Age of Innocence* continues; it has been adapted into a movie in 1993 and won many film awards.

Considering that *The Scarlet Letter* and *The Age of Innocence* are two literary works that talk about conflicts which happen because of individuals who have different opinions than the social conventions in their society, I believe that the most significant element to be analyzed is indeed the conflicts within these two novels. Conflict in literature itself is “any struggle between two opposing forces” (“Conflict”). Conflict is divided into physical conflict, social conflict, and inner conflict. Physical conflict is the struggle between man and the physical world, like forces of nature; social conflict is the struggle of man versus man and man versus society; inner conflict is a struggle of man versus himself (“Cascio”). However, in my analysis, I would like to focus only on the social and inner conflicts.

In my analysis, I would like to use the formalism approach. Formalism is “a style of inquiry that focuses, almost exclusively, on features of the literary text itself” (“Formalism”). In conducting the study, I only need to focus on those two literary works without using any other theories. Thus, formalism approach will help me in writing my analysis of both of these novels.

Statement of the Problem

The problems I would like to analyze in this study are:

1. What kind of conflicts happen in *The Scarlet Letter* and *The Age of Innocence*?
2. What is the cause of each conflict?
3. What is the resolution of each conflict?

Purpose of the Study

Based on the statement of the problems above, the purposes of the study are:

1. to show what kind of conflicts happen in *The Scarlet Letter* and *The Age of Innocence*;
2. to show what the cause of each conflict is;
3. to show the resolution of each conflict.

Method of Research

In writing my thesis, I do some library and online research in order to find the materials needed for my thesis. First, I begin my research by reading Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* and Edith Wharton's *The Age of Innocence*. Then, I decide what topic is going to be analyzed and read some books and references which might be relevant to the chosen topic. After that, I analyze the primary texts using several relevant references and materials from the Internet that can support my analysis. Finally, I draw some conclusions from my analysis.

Organization of the Thesis

This thesis consists of four chapters, preceded by Acknowledgements, Table of Contents, and Abstract. Chapter One is Introduction, which consists of Background of the Study, Statement of the Problem, Purpose of the Study, Method of Research, and Organization of the Thesis. In Chapter Two, I analyze the conflicts in Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*. In Chapter Three, I analyze the conflicts in Edith Wharton's *The Age of Innocence*. Chapter Four provides the conclusion from what has been analyzed in the previous chapters. This thesis ends with Bibliography and Appendices, consisting of Synopsis of the Literary Works and Biography of the Authors.

