

## CHAPTER FOUR

### CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I would like to draw some conclusions from my analysis of the social and inner conflicts in the two novels I have analyzed: Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* and Edith Wharton's *The Age of Innocence*.

The first novel, *The Scarlet Letter*, tells about Hester Prynne and Mr. Dimmesdale, who experience several conflicts because they have different views from their society concerning some social conventions at that time. The first conflict is a social conflict between Hester and the society, who is represented by Mr. Wilson, Governor Bellingham, and Mr. Dimmesdale. The conflict is about Hester's insistence to keep the name of her affair a secret. The second conflict is also a social conflict that happens between Hester and the society about Hester's right to keep her child. The third conflict is an inner conflict experienced by Hester about how she deals with the sentences given to her by the society. The fourth as well as the last conflict in *The Scarlet Letter* is another social conflict that happens between Mr. Dimmesdale and the people around him. This conflict tells about the different views between how the people in the society and Mr. Dimmesdale sees a reverend.

In the second novel, *The Age of Innocence*, the story revolves around Newland Archer, Ellen Olenska, and May Welland. Each of them has their own view that is different from the social conventions in their society at that time. This difference leads to some social and inner conflicts. The first conflict in the novel is a social conflict between Newland Archer and May Welland. This conflict is about May's insistence to hold the society's convention about long engagement, whilst Archer wants to break away from it and hasten their engagement. The second conflict is also a social conflict that happens between Archer and Ellen Olenska about Ellen's wish to get a divorce from her husband, while Archer tells her not to get a divorce. The third conflict is another social conflict between Archer and Ellen. This time, it tells about their wish to be together. The last conflict is an inner conflict experienced by Archer about his feelings to Ellen, because at the same time, he also realizes his position as May's husband.

After analyzing the two novels, I found some similarities and differences. The first similarity is that both stories are set in the New England – specifically, Boston for *The Scarlet Letter* and New York for *The Age of Innocence*. The second similarity is that the conflicts happening in the two novels are experienced by both male and female individuals. In *The Scarlet Letter*, both Hester Prynne and Mr. Dimmesdale experience the conflicts. The same thing also happens in *The Age of Innocence*, where Newland Archer, May Welland, and Ellen Olenska are the ones experiencing the conflicts. The last similarity is that every conflict that happens in the stories is triggered by the different views between some individuals and the society concerning the social conventions in their society.

Despite the similarities, there is also the differences between the two novels. The first difference is the setting of time. *The Scarlet Letter* is set in the mid of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, which was the era of Puritanism in New England, whilst *The*

*Age of Innocence* is set in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, specifically 1870s, when America was in the Gilded Age period. The second difference is the kind of punishment given to someone who break the social convention in the two stories. In both of the novels, the consequence is that they must bear the social punishment. However, in *The Scarlet Letter*, besides a social punishment, someone who break the social convention must also suffer a physical punishment, like Hester who is imprisoned. While in *The Age of Innocence*, the consequence is only a social punishment without any physical punishment.

Having found the similarities and differences between the two novels, I have come to conclusions that in the society where people live, there will always be a set of social conventions that is expected to be accepted and followed by every member of the society. However, despite its important function to bind people to live together in harmony, there will always be the possibility of someone who disagrees with the social conventions in the society. They may have their own opinion about what is right, or they may find that the social conventions, when applied, are unfair. Due to these contrasting views, a conflict, either social or inner, will eventually happen in the society. In this case, the individual who is involved in the conflict can be anyone, meaning that the conflict is not limited to a certain gender in the society, but it can happen to both male and female individuals. Moreover, given the fact that *The Scarlet Letter* and *The Age of Innocence* are set in different era, I can conclude that this condition will remain. Even after centuries apart, this condition does not change much. The social conventions may be different, but the conflicts are always there.

In my personal opinion, both of the novels not only successfully deliver the stories in such a great way but also give me a broader knowledge of history about the time set in the stories. Through Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, I can see how

strict the Puritans were to what they believed to be true. They sentenced anyone who violated their beliefs and rules. Meanwhile, through Wharton's *The Age of Innocence*, I can see how some people become hypocrites just because what they desire is not appropriate in the eyes of the society. They seem to be willing to do anything in order to maintain and keep their reputation intact.

Having analyzed the novels, I still believe that every social convention is actually invented for the good in the society. It prescribes what is appropriate and what is not appropriate for someone to do in a certain situation. However, it does not mean that we should always submit to it. We can speak up our mind in times when we think that the situation is unfair or maybe if we have a different but better opinion which can help to improve the situation. After all, every social convention is made by the people in the society, and it is not something unchangeable. When we speak up our mind, there is always a possibility that the social convention will remain the same and we cannot do anything but to accept it. However, there is also a chance that we can change the social convention with our opinion for the better of our society, even if the cycle may eventually begin again, owing to the fact that the social convention is, one more time, can be conflicted by any individual in the society.