

# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The issue of adultery has become one of the major themes that have been very much discussed until today. This issue happens to be the subject matter in the novels because this issue represents the situation that really happens in society. However, it is continually covered by society.

I have chosen two novels dealing with the issue of adultery. They are The Scarlett Letter by Nathaniel Hawthorne and The Mermaid Chair by Sue Monk Kidd. In The Scarlet Letter, written in the 19th century, Hawthorne presents a complex protagonist because “his works focus on individual effort to understand moral problems and relationship”.(Person). The Scarlet Letter is an influential novel for the United States of America and this novel has been known as Hawthorne’s masterpiece. “...Nathaniel Hawthorne’s The Scarlet Letter reaches to our nation’s historical and moral roots for the material of great tragedy...” (The Scarlet Letter). The Mermaid Chair, written in the 20th century, is an excellent novel because in The Mermaid Chair, Sue Monk Kidd achieves “a bold intensity and complexity.” (The Mermaid Chair)

I would like to analyse characterization, specifically the protagonist. I personally think that analysing the protagonist of a novel is interesting because the protagonist is the central character who will face some problems around her. Definitely, the author has particular motivation in creating the protagonist. In both The Scarlet Letter and The Mermaid Chair, the protagonist of each story is a wife who is tempted into having an affair with another man. In The Scarlet Letter, the protagonist is Hester Prynne. She is portrayed as a wife who is tempted into having an affair with Arthur Dimmesdale and I believe this is related to “Hawthorne’s purpose to explore the ideas of individual responsibility by using the protagonist”. (Merriman). Meanwhile, in The Mermaid Chair, Jessie is tempted into having an affair with Brother Thomas. Since Jessie is tempted into having an affair, she finally knows what is best for herself. The Mermaid Chair is about “a vision quest. Jessie is trying to find herself” by this affair ( Duval). Moreover, in The Mermaid Chair “Kidd tried to figure out for Jessie the confluence of authentic love and freedom at the same time” (Duval). Furthermore, I believe Jessie must be responsible for having this affair.

The two novels have the same subject matter, that the protagonist deals with adultery sin and they must be responsible for having this affair. The protagonists in these novels have freedom to choose whether to involve themselves in this affair or not. Moreover, they will face some choices in their life. Thus, in analysing these novels I think it is suitable to use Soren Kierkegaard’s theories. I have chosen his theories because they emphasize on the individual and Kierkegaard “stressed the

ambiguity and absurdity of the human situation. The individual's response to this situation must be to live a totally committed life, and this commitment can only be understood by the individual who has made it. The individual therefore must always be prepared to defy the norms of society for the sake of the higher authority of a personally valid way of life.” (existentialism). Thus, I think his theories are suitable for analysing the two novels.

### **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEMS**

The problems are stated as follows:

1. How do the authors portray the protagonists?
2. What is the purpose of each author in creating such a character?

### **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

Based on the statement of the problems above this study is done:

1. To show how the authors portray the protagonists in the novels
2. To show the purpose of each author in creating such a character

### **METHOD OF RESEARCH**

I start the research for this thesis by library research, by first reading The Scarlet Letter and The Mermaid Chair as the primary texts. I also read and compile some texts that are taken from reference books and the Internet. After that, I analyse the two novels. Finally, I make some conclusions.

## **ORGANIZATION OF THE THESIS**

This thesis consists of three chapters, preceded by the Acknowledgements. Chapter One is the Introduction, which consists of the Background of the Study, the Statement of the Problem, the Purpose of the Study, the Method of Research, and the Organization of the Thesis. Chapter Two is the discussion of the portrayal of the protagonists in The Scarlet Letter and The Mermaid Chair. The last chapter, Chapter Three, is the Conclusion. The thesis ends with the Bibliography and the Appendices, which contain the synopses of the two novels and the biography of each author.