

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the Research

In American literature, violence plays a significant role in exploring various themes, such as social injustice, individual trauma, and the critique of societal norms and structures. Through the depiction of violence, American writers can express the complexity of the human experience and invite readers to consider the profound impact of violence and its forms on individuals and society.

In *Deadly Musings: Violence and Verbal Form in American Fiction* (1993), Michael Kolaweski argues that violence in American novels can manifest as racial attitudes, attempts at revenge, or the disruption of a person's perception of the world as just a stable place (4). In American literature, writers use violence to explore and critique various aspects of society including social injustice, racial issues, and the human condition. Violence is depicted not only as brutal but also as emotional and terrifying. It is often described in detail and with deep emotion, impacting the reader and showcasing the writer's skills in crafting a narrative. Among the American fiction that features violence is *The Scarlet Letter* by Nathaniel Hawthorne. In *The Scarlet Letter*, Hawthorne explores the consequences of sin and guilt in a rigid Puritan society (45). The novel illustrates how a person's actions and roles are shaped by status, norms, and social class, revealing how the environment and society are governed by specific social norms and structures that in turn, create violence through social status and class.

The Scarlet Letter was written by Nathaniel Hawthorne and published in 1850. The novel is set in New England, and is based on the Puritan society of the time. The Puritans were Christians who believed it was their duty to live according to God's will and spread God's teachings to transform their families, communities, and the broader society into parts of God's kingdom.

The Scarlet Letter portrays various forms of violence, including social and psychological abuse, reflecting the harsh realities of Puritan society and its impact on individuals (Brown 112). The novel depicts the suffering of Hester Prynne, a woman who conceives a daughter through an affair and then struggles to create a new life of repentance and dignity. It contains numerous historical, religious, and symbolic allusions. The violence portrayed in this work takes various forms, kinds, including psychological, symbolic, and emotional violence. The story is full of symbolism, offering many interpretations to the reader.

Nathaniel Hawthorne was born in Salem, Massachusetts, in 1804. In 1821, he enrolled at Bowdoin College, was elected to Phi Beta Kappa in 1824, and received his diploma in 1825. In 1828, he published his first novel, *Fanshawe*, which he later tried to suppress because he felt it did not meet the standard of his later work. In 1837, he released *Twice-Told Tales*, a collection of short stories that he had gathered from newspapers. He married Sophia Peabody the following year. Before marrying Peabody in 1842, he worked at the Boston Custom House and joined Brook Farm, a transcendentalist commune. They lived in The Old Manse in Concord, then in Salem, the Berkshires, and finally in The Wayside in Concord. In 1850, he released *The Scarlet Letter*, followed by a series of other

books. *The Scarlet Letter* was written by Nathaniel Hawthorne to expose the life and hypocrisy of Puritan society at the time.

Much of Hawthorne's writing is set in New England, with several pieces having anti-Puritan moral metaphors. His fiction works are considered part of the romantic movement and, more specifically, dark romanticism. The themes of Hawthorne's works concern the inherent evil and sin of humanity, and his works often have moral messages and deep psychological complexity. His published works include novels, short stories, and a biography of his college friend Franklin Pierce, the 14th President of the United States.

On the other hand, this study will examine how Nathaniel Hawthorne depict various forms of social violence that occurred in Puritan society, how he presents the novel as a reflection of real life during the Puritan Era, and how he portrays social violence in *The Scarlet Letter* as reflection of the social conditions of the time. The social environment significantly influences and can lead to violence. I chose this topic because the exciting research on it is limited, and I hope this study will be useful given its focus on the novel. Based on this research background, I intend for this study to serve as guide for further research on the same topic.

Lastly, I am using and approach to analyze the novel. I have titled this research **“Social Violence in The Puritan Era in The Novel *The Scarlet Letter* by Nathaniel Hawthorne.”**

1.2. Identification of The Problem

Hawthorne presents various social issues in his novel *The Scarlet Letter*, including the theme of violence. Throughout the novel, violence is depicted in emotional, psychological, and symbolic ways, both directly and indirectly. This study aims to explore the types of social violence that Hawthorne portrays in *The Scarlet Letter*, how he presents the novel as a reflection of real life during the Puritan era, and how he uses the depiction of social violence to mirror the social conditions of the time.

1.3. Review Related Literature

Violence is a common theme in contemporary literary works, especially in American literature. Many literary works address violence, and some scholars have researched how it is represented in literature.

The first book that the researcher would like to review is entitled “*Deadly Musings: Violence and Verbal Form in American Fiction*,” presented by Michael Kolaweski. Kolaweski (1993) examines how violence in American fiction accomplishes several goals, including the reflection of the cruelty of society, the state of humanity, and character development. He demonstrates that the representation of violence in American fiction is complicated. Kolaweski also focuses on the impacts of violent narration on readers and society. This book plays an important role in understanding the complexity of violence in literary works and culture in general.

The second analysis was presented by Kinley (1950-1975), in his study about *Violence and Masculinity in American Fiction*. Kinley focuses on the

reflection of the concept of masculinity in literary works through the theme of violence. Kinley stated that in literary works, violence is often used by men as a measure of strength and courage. Violence also has an impact on society and individuals, both victims and perpetrators. Kinley believes that current literary works often display psychological trauma caused by violence as well as society's responses to violence. Kinley also examines the violence contained in today's literary works are influenced by events that occurred in the past. This analysis makes it easier for researcher to understand the representation of violence and gender identity in American literary works.

Another related research is *A Critique of the Representation of Violence in American Fiction* by Knight (2012). Knight focuses on the representation of violence in American literature and how it affects readers and society. He also examines literary works from different eras and identifies the themes and the way violence is represented in American fiction. Knight also examines the relationship between violence in literature and the realities of society. This research helps the writer to understand the relationship between violence and society.

Next, an article entitled *Violence and Identity in Richard Wright's Native Son* (2016) vol 2, issue 2 by Gee. Gee focuses on how the main character is depicted using violence to show his social identity and how society is controlled by violence. Gee also concludes that violence in literary works does not only take the form of physical violence but also takes the form of identity violence. Based on the novel *Native Son*, Gee argues that the writer depicts how violence can be

used as a form of resistance, especially for victims, who both experience violence such as racism and exclusion.

The next review is a thesis entitled *The Violence Against Women in the Novel Big Little Lies* (2002) by Nurul Rahmi from the English and Literature Department, Alauddin State Islamic University of Makassar. Rahmi explores the violence experienced by the female character. *She found several types of violence in the novel Big Little Lies* related to real life, including verbal and physical violence. In the study, the researcher argues that women become the object of abusive behaviour by men in the novel. Rahmi used a feminist approach to analyze the novel. Rahmi concludes that the women in that novel struggle to face all the forms of violence to get freedom. Overall, this thesis identifies various types of violence experienced by the female character and how she responds to the violence.

After reviewing several research studies, the researcher found that not all of them discuss the several kinds of social violence; some of them examine violence and the effects of violence. Additionally, while previous studies address violence in American literature, they do not use a sociology of literature approach to describe it. This research, however, will specifically focus on the depiction of violence in Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*.

1.4. Research Questions

This research will answer the following questions:

1. What kinds of social violence does Hawthorne depict in *The Scarlet Letter* during the Puritan era?

2. How does Hawthorne present the novel as a reflection of real life in the Puritan era?
3. How does Hawthorne portray social violence in *The Scarlet Letter* as a reflection of the social conditions in the Puritan era?

1.5. Scope of The Research

This research will focus on how Hawthorne presents the social violence in the Puritan era in *The Scarlet Letter*. To achieve this, I will examine how the novel reflects the realities of social life at that time. Specifically, the research will address three main areas. First, I will analyze the tragedy and violence depicted in the novel and explore the reasons behind these tragedies using a sociological approach. Second, I will investigate the historical background of social violence in the Puritan era, which will aid in analyzing the types of violence portrayed. Finally, I will examine how the novel reflects real-life conditions in the Puritan era and how it uses social violence as a mirror of the era's social conditions.

1.6. Objectives of the Study

1. To reveal various types of social violence that Hawthorne presents in the Puritan era in *The Scarlet Letter*
2. To present the novel as a reflection of real life during the Puritan era
3. To examine how Hawthorne depicts the social violence in *The Scarlet Letter* as a reflection of social conditions in the Puritan era

This research aims to reveal the types of social violence represented in the Puritan community and how the author depicts the conflicts and societal factors

that lead to violent acts in Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*. Additionally, this study will examine the social environment that contributes to violence within the Puritan community. It is hoped that the results of this study will serve as a useful reference for future research.

