

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

Children's literature has a long and illustrious history dating back to the mid-nineteenth century, and it is a significant component of popular culture. Children's books are vital in the process of social learning and identity development as they teach children the ideas about gender, race, and class from their earliest life stages. Books, among other things, shape children's understanding of gender norms and the diverse ways in which girls and boys view their social position.

Children learn to identify visuals long before they have a grasp of text, therefore picture books are a crucial media source for young readers (Moerk, 1985 as cited in Garner et al., 2018, p. 1). Picture books have also been shown to be useful for educating children about a variety of issues, including preschool and kindergarten transition, coping, poverty, racism, and other types of individual and family diversity. The connection between text and image in picture books is extensively established as creating a helpful meaning-making environment for young readers. Coulthard (2003 as cited in Mantei et al., 2014, p. 77), for example, argues that the existence of images promotes equality in terms of access for youngsters, independent of decoding ability or cultural background.

The Disney Brothers Cartoon Studio was established in Hollywood, California, on October 16, 1923, by Walt Disney and his brother Roy. The studio, which is now known as the Walt Disney Company, has had a significant effect on

the entertainment business and is currently one of the biggest media organizations in the world. The Walt Disney Company has produced dozens of groundbreaking and acclaimed films. It has evolved into a holding company for all manner of media and entertainment properties, opening theme parks across the world beginning in 1955 and acquiring dozens of companies in the '90s and 2000s. Disney now owns and operates ABC, ESPN, Pixar, Marvel Studios and Lucasfilm. This research used several children's books published by Disney. Considering that the characters in these works may be distinguished explicitly depending on how they represent different genders, from the nature shown in the story's text as well as the character-based artwork, in accordance with the research topic. The first book is entitled *The Lion King* (2016), the second book is entitled *Bambi* (2006), and the third book is entitled *The Fox and The Hound* (1981). These books feature a variety of animals on each title and also packed interestingly with attractive illustrations, intriguing storyline, and teaches young children about life lessons that could be picked from each story.

As animal characters with human-like traits and gender roles, all of the characters in the three books used as research sources cannot be separated from existing gender stereotypes. With this in mind, this study will dissect the gender stereotypes that exist in the characters in the three books, which are projected with animal characters who have human-like traits.

According to Aslan & Bas (2020), ecocriticism defines how each part of the field of being outside of human beings interacts with each other and their surroundings in literary texts, as well as the approach of literature to these

interactions and the types of discourse that a human person may control through language. The understanding of the human being's self-realization potential and the beginning of conscious living are the initial steps in ecocriticism philosophy. In this way, the concept of self-realization, which holds that individual awareness is shared by all mankind, becomes a way of life. There is a loop where everything is related in this lifestyle where ecological consciousness is spreading. Rather than being positioned up or down, living beings in this cycle behave as chains in connection to one another. As a result, when creating their selfhood, humans evaluate their current interactions and linkages with “other living and non-living species, ecosystems, the planet, itself, and its awful history” (Dindar, 2012, p. 79).

The previous study regarding the representation of gender on animal characters in children's picture books is very limited. However, several relevant studies are found. Berry & Wilkins (2017) explore how primary characters who are anthropomorphized inanimate objects, such as trucks and bulldozers, as well as natural-based phenomena, such as trees and clouds, are portrayed in terms of their gender roles in over 103 books. Overall, the study discovered that male characters were not only overrepresented in the literature, but they were also shown participating in more thrilling, daring actions than female ones. Females were more frequently shown inside, as nurturing individuals, and working in roles that were traditionally associated with women.

Another study about gender representation on animals in children's literature was conducted by Makgabo & Jorolan-Quintero (2020). They explore parallels in the representation of animal characters as women in four chosen

folktales from indigenous populations in the Philippines and the Northern Sotho language in South Africa. Content, topics, subject matter, cultural relevance, values, beliefs, and ideals inherent in each literature are examples of similarities and contrasts. Overall, the study found that the four folktales highlight the important responsibilities of women, particularly in the home sphere, as mothers, spouses, and confidantes. Despite major cultural changes, these positions are consistent between South Africa and the Philippines. All folktales have both entertaining and educational value. Their entertainment value stems from the use of animals as characters representing human nuances, whereas their instructive value stems not only from the moral lessons embedded in each tale, but also from their potential to provide a broader, critical perspective on cultural values and traditions, such as gender roles.

Different from the previous studies, this research will employ Golombok's (1994) theory of Gender Stereotype in analyzing the representation of gender on animal characters in children's picture books. Then, combining this Gender Stereotypes and Social Semiotic theory by Kress and Van Leeuwen, this research will analyze the representation of gender represented by the illustration of the characters in the picture books, whilst the written text will be analyzed through Todorov's narrative structures. Gaard's Ecofeminism (1993) will also be utilized in analyzing the relationship between ecology and gender.

1.2 Research Question

The research tries to answer the following questions, based on the context of the study and the reason for choosing the topic:

1. How does the setting of place in the books represent the actual locales based on Hunt's theory?
2. How are gender representations of animal characters portrayed both in the written and visual illustration of Disney's children's picture books?
3. How are the gender representations of animal characters synthesized between the illustration and written texts of Disney's children's picture books?
4. How are the gender representations of animal characters in Disney's children's picture books synthesized with the concept of ecofeminism?

1.3 Objective of The Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate how gender pronouns are represented through visual and written text, and also investigate how ecological issues in the stories are represented through ecofeminism in Disney's *The Lion King*, *Bambi* and *The Fox and The Hound*.

1.4 Scope of The Study

The scope of the study are Disney's *The Lion King*, *Bambi* and *The Fox and The Hound* picture books. These stories were chosen because the story includes animals that are pronounced with gender pronouns, therefore could be used in supporting this study.

1.5 Significance of The Study

The study on gendered representation used on a non-human antecedents in children's picture books can be a learning paradigm for English studies to enhance the knowledge about the topic. The study's goal is to help

students be aware of the representation of human pronouns on animals and also its ecological values and issues to help them to better understand selected material.

