



CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of Study

Disney cartoon movies are animated movies produced by Walt Disney Pictures, a movie production company from the United States. Disney cartoon movies are known for their high-quality animation and entertaining stories, so they are liked by many children and adults. Some examples of Disney cartoon movies include "Big Hero 6", "The Incredibles", "Aladdin", "*The Little Mermaid*" (Rottentomatoes, 2023) . Additionally, Disney also produces animated movies that are not cartoons, such as live action movies with fantasy, romantic and family genres such as *the Little Mermaid* movie. In fact, *the Little Mermaid* movies frequently use skin representation as a canvas to depict changing storylines, cultural transformations and societal norms. With the release of the more current 2023 adaptation and the original 1989 animated version, the classic story of *The Little Mermaid* has been transformed.

The 1989 animated adaptation of The Little Mermaid narrates the tale of Ariel, a young princess of the sea who longs to be a landlubber. This rendition, which is set in a Eurocentric cosmos, reflects the cultural norms and aesthetics of its era by emphasizing themes of adventure, the quest of personal happiness, and traditional fairy-tale romance. Ariel strikes a bargain with Ursula, the sea witch, offering her voice in return for human legs as a result of her curiosity about the human world. The story depicts the customs and expectations of the late 20th century, with a focus on the generational divide between Ariel and her father, King Triton, who prevents her from pursuing her aspirations of coexisting with humans. Ariel's voyage serves as a metaphor for the battle for individual independence and self-discovery inside a strict social framework, which highlights the larger issue of human desire versus societal restraints.

The 2023 real-action adaptation, on the other hand, keeps the main storyline of Ariel's attempt to live on land but adds considerable changes to conform to contemporary social norms. In this adaptation, Ariel is shown as a stronger, more self-reliant figure and themes of self-discovery, identity, and cultural variety are highlighted. A step toward more inclusive portrayal is seen in the choice of Black actress Halle Bailey for the role of Ariel, which reflects modern ideals of inclusion and diversity. The movie explores the difficulties of overcoming social boundaries and the significance of cultural acceptance as it digs further into problems of race, identity, and inclusion. It also addresses contemporary social concerns. The 2023 rendition seeks to relate with modern viewers by modernizing the representation of individuals and their interactions while showcasing the changing cultural and socioeconomic conventions of today. In keeping with the current movement for a more inclusive and representative media landscape, this contemporary retelling emphasizes the continuous fight against social constraints and the celebration of many identities.

The major differences in themes and social conditions between the two versions of the movie reflect shifting social norms and values from the late 20th century to the early 21st century. Thus, analyzing these two films in terms of comparative literature is important to understand how social and cultural changes affect representations in popular media. This research aims to identify and analyze the similarities and differences in the themes and social conditions depicted in the 1989 and 2023 versions of *The Little Mermaid*, as well as how these changes are implemented in each film's narrative.

Comparative literary studies are a useful tool for assessing themes, narratives, and stylistic characteristics when comparing different versions of a single film, such the two adaptations of *The Little Mermaid*. By extending the scope of study to encompass storytelling components, cinematic techniques, and cultural contexts, this method improves our comprehension of the social, historical, and cultural aspects of the film's production and reception (Domenguez et al., 2015). We can see how certain components have been



added, removed, changed, or modified to suit shifting social norms by contrasting the versions from 1989 and 2023. The 1989 adaptation emphasizes classic fairy-tale romance and individualistic happiness, reflecting the societal mores and expectations of the time. On the other hand, the 2023 adaption tackles modern concerns like inclusivity and representation while concentrating on themes of self-discovery, identity, and ethnic variety. This comparative approach provides a framework for examining how the subjects and social contexts of both movies have evolved over time and impacted how audiences comprehend the stories that are being told. From this approach, we may comprehend the dynamic relationship that exists between cinema adaptations and the dynamically changing cultural milieu in which they are placed.

Additionally, this study has several relevant previous studies. The first previous study, "The Comparison Between The Movie Of Mulan 1998 And Its Remake, Mulan 2020 (A Comparative Literature Study)", was conducted by Syafinah & Susilowati (2021). This prior study aimed to compare the 1998 version of Mulan to its 2020 remake and to uncover the similarities and differences in intrinsic elements of both movies. The second previous study was conducted by Tampus et al (2022). "Comparative Analysis of Hans Christian Andersen's and Walt Disney's The Little Mermaid", their study compared the Disney version of Hans Christian Andersen's *"The Little Mermaid"* with literary features, plot structure, characters, and imagery. The third previous study, "Theme-Driven Social Analysis: Three Approaches" discusses strategies for conducting cultural and historical analyses by examining multiple cases that illustrate a common social phenomenon, focusing on underlying social and cultural forces (DeGloma, 2024). The last previous study, "Part of Whose World? How The Little Mermaid (2023) Attempts to Revise the Racist Tropes of the 1989 Animated Film Musical" analyzes how the 2023 remake of *The Little Mermaid* seeks to address and revise the implicitly racist narratives present in the original 1989 film, particularly through its depiction of racial difference (Richardson, 2024).

Although there are many studies that discuss *The Little Mermaid*, there are some gaps that have not been discussed in previous studies. Syafinah & Susilowati (2021) did not discuss the movie *The Little Mermaid*, despite using the same comparative literature theory. Tampus et al. (2022) did not use skin representation theory for comparison, and used discourse analysis instead of comparative literature theory. DeGloma (2024) did not focus on applying his thematic analysis strategies to specific cultural artifacts like films, despite offering a comprehensive theoretical framework for examining broad social and cultural forces. And Richardson (2024) did not focus on the comparative analysis of themes and social conditions between the 1989 and 2023 versions of *The Little Mermaid*, despite addressing racial representation in the films.

However, this study focuses on the themes that are similar and the social contexts that are different between the two Little Mermaid films. Through a comparative literary method, this study intends to assess how theme and social setting are portrayed in both the 1989 and 2023 adaptations, drawing on Abrams and Harpham's notion of intrinsic elements and their findings. The study will analyze the various social contexts that represent the cultural and socioeconomic changes over time, as well as the recurring themes that run across both movies, such as Ariel's struggle for independence and self-discovery. By focusing on how these fundamental components change and adjust to modern values and norms in each rendition of the movie, this study closes a gap in the body of knowledge.

The controversy surrounding Disney's *The Little Mermaid* (1989 and 2023) can be examined from the standpoint of comparative literature theory as a dynamic illustration of shifting societal ideals and cultural trends. Domínguez et al. (2015) state that comparative literature promotes the analysis of literary works from various historical periods and cultural contexts in order to spot influences, parallels, and discrepancies. This concept is useful for examining the societal issues and ideas depicted in the two Little Mermaid adaptations. Through the use of Abrams and Harpham's theory of intrinsic elements, this study can investigate the temporal evolution of theme and





social setting. While the 2023 live-action adaptation tackles modern concerns like diversity, inclusivity, and self-empowerment, the 1989 animated version emphasizes individualistic aspirations and traditional romance, reflecting the societal conventions and expectations of its day. An extensive examination of how the fundamental components of topic and social situation in both film adaptations represent evolving cultural trends and societal ideals is made possible by this theoretical framework. It can therefore aid in illuminating the ways in which these media portrayals both reflect and shape more general societal attitudes and views.

The following is an example of data analysis using screenshots from the required sources. In the context below, the scene in which Ariel rescues Prince Eric from a burning ship.



Figure 2 *The Little Mermaid* 1989

Minute: 25.02



Figure 1 *The Little Mermaid* 2023

Minute: 29.08

The scene reflects significant changes in the representation of characters and themes. In the 1989 version, this scene emphasizes Ariel's curiosity and courage, which is more focused on personal adventure. Whereas in the 2023 version, the same scene portrays Ariel as a strong and independent heroine, who not only fights for her love but also for her recognition and identity in the human world.

The aim of this study is to compare and contrast the two cinematic adaptations of *The Little Mermaid* in order to analyze how themes and social situations are portrayed. By employing Abrams & Harpham's notion of intrinsic elements—specifically, "theme" and "social condition"—to analyze *The Little Mermaid* film versions between 1989 and 2023, this study seeks to close the gap in prior research on this subject. Thus, the title is "Theme and

Social Condition Portrayed in Disney's The Little Mermaid 1989 and The Little Mermaid 2023: A Comparative Literature Study."

1.2 Statements of the Problem

- 1) What are the similarities related to themes and differences related to social conditions found in the films The Little Mermaid 1989 and The Little Mermaid 2023?
- 2) How do the similarity and differences applied in The Little Mermaid 1989 and The Little Mermaid 2023?

1.3 Objectives of the Study

- 1) To Identify and analyze the similarities in themes and differences in social conditions depicted in Disney's The Little Mermaid 1989 and The Little Mermaid 2023.
- 2) To explore how these themes and social conditions are portrayed and applied in both versions of the film.

1.4 Significances of the Study

1. Theoretically: This research advances comparative literature by examining how motifs and societal contexts are represented in different versions of The Little Mermaid. Utilizing Abrams and Harpham's intrinsic element theory, with a focus on theme and social setting, it highlights the impact of cultural and socioeconomic factors on literary adaptations. The study enriches discussions on representation and adaptation, showing how adaptations reflect changing societal values. This theoretical insight can guide future research on literary adaptations and their social implications.
2. Practically: The study provides valuable insights for cultural critics, educators, and filmmakers. Educators can use the comparison of The Little Mermaid's 1989 and 2023 versions to illustrate how socioeconomic and cultural conditions shape storytelling. Filmmakers can learn the importance of adapting stories to align with contemporary values, promoting inclusivity and relevance. Cultural critics and audiences can develop a more critical perspective on media consumption by recognizing how modern adaptations reflect current issues. Ultimately, the study

underscores the dynamic relationship between literature, film, and society, emphasizing the importance of cultural awareness in creative works.

1.5 Scope and Limitations

This research examines the societal contexts and motifs in the 1989 and 2023 adaptations of *The Little Mermaid*. It focuses on the main themes and social settings of both films, highlighting how they reflect the cultural norms of their respective eras. The analysis is guided by Abrams and Harpham's theory of intrinsic elements.

The study is limited by its focus on only two adaptations of *The Little Mermaid* and relies on qualitative analysis, which can be subjective. Additionally, it only considers the themes and social contexts explicitly depicted in the films, excluding other external influences or adaptations.

1.6 Research Method

1) Research Design

This study uses qualitative analysis with the theory of comparative literature as its research methodology. It involves a comprehensive analysis of the stories, characters, and thematic components of the movies to identify and evaluate how themes and social conditions are portrayed. The study specifically employs Abrams and Harpham's theory of intrinsic elements, focusing on the themes and social settings within the films. By analyzing the 1989 and 2023 adaptations of *The Little Mermaid*, the research aims to understand how these intrinsic elements have evolved to reflect changing cultural and societal values. This approach provides a structured framework to dissect the similarities and differences in the thematic and social representations of both films, offering insights into the broader impact of cultural shifts on media narratives.

2) Data and Source of The Data:

The data of this research is the captured scenes of movie, the number of the data in similarities of the theme in *The Little Mermaid* (1989) and *The Little Mermaid* (2023) movie is 16 data. Then, the number of the data in



differences of the social condition in The Little Mermaid (1989) and The Little Mermaid (2023) movie is 11 data. Additionally, the source of the data is the “The Little Mermaid (1989 and 2023) versions.

Coding: 01/TLM/89/09.45

Notes:

01: number of data

TLM: Movie title

89: movie code version 89

09.45: movie minute code

3) Steps of Data Collection

- a. Downloading both movies
- b. Watching both films thoroughly
- c. Obtaining and review both films carefully
- d. Selecting scenes that is relevant to the research objectives, focusing on themes and social conditions
- e. Selecting and documenting key scenes and dialogues for detailed analysis.
- f. Copying scene captures into a table

4) Steps of Data Analysis

- a. Identifying the similarities related to themes and differences related to social conditions found in the films The Little Mermaid 1989 and The Little Mermaid 2023
- b. Explaining the similarities related to themes and differences related to social conditions found in the films The Little Mermaid 1989 and The Little Mermaid 2023.
- c. Deriving the conclusion

1.7 Definition of Key Terms

- 1) Theme: According to Abrams and Harpham, a theme is the central idea or message a literary work or film aims to convey.
- 2) Social Conditions: Social conditions refer to the societal factors influencing people's lives, including economic, cultural, and environmental aspects (Abrams & Harpham, 2012, p. 355).
- 3) Intrinsic element: Abrams and Harpham define intrinsic elements as the fundamental components of a literary work, such as theme, plot, character, and setting.
- 4) Comparative Study: A comparative study examines the similarities and differences between two or more subjects (Domenguez et al., 2015).

1.8 Thesis Organization

This thesis is divided into four chapters. Chapter I serves as an introduction. This chapter includes the study's background, problem statements, objective, significance, scope, and limitations, research method, as well as an explanation of key terms and an arrangement of the thesis. Chapter II, presents a review of related literature, examining comparative literature theory. Chapter III presents the findings and discussion. The last chapter comprises the conclusion and suggestions, summarizing the study's findings and discussing potential future research directions.

