



## CHAPTER II

### RELATED OF LITERATURE

A survey of the literature on the subjects and social settings shown in Disney's The Little Mermaid (1989) and The Little Mermaid (2023) is provided in this chapter. The review is divided into two primary sections: Prior Research and Theoretical Frameworks. Themes, Social Setting in Literature, and Comparative Literature are among the theoretical frameworks that are covered. The chapter also looks at earlier research that is pertinent to the evaluation of these movies.

#### 2.1 Theoretical Frameworks

##### 2.1.1 Comparative Literature

Comparative literary study involves understanding and assessing literary works that come from different languages and cultures. It involves reading, analyzing, and interpreting literary works in the context of their culture and language of origin. In addition, an important aspect of comparative literary study is comparing one literary work with another. This involves identifying similarities, differences, motifs, themes, styles, and structures between the literary works. This comparison can help in understanding influences, trends, and themes that cross cultural and linguistic boundaries. Comparative literary studies also considers the relationship between literature and other areas of human expression, such as visual arts, music, philosophy, history, and religion. This includes research into how literary works are reflected in or interact with these fields, as well as how they influence and give meaning to each other (Domínguez, Saussy, & Villanueva, 2015).

In relation to visual arts, which is in line with this research, analyzing visual artworks involves understanding and assessing artworks that come from various cultures. This includes studying the techniques, styles, themes and cultural contexts in which the artworks were created. As in the study of comparative literature, it is important to consider the



cultural and historical context in which the visual artwork emerged. This helps in understanding the background and influences that may have affected the creation and interpretation of the visual artwork. Thus, comparative literary studies in visual arts pave the way for a deeper understanding of cultural diversity, aesthetics, and the relationship between visual arts and other aspects of human life (Domínguez, Saussy, & Villanueva, 2015).

In comparative literary studies in the visual arts, it is important to consider the cultural and historical context in which the work of visual art emerged (Domínguez, Saussy, & Villanueva, 2015). This include:

1. Cultural Context:
  - a) Cultural Values and Norms: Understanding the values, norms, and beliefs of the culture in which the artist operates can assist in the interpretation of works of visual art. For example, understanding the concepts of beauty or truth in a particular culture can help explain the visual arts choices made by artists from that culture.
  - b) Traditions and Rituals: Identifying cultural traditions or rituals that may have influenced an artist in creating a work of visual art can provide insight into the meaning and function of the work of art within that cultural context.
2. Historical Context:
  - a) Historical Period: Placing a work of visual art in the context of a particular historical period can provide information about the social, political, and economic conditions of the time that may influence the themes and style of visual art.
  - b) Historical Events: An understanding of the historical events that occurred during the creation of a work of visual art can help in interpreting the message or statement that the artist may wish to convey.
  - c) Influence of Art History: Understanding the development of visual arts in history can help in tracing the influence of previous artists or particular art movements on the visual artwork being studied.

By considering these cultural and historical contexts, comparative literary studies in the visual arts can provide a deeper understanding of the meaning, purpose, and value of the visual arts in various cultural and historical contexts.

### 2.1.2 Theme

The main idea or underlying message that a writer wants to get over in their work is referred to as a theme in literature. Themes are important because they offer deeper understandings of the story's characters, storyline, and overall message. A theme is "the general concept or doctrine, whether implicit or asserted, which an imaginative work is designed to incorporate and make persuasive to the reader," according to Abrams and Harpham (2012). Ideas like love, power, identity, and conflict are examples of universal themes that cut across all cultures and eras.

The primary topic of Disney's The Little Mermaid centers on Ariel's endeavor to integrate herself into the human world. Despite variations in societal contexts and character portrayals, this subject is evident in both the 1989 and 2023 versions.

**Curiosity and Need for Knowledge:** Ariel's unquenchable curiosity about the human world is one facet of this theme. Her yearning to discover life beyond the sea and her collection of human relics represent a common quest for knowledge and comprehension of the unknown. Scenes in which Ariel engages with human artifacts demonstrate this topic, highlighting her fascination and longing for a different life.

- a. **Conflict and Defiance:** King Triton, Ariel's father, who stands in for the constrictive social conventions of the undersea realm, is the main source of conflict during Ariel's quest. Ariel's refusal to comply with her father's orders highlights the subject of personal desire versus social norms. Ariel and Triton's ideological and generational divides are brought to light by this confrontation, which also serves as a larger allegory for the fight for individual liberation.

- b. Identity and Transformation: Ariel's story revolves around the idea of transformation. Her readiness to exchange her voice for human legs is a sign of a great giving and a life-changing quest for self-awareness. This metamorphosis represents her search for a new identity and position in the world in addition to its physical aspect. Through Ariel's contacts with human people, where she negotiates her dual existence as a mermaid and a human, the issue of identity is further addressed.
- c. Love and Sacrifice: Ariel's decisions and actions are often driven by her love for Prince Eric. Ariel sacrifices her voice and puts her life in danger in order to be with Eric, illustrating how sacrifice and love are entwined themes. This theme, which reflects a timeless tale present in many literary works, highlights the ability of love to motivate people to make tremendous sacrifices.

The activities of characters, their conversations, and the development of the plot, in the opinion of Abrams and Harpham, frequently disclose themes (Abrams & Harpham, 2012). These themes are important to the meaning and impact of both versions of The Little Mermaid since Ariel's choices and actions continuously reflect them.

- a. 1989 Version: The Little Mermaid's first adaptation portrayed Ariel's struggle in a fairly direct way, emphasizing her need to leave the safety of her underwater existence and experience life on land. Her agreement with Ursula, the sea witch, dramatically illustrates the idea of transformation and highlights the personal costs she is prepared to incur.
- b. Version 2023: This version keeps the main idea the same, but it incorporates more varied casting and modern social themes, adding levels of complexity. This rendition reflects the values of contemporary society by emphasizing themes of acceptance and inclusivity. The story is given further thematic depth by contrasting Ariel's attempt to adapt into the human world with more general themes of social integration and cultural variety.



### 2.1.3 Social Conditions in Literature

In literature, the cultural, economic, and societal context in which a story takes place is referred to as the social setting. It is essential in determining the actions, interactions, and general plot structure of the characters. Social conditions are "the set of social and cultural circumstances within which the characters act and interact," according to Abrams and Harpham (2012). These circumstances provide a backdrop that mirrors the setting and era of the novel, influencing the characters' motivations, conflicts, and resolutions.

The social environments of *The Little Mermaid* in the 1989 and 2023 adaptations represent disparate cultural attitudes and socioeconomic norms, which affect how the tale is told and understood.

- a. Cultural Context: The views, customs, and values that are characteristic of the society in which a story is situated make up the cultural context of a story. *The Little Mermaid* from 1989 has a very uniform cultural backdrop, which is indicative of the Western-centric viewpoint that dominated Disney movies at the time. The film's characters, milieu, and societal conventions are predominantly shaped by Western conceptions of attractiveness, familial responsibilities, and roles.

The 2023 edition, however, takes into account a wider range of cultural contexts. Characters in this rendition come from a variety of ethnic backgrounds, illustrating a wider range of cultural influences. The multiculturalism and inclusivity themes are intended to be embraced by a worldwide audience through the incorporation of many cultural components and a varied cast.

- b. Economic Conditions: The material and financial situations that impact the characters and their interactions are referred to as economic conditions. The subtle distinctions between the undersea realm and the human world in both versions of *The Little Mermaid* hint at the state of the economy. The human realm is portrayed as a mixture of wealth and poverty, whereas the underwater kingdom,

headed by King Triton, is shown as an affluent and well-organized society.

The version from 2023 presents a more complex picture of the state of the economy, taking into account modern concerns like social mobility and economic inequality. This is seen in how Prince Eric's kingdom is portrayed, where the social and economic divide between the aristocracy and commoners is more obvious and gives the story more depth.

- c. Social norms and values refer to the collective beliefs and standards that direct behavior within a community. The tight customs and regulations of the underwater kingdom, where King Triton upholds a strong division between merfolk and humans, serve as a visual representation of society conventions in the 1989 adaptation. Ariel's disobedience to these expectations highlights issues of individual independence and defiance of social standards, posing a challenge to the status quo.

The 2023 modification takes into account changing cultural norms and values, especially with regard to inclusivity and gender roles. More autonomy and agency are given to Ariel's character, which is consistent with modern feminist values. In addition, the inclusion of a variety of relationships and individuals highlights contemporary ideals of equality and acceptance in contrast to the original version's more conventional portrayal.

The social environment, according to Abrams and Harpham, is an essential component of the story that gives the events of the story and the actions of the characters context and meaning (Abrams & Harpham, 2012). The social context of The Little Mermaid not only influences the experiences of the characters but also serves as a window into larger societal shifts over time.

- a. 1989 Version: With its focus on individualism, passionate love, and conventional family arrangements, the original film's social milieu is evocative of late 20th-century American culture. With an emphasis on

themes of self-discovery and independence, the portrayal of Ariel's rebellion against her father's authority and her pursuit of personal happiness is consistent with the cultural environment of the time.

- b. Version 2023: The video has been updated to reflect the social and cultural shifts of the early 21st century. The current state of society is reflected in the broad representation of characters, the emphasis on inclusivity, and the portrayal of modern social issues including gender equality and economic disparities. These components give the story additional depth, which increases its relevance and relatability to the audience of today.

## 2.2 Previous studies

This research is based on several relevant previous studies, which help to understand the changes in themes and social conditions in the film adaptations of *The Little Mermaid* from 1989 and 2023.

Syafinah & Susilowati (2021) carried out the first paper, "The Comparison Between The Movie Of *Mulan* 1998 And Its Remake, *Mulan* 2020 (A Comparative Literature Study)". The purpose of this study is to examine the similarities and differences between the intrinsic aspects of *Mulan* (1998) and 2020. "Comparative Analysis of Hans Christian Andersen's and Walt Disney's *The Little Mermaid*" was the title of Tampus et al. (2022) second study. It contrasted Disney's adaptation of Hans Christian Andersen's *The Little Mermaid* with literary elements, story structure, characters, and visual images. Putri (2023) did a third study titled "Comparison In Animated Films *The Little Mermaid* (1989) And Versions Live-Action Adaptation *The Little Mermaid* (2023)", in which she used comparative literary theory to compare the Little Mermaid films from 1989 and 2023. The majority of prior research has focused on comparing literary devices, discourse analysis, cultural values, visual aesthetics, and gender roles. 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).

This study focuses on the themes and social conditions that are similar and different across the two *Little Mermaid* films. By utilizing Abrams and Harpham's theory of intrinsic elements within a comparative literature framework, this study aims to fill the current gap by concentrating on examining the themes and social contexts in both cinematic adaptations. The analysis will highlight how these elements reflect the evolving cultural and societal values between the 1989 and 2023 versions of *The Little Mermaid*.

