

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### A.1 Background of Research

A wide variety of films with various genres are produced every year; among these genres, animated films occupy a special place due to their creative potential. Paul Wells in his book *Understanding Animation* explains the definition of an animated film as a film made by hand, frame-by-frame, providing an illusion of movement that has not been directly recorded in the conventional photographic sense (Wells, 2013, p. 3). In line with this definition, the complicated process allows animators to bring their artistic vision to life in a way that no other genre of film can.

In addition, animated films have a high appeal to audiences of all ages. The genre continues to captivate audiences by constantly innovating and pushing the boundaries of storytelling and visual art through unique characters. On the other hand, the fast-paced evolution of technology has significantly impacted animated films. These advancements have enabled companies like Walt Disney and Pixar Inc. to produce successful movies with stunning visuals and complex narratives. Meanwhile, according to Becker (2017, p. 6), the success factor of Walt Disney is timelessness coupled with innovation that starts from the idea of making next-level animated films. In shaping this, Disney began to form a character with a historical background (Huang, 2021, p. 153).

According to Huang (2021, pp. 153-154), Disney utilizes the historical side when creating characters; each character creation does not only fit the plot but also considers the specific historical background in the production. Meanwhile, by partnering with Pixar, Disney wants to maintain the 'timeless factor' (Becker, 2017, pp. 4-5). This is because Disney makes rides, characters, and attractions very carefully to enhance the characteristics of timelessness itself. In addition to historical background, Disney-Pixar creates characters influenced by cultural factors. Referring to Huang (2021, p. 154) as one of the companies from America, Disney often slips the idea of "The American Dream" in its movie characters, which makes Disney movies express the view that anyone can achieve the goal through hard work and against prejudice.

Then Becker (2017, pp. 19-21) argues that Disney movies and their characters are seen in a different, unique light, causing some of their movies to be seen as 'Disney Classics.' One of the animated films with unique characters in 2023 is *Elemental*, directed by Peter Sohn. This is a film by Disney and Pixar with Denise Ream as producer. In addition, Sohn stated (2023) that this film raises the theme of immigrant struggles in various cultural clashes with two main characters, Ember Lumen, and Wade Ripple, who have contradictions as conflicts presented in the film. The setting in this film is Element City, a city with residents consisting of various natural elements as defined by the ancient Greeks and anthropomorphizing them as characters. For example, the water element or water people were the first residents in the city to be shown as people who can walk,

talk, and shape H<sub>2</sub>O. Then, the air element humanoid is a floating puffy of clouds with arms, legs, and a mouth full of wind—followed by the earth element, presented as a ball of dirt with plants growing on it. The last is the fire element or fire people, the previous residents who immigrated to Element City from Fireland. He stated that one of the biggest challenges to using that kind of element as a character was how to emote in a human way, but they cannot be human in terms of a skeleton (Sohn, 2023). Hence, the setting in this film shows the diversity in one place, including what happens to the main characters as two opposing entities. Meanwhile, the two main characters meet when Ember Lumen loses her temper while replacing her father, who is serving "The Fireplace" store customers. Ember accidentally breaks a water line in the building, and that causes Ember to meet Wade Ripple, who has a friendly character like a golden retriever dog. However, Wade is a local city building inspector, so the first time Wade sees the Lumen family's building, he claims that "The Fireplace" breaks city regulations, resulting in the store's closure.

The main conflict in the movie *Elemental* (2023) is the difference between the main characters, Ember Lumen, who is a fire element with a fiery character, and Wade Ripple, from the water element, who has a calm and go-with-the-flow character as a fundamental contradiction represented in this movie to resolve problems and keep them together to handle the transformation of personality that are growing. In this case, both characters are presented with inner conflicts about acceptance and differences in their characterization. Furthermore, Strong

(2023) stated in his film critique titled "*Elemental* Review" that the movie has an oppositional appeal, with a tendency to play it safe. This is because the first meeting between Ember Lumen and Wade Ripple begins the classic story of two opposites attracting each other. At the same time, Sohn (2023) as a director revealed another interesting part mentioned in the movie is the influence of the director's background as an immigrant who moved from Korea to America. This is like the background of Lumen's family who immigrated from Ireland to Element City. Consequently, the movie shows Lumen's family as one of the images of an Asian-American family living in another country but still maintaining the culture of their home country. This includes shaping Ember's character who is hard on herself and has to give up on her dreams.

Based on the film criticism above, this study tries to redefine the meaning of relationship in the dynamic personality transformation between the two main characters of the movie *Elemental* (2023) by implementing Jacques Derrida's Deconstruction Theory. Deconstruction is a critical concept in post-structuralist thought associated with Jacques Derrida which emerged in the late 1960's. Meanwhile, as a definition, deconstruction does not have a definite definition for the word 'deconstruction' in literature (Garg, 2021, p. 94). This is in line with Spivak in her translation of the book *Of Grammatology* (2016) which states that in deconstruction, a text is an open entity and has no absolute final meaning. Furthermore, Norris (2002) states that presenting 'deconstruction' as if it were an established method, system, or body of ideas means falsifying its nature and

opening itself up to accusations of reductive misunderstanding. This is in line with Derrida's statement in *Deconstruction in a Nutshell: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida* by John Caputo (1997) which states that deconstruction is not a method or tool that can be applied to something outside itself. According to him, deconstruction is something that happens inside (Caputo, 1997, p. 8). In other words, this phenomenon occurs and requires many different perspectives to see it. It confirms that deconstruction, according to Derrida, is not a method, but an activity of close reading. This allows deconstruction theory to be applied to various literary works, which do not see a text as an entity with a unified structure but instead as a collection of contradictions from diverse perspectives. This process reassembles them into a unified meaning contained in the text.

This research adds a different dimension to the singular truth of relationships. Through deconstruction, the meaning of the relationship is dissected through the main characters who experiences dynamic personality transformation, providing a new perspective on the characterization of the main characters in a film. Pickering and Hoepfer define a character as "any individual in a literary work" (Larasati, 2023, p. 2). Meanwhile, according to Truman, Kuncara, and Setyowati (2017, p. 47) characters can be defined as participants in a work who are understood by the reader and have certain moral characteristics and tendencies as shown in speech and behavior.

By using this theory, this research reveals the personality transformation of the displayed characterizations to find new meanings in a relationship. It does

not just continue from previous film criticism but aims to unravel the complexity of the film. This research conducts a deconstruction analysis of the main personality transformation in the movie *Elemental* (2023), focusing on two characters with contrasting personalities: Ember, who is a fire girl, and Wade, who is a water guy. Using a deconstructive reading, this research explores the complexities and changes in these characters. The study aims to redefine new meanings in the relationship through the contradictions inherent in their opposing characteristics and ultimately reveal the relationship between them, based on the idea that fire and water cannot be united.

### **A.2 Problems of the Research**

Based on the research background, this research focuses on the main problem that is:

1. How are the characterizations of the main characters represented in the movie *Elemental* (2023)?
2. How does the personality transformation of the main characters develop in the movie *Elemental* (2023)?
3. How does the personality transformation of the main characters contribute to the redefinition of the relationship meaning?

### **A.3 Objectives of the Research**

Based on the formulated research problem, the objective of this research is to apply Jacques Derrida's deconstruction theory, that is:

1. To analyze the characterization of the main characters in the movie *Elemental* (2023).
2. To find out the personality transformation of the main characters in the movie *Elemental* (2023).
3. To explore how the main characters' personality transformation contributes to redefining the meaning of relationships.

#### **A.4 Significances of the Research**

Based on the research objectives carried out by the researcher, this research has two important contributions. Theoretically, the results of this research can make an active theoretical contribution to the understanding of Jacques Derrida's deconstruction theory. Furthermore, the researcher expects that the findings of this study will be utilized as a reference and source of information for future research. Through an active contribution to the application of deconstruction theory, it will not only summarize existing knowledge but also provide new perspectives in film, a conceptualized framework, and a scientific approach. Furthermore, the researcher envisions the result of this study as a more useful reference, enrichment of future studies, and consultation to understand deconstruction studies or explore related topics.

Practically, this study offers insights and applications that are valuable to a wide audience, including researchers, students, educators, and film industry professionals. By providing a detailed analysis of personality transformation in the movie *Elemental* (2023), these findings can enhance academic curriculum and

discussions in educational institutions. Students and lecturers can use these insights to deepen their understanding of deconstruction theory and its application in film studies, creating a more engaging and dynamic learning experience. Additionally, this research can inform practitioners in the film industry by illustrating how character portrayals can explore innovative storytelling techniques, ultimately contributing to the growth and diversification of the global film industry. By bridging theoretical concepts with practical implications, this research enriches academic knowledge and supports the ongoing development of creative practices in film production and analysis.

#### **A.5 Limitation of the Research**

This study focuses on the character depiction and development between the two main characters of the movie *Elemental* (2023), where Ember Lumen is fire and Wade Ripple is water, based on deconstruction theory. Consequently, the film's other characters cannot be analyzed in depth. Nevertheless, this study focuses on Jacques Derrida's deconstruction theory to reveal the contradictions of the main characters and other influences as a part of redefining a new meaning in relationships, such as the living environment or background of the main characters. Meanwhile, this study does not explore the filmmaker's perspective or the production and cinematic aspects of the movie, such as cast selection, art direction, shooting, and other influential creative elements. The limitations created in this study are intended to help this study focus on redefining a new meaning using the

deconstruction of Jacques Derrida's theory shown by the main characters and the scope of the study.

#### **A.6 Definition of Key Terms**

To clarify and understand the terminology in this study, the researcher explains key terms such as the deconstruction theory of Jacques Derrida, character and characterization, plot, and personality transformation. The first term in this research is the deconstruction theory by Jacques Derrida. In defining Derrida's thoughts on deconstruction, it cannot be separated from the way of thinking of post-structuralism. Derrida defines deconstruction as something that happens inside (Caputo, 1997). Although this does not answer the meaning of deconstruction, it is responded to in the book *Critical Theorist and International Relations* by Jenny Edkins and Nick V. William (2009). Deconstruction is defined as a form of criticism based on careful reading.

On the other hand, Aprilia and Arianto (2021, p. 67) stated that deconstruction is a theory that explains how a text can be comprehended not only by reading the text structure but also by looking at two opposing elements, which is binary opposition. Furthermore, binary opposition is defined as words that must be contrasted with other words. (Larasati, 2023, p. 12). In addition, binary opposition explains that a text has opposite sides and does not always have one absolute meaning. (Aprilia & Arianto, 2021, p. 68). The following term in this research will be focused on character. In literature, a character is a fictional person, creature, or entity who appears in a story. Furthermore, according to Truman, Kuncara, and

Setyowati (2017, p. 47), characterization is a clear description or depiction of a person featured in a story that can be physical and psychological. It is also explained that characterization is a shaping element whose presence is needed to bring characters to life in the story. It can be concluded that characterization is everything that is shown to indicate a character. Then, In the context of this research, personality transformation is a profound change that occurs in a character that significantly alters their self-perception and interaction. Then, according to the *American Psychological Association (APA)*, personality refers to the enduring characteristics and behavior that comprise a person's unique adjustment to life, including traits, interests, drives, values, self-concept, abilities, and emotional patterns.

#### **A.7 Organization of the Research**

This research is presented in five chapters: introduction, literature review, research methodology, discussions, and conclusion. The first chapter covers the background of the research, the problem of the research, the objectives of the research, the significance of the research, the organization of the research, and the definition of key terms. Furthermore, the second chapter contains the previous research, deconstruction, characters and character development, plot, and review of the related research. The third chapter, the research methodology, includes the type of research, source of data, and method of collecting data. Then, the fourth chapter contains data description and data analysis conducted by the

researcher. Finally, the fifth chapter is the closing, which includes conclusions and suggestions for further research.

