

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Theoretical Framework

Since the analysis of this thesis is going to deal mainly with the elements of fiction of children's literature, therefore the analysis will be based on the theories about children's literature and the intrinsic elements of literature.

2.1.1. Children's Literature

In Children's Literature, Huck, Hepler, and Hickman state that children's books are books that have the child's eye at the centre (6). It means that books for children must contain or at least reflect the emotions and experiences of children. Children can feel angry, frustrated, or bitter. They may endure pain, sorrow, or horror. But despite the feelings they have and the conditions they are in, there is still some hope resides within them. This hope may act as some kind a way to cope with the situation.

Huck, Hepler, and Hickman argue that writing for children should not necessarily be treated differently. They say that the skilled author does not write differently or less carefully for children just because the author thinks the children will not be aware of style or language. E. B. White asserts in his book On Writing for Children:

Anyone who writes *down* to children is simply wasting his time. You have to write up, not down.... Some writers for children deliberately avoid using words they think a child doesn't know. This emasculates the

prose and . . . bores the reader.... Children love words that give them a hard time, provided they are in a context that absorbs their attention (140).

C. S. Lewis in On Three Ways of Writing for Children also maintained that he wrote a children's story because a children's story was the best art form. Thus, since a children's story is considered to be the best, writing *down* for children would only hamper the art form.

Moreover, Huck, Hepler, and Hickman in Children's Literature explain that the uniqueness of children's literature lies in the audience that it addresses. Authors of children's books are circumscribed only by the experiences of childhood, but these are vast and complex. Because children think and feel; they wonder and they dream. Their lives may be filled with love or terror. Much is known, but little is explained. Children are curious about life and adult activities. They live in the midst of tensions, of balances of love and hate within the family and the neighbourhood. The author who can fill these experiences with imagination and insight, give them literary shape and structure, and communicate them to children is writing children's literature (6).

Literature develops children's imagination and helps them to consider nature, people, experiences, or ideas in new ways. Good writing may pique the child's curiosity just as much as intriguing art. Literature helps children to entertain ideas they never considered before; to dwell in possibility. Literature frequently provides answers to the child's "what if?" questions (8).

One of the values of fairy tales and myths is the way in which they stretch the child's imagination. No child could imagine creating a coach out of a

pumpkin, horses from mice, and coachmen from lizards. Yet they readily accept it all in the well-loved tale of Cinderella. In The Uses of Enchantment: the Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales, Bruno Bettelheim maintains, “Fairy tales have unequalled value, because they offer new dimensions to the child’s imagination which would be impossible for him to discover as truly on his own (7).”

The same idea also comes from an author Mollie Hunter. In her book If You Can Read, she states that the whole reward of reading is:

...to have one’s imagination carried soaring on the wings of another’s imagination, to be made more aware of the possibilities of one’s mind, to be thrilled, amazed, awed, enchanted—in the worlds unknown until discovered through the medium of language and to find in those worlds one’s own petty horizons growing wider and wider (435).

In Children’s Literature, Huck, Hepler and Hickman belie that new perspectives are derived as the child has vicarious experiences through literature. Good writing may transport the reader to other places and other period of time and expand his life space. The reader experiences identification with others as he/she enters an imaginary situation with his emotions tuned to those of the story. Literature provides vicarious experiences of adventure, excitement, and struggle against the elements or other obstacles. Whether reading takes him/her to another land, another time period, or an imaginative country of the mind, the young reader will return home enriched by these vicarious experiences. She will then see herself and her immediate world in a new way. Reading gets us out of our own time and place, out of ourselves; but in the end it will return us to ourselves, a little different, a little changed by this experience (9).

Literature must be able to develop insight into human behaviour. According to Huck, Hepler, and Hickman, literature reflects life, yet no book can contain all of living. By its very organizing properties literature has the power to shape and give coherence to human experience. It may focus on one aspect of life, one period of time in an individual's life, and so enable a reader to see and understand relationships that he had never considered (9).

So much of what is taught in school is concerned with facts. Literature is concerned with feelings, the quality of life. It can educate the heart as well as the mind. Chukovsky, the Russian poet, says in his book From Two to Five:

The goal of every storyteller consists of fostering in the child, at whatever cost, compassion and human-ness, this miraculous ability of man to be disturbed by another being's misfortune, to feel joy about another being's happiness, to experience another's fate as your own (138).

Literature can show children how others have lived and "become", no matter what the time or place. Huck, Hepler and Hickman believe that as children gain increased awareness of the lives of others, as they vicariously try out other roles, they may develop a better understanding of themselves and those around them. Through wide reading as well as living, the child acquires his perceptions of literature and life (10). From this statement, it can be inferred that literature also teaches the reader to be empathetic towards their surroundings.

Literature presents universality of experience. According to Huck, Hepler, and Hickman, literature continues to ask universal questions about the meaning of life and human relationships with nature and other people. Literature helps

children toward a fuller understanding of the common bonds of humanity. Children's literature is replete with other stories of such true friendships or the renunciation of friendships. Literature illumines all of life; it casts its light on all that is good in human life; but it may also spotlight that which is dark and debasing in the human experience (10).

2.1.2. Elements of Fiction in Children's Literature

As indicated by Huck, Hepler and Hickman in Children's Literature, a young child's initial response to a book, story, or poem is emotional; the child will tell you how he feels about it and what it means to him. Once a child begins to deal with the "whys" of his feelings he will discover the ways in which the author builds plot, develops characters, and uses languages to create meaning and feeling (17).

Huck, Hepler, and Hickman suggest that the conventional criteria to evaluate a work of fiction include such elements as plot, setting, theme, characterization, style, point of view, and format. Specialized criteria need to be applied to different types of literature, regarding the type of literature. In evaluating fiction, it is usually begun with these criteria:

- **Plot**

Of prime importance in any work of fiction for children is the plot. Children ask first, "Does the book tell a good story?" The plot is the plan of action; it tells what the characters do and what happens to them. It is the thread that holds the fabric of the story together and makes the reader want to continue reading.

A well constructed plot is organic and interrelated. It grows logically and

naturally from the actions and the decisions of the characters in given situations. Huck, Hepler and Hickman believe that the plot should be credible and ring true rather than depend on coincidence and contrivance. It should be original and fresh rather than trite, tired, and predictable. Plot is but one element of good writing. If a book does not have a substantial plot, it will not hold children's interest long. However, well-loved books contain indefinable qualities and are memorable for more than plot alone (17).

In The Tale of Despereaux, since the story is divided into several sections, so does the plot. The first section of the book conveys the story of Despereaux. The story starts with the birth of Despereaux. Here the reader is being introduced with the character which happens to be a mouse. It is told that Despereaux is different from other mice. The second section of the book conveys the story of Roscuro the rat. The story of the second section happens before the story of the first section occurs. It begins with the author introducing the character. The author as the narrator explains the meaning of Chiaroscuro, the name of the character. The third section of the book conveys the story of Miggery. The story of the third section happens before the story of the first and the second section occur. The author explains that Miggery was born in time before Despereaux and Roscuro were born. It is said that nobody cares about what she wants.

▪ **Setting**

The structure of the story includes both the construction of the plot and its setting. The setting may be in the past, the present, or the future. The story may take place in a specific locale, or the setting may be deliberately vague to convey the universal feeling of all suburbs, all large cities, or all rural communities.

Both the time and place of the story should affect the action, the characters, and the theme. If the literature is historical fiction, whenever a specific period of time or locale is presented, it should be authentic and true to what the author knows of that period, place, or people. Part of the challenge of writing accurate historical fiction is believable reconstruction of the time and place of the action. If the literature is fantasy, then the imaginary settings of fantasy must be carefully detailed in order to create a believable story.

The setting of a story, then, is important in creating mood, authenticity, and credibility. The accident of place and time in a person's life may be as significant as the accident of birth, for places may have tremendous significance in our life story (18).

The author does not indicate the time clearly, but it is clear that the story in The Tale of Despereaux takes place in a place called Kingdom of Dor. The story happens within the walls, the library, the dungeon, the kitchen of the castle, and in a place far from the castle.

▪ **Theme**

The theme of a book reveals the author's purpose in writing the story. Most well-written books may be read for several layers of meaning (plot, theme, or metaphor).

According to Huck, Hepler and Hickman, theme provides a dimension to the story that goes beyond the action of the plot. The theme of a book might be the acceptance of self or others, growing up, the overcoming of fear or prejudice (19). In children's literature, the theme of a story should be worth imparting to young people and be based on justice and integrity. Sound moral and ethical principles

should prevail.

Paul Hazard, writing in Books, Children and Men, made these comments concerning the kind of children's books that he felt were good:

...and books that awaken in them not maudlin sentimentality, but sensibility; that enable them to share in great human emotions; that give them respect for universal life—that of animals, of plants; that teach them not to despise everything that is mysterious in creation and in man.... I like books that set in action truths worthy of lasting forever, and inspiring one's whole inner life.... In short, I like books that have the integrity to perpetuate their own faith in truth and justice (42-44).

However, there is something to be concerned about writing for children. Huck, Hepler and Hickman state that, "one danger in writing books for children particularly is that the theme will override the plot. Authors may be so intent on conveying a message that story or characterization may be neglected (19)."

The themes in The Tale of Despereaux include love, bravery, betrayal, hope, despair, vengeance, empathy, and forgiveness. The idea of castles, dungeons, kings, queens, princesses, and brave heroes belong in what many of us consider being the basic elements of a classic fairy tale. DiCamillo seems to go right along with this theme but added a new element of adventure which includes a mouse, instead of a knight, as the hero on a journey to save a princess.

▪ **Characterization**

True characterization is another hallmark of fine writing. The people portrayed in children's books should be as convincingly real and lifelike as our next-door neighbours. Many of the animal characters in modern fantasy have real

personalities, also. The credibility of characters will depend on the author's ability to show their true natures, their strengths, and their weaknesses.

According to Huck, Hepler and Hickman, in revealing character an author may tell about the person through narration, record the character's conversation with others, describe the thoughts of the character, show the thought of others about the character, or show the character in action. If only one dimension of a character is presented, or one trait overemphasized, the result is likely to be stereotyped and wooden (20).

In addition to realism in characterization, Huck, Hepler and Hickman argue that there should be consistency in character portrayal. This consistency should conform to the true nature of the character as the author has presented him. The characters should be depicted so that everything they do, think, and say will seem natural and inevitable. Characters should act and speak in accordance with their age, culture, and educational background (20).

Another aspect of good characterization is growth and development. The reader should be aware whether the characters change in the course of the story, or if they remain the undaunted and self-sufficient personalities that they were in the beginning of the tale. If he/she spots the change then the character(s) can most likely be included in a good one. According to Huck, Hepler and Hickman, to appear truly human they must grow and change before the reader's eyes. In keeping with life itself, that change is usually gradual and convincing, rather than mercurial and unrealistic. Not all characters will change, but many of them are memorable for their personality development. It can be said that a character is well written when long after we have forgotten their stories, we can recall some of

their personalities in children's literature (21).

There are three main characters in The Tale of Despereaux. They are Despereaux Tilling, Chiaroscuro, and Miggery Sow. The characteristics of these three characters change in the course of the story.

▪ **Style**

An author's style of writing is simply selection and arrangement of words in presenting the story. Good writing style is appropriate to the plot, theme, and characters, both creating and reflecting the mood of the story. An author's style is individual and unique. Certain authors can tap into the feelings and emotions of childhood itself.

Children do not enjoy a story that is too descriptive, but they can appreciate figurative language, provided the comparisons are within their background of understanding. The style of writing should mirror the setting of the story and the background of the characters. According to Huck, Hepler and Hickman, children in the middle grades can comprehend symbolic meaning and recurring motifs. Motifs contribute to the structure of a story, for they provide the meaningful threads that run through it and help to unify it. The taste of children place some demands on the writer's style. Children tend to want action in their stories and prefer a style that has movement rather than too much description or introspection. Children also demand conversation in their stories (23).

The best test of an author's style is oral reading. Does it read smoothly and effortlessly? Is the conversation artificial, or does it really sound like people talking? Does the author introduce variety in the sentence patterns and use of words? Although it is difficult for children to analyze a particular author's style,

they do react to it. Huck, Hepler and Hickman believe that children can quickly detect if an author talks down to them. Adults respond to the clever, the slyly written, and the sarcastic; children do not. Frequently, children are better able to identify what they dislike about an author's style than to identify what they like. Obviously, the matter of style is important when adults evaluate books for children (22).

In *The Tale of Despereaux*, The story for each section in the book is told in a different timeline. The author uses "dear reader" to address the reader. This kind of interaction comforts the reader.

▪ **Point of View**

The author's choice of point of view will necessarily influence style, structure, and revelation of character. There are some types of point of view. Using the third person, the omniscient point of view allows the author the complete freedom to crawl inside the skins of each of the characters, thinking their thoughts, speaking their words, and observing the action of the story.

The authors who use this type of point of view include the Colliers, Madeleine L'Engle, and Katherine Paterson. According to Huck, Hepler and Hickman, in the hand of such skillful writers, the first-person narrative creates a kind of "you are there" feeling. On the contrary, the use of the first person in the hands of less qualified writer may make for easy reading, but it does not stretch the reader's vocabulary or imagination.

Mollie Hunter, in her book *Talent Is Not Enough*, warns that the first-person point of view can be restricting:

The result of this device may be a story to which a reader can relate in

very direct terms; but simply because of the narrator's limited vocabulary, there is no scope for adventure in language which allows the reader's mind to soar (23).

The author Kate DiCamillo tells *The Tale of Despereaux* through the voice of an omniscient narrator. This way, the author can include all thoughts and conversations. This kind of point of view also enables the author as narrator to provide a prologue and epilogue for the playing out of this story.

▪ **Format**

The format of a book includes its size, shape, the design of pages, illustrations, typography, quality of paper, and binding. Frequently, some small aspect of the format, such as the book jacket, will be an important factor in a child's decision to read a story.

Besides the illustration, the typography is important to be paid attention to. Huck, Hepler and Hickman state that the type should be large enough for easy reading by the age level for which it was intended. At the same time, if type face is too large, children will consider the book "babyish." The space between the lines (leading) should be sufficient to make the text clear (26).

The quality of the paper must also be considered. Huck, Hepler and Hickman believe that a cream-tinted, dull finished paper that is thick enough to prevent any penetration of ink is most desirable. The binding should be durable and practical, one that can withstand the use of many interested, but frequently grimy, hands. For library and classroom use, books that are bound in cloth, with soil-resistant, washable covers are recommended. However, a book should never be selected on the basis of format alone, without an accompanying evaluation of

its content. No book is better than its text (25).

The typography in The Tale of Despereaux is clear enough, with sufficient space between the lines, and the font size which is not too large and not too small. The thickness of the paper is alright, although the writer can still see through the printed writings behind the page that is currently being read. The quality of the paper is a little disappointing though.

2.2. Related Studies

So far, the writer has not found any studies or analysis conducted upon the Tale of Despereaux novel and its components whether in electronic media or printed media. However, the writer did find some book reviews (and some movie reviews too) regarding this novel on the internet although none of them seem to be discussing the novel in depth.

One of them came from Elizabeth Kennedy. In her review, she mentioned about the story, the author, the moral of the story, and her recommendation toward this book. She pointed about the award received and why the author wrote such story. She also gave brief explanation about the plot, the characters, the theme, the lay out, and the style of writing.

Another review came from a blogger (a person who writes in a blog) named Andra. In his review, he only mentioned the general information about the novel and how he highly recommended this book, especially for children, because he found that the language is easy to understand and how the novel could deliver the message without being preachy. He also mentioned about the plot, the characters, and the plus point of the book.

Since this book has been adapted into motion picture, the writer found more articles concerning the information about the movie version than the book version. One came from Claudia Puig. Her article was published in the USA TODAY Community website. The other came from Sheri Linden. Her article in Los Angeles Times was published in Fandango website. Both review the movie The Tale of Despereaux and compare it with the movie Ratatouille. The complete reviews can be seen in the appendix. The writer deliberately took only two reviews for every version of the work (the book and the movie) because other articles regarding the work discuss pretty much the same thing as those two.