

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1. Background of the Study

Literature cannot be separated from our life. Our acquaintance with literature begins ever since we were very young. Perhaps we did not realize that, for the first time, we have encountered literature in the form of nursery songs or lullabies sung to us when we were babies. Or maybe the most obvious example was when our parents read us stories before we went to bed. Those songs and stories are part of literature. According to Huck, Hepler, and Hickman in their book Children's Literature, literature is the imaginative shaping of life and thought into the forms and structures of language. The province of literature is the human condition: life with all its feeling, thoughts, and insights. The experience of literature is always two-dimensional, for it involves both the book and the reader. However, if the child has no background in fantasy, cannot comprehend the complexity of the plot, nor tolerate the logic of its illogic; he/she will not be able to interact with the book and so experience literature. We need to consider the function of the words and pictures. Huck, Hepler, and Hickman also stated that good writing or effective use of language, on any subject may produce aesthetic experiences (4).

Nowadays children are becoming more knowledgeable about certain life experiences than before. They have become more critical about what happens around them. But that does not mean that they should be allowed to read anything or what they are not supposed to read. Instead, the content of children's literature

should be kept in the boundaries of children's experience and understanding. As stated by Huck, Hepler, and Hickman, "Certain emotional and psychological responses seem outside the realm of childhood. For example, the feeling of nostalgia is an adult emotion that is foreign for to most boys and girls. Children seldom look back on their childhood, but always forward (5)." Speaking of children's emotion, it is something simple yet complicated. Children may have known the feeling of pessimism or hopelessness in their life and they may have even been in some sort of hopeless situations. But beyond their pessimism, children still expect good things to happen in life. And beyond the despair, they are not without hope. In other words, children see beauty where there is ugliness, and they are hopeful when adults have given up. But this does not necessarily mean that all stories for children must have happy endings. They may have any endings as their authors' choose to have. But when we close the door on hope, it means that we are leaving the realm of childhood. Thus, Huck, Hepler, and Hickman believe that children's literature is a literature that has the child's eye at the centre.

Such kind of literature is found in The Tale of Despereaux, which becomes the object of the writer's thesis. The writer considers that this book contains the characteristics of a children literature. To be a little specific, the story also includes a hope-beyond-despair theme. In this thesis, the writer will analyse a children's book called The Tale of Despereaux from its elements of fiction, especially the characterization. Besides having a good writing and effective use of language, this book also has illustrations which are expected to help the children

who do not have background in fantasy, to be able to comprehend the complexity of the plot and tolerate the logic of its illogic, just as stated earlier.

The Tale of Despereaux is a book written by Kate DiCamillo. Her other works include The Tiger Rising and Because of Winn-Dixie, which has won several major awards, including the Newberry Honor, one of the most prestigious prizes in US. The Tale of Despereaux has become a very popular title in the US and the UK, which sells over 200.000 copies.

Kate DiCamillo lived in the south of the USA for much of her childhood and studied at the University of Florida. The Tale of Despereaux was inspired by Luke Bailey, her best friend's son, who asked her if she would want to write a story for him about an unlikely hero with exceptionally large ears. She currently lives in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Kate has a degree in English from the University of Florida in Gainesville. At that time, she had been writing daily for the past seven years. Thanks to a competitive grant from the McKnight Foundation, Kate received some financial support while writing her first book, Because of Winn-Dixie. The most frequently asked question she had was, "How long does it take you to write a book?" Kate said it took about a year. "I write every morning, or try to, no matter where I am or what I am doing. I give myself a page limit. Two pages. That's all I ask of myself." Kate went on to say that she also did a lot of rewriting ([childrensbooks.about.com](http://childrensbooks.about.com)).

Being a part of a writing critique group has been very helpful to Kate. She had been meeting with the same group of writers for about five years. They meet

every other week to read their work aloud to one another and discuss it. The group provides "support and community".

Kate's characters seem to be very real to her. She said that they shaped her by "telling me their stories." She stated, "It's always a challenge to get myself out of the way so that the story can be told." Kate mentioned that twelve-year-old Rob Horton, the main character in *The Tiger Rising*, first appeared in a short story she wrote. "Rob just kind of haunted me and it took me a while to figure out the story he wanted me to tell." Although both of her novels share the theme of the loss of a parent, Kate said that as she was writing, it was "a theme I was not even aware of." As Kate DiCamillo told us, having her first book, *Because of Winn-Dixie*, designated a 2001 Newbery Honor book was "an incredible honor." When you have won such a prestigious honor, what's left? According to Kate, "I just want to tell more stories." In 2003, *The Tale of Despereaux* was published and in 2004, she was honored with the Newbery Medal for the book. A quirky fairy tale, it is quite different from her previous work, although the excellent writing and several familiar themes are still present. The inspiration for this story came from her best friend's son, who asked for a story about "an unlikely hero. He has exceptionally large ears." The hero certainly is unlikely; he's a mouse who loves music.

Although it is a simple story for children, the writer finds that there are several interesting aspects in it. The writer chooses this novel for some reasons. And these reasons are also something that makes this novel different from other stories for children. The first one is the relationship. At the start of the story the characters do not know one another, but at the end they have come into each

other's lives. The activities of one character affect the others in one way or another. One character would do something that will influence another character's life and so on. Moreover, this kind of interaction grows as the story goes. And as the story goes, the interaction becomes the one that intertwines the lives of the characters.

Second is the character. Other reason why the writer chooses this novel is because it has unique characters. The animal characters can behave and interact like real human while retaining their animal traits. Unlike other similar stories which involved miraculous events such as animal-to-human transformation or something like that, the animal characters in this novel stays the way they are until the end of the story. Although this is similar to another fiction story and perhaps considered to be a fairy tale, the author does not put any fairy tale material on the characters, such as supernatural transformation, magical power or being, and miraculous events that help them along the way.

Third is the moral. This novel has strong message or moral of the story. The author puts message at the end of each problems or cases aroused to give clear explanation to the children, which the writer believes is the main target of this novel. The moral described in this novel is about how the character defends his idea; how he stands up for something he believes in, although it costs him dearly.

It is true that the main characters of this novel are animals. And since the author of this novel puts or "endows" human characterizations and traits to the main characters, which some of them are animals, therefore the writer will discuss and analyze these characters as if they were real humans.

There are several main characters in this novel. This novel has four sections. Each of the characters is described in one section. Those sections are called 'Book the First', 'Book the Second', 'Book the Third', 'Book the Fourth', and 'Coda'. The last one is the author's message to the reader.

Book The First tells us about the origin of Despereaux Tilling, a mouse, with an unusual mouse-nature, who falls in love with a human princess named Pea. Despereaux likes to read books rather than to nibble them. Due to his irregularity, Despereaux is forced to be exiled and sent away to the dungeon. In the dungeon, he meets Gregory the dungeon keeper who has also become a long time prisoner.

Book The Second tells us about the origin of Chiaroscuro (Roscuero), a rat that was born in a dungeon several years before Despereaux was born. He has an inordinate interest in illumination of all sorts. There he meets a new prisoner who is later known to be the father of a girl named Miggery Sow. The attraction to lights brings Roscuero into a party upstairs held by the king. There, he accidentally kills the queen (Pea's mother) when he falls from the chandelier into the queen's bowl of soup and makes her die of shock. From then on, the king forbids soup in the entire kingdom including all the equipments involved in the making and eating of soups. He also orders the death of every rat in the land. As for Roscuero, he goes back to his hideout in the dungeon.

Book The Third tells us about the origin of Miggery Sow, a girl born many years before Despereaux and Chiaroscuro far from the castle where Despereaux was born. She is an orphan who is sold by his father to a man called Uncle when

she is still young. Her life soon becomes a nightmare ever since. Nothing she does seems right for the Uncle. He clouts her ear every time she makes mistakes and whenever he likes to. A kingdom soldier takes Miggery Sow to the castle as he collects the bowls, kettles, and spoons from the people.

Book The Fourth tells us about Miggery Sow who is taken to the castle. She is given jobs there which none of them are being done accordingly. When the Cook asks her to deliver food to the dungeon for Gregory, she meets Roscuro. From then on, Roscuro tries to find a way of using Miggery to do his bad scheme for Princess Pea. He chooses Miggery to help him with his plan because she is the only human who can hear him—her clouted ears somehow are able to hear his pitching voice, and because he wants to use Miggery's disorientation towards the idea of becoming a princess. This section also tells us about the "quest" of Despereaux in searching for Princess Pea and saving her from Roscuro.

## **1.2. Statement of the Problems**

1. How does the characterization of the main characters developed?
2. What are the meanings behind the characterization?

## **1.3. Objective of the Study**

1. To find out how the characterization of the main characters is developed.
2. To identify the meanings behind the characterization.

#### **1.4. Scope and Limitation**

In order to keep the study stays in the expected area, limitations will be applied in the analysis. The writer will focus the discussion on the intrinsic elements of the book The Tale of Despereaux which is supported by the theory of children's literature. Further discussion will be focused on the characterization of the main characters in order to find out any messages behind the characterization.

#### **1.5. Significance of the Study**

By analyzing The Tale of Despereaux as the material of the thesis, the writer hopes that anybody who reads this might get something valuable to broaden the understanding about literary work. Since it expresses valuable things about life, in this case, about problem solving and relationship, therefore the writer hopes that the analysis of this novel can give some contribution to understand life better.

The contribution also goes to the students of the English Department of Airlangga University, especially those who are taking literature as their major and have the interest to analyze a literary work. The writer hopes that this thesis may give some valuable information and knowledge.

#### **1.6. Theoretical Approach**

For the analysis, the writer will apply some theories. To see how the story is developed, the writer will mostly use the theory from the book Children's Literature in the Elementary School which is written by Charlotte S. Huck, Susan Hepler, and Janet Hickman. The writer will also use the theory from the book

Mastering English Literature which is written by Richard Gill.

The book Children's Literature in the Elementary School is used because it contains comprehensive information about literature for children. It compiles the theories of many children's literature experts, such as Bruno Bettelheim or W. H. Auden. It also provides numerous examples of children's book.

The book Mastering English Literature is used because it explains about the elements contained in a literary work, specifically novel, which in this case the elements are referred as the elements of fictions. The explanation of the elements of fiction from this book is then combined with the explanation from the Children's Literature book to find the best explanation needed in order to analyze the object of this thesis.

### **1.7. Method of the Study**

The method used in this study is library research to find some theories, relevant books, and internet sources related to the analysis. The main source is the novel The Tale of Despereaux written by Kate DiCamillo.

Moreover, this study applies the method of data collection from the novel by having a close reading on it, making data classification, and determining the data based on the criteria. Therefore, the writer will use descriptive-interpretative analysis and explanation throughout the events and actions in the novel related to the subject being explained.

First, the writer will collect the data needed from: the novel itself; books containing related theories; and internet sources. The writer will then close-read

the novel based on the problems which are brought up. After that, he will apply the chosen theories to analyze the novel in order to get the answer to the statement of the problems. And the last, the result of the analysis will be used to obtain the objective of the study, and will be concluded.

### **1.8. Definition of Key Terms**

- Personality : Something which is unique about a person (character), the characteristics that distinguish him/her from other people (character). Personality implies predictability about how a person (character) will act or react under different circumstances.
- Conflict : Clashing of opposed principles or ideas.
- Ambition : Desire for advancement or distinction, or for specific attainment.
- Motivation : stimulation of interest that induces a person to act in a particular way.