

## **Hero Construction Narrative In *A Bug's Life*, The Film**

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The present study entitled **Hero Construction Narrative in A Bug's Life, The Film** aims to investigate the film narrative of hero construction. The study employs a descriptive qualitative study with textual analysis approach. The present study adopted Hourihan's (1997) theory as its major theoretical framework and the language of film theory (Heintz and Stracey, 2006). The study found that the hero construction in the film is presented through three phases there are the initiation phase, the conflict phase and the resolution phase. These phases are also analyzed through the language of the film. They are crafted through the pattern of cause and effect where film characters become the agent of causality. These characters are put in binary opposition to construct the hero in the narrative which is mediated through the language of film, such as camera shots, camera movement and *mise en scène*. The uses of binary opposition support the delivery of the didactic message in the film, since animation films that focus on hero's journey are often directed to children.

**Keywords:** *Film, Animation Film, Narrative Cinema, Hero Construction, Children's Literature*

## INTRODUCTION

In the modern era, film is considered as one of literary genres. Film have also had a major influence on the fine arts; novel, more abstract approaches to painting have been taken in response to this new media (Klarer, 1998). Films are often made in order to depict something in the real world and convey it in other ways, particularly stories in motion pictures to the audience.

In accordance to the notions above, the current study analyzes film as the subject of the research. Although film has its own specific characterization and terminology, it is possible to analyze film by drawing on methods of literary criticism (Klarer, 1998). As other form of literature, films are often offered as representations of reality. In this case films are constructed to

the viewers. In other way, films are made in a specific way for a particular purpose. Therefore by analyzing film, this study aims to find the purpose of the film, to see whether the film is represents appropriate ideas about reality or place the viewers to see the subject in particular way.

According to Heintz and Stracey (2006), films are shaped for an audience. They are expected to attract their audience. One example is animated film that is usually addressed for children (Dirks, 2011). Usually, animated film shows a clear distinction between what is good and bad. However, this distinction is analyzable because what is shown in the film can actually be more complex than what is seen. Nodelman (2008: 341) says that children literature claims free from

adult content that nevertheless lurks within it. Consequently, by analyzing animated film that adult content are identified.

This study uses *A Bug's Life* film as the subject. *A Bug's Life* is an animated film in which the script is directed by John Lasseter and written by John Lasseter, Andrew Stanton and Joe Ranft. The story is about an ant colony that is occupied by grasshoppers gang. One of the film issues is about the hero construction of the protagonist. Therefore, this study aims to find out how the animation reveals the narrative structure of hero construction through insects character.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Several theories have been chosen as the framework to investigate and categorize the data in

the study. First, this study uses theoretical framework from Hourihan (1997). She identified the common narrative pattern of hero construction through several phases. Second, this study also uses Heinz and Stracey's theoretical framework which identified how films convey its representation through the language of film, such as shots, composition, movement and *mise en scène*. The description and presentation of the analysis are critically analyzed and interpreted by means of categorizing how the narrative of a hero construction represented through the scene. Therefore, by investigating *A Bug's Life* film and its medium, it reveals the way how the animation tells the narrative of a hero construction in it.

Narrative refers to the strategies, language of film

employed to organize a story (Hayward, 2006). She also argues that narrative cinema is a strategy of reproducing the ‘real world’, one which the spectator can identify with or consider to be within the realms of possibility.

To understand this narrative form, films have some features that serve as film medium or cinematic technique, such as the language of the film, camera shots, camera movements and *mise en scène*. These techniques have different functions and approaches to convey the film’s narrative to the spectator. Therefore, an analysis of these techniques can give an indication of what the filmmaker intend to do.

## DISCUSSION

The hero narrative in *A Bug's Life* is crafted through a pattern of

cause and effect. In general, the narrative begins with one situation, and then a series of change occurs according to a pattern of cause and effect. This pattern is repeatedly constructed based on the new situation which is produced from earlier pattern effect. Afterward, new situations arise and lead the spectators to the end of the narrative. The cause and effect pattern in *A Bug's Life* strengthens the statement from Bordwell & Thompson (2010) that narrative depends on causality. Typically, the agents of causality in a film’s narrative are characters who have specific traits and want to achieve specific goals. The clash of these characters’ contrasting traits and conflicting goals underpin the pattern of causality in the story.

In *A Bug's Life*, there are two characters which play important

roles in constructing the pattern of causality in the story. Those two characters are Flik and Hopper. Flik, an ant is the protagonist in the film, while Hopper, a grasshopper is the antagonist. These are the characters with contrasting traits and conflicting goals. Hopper's goal is to oppress the ant colony and force them to think conservatively which means that the ant colony has to obey the regulations dictated by Hopper. Hopper intimidates the colony to increase the offering and reduce the amount of time. At the same time, the colony's primary objective is to collect the foods as fast as they can and not trigger any new problems, it

makes the colony desperate. Therefore, the colony did not accept Flik's innovation because they are afraid that it spoils their objective. On the contrary, Flik's goal is to liberate the ant colony and introduce to the colony some new ideas or innovations. Flik wanted the colony's food collecting become efficient and fast. Therefore, he proposed a harvester and other inventions to help the colony. Hopper's oppression and Flik's innovation are put in binary opposition which creates conflict. This conflict drives the phases of hero's journey as proposed by Hourihan in *A Bug's Life*.



**Figure 1. “Flik’s Invention” Scene** The shot in “Flik’s Invention” scene presents the introduction of Flik.

The initiation phase of the film introduces Flik by using medium shot and eye-level angle. Medium shot and eye level angle create a feeling of intimacy and normality (Heints and Stracey, 2006). This resulted where the spectators lend the characters' gaze. According to Higgins (2012), such introduction invites the spectator to fell first and think later. That feelings or sympathy build for Flik is also emphasizes by Flik's and Hopper's characterization. These two characterizations construct a binary of a protagonist who is friendly and innovative, also an antagonist who is cruel and unfriendly. As an illustration, Flik is presented as the worker which collects food. He is also friendly and innovative. He shared his story with princess Dot.

He helped princess Atta with his harvester and the telescope. Though, the colony did not accept his idea, Flik never gives up on his goals. On the other hand, Hopper is described as cruel and strong. He is presented as the master of the ant colony. He shows his power by his intimidating speech. He rejects and prevents others from expressing their opinions. He also demands more foods from the colony. It makes the colony fear for Hopper. Thus, the colony obeys Hopper's order and thinks conservatively. The colony does not want their objective in executing Hopper's demand failed. Hence, they work safely and reject any ideas because it might risk them. That is the reason why Flik's idea is rejected by the colony. As a result, Flik is considered as troublemaker.

The binary opposition in the initiation phase evokes sympathy for Flik.

The binary opposition explores further creating conflict by both characterizations in Flik's Adventure. As an illustration, Flik is determined to succeed. He goes to the big city to find warrior bugs. Flik cleverly creates an artificial bird to deceive Hopper. In contrary, Hopper is relaxing in a resort. Hopper is fooled by Flik's artificial bird though Hopper finds out that it was artificial in the end. In this phase, Flik achieves many developments by staying on his traits. In this phase, the languages of film are more varied. Thus, different focalizations

are achieved and assured the emotional experience to the spectators (Higgins, 2012).

In the final phase, the binary opposition is more pronounced because it is needed to show the consequences of being the opposition of a good guy. For example, there is significant traits shift. Flik who is weak and coward become strong and brave while Hopper is in the opposite. This kind of emphasize is needed in a children literature which provide social learning for children. It is important to show that one become a hero because he is brave, strong, resourceful, and determined to be successful (Hourihan, 1997).



**Figure 2. “The Grasshopper Arrive” Scene.** The shot in ‘The Grasshoppers Arrive’ scene uses a different camera angle to determine subject’s power relation

This binary opposition also works in the languages of film. The language of film consists of camera shots, camera movement, and *mise en scène* those are exploited to create the contrasting characters. As an illustration, Flik is presented in high angle shot when Flik is on the same

scene with Hopper. High angle shot gives Flik a defenseless looks because the spectators are looking down to him. On the contrary, Hopper is presented in low angle shot. This angle gives him powerful looks because the spectators are looking up to him.



**Figure 3. The Ant Island and Hopper’s Sombrero Resort.**

Setting of place is one of *mise en scène* elements. The binary opposition also works in the setting of place. Flik lives in The Ant Island, the filmmaker depicts the Ant Island with vivid and various color. Otherwise, Hopper’s Sombrero Resort which he lived in depicted through dull and single color. The filmmaker establishes some scenes with different shot angles and movement to give different impression to the spectator. All those camera techniques are to determine scenes function as a focalization where the spectators lend the characters’ gaze. By using

different focalization through camera technique, the spectators can follow the hero narrative in *A Bug's Life*.

This binary opposition is put to work throughout the film. Therefore, the use of binary opposition becomes effective because the story is intended for children. Nodelman (2008) states that characters in children's literature are often put in sets of binary opposition. Binary opposition might simplify an infinite range of possible positions of differing kinds of human relationships. This simplification, like in *A Bug's Life*, makes the message 'the good always win' is easier to understand for its implied reader in these case children.

## CONCLUSION

From this study, it can be inferred that the narrative of a hero is constructed through film languages and binary opposition of the characters. Through this method the messages from the film become more pronounced and more easily understood by younger audience.

The study suggests that more analysis of film is more conducted because it is a lucrative site for further study in the field of literature, in this case children literature. This study is also expected to motivate future readers and researchers to better understand about how film can give meanings and emotional experience through language of film technique to the spectators.

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