

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Most readers may admit that William Shakespeare's Hamlet is one of his difficult plays to read. Conner stated that readers would need extra effort to interpret Shakespearean plays which are "...difficult, demanding, strange indeed," (1). The common issues found in reading the play are the length and the language that children would tend to avoid. Hamlet has 4.042 lines with plots that are equipped with many subplots. In addition to having a complex plot, Hamlet was written in Early Modern English in which nowadays young readers would have trouble in understanding the language since they still have inadequate literacy ability.

Issues in reading Hamlet mentioned above had been disqualified since the emergence of the play's adaptation to children prose in the early nineteenth century. Charles Lamb and Mary Lamb first published *Tales from Shakespeare* in 1807 which comprises twenty plays including Hamlet. A century afterward, the idea to create children's prose of Shakespearean play had developed to the point when Edith Nesbit wrote *Beautiful Stories from Shakespeare* in 1907 which also includes Hamlet. Lamb Siblings and Nesbit have cleared up the doubts of introducing Hamlet play to children. They have adapted Hamlet into an easier form for children by writing it into prose.

As Lamb Sibling wrote in the preface of *Tales from Shakespeare*, the intention of the book had been to avoid much effort in understanding Shakespearean plays especially for young readers (Lamb xvi). To recreate the simplest form of the play that

children can understand also had been Nesbit's object at the first place in writing *Beautiful Stories from Shakespeare* (Nesbit 3). This indicates that the existence of Shakespearean tales has been in fact so helpful in terms of literary canonization; to introduce children to Shakespeare's works earlier and to make them aware of his utmost work.

To make *Hamlet* more accessible for children, *The Lamb Siblings* and Nesbit had done a huge reconstruction of the play, most notably the plot. How they reconstructed the play to short stories is compelling; see how they managed to reduce 4,042 lines into possibly dozens of times lesser. The simplification of the plot affects the amount of the characters in which several side characters are not included. It is because characters are determined by their actions that construct the plot. The reconstruction of the play, therefore, affects the length of the narrative that the play becomes more concise.

On the other hand, 'to be concise' may be perceived as a shortcoming, for readers will miss numerous elements from the original play. If the plot simplification and character reduction happen to diminish the essentials of the original text, the shortcoming can be confirmed. Therefore, it is necessary to work on the deep analysis of the plot and characters that requires structuralism which, in literature, examines plots as the narrative structure and characters as the supportive elements in plot development.

As both plots and characters are fundamental elements of narratives, employing structuralism to analyze them is required to see a larger system which constructs the tales of *Hamlet*. A. J. Greimas's narratology, as one of structural examinations on narratives, offers 'actantial model' as a means to break down the function of characters

within the plot. If one character happens to have no function, the character remains insignificant to the major plot of the work and there would be no problem if the character is omitted. Greimas's actantial model, here, has a role to display the underlying structure of a narrative to determine the essential actant (what Greimas refers as the 'actor') and their function which establish the functional events in the plot. Greimas's narratology, therefore, is able to prove that its typical structural model can represent the essentials of a complex tragedy like Hamlet. This thesis identifies whether Charles & Mary Lamb and Edith Nesbit's efforts to reconstruct the plot of Hamlet tales is worth the quality—the capability of retaining the essentials of the play despite the plot simplification and actant omission.

1.2 Identification of the Problems

The adaptation process of Shakespeare's Hamlet into a tale involves plot simplification and actant reductions. These processes may change or reduce the essentials of the original text. Whether the adaptation processes change or reduce the play's essentials becomes the concerns that need to be validated to find out that a narrative structure is able to hold the essential of a narrative like Hamlet. Moreover, the tales of Hamlet are rather an introduction to Shakespeare to children that are expected not just to entertain, but also to educate. This means that despite how short and amusing the tales are, they are expected to still retain the essence and the values of the original text of Hamlet play.

1.3 Review of Previous Studies

Discussion on omission or the absence of elements in Hamlet's short story adaptation are barely found but many scholars have examined these adaptations and the importance in the world of Children's Literature. Vicente-Yagüe-Jara and García-Gómez (2018) studies seven literary adaptations of Shakespeare's Hamlet to seek the technique of recreating the play to prose. The study finds the common variety of the general form, the language, and intertextuality from each adaptation. The data analysis is done by classifying the adaptation to several categories such as level/age, thematic comparison, gender, format, and linguistic style. This classification helps to find the suitable adaptation that can be used in the classroom based on the intended audiences and teaching necessity.

Harvey (2016) in her essay "A Classic for the Elders": Marketing Charles and Mary Lamb in the Nineteenth Century," proposes subgenre "children's Shakespeare" to refer to Tales from Shakespeare (1807). It writes that the emergence of the Tales was a big influence to other authors to adapt Shakespearean plays to prose. The study of this essay focuses on external aspects (paratextual) that build the Tales of the advanced edition; how the Tales were served adjusting the generation of Victorian and Edwardian young readers.

In regard to how this study is conducted in which it is done by applying A. J. Greimas' actantial model to particular literary works, such studies are found. Handayani (2010) examines the basic structure of the actantial model in J. R. R. Tolkien's The Hobbit, and explain the model into functional structures in her thesis titled "An Application of A. J. Greimas' Structural Analysis on Tolkien's The Hobbit."

It is done by identifying and by explaining the correlations and the functions of each element in the model/scheme. The scheme helps readers to easily understand the novel.

This study proves that *The Hobbit* possesses the axis of Syntagmatic units, an advanced theory by Greimas that include contractual structure, performative structure, and disjunctive structure. Main characters of the novel such as Bilbo, Thorin, and Bard become the focus of each actantial model as the subject. The model discovers the main characters' ambitions to attain their goals (object). From this study, the writer is able to elaborate the plot from these three actantial models.

Setiawati (2007), in her thesis "Action of Character and Elements of the Construction in J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit: An Analysis of the Narrative Structure*," discusses the novel through the lens of Structuralism which believes that a story is constructed by the actions of its characters. The writer applies Structuralism theory by Vladimir Propp who clarifies thirty one functions distributed into seven main spares of action and the constructive elements built in the story. The study finds that only thirty functions out of thirty one and five main spares of actions out of seven. Constructive elements built in the novel are similar to fairy tales Propp had studied which concludes that *The Hobbit* owns fairy tales elements but cannot be referred to as one of them, since the functional structure and the action spares are not similar to what Propp proposed.

Putra (2006) in his thesis titled "Actant and Functional Structure of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*," also involves A. J. Greimas' theory in studying *Hamlet* that examines the form and the pattern of actantial model and also the functional structures

of each character included. The reason behind the study is to help readers to comprehend the play better since Hamlet is a complicated play in term of delivering the characters. The writer discovers four of Greimas' schemes that lead to the theme of the play which is divided into minor and major themes. The themes are composed and portrayed by the pattern of the characters' actions and characterization. Similar to Putra, Restu (2005) also employs Greimas' actantial model and functional structure in examining Mark Twain's Pudd'nhead Wilson which also intends to discover the theme of the novel through actant schemes.

1.4 Research Questions

This study answers these following questions:

- 1.4.1 What are the differences between the structures of William Shakespeare's Hamlet and its prose adaptations?
- 1.4.2 How do Charles & Mary Lamb and Edith Nesbit simplify Hamlet prose adaptations and which actants are omitted in the stories?

1.5 Scope of the Study

The study focuses on analyzing the plot simplification and actant omission in Hamlet's short story adaptation by Lamb Siblings and Edith Nesbit. This means that this study pays attention to the intrinsic elements of the tales which are the plot and the characters. To answer the research questions, therefore, it is necessary to conduct the study by applying A. J. Greimas Narrative theory which identifies plot development by actants, and by employing the device he proposes, actantial model. The original text of

Hamlet play becomes the chief reference and it will be compared with the tale adaptations to find the excluded actants how the plot is simplified. The analysis results that Greimas's schemes show the exclusion actants are considered unnecessary. Such exclusions will determine whether that Hamlet's tale adaptations either hold or change the essentials of the original text of Hamlet.

1.6 Objective of the Study

This study aims at enriching the English Department's road map of studies on Children's Literature. Another interesting point is that, a play like Hamlet, which is basically intended for adults, can be enjoyed by children after the emergence of the play's adaptation. Charles & Mary Lamb and Edith Nesbit manage to compose heavy subjects rooted in Hamlet play to become subtler that children can easily grasp. Studying how the longest play of William Shakespeare like Hamlet is adapted to the simpler form is supposed to be a notable discovery in the world of literature. Tale adaptations like what Lamb Siblings and Nesbit wrote are not just about shortening plays, but there had been goals in the first place; to engage children who are basically determined learners and to preserve canonical literature like Hamlet. It, thus, would never be a crime to introduce Shakespeare earlier for children.

Hamlet is definitely a play containing plenty of moral value, and after it has been adapted to different forms, there will be a possibility the original values would change or even disappear. These views are adequate enough to be the reasons why it is necessary to analyze how the plots of Charles & Mary Lamb and Edith Nesbit's Hamlet tales version are simplified and to discover whether these tales still hold the essentials

of the original text of William Shakespeare’s play Hamlet after the plot simplification and actant exclusion.

