

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background of the Research

Meaning is not only constructed by single elements but also through the interconnections or relationships between ideas that are sometimes contradictory. This phenomenon exists both in the real world and in literary works. For example, in daily life, the day is often associated with activity and work, while the night is understood as a time for rest. In literature, light often symbolizes truth and hope, while darkness is interpreted as fear, secrecy, or evil. Opposition, therefore, is deeply inherent in human life and shapes the way people perceive the world. This is one of the main concepts in structuralism, known as binary opposition.

Structuralism in literary studies builds on Ferdinand de Saussure's idea that meaning arises from a system of differential signs rather than from isolated elements. In this view, a literary text functions as a self-contained system in which words, images, and characters gain meaning through contrast and opposition. This approach lays the foundation for applying the concept of binary opposition to literary analysis.

According to Claude Lévi-Strauss (1963), binary oppositions are fundamental principles in the way humans understand the world and construct meaning. He argued that the human mind naturally organizes experiences into pairs of opposing concepts such as nature versus culture, life versus death, or child versus adult. Although Lévi-Strauss originally applied this framework in anthropology and the study of myth, his method, mapping meaning through underlying oppositions, can

also be applied to literary texts. Fictional narratives, like myths, are structured systems of signs that organize human experience through oppositional relationships. Applying Lévi-Strauss's insights to literature helps reveal how meaning is produced through the interplay between opposing forces within a text.

One of the most noticeable forms of binary opposition in everyday life is the contrast between the world of children and the world of adults. Children are often associated with innocence, imagination, and freedom of thought, while adults are viewed as logical, authoritative, and bound by social conventions. The tension between these two worlds not only manifests in real-life interactions but also becomes a major theme in various literary works, particularly those featuring child protagonists. In this context, the binary opposition of child versus adult serves as a useful framework for exploring identity formation, the process of maturation, and the negotiation of authority.

The dynamics between the worlds of children and adults have gained renewed attention in recent literary criticism. Scholars in childhood studies argue that childhood is not a fixed biological stage but a cultural and social construct shaped by power relations (Ariès, 1962; Nikolajeva, 2010). Moreover, post-structuralist approaches question the stability of identity and emphasize the fluidity of subject positions (Hall, 1996; Jenks, 2005). These shifts have made the child–adult binary an especially relevant topic today, as it allows critics to read children's literature not merely as stories for young readers but as cultural texts where power, identity, and resistance are negotiated. Consequently, studying the opposition between children and adults in literature contributes to broader discussions about authority, knowledge, and social hierarchy.

The writer is interested in analyzing Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking-Glass* because the novel vividly presents moments where the child protagonist, Alice, encounters confusing and illogical rules imposed by adult-like figures in an unfamiliar world. The text continuously blurs boundaries between sense and nonsense, logic and absurdity, childhood and adulthood. *Through the Looking-Glass* (Carroll, 1871) is a fantasy novel that tells the story of Alice's journey into a world where everything appears reversed or inverted. The novel is well known for its playful use of language, symbolic characters, and underlying social commentary. Its inverted world and chess-based structure provide an ideal setting for examining how adult authority is questioned and subverted through the child's perspective.

This novel is particularly suitable for this study because Carroll deliberately constructs a world where traditional power relations are inverted. The Looking-Glass world exposes the absurdity of adult logic, authority, and linguistic conventions by placing the child in situations where she must make sense of irrational adult behavior. The interactions between Alice and characters such as the Red Queen and Humpty Dumpty highlight how the child's imagination and curiosity resist the rigidity of adult reasoning. For this reason, the novel serves as a perfect "laboratory" for studying how the binary opposition between child and adult is constructed, challenged, and transformed.

This study examines how the binary opposition of child versus adult is represented through Alice's experiences and interactions with other characters in *Through the Looking-Glass*. It also explores the ways in which Alice resists adult control and asserts her own agency within the Looking-Glass world. Therefore, this research aims to identify how the child vs. adult opposition is shown through Alice's

experiences in *Through the Looking-Glass*, and analyze how Alice resists adult control in the Looking-Glass world.

## 1.2 Identification of the Problems

In Lewis Carroll's novel *Through the Looking-Glass*, there are two main issues that are of concern to researchers. First, the emergence of a conflict between the positions of children and adults through Alice's experiences while in the looking-glass world. Alice as a child character is often placed in situations that confuse her, make her questionable, or even controlled by strange and authoritative adult figures. This illustrates the binary opposition between children and adults that ideologically shapes the main character's experience.

The second problem is how Alice as a child responds to the dominance and control of adult figures in the looking-glass world. The world has rules that are illogical and difficult for children to understand. However, in various situations, Alice not only passively accepts this treatment, but also shows forms of resistance, either through questions, rejections, or small actions that imply her desire to remain sovereign over herself. This is important to analyze through a structuralism approach, because it shows how child characters can negotiate their identities and spaces in a structure full of control.

The focus of this research is to see how the opposition of children vs adults is constructed in the novel and how Alice's forms of resistance against adult dominance are manifested in narrative and space.

### 1.3 The Review of Previous Studies

To help in understanding and carrying out this research, the writer uses several previous studies related to the theories, problems, and the novel used in this research. The first paper: “Psychology of a Girl Child in *Through the Looking-Glass*” by Riya Joshi (2022). This article focuses on the psychological growth of the protagonist, Alice, and examines how Alice's experiences in the Looking-Glass world can help to develop her creativity, competences, and personality formation. Investigating the character of Alice, Joshi adopts a literary psychology perspective to develop a series of reflections on what Alice's escapades suggest about the psychological development and education of girls in a world that is full of the odd and unnatural.

Joshi's study offers a valuable insight into the complexity of Alice's personality. In her study, however, Joshi does not draw enough attention to the factors of space, or the spatial organization of the Looking-Glass world itself, in the formation of Alice's experiences and identity. It is this gap that is this essay will be concerned with, considering how the destabilized space of the Looking-Glass world impinges upon its inhabitants, particularly in terms of the binary construct between children and adults.

Meher Nandrajog (2021) wrote a thesis called “Experiences of Childhood in the Victorian Cultural and Literary World of Carroll’s Alice in *Through the Looking-Glass*”. Viewed in this light, the character of Alice provides a prism through which childhood is refracted in a Victorian cultural and historical world. Nandrajog examines how Alice interacts with the world *Through the Looking-Glass*, where there is reversed logic and language, and discusses how it reveals a critique of the social norms and values of the time.

Nandrajog demonstrates in his analysis that the grotesque language and even story pattern within this novel becomes satirical and subversive against the order of Victorian culture. This study uses a historical and cultural approach to read the character of Alice as a representation of middle-class children trying to navigate the adult world. By connecting the text to the social context of its time, Nandrajog provides a deep understanding of how childhood is socially constructed in the literature of the era.

Nisrina Dewi Ambarwati and Tatan Tawami (2024) conducted a study entitled “Mental Binary Opposition of Wednesday and Enid in *Wednesday Series* S1 Episode 1 and 4”, published in *Apollo Project*, Vol. 13, No. 1. This study aims to analyze the mental binary opposition between two characters, Wednesday and Enid, in the *Wednesday Addams* series season one, episodes 1 and 4. This study uses Claude Lévi-Strauss' binary opposition theory and qualitative descriptive methods. Data were collected from scenes and English subtitles in the series.

The results of the study show that there are four prominent mental binary oppositions, namely: darkness vs brightness, quiet vs talkative, rigid vs flexible, and indifferent vs caring. Wednesday's character shows very contrasting mental traits compared to Enid, her best friend. Each pair of traits not only shows the personality of each character but also carries a deeper meaning about the dynamics of their relationships and identities.

The study above is relevant to this study because both use Lévi-Strauss' theory of binary opposition. However, the difference lies in the object and focus of the research. Ambarwati and Tawami highlight the mental opposition in contemporary

fictional characters through television series, while I apply it to Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking-Glass*, with a particular focus on the binary opposition between children and adults. This study aims to reveal how this opposition shapes the narrative and characterization of the main character in the context of the absurd and symbolic mirror world.

Ho-chia Chueh (1999) in his article entitled "A Form of Binarism: Lévi-Strauss' Definition on Cultures", published in the journal *ACCESS: Contemporary Issues in Education*, critically discusses Lévi-Strauss' methodology, especially the use of the concept of binary opposition in understanding culture. In this article, Chueh examines how Lévi-Strauss places binary opposition as the basis for constructing cultural meaning, but also shows the limitations of this approach. Chueh argues that the meaning of culture in Lévi-Strauss' framework relies too much on theoretical constructions formed by the researcher himself, so that it does not provide an adequate understanding of complex cultural diversity.

In his analysis, Chueh raises the methodological issue that the use of binary opposition can create a simplification of social and cultural realities that are more fluid and not always dualistic. Therefore, this article provides a critical view of the application of Lévi-Strauss' theory in cultural studies, while also opening up a discussion about the limits of using binary structures in scientific studies.

This research uses Lévi-Strauss's concept of binary opposition, not in the broad cultural context as analyzed by Chueh, but in the realm of literary fiction. The writers' focus is on how the opposition between child and adult is formed through the interaction of characters and narrative structure in *Through the Looking-Glass*.

While acknowledging the limitations of Lévi-Strauss's theory as criticized by Chueh, I use it as an analytical tool to explore how child identity is constructed in a narrative dominated by adult logic and authority. This approach helps to show how literary texts also become spaces for the operation of symbolic systems and conflicts of binary opposition.

#### 1.4 Research Questions

From the background above, two research questions can be put forward as follows.

1. How is the binary opposition (child vs. adult) structurally constructed through Alice's interactions with key adult figures (Red Queen, White Queen, and Humpty Dumpty) in Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking-Glass*?
2. What are Alice's narrative strategies for intellectual resistance and identity assertion against the symbolic dominance of adult authority in the Looking-Glass world?

#### 1.5 The Scope of the Research

This research focuses on the binary opposition between child and adult as reflected in the character of Alice in *Through the Looking-Glass* by Lewis Carroll. The analysis centers on Alice as the primary child character and her interactions with key adult figures in the Looking-Glass world, specifically the Red Queen, the White Queen, and Humpty Dumpty. The analysis is limited to how this opposition is constructed through Alice's experiences and how she resists adult control within the Looking-Glass world. The analysis will be conducted using a structuralist literary

approach, particularly focusing on binary oppositions as proposed by Claude Lévi-Strauss.

### 1.6 The Objective of the Research

In general, the purpose of this study is to broaden the understanding of the dynamics of binary opposition between children and adults in Lewis Carroll's novel *Through the Looking-Glass*. This study specifically aims to analyze how the child vs adult opposition is constructed through the experiences of the main character, Alice, and how the forms of resistance shown by Alice to the dominance of adult characters in the looking-glass world. This analysis is expected to provide new contributions to the study of structuralism in children's literature which has not discussed much about the forms of children's resistance to narrative control from adult characters.

