

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Literary and film studies often emphasize the importance of character as a central element in narratives, since characters embody values, motivations, and human complexities that drive the story (Egri, 1960; Kenney, 1966). Character analysis becomes fundamental because it allows audiences, critics, and scholars to reflect on, empathize with, and learn from individuals' behaviors, decisions, and struggles. In contemporary culture, character construction not only mirrors social realities but also shapes norms, identities, and cultural perspectives (Smith, 2018). Audiences today are particularly drawn to figures whose journeys resonate with real-world challenges such as ambition, resilience, inclusion, and identity formation. These phenomena underscore the urgency of examining characters in narratives, as they reveal societal values and provide insights into human behavior within broader cultural contexts.

On the other hand, literature traditionally focuses on written texts; visual media such as film extend character analysis into multimodal forms, combining dialogue, performance, music, and visual techniques (Bordwell & Thompson, 2010). Musical films, in particular, develop characters through dialogue, lyrics, choreography, and cinematography, offering a richer understanding of emotions and personal struggles than conventional storytelling (Monaco, 2009). Previous research has mostly analyzed characters in literary works or through a single

theoretical lens (Jones, 2017; Lee, 2015). No study has yet explored P.T. Barnum in *The Greatest Showman* using different approaches alongside classical theories.

In addition, analyzing characters and characterization also has a social function. Characters often represent issues such as inequality, discrimination, ambition, and resilience that reflect the realities of society. Through character studies, audiences can see how stories mirror social values and problems in everyday life, making character analysis not only a way to understand personal traits but also a tool for social awareness that shows how literature and film can reflect changes and challenges in an evolving society. As demonstrated by Hardiyanti et al. (2024), character analysis through three-dimensional aspects provides a deeper understanding of how individuals are shaped by their psychological, sociological, and physiological traits, while Juniarta et al. (2025) highlight how power relations and domination within narratives also reveal broader cultural and social dynamics.

A notable example is P.T. Barnum in *The Greatest Showman* (2017), whose journey from humble beginnings to a successful entertainer illustrates how narrative, music, and stage performance collectively shape a character. His interactions with family, including his wife Charity and their children, as well as colleagues such as Phillip Carlyle and Jenny Lind, provide sociological dimensions that enrich his psychological and physiological portrayal (Kenney, 1966), making him an ideal subject for multidimensional analysis.

Examining Barnum's character is particularly valuable because it offers insights into leadership, ambition, resilience, and ethical dilemmas in social and

cultural contexts. The findings are relevant for film scholars, literary critics, educators, and audiences interested in understanding how musical narratives reflect and influence societal values. By identifying both direct and indirect traits, this study demonstrates the importance of characterization in understanding individual development and broader human experiences (Egri, 1960).

1.2 Problems of the Study

There are two problems of this research. The problems can be formulated as follows:

1. What are types of characterizations are revealed in the main character of *The Greatest Showman* (2017)?
2. How is the characterization of the main character constructed in *The Greatest Showman* (2017)?

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The study will be based on the problems explained above. This study has two objectives. Those can be described as follows:

1. To find out the types of characterization found in the main character, P. T. Barnum, as portrayed in *The Greatest Showman* (2017).
2. To analyse how the characterization of the main character is constructed in the film through dialogue, lyrics, performance, and multimodal elements.

1.4 Limitations of the Study

This study is limited to the analysis of the characterization of P.T. Barnum as the main character in *The Greatest Showman* (2017). The analysis does not include other characters or historical accounts of Barnum's life. The focus is restricted to the main character constructed in the film in order to focus on the topic and the character. This study focuses only on the main character, P.T. Barnum, as portrayed in *The Greatest Showman* (2017). The analysis does not include other characters or the real historical background of Barnum's life. It only discusses aspects related to his characterization as shown in the film, while topics outside this focus are not included in the discussion.

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study is expected to contribute to a better understanding of how the main character in *The Greatest Showman* (2017) is constructed. Its significance can be seen in two aspects: theoretical and practical.

1.5.1 Theoretical Significance

Theoretically, this study aims to enrich literary and film studies on characterization, especially in cinematic works. By focusing on the main character constructed, the study highlights how dialogues, lyrics, and visual elements contribute to shaping characterization. This emphasizes the importance of analyzing character construction in film without relying solely on textual approaches.

1.5.2 Practical Significance

Practically, this study is expected to serve as a useful reference for students and researchers of English literature and film, especially at Universitas Mahasaraswati Denpasar, who are interested in conducting similar studies on characterization in both literary and audiovisual works.



CHAPTER II

REVIEW RELATED LITERATURE, CONCEPT, AND THEORIES

This chapter consists of three main subchapters: a review of related literature, concepts, and the theoretical framework. The first subchapter reviews five previous studies related to characterization in literature and film, comparing their findings and highlighting the novelty of this study. The second subchapter clarifies the key concepts used in this research. The last subchapter presents the theoretical framework that underpins the analysis.

2.1 Review of Related Literature

Five previous studies have discussed characterization from different perspectives, consisting of two undergraduate theses and three journal articles. Putra (2022), in his thesis, analyzed the novel *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*. His study aimed to explain how characterization is presented through text, applying a general theory of characterization with a descriptive textual method. The result showed that dialogue and narrative structure played an important role in revealing the characters. However, the study only relied on textual analysis and did not address multimodal aspects, which limits its relevance to film analysis.

A more specific study was conducted by Choir (2023), who examined P.T. Barnum in *The Greatest Showman*. This thesis aimed to describe Barnum's character development based on Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Using a qualitative textual approach, the study found that Barnum's main motivation was his pursuit of recognition and self-actualization. While this work contributed to understanding the

psychological side of Barnum, it did not explore the audiovisual and musical features of the film, which are very significant in a musical narrative.

In addition to these theses, three journal articles also provide valuable insights. Mendelay (2021) conducted a multimodal study of contemporary musical films. His study aimed to show how lyrics, choreography, and cinematography work together to shape character identity. The findings confirmed that character construction in musical films is strongly supported by multimodal features. However, his research did not use classical theories such as Egri's or Kenney's, so the analysis lacked a strong link to literary frameworks. Similarly, Amensi (2023) studied the dual protagonists in *Cruella*. Her work focused on the role of internal motivations and social interactions in shaping character development, using a narrative and psychological approach. The findings revealed how ambition and social environment influenced the characters, but once again, the study remained in textual and psychological analysis without involving multimodal elements.

From a local perspective, Septiarini et al. (2024) analyzed *The Kissing Booth* to describe how characterization is influenced by sociocultural contexts. Their descriptive approach showed how characters reflect social values and relationships. Meanwhile, Febriani and Juniarta (2024) explored *She Said (2022)* through a feminist perspective. Their study highlighted how gender roles and power relations affect the construction of female characters in the film. Both articles widened the scope of film analysis by introducing sociocultural and feminist frameworks, but they did not apply Egri's or Kenney's theories, and neither of them examined characterization from a multimodal point of view.

When viewed together, these studies share some similarities and differences. They are similar in the sense that all of them aimed to describe how characters are constructed and developed within narratives. Each of them also used qualitative methods and provided insights into how certain aspects, such as dialogue, psychology, or social context, shape a character. However, they differ in the focus, theories, and approaches they used. Some focused only on textual dimensions (Putra, 2022), while others explored psychological motivations (Choir, 2023; Amensi, 2023), multimodal features (Mendelay, 2021), or sociocultural and feminist perspectives (Septiarini et al., 2024; Febriani & Juniarta, 2024). These differences show that existing studies have not yet integrated classical theories like Egri's three-dimensional character model and Kenney's characterization theory with multimodal analysis of a musical-biographical film. Therefore, this research is expected to fill the gap by offering a more comprehensive approach to analyzing P.T. Barnum in *The Greatest Showman*.

Taken together, these five studies, two theses, and three journal articles, demonstrate that previous research has approached characterization from textual, psychological, feminist, or multimodal perspectives. However, none of them integrated Egri's and Kenney's classical theories within the multimodal analysis of a musical-biographical film. The gap is therefore evident: existing works are either restricted to textual analysis, focused narrowly on psychological or sociocultural dimensions, or employed multimodal theory without grounding in classical characterization frameworks. The novelty of this study lies in its focus on analyzing P.T. Barnum's characterization in *The Greatest Showman* by combining Egri's

(1960) three-dimensional character model and Kenney's (1966) theory of characterization. This combination of classical literary theories offers a more complete way to understand how the main character is developed in the film and how his traits are represented through dialogues and actions.

2.2 Concepts

There are three main concepts used in the study: the concept of characterization, the main character, and the movie, which are described as follows:

2.2.1 Characterization

Characterization is the process by which an author or filmmaker presents and develops characters in a literary or artistic work. According to Murphy (1972, pp. 161–173), characterization can be revealed through dialogue, actions, thoughts, and other characters' reactions. This concept helps explain how characters are constructed and perceived in both literary and cinematic works.

2.2.2 Main Character

The main character, or protagonist, is the central figure in a narrative who drives the plot and whose development becomes the primary focus. Kenney (1966) emphasizes that the main character is essential for the progression of the story and is often the figure with whom audiences most closely identify.

2.2.3 Movie

A movie is a form of visual storytelling that combines moving images, sound, dialogue, and other cinematic elements to convey meaning. Bordwell and Thompson (2008) argue that films use visual and auditory techniques to build narrative structure and evoke audience response.

2.3 Theories

This study employed two main theoretical foundations to analyze the characterization of P.T. Barnum in *The Greatest Showman* (2017), namely Egri's (1960) three-dimensional character model and Kenney's (1966) theory of characterization. Each of these theories is applied to address different research problems.

2.3.1 Characterization

Characterization is the process through which an author or filmmaker develops and presents characters in a narrative. It allows the audience to gain insight into a character's traits, motivations, and development across the storyline. In film, characterization is conveyed through dialogue, narration, performance, song lyrics, and visual elements (Kenney, 1966; Abrams & Harpham, 2009; Bordwell & Thompson, 2010).

2.3.2 Main Character

The main character is the central figure who drives the story's progression and whose development is the primary focus of the narrative. Kenney (1966) notes that the main character is often the character with the greatest complexity, whose actions and decisions influence the course of the story. In *The Greatest Showman* (2017), P.T. Barnum serves as the main character whose personal journey and transformation shape the film's overall narrative.

2.3.3 Three-Dimensional Character

Egri (1960, pp. 32–62) proposes that a character can be analyzed through three interrelated dimensions: physiological, sociological, and psychological aspects.

2.3.3.1 Physiological Dimension

Physiological Dimension refers to the character's outward traits, such as age, gender, physical appearance, and health condition. These aspects often influence how the audience perceives the character's role in the story (Egri, 1960, pp. 32–62).

2.3.3.2 Sociological Dimension

Sociological Dimension deals with the character's background and social environment, including family, occupation, education, class, and

relationships. This dimension provides insight into how a character's social position shapes their values and choices (Egri, 1960, pp. 32–62).

2.3.3.3 Psychological Dimension

Psychological Dimension focuses on the character's internal world, such as attitudes, desires, motivations, beliefs, and emotional tendencies. This dimension often reveals the deepest aspects of a character's personality and explains their behavior across the narrative (Egri, 1960, pp. 32–62).

By examining these three dimensions, a more holistic understanding of a character can be achieved. In this study, Egri's model is employed to address the first research problem, namely, to identify and classify the types of characterization revealed in the main character of *The Greatest Showman* (2017). This framework helps uncover P.T. Barnum's traits, background, and motivations as represented in the film.

2.3.4 Theory of Characterization by Kenney (1966)

Kenney (1966, pp. 34–38) explains that characterization is the way an author or filmmaker constructs and presents characters in a narrative. He states that characterization can be revealed through various techniques such as dialogue, action, thought, interaction with other characters, and narrative description.

Dialogue conveys the personality, emotions, and intentions of a character through spoken words, while action reflects decisions, choices, and moral values.

Thought reveals the inner feelings, dilemmas, or motivations of a character, and interaction with other characters demonstrates relationships, conflicts, or social roles. In addition, narrative description allows the story itself to portray the traits and development of the character.

Through these techniques, a character is not only shown but also gradually developed across the storyline. In this study, Kenney's theory is employed to address the second research problem, namely, to analyze how the main character's characterization is constructed in the film. By applying this framework, the study explores the cinematic and narrative strategies, dialogues, performances, song lyrics, and visual elements that contribute to shaping the portrayal of P.T. Barnum.

