

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Research Background

Starting from the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, more than half of the films produced in American cinema were Western-themed. This because during that period, the Western became the heart of popular culture in the development of film genres, presenting various forms of action, adventure, and conflict that were closely related to the historical conditions of the United States that association with the lives in the frontier region, so it was not surprising that the Western genre was often considered as the first genre to emerge and also the most popular genre in the history of American cinema (Bordwell & Thompson, 2019). However, even a popular genre like the Western eventually succumbed to the change of time and the dynamics of the modern marketplace, leaving behind the old narratives of heroic Western deeds that were once highly glorified. Although the Western was considered a declining genre, in reality, it never truly disappeared; instead, it attempted to revive itself by adapting to modern conditions which gave birth to a subgenre known as the contemporary Western. In this new form, the Western was set in the present time and provides a modern conflict but still maintained its traditional elements and frontier themes that becomes the icon of this genre. Therefore, this research aimed to explore and analyze how *Rango* (2011) could represent the elements of the contemporary Western through its narrative structure, characterization, and visual elements.

When it came to the Western genre, the first thing that typically came to mind was the vast expanse of desert and barren landscapes. However, it was these desolate settings that contributed to the symbolic characteristics of the genre. According to (Wyatt & Saricks, 2019), Western was a genre that was set on the American frontier during the last part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (1865-1900) following the end of the Civil War. Geographically, Western was a genre that was set in the

western or southwestern United States, with the Missouri and Mississippi River basins as its boundaries, which was famous for its landscapes that showed wasteland and wilderness. Because of this, the Western setting was always located in the western region of America, commonly known as the Wild West or Old West, which was described as a beautiful but dangerous place. (Wyatt & Saricks, 2019) further explained that the setting in the Western was very important and was created carefully in order to make an infinite variety of possibilities in the narrative so that anything could happen in this genre. Therefore, the openness and various possibilities ultimately played an important role in defining the characters and shaping the story in the Western genre.

The Western genre was familiar with the figure of a man riding a horse with a cowboy hat and revolver around his waist, which gave an impression of a tough and strong person. According to (Petrie & Boggs, 2018), the western hero was usually depicted as a tough individual who came from the frontier or far west. This hero was often shown as a mysterious loner and a person who made his own decisions and plans without relying on others. All of his actions were based on the code of ethics that he followed, and not based on demands from society or for personal gain. The code of ethics adopted by the western hero was usually related to human dignity, valor, justice, fair play, equality (justice for the oppressed), and respect for women. (Petrie & Boggs, 2018) added that the Western hero was always made to be clever and smart, and also known to be friendly, humble, honest, firm, always consistent in his dealings with others, and never acted cruel, devious, or petty. Furthermore, (Petrie & Boggs, 2018) also explained that the Western hero was also introduced as a traveler who wandered in the Wild West, therefore he usually had excellent horse-riding skills, as well as above-average fighting and shooting ability. In certain situations, he could also be a reliable leader whether in leading others or leading himself. As a loner, he also separated himself from society but sometimes still fought on their behalf. Because he didn't have a close relationship with society, the western hero was usually shown as unemployed, that had no possession of ranch, lover, or family. His entire life was dedicated to traveling across America in search of new challenges, and his separation from society allowed him to have

freedom as a full-time hero. Besides offering adventure and action, sometimes Western stories also included some romantic sparking between the hero and one of the heroines. To make the romance between these two looks more intense and interesting, the heroine was usually made to misunderstand the motives and actions taken by the hero and only realized what he was doing when he had successfully fulfilled his mission. Although their love interest developed throughout the story, their love never succeeded, and the hero eventually left at the end (Petrie & Boggs, 2018). In addition, the Western could also be easily seen through the introduction and resolution of the story. According to (Petrie & Boggs, 2018), many Western stories began with the arrival of the hero riding from the left of the screen and then ended with him riding towards the right or usually towards the fading sunset to display the heroic effect of the character.

Besides the protagonist, the Western genre also emphasized the storyline which was enhanced by various kinds of actions and conflicts that depicted the United States. According to (Saricks, 2009), the story in the Western usually highlighted the conflict between good and evil which in line with (Bordwell & Thompson, 2019) statement that the themes presented by this genre usually focused on conflicts between civilized territories and borderlands that had no laws. (Schatz, 1981) also added that the West was a genre whose main story was a conflict between civilization and savagery which was described in the form of East versus West, garden versus desert, America versus Europe, social order versus anarchy, individual versus community, town versus wilderness, and also cowboy versus Native American. Therefore, Western was famous for many conflicts involving cowboys, sheriffs, gunslingers, outlaws, and Native Americans. However, conflicts that often occurred in the Western usually involved white pioneers who were explorers who moved to frontier areas to create new settlements and civilizations in the western region with Native American tribes who felt disturbed by the presence of these white explorers. As stated by (Bordwell & Thompson, 2019), usually the Western stories that raised this conflict always presented white pioneers as the right side and labeled the Native Americans as primitive and savage. So that stories that raised this theme were usually filled with racist stereotypes against the Natives.

However, as time progressed, the conflicts that often arose in the Western turned into a fight between the community and the outlaws, shown in the form of bank robberies, train hijackings, landowner brutes, and confrontation between outlaws and law enforcement.

Pacing is one of the most important things in the Western because pacing could create the tension, atmosphere, and also emotional feeling. In the Western genre, the pacing was usually fast. The reason was because Westerns were packed with many adrenaline-filled scenes such as gunfights and chases. As stated by (Saricks, 2009), stories that contained adrenaline could be called fast-paced narrative texts which were used to make the story more interesting by creating lots of twists and a suspenseful atmosphere. Stories that used fast pacing had to be filled with lots of action and adventure that focused on establishing the plot in the story. However, (Saricks, 2009) also stated that the pacing in the Western did not always have to be fast. This was because there were some Western films that focused on creating mystical elements in the development of the narrative and characters which were intended to deepen the atmosphere of the frontier setting. In addition, the Western films that used slow pacing usually focused more on introducing the landscape or setting where the story took place rather than immediately rushing into action-packed scenes, which required a progressive plot and pacing as the story progressed.

The use of tone in the Western genre was also an important aspect because tone could create the emotional atmosphere that happened in the film. According to Pye in (Donaldson , 2014), tone was the feeling expressed by the director in his film that was used to create an atmosphere in the storyline which could affect the mood of the audience. Because of this, tone was very important in shaping the emotion of the audience by creating an atmosphere that suited the storytelling and genre of the film. Moreover, tone was also used to direct the audience on how they should feel and react toward a particular scene, whether through the feelings of tension, sadness, joy, surprise, horror or even humor. According to (Saricks, 2009), the tone that commonly appeared in the Western was always gloomy and used melancholy

melodies with lyrics that told of hard times along with a sense of uncertain future. This aimed to create a somber atmosphere that depicted the difficulties of life in the harsh and wild border region. The use of this melody could create a theme of loneliness, loss and struggle that the main character had to face in his journey exploring the unforgiving environment of the frontier. Furthermore, the use of lyrics that told of the uncertainty of the future reflected the vague and unpredictable nature of life in the West. Therefore, this combination of melody and lyrics was important for deepening the emotional connection of the main character with the audience.

Lastly, what made the Western iconic was the use of language contained in the dialogue of the story. According to (Wyatt & Saricks, 2019), the language in a traditional Western film mostly used monosyllabic dialogue, which could give a distinct perception or image of this genre. Conversations that only used one syllable were considered to give the impression of being short, firm, and tough. This was aligned with the atmosphere in the wild west, where this place was filled with rough and tough people. Moreover, the use of this monosyllabic also served to increase the intensity and tension of the audience when watching Western films because this showed the characteristics of a gunslinger who was portrayed as a pragmatic and straightforward individual. Furthermore, the Western was also known for using jargon or special vocabulary in their films. The jargon used in Western films was always related to the lives and habits of people who lived in the wild west such as the words "howdy", "six-shooters", and "iron works". Therefore, the purpose of jargon in Western films was to create an authentic atmosphere that strengthened and emphasized the cultural setting and characteristics of the region where the story took place and also helped to make it easier for the audience to understand the characteristics of the people in that period. In addition, the jargon used in Western films was always related to weapons, animals, life, and also criminals, which were very closely related to the Wild West (Saricks, 2009). Therefore, Western films were also identical with the use of language that had a philosophical and wise tone that could give the audience insight into the perspective on life and morality in the Wild West. Even though the words were usually short and simple, the meaning contained in them was very broad and deep and often appeared in situations where

the character was contemplating or rethinking the actions he had taken. Again, the use of this language showed life experience as well as the characteristics of culture and habits in this period.

From the explanation above, it can be concluded that the Western was a historical genre that was identical with the landscape and its civilization in the western region of the United States or the Wild West in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This genre focused on the theme of good against evil that was represented by society, gunslingers, cowboys, outlaws and also Native Americans, where this conflict was aligned with the conditions that occurred at that time. Furthermore, the use of fast pacing accompanied by melancholic music and also unique jargon further strengthened the Western elements displayed by this genre. However, as time progressed, the Western genre was slowly beginning to decline in popularity. According to (Wyatt & Saricks, 2019), Westerns were often referred to as a declining genre. This could happen because people then viewed Westerns as an old-fashioned genre that was no longer relevant. The figure of a hero who brought a high value of justice was now widely used in other genres without bringing the Western theme. Therefore, the Western in this modern period had transformed into a genre called action. The landscape that symbolized the Western was no longer using the frontier as the setting of the story because, in reality, the frontier had been fully explored and could not be expanded anymore. Because of this, the Western genre was now focused on modernizing the settings by adding contemporary traits to the story. In definition, contemporary meant aligning with modern trends. The term contemporary could also refer to something that was currently happening or had recently happened (Broughton, 2016). This means contemporary tried to reflect a new idea, which continued to develop as time progressed. In the context of film genres, this contemporary style referred to innovation and transition that could ultimately unlock the potential for new story ideas that were fresh, relevant, and acceptable to various audiences. Thus, the Western had evolved into what was now referred to as contemporary Western, which was more focused on discussing moral ambiguity, social issues, and also the deconstruction of the cowboy myth.



Based on the explanation about the Western above, the researcher had finally decided to choose one of the Western films as the object of research. The film that was discussed was a Western film entitled *Rango* (2011) directed by Gore Verbinski. *Rango* (2011) was an interesting object to discuss because it was a PG-rated animated film, which meant it could not be watched directly by children and needed direct supervision from parents. This created an interesting contrast because the form of animated films that were usually presented to children were instead made with Western themes which actually must have contained many adult scenes. However, this was what ultimately gave *Rango* (2011) its own distinctiveness and uniqueness in the pantheon of other Western films as it strove to showcase traditional Western elements in a realistic and detailed three-dimensional animation, which was very rare in the Western genre. In addition, even though *Rango* (2011) was an animated film, it was thick with themes that raised social issues and problems that occurred in the life of modern society through its main protagonist. Therefore, *Rango* (2011) was not just a film that only provided entertainment to children with comedy and humor in the story, but also acted as a social criticism that was relevant to the contemporary context, so that *Rango* (2011) could be an interesting example of the application of traditional Western elements into a modern context in the form of an animated film. Therefore, the researcher decided to use *Rango* (2011) as a research object to find out and prove that this film could be categorized into the contemporary Western subgenre by using the Western formula theory by Wyatt & Saricks and also Petrie & Boggs characterization theory which focused on discussing traditional Western elements and also the characterization of the main protagonist in this film. These two theories were chosen due to their relevance to the topic of research. The aim was to explore how traditional Western elements such as moral conflicts, borders, and the presence of foreign heroes were still represented in the context of contemporary animated films, and how the image of the protagonist, in this case Rango, developed narratively and psychologically throughout the entire film. With Wyatt & Saricks theory, researchers could analyze typical Western narrative and thematic structures and adapt them to a more contemporary social context, while Petrie & Boggs

characterization theory provided a framework for analyzing the internal and external action of Rango as a protagonist. Therefore, by combining these two theories, this research attempted to show that *Rango* (2011) not only imitated the traditional Western, but also tried to modify it.

When discussing the film, it could not be separated from the synopsis that gave the audience the whole picture of the story. In brief, *Rango* (2011) told the story of a chameleon who lived as a pet lizard and suffered an identity crisis from prolonged isolation. He always wondered how he could stand out and be the center of people's attention even though he was a chameleon whose natural trait was to hide and camouflage. It wasn't long before he was stranded in a desert and found a town called Dirt. Through some unexpected events, Rango eventually became the new sheriff and served as a hero and protector of Dirt. Even though Rango was just pretending, a series of incidents and tragedies ultimately forced Rango to change into a real sheriff and become a living legend. From the synopsis above, it could be seen that *Rango* (2011) did seem like a strange and awkward Western film. However, this film was successful at the box office and gained a massive positive review from the audience. This could be proved by the total income of *Rango* (2011) which reached the amount of 245.7 million dollars even though it only had a budget of around 135 million dollars. Additionally, *Rango* (2011) also won several major awards in 2012 including Best Animated Film, Best Animated Female Character, Best Character Design, Best Visual Effects, and various other awards.

As a general reference, the researcher found several research papers that discussed *Rango* (2011). The research entitled *Searching for Personal Identity of Rango in Gore Verbinski movie: Rango (2011): an Individual Psychology Approach* by Raya Gilang Safitri (2012) showed that in *Rango* (2011), there was a problem regarding Rango's search for self-identity. This research aimed to analyze the story-forming elements and the characteristics of Rango in the film based on the psychological perspective. In the research entitled *A Film of Many Colors: Neoliberalism, Capitalism, and Climate Change in Rango* by Sierra Javras (2021),



this research analyzed the ideology of neoliberalism contained in *Rango* (2011) through filmmaking techniques such as mise-en-scene, character design, and narrative style. Furthermore, Javras used this film-making technique to analyze the act of water hoarding as one of the characteristics of capitalism. In the end, this water hoarding activity caused climate change which damaged the environment and ecosystem of the desert. Lastly, there was also research titled *War and Politics on Water: An Eco-Critical Critique of Animation Movie Rango* by Hayat, Iqbal, and Nadeem (2021) where the analysis discussed aqua politics which indirectly exploited the society that existed in *Rango* (2011) through efforts to control water resources seen from an ecocritical perspective and also discussed the impact of water politics on the development of an individual identity.

## **1.2 Statement of Problem**

From the previous research above, it can be concluded that this research shows a novelty that has never been studied before in which the researcher will analyze how elements of traditional Western formula are featured in the contemporary Western narrative and also identify how *Rango* characteristics can contribute in creating a Western element in this film.

## **1.3 Research Question**

Based on the research background presented above, the researcher concludes that two questions will be the main focus of this research.

1. How the Western elements are represented in *Rango* (2011)?
2. How *Rango*'s characterization can contribute to the creation of Western elements in *Rango* (2011)?

## **1.4 Research Purposes**

Based on the formulation of the research questions above, the objectives of this research are as follows.

1. To analyze the representation of the Western formula in *Rango* (2011).

2. To analyze the contribution of Rango's characterization in creating Western elements in *Rango* (2011)

### 1.5 Research Significant

The researcher hope that the results of this research can provide valuable insights and benefits for the field of literature. This research is focused on increasing understanding and theoretical perspectives in the field of film studies, with a special focus on elements of the Western formula for English literature students. Furthermore, the researcher also hoped that this research could become a real resource for future researcher and individuals who are interested in discussing the Western films. From a practical perspective, this research can be used as a reference for other students who are working on research related to the analysis of Western formula.

### 1.6 Conceptual Framework

This research aimed to look for Western elements contained in *Rango* (2011) and also to find how Rango characterization can contribute to creating the Western elements in *Rango* (2011). In order to answer the two research questions, the researcher used a theoretical framework consisting of Wyatt & Saricks Western formula and Petrie & Boggs characterization theory. After determined the theories that will be used in this research, the next step will be explaining descriptively how the researcher analyzed *Rango* (2011) using these two theories.

To answer the first question, the researcher must focus on finding Western elements in *Rango* (2011). In order to support this analysis, the researcher uses the Western formula by Wyatt & Saricks. This formula divides the elements in the Western genre into six different parts, namely setting, characterization, storyline, pacing, tone and language. To begin this analysis, the first things the researcher does is to watch *Rango* (2011) in detail and thoroughly in order to collect data in the form of Western elements that are presented in this film. Second, to prevent data from being scrambled, the researcher then provides a timestamp and also a brief description as a marker for the data that has been collected. Third, after all the data

has been obtained, the researcher categorizes the data into six parts contained in the Western formula. Fourth, and also the last step is to analyze and explain the raw data based on the researcher interpretation and reading comprehension that have been done previously in order to provide a reason why the collected data can be categorized as Wyatt & Saricks Western formula.

Then, to answer the second question, the researcher must re-watch *Rango* (2011) and only focus on finding Rango's characterization in this film. In order to support the finding process, the researcher uses the characterization theory by Petrie & Boggs which divides the characterization in a film into eight different parts, namely characterization through appearance, characterization through dialogue, characterization through internal action, characterization through external action, characterization through reaction of other characters, characterization through contrast: dramatic foils, characterization through leitmotif, and characterization through choice of name. As previously, after re-watching *Rango* (2011), the researcher collected data in the form of Rango's characterization in this film. After the data was collected, the next step was to provide a mark in the form of a timestamp and also a short description so that the data would not be scrambled. Then, the researcher categorized the data that had been collected into the eight parts of characterization in a film according to Petrie & Boggs if there is any. Finally, the researcher then analyzed and described the data Based on the researcher interpretation and reading comprehension. After completing the analysis of each data from the two research questions, the final step is to make a conclusion based on the findings and analysis that had been done by the researcher.

This conceptual framework can be depicted with a scheme that shown below.

