



Seminar Nasional Bahasa & Sastra
SENABASTRA

Universitas Trunojoyo Madura
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A PORTRAYAL OF GENDER AND EQUALITY: DISNEY'S *POCAHONTAS* BETWEEN FICTION AND HISTORY

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Abstract: In the era of visual media, children's stories have become popular products of entertainment industries. Disney which focuses on children's stories production has proved itself to be the world class entertainment industry in which the stories have been spread throughout the world. Disney's stories are developed from fairytales, folktales, and folklores in which one of the well-known stories depicts a Native American figure, Pocahontas, as a heroine. This paper will examine how Disney has promoted two issues in modern society, namely gender and equality, to the understanding of traditional children's literature through a fictional characterization of folkloric Pocahontas.

Keywords: Fiction, Gender

BACKGROUND

Entertainment which has been a global industry brings pleasure to all people around the world. Though it is not the only player in global entertainment, U.S. has dominated in creating mass culture which transforms the world. Among the most famous American entertainment, Walt Disney has entertained people around, especially children the world with children's animated stories for decades. Fairy tales and folktales have provided a source of inspiration for Disney children's stories. Like other American popular culture products, Disney children's stories have exported American cultural values to the world.

However, critics to entertainment industries vary from negative to positive issues. Entertainment industries have been accused of harming children, shortening attention spans, trivializing culture, vulgarizing taste, sanctioning violence, polarizing audiences, and undermining communities (Blakey, 2001, p. 3). Some believers in the cultural imperialism theory laud an American cultural hegemony as the New World Order – "the best model for the future" (Rothkopf in Blakey, p. 7). While others argue that American cultural content does not make people subjects of American ideology but empowers them to develop their own identities (Blakey, p.7).

Through Disney children's stories, American cultural contents open people's minds, especially children. Children's stories – regardless of what form it takes – are often created and structured in really specific ways. Children are open to anything and accept it without question. Like in any children's stories, everything in Disney's stories, from conflicts to knowledge is more linear. They provide a simple world by making sense without too many twists and complexities to get in the way or overshadow it. The nature of children's stories present good and evil, right and wrong, limits and possibilities are as something heartbreaking to get. However, without denying their nature as children's stories, in Disney's hands, fairytales, folktales, and folklores have experienced some "treatments" in term of contents.

Disney has experienced in filtering out any explicit fairy tales, changing both the traditional stories and folk figure in Disney's own version. Therefore, Disney's stories are not merely bedtime stories. They also promote some global issues, such as gender and equality, in the packages of children's stories. In doing so, Disney's stories have created their own version of imaginary heroine, imaginary female celebrity as well as both imaginary and folkloric female figures. They have placed a real folkloric female figure between history and fiction. How Disney's story promotes gender and equality to the understanding of traditional children's literature can be seen further through its fictional characterization of folkloric Pocahontas.