

CHAPTER 2

THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Adaptation

Adaptation, according to Linda Hutcheon (2013), is both a product and a process of reinterpretation. As a product, it is a reworking or “transcoding” of an existing work; as a process, it involves acts of interpretation, creation, and recreation across contexts and media. Therefore, adaptation is not merely the transfer of a story from one medium to another, but a dynamic reimagining shaped by the conventions and possibilities of the new form.

Hutcheon (2013; p. 7) also emphasizes that adaptation involves repetition without replication, which means that while the adapted work echoes the original, it simultaneously generates new meanings for different audiences, times, and contexts. This process inevitably entails selection, omission, and addition, as creators reshape the story’s elements, plot, character, or theme to align with the expressive tools of the new medium. In film, these tools include visual composition, sound design, cinematography, and editing, which work together to convey narrative meaning through sensory experience.

According to Petrie and Boggs (2018; p. 80), film is a distinctive art form that combines image, sound, and movement to create emotional and intellectual engagement. Unlike written literature, which relies on linguistic description, films communicate through visual and auditory signs that can evoke realism, symbolism, and mood. Therefore, adapting a literary text into a film requires more than translating words into images; it involves a rethinking of narrative structure to match the rhythm, pacing, and emotional impact of cinematic storytelling.

One of the most common forms of adaptation is the transformation of a novel into a film. A novel is a long work of fiction written in prose that

presents a structured narrative through characters, plot, setting, and theme. According to M. H. Abrams (1999, p. 190), a novel is “a long fictional narrative in prose, which is organized into chapters and portrays characters and actions with some degree of realism.” This definition highlights the novel's emphasis on extended narrative development and detailed characterization. Unlike shorter fictional forms, such as short stories, novels provide a broader space for exploring complex conflicts, psychological depth, and thematic richness. Therefore, when a novel is adapted into a film, its extensive narrative elements often undergo selection, condensation, or transformation to fit cinematic structure.

McFarlane (1996; p. 12) notes that an adaptation cannot replicate every element of its source material. Instead, it must capture the essence of the original work while expressing it through the language of film, utilizing mise-en-scène, performance, and visual rhythm to reinterpret the story anew. The study of adaptation thus reveals how meaning changes across media and how filmmakers reinterpret literary imagination within visual and temporal constraints.

2.2 Character

A character is generally understood as the person, animal, or entity represented within a narrative or dramatic work, interpreted by readers through their actions, speech, and interactions. Abrams (1999; p. 23) defines characters as “the persons represented in a dramatic or narrative work, who are interpreted by readers as possessing particular moral, intellectual, and emotional qualities by inferences from what the persons say and do.” Similarly, the Oxford Research Encyclopaedia emphasizes that character functions both as a narrative property and an ethical category, historically rooted in Aristotle's view of character as a device to advance plot, while modern theorists highlight its role in shaping identity and social norms.

Uri Margolin further argues that a literary character is a conceptual construct created by text, which can project the image of a possible human being and even achieve cultural autonomy beyond its originating work. These perspectives collectively underscore that characters are not merely fictional figures but complex constructs that embody psychological depth, moral dimensions, and cultural significance.

In literature, characters are presented through language and narration, allowing readers to infer moral, intellectual, and emotional qualities from what they say and do. In contrast, film characters are shaped not only by narrative structure but also by performance and cinematic form. As Petrie and Boggs (2018, p. xx) note, film communicates meaning through its visual and auditory elements, and character development is influenced by the medium's temporal limitations.

The protagonist is the central character in a narrative who drives the main action and around whom the conflict revolves. According to M. H. Abrams (1999, p. 265), the protagonist is the chief character in a plot, on whom the reader's interest is focused. In a novel, the protagonist is developed through narrative description, internal thoughts, dialogue, and actions, allowing readers to understand the character's psychological depth and moral growth. In film, however, the protagonist is conveyed not only through dialogue and action but also through visual performance, cinematography, and sound. As explained by Joseph M. Boggs and Dennis W. Petrie (2018), film characters are revealed through appearance, gestures, facial expressions, and interaction with the cinematic environment. Therefore, while the function of the protagonist remains central in both media, the methods of characterization differ according to the medium's expressive tools.

Although most scholars agree that the protagonist functions as the main character who carries the narrative conflict, differences appear in emphasis rather than definition. Literary scholars such as Abrams focus on narrative

structure and reader interpretation, highlighting the protagonist as the focal point of thematic and moral development. Film theorists, on the other hand, emphasize embodiment and performance, viewing the protagonist as a visual and dramatic presence shaped by actors, mise-en-scène, and editing. Thus, the core definition of a protagonist does not significantly differ between novel and film, but the means of constructing and presenting that character vary according to the conventions of each medium.

2.3 Plot

Plot represents the arrangement of events that shape the structure of a narrative. Abrams (1999; page 224) explains that a well-organized plot develops through a sequence of exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution commonly described as Freytag's Pyramid. This structure provides coherence, allowing audiences to trace the evolution of conflict and its resolution.

In adaptation, however, the plot often transforms to fit the temporal and aesthetic demands of film. Petrie and Boggs (2018; p. 3) highlight that cinematic storytelling operates through motion and rhythm, meaning that narrative events may be condensed, rearranged, or omitted to sustain viewer engagement. Filmmakers frequently simplify subplots, modify chronology, or introduce new scenes to enhance dramatic tension or emotional pacing.

Hutcheon (2013, p. 7) states that these changes should not be viewed as losses but as creative strategies that reflect the adapter's interpretive stance. By altering the plot, adapters may shift narrative emphasis from inner psychological reflection in prose to visual expression of emotion and action on screen. Examining these plot modifications helps reveal how adaptation translates literary time and space into cinematic form, thereby reshaping audience perception and emotional rhythm.

2.4 Setting

Setting encompasses the time, place, and social environment in which a narrative unfolds. As Kennedy and Gioia (2010; p. 180) emphasize, setting is not a static backdrop but a dynamic element that shapes a story's atmosphere, influences character behavior, and reinforces thematic meaning. It situates the narrative within a recognizable or imagined world, providing concrete context for the conflicts, cultural norms, and emotional tone governing the story.

In film adaptations, setting often undergoes reinterpretation to suit the demands of the cinematic medium. Petrie and Boggs (2018; p. 112) explain that visual design, including production design, props, costume, makeup, and lighting, plays an essential role in establishing the world of the film. Through these elements, filmmakers can reconstruct or reinvent a setting to enhance realism, evoke mood, or generate symbolic effects. Directors frequently adjust settings to align the story with their artistic vision, to appeal to contemporary audiences, or to reflect updated cultural or historical contexts. Such modifications may involve relocating the geographical setting, shifting the historical period, altering architectural styles, or reimagining social environments to convey different cultural meanings.

Setting in a film has distinct effects on narrative experience. Because cinema operates through visual immediacy, the representation of setting carries emotional and symbolic weight. Petrie and Boggs (2018; p. 113) highlight that setting in film is a powerful tool for creating emotional atmosphere, shaping the viewer's psychological response through lighting, spatial arrangement, color palette, and environmental detail. For example, dim lighting, narrow hallways, and gothic décor might evoke suspense or danger, while warm lighting and open spaces generate comfort and safety. Through such techniques, directors guide viewer interpretation and intensify the narrative's emotional register.

Additionally, setting in a film often functions symbolically. According to Boggs (2018; p. 113), setting may serve as a visual symbol that communicates underlying themes, conflicts, or character states. A grand hotel might symbolize wealth, decadence, or corruption; a desolate landscape may represent loneliness, fear, or moral decay. Symbolic settings allow filmmakers to encode thematic meaning through visual cues rather than dialogue. This symbolic dimension becomes especially significant when adapting literary works, where descriptive passages must be translated into concrete imagery. The film's setting thus becomes a narrative device that conveys meaning through design, texture, and atmosphere rather than words.

Furthermore, setting interacts with characters by shaping their identities and actions. The cultural and historical milieu in which characters exist determines their motivations, social expectations, and moral choices. In adaptation studies, examining changes in setting reveals how filmmakers reinterpret character relationships, alter narrative tension, or shift thematic focus. For example, modernizing a setting may introduce new social issues or reinterpret power dynamics present in the original text.

Setting also contributes to world-building, especially in stories with fantastical or supernatural elements, such as *The Witches*. Film, with its capacity for visual spectacle and special effects, can expand or update the imaginative spaces described in literature. The relocation of Dahl's original setting or the transformation of the witches' meeting place in the film version reflects not only artistic preference but also contemporary cinematic conventions and audience expectations.

Moreover, setting participates in establishing tone, guiding transitions, and enhancing narrative structure. Changes in location or atmosphere may signal plot shifts, indicate character development, or foreshadow upcoming events. As Petrie and Boggs note, the design and placement of settings help maintain narrative coherence and emotional rhythm throughout the film.

In a comparative analysis between a novel and its film adaptation, exploring setting reveals how the film medium reshapes spatial and cultural environments to highlight certain themes or appeal to modern sensibilities. Differences in setting between Roald Dahl's *The Witches* and the 2020 film adaptation, such as geographical relocation, updated time period, or altered social context, offer insight into the filmmakers' interpretive strategies and their impact on story, character, and meaning.

For example, transposing a story from one culture to another can result in what Hutcheon (2013; p. 149) calls "indigenization," the process of recontextualizing a narrative so that it resonates with local values, symbols, or traditions. Through such transformations, adaptation becomes not only a translation of setting but also a reinterpretation of meaning, as filmmakers construct new visual environments that reflect their sociocultural moment. Analyzing differences in setting between novel and film, therefore, illuminates how adaptation reconstructs the story's world, mood, and ideology.

2.5 Theme

Theme refers to the central idea or underlying message of a story, the insight it offers into human nature or social experience. Stanton (1965) defines theme as the author's commentary on life or moral truth. Themes can be explicit, conveyed through dialogue and action, or implicit, embedded within imagery and tone.

In adaptation, the theme may remain constant or change depending on the filmmaker's interpretive goals. Hutcheon (2013) notes that adaptations are inherently dialogic; they enter into conversation with their source texts, affirming or challenging original meanings. As Hutcheon (2013) explains, adaptation is an act of reinterpretation shaped by the expressive possibilities of a new medium. Because film communicates meaning through visual composition, performance, and cinematic techniques (Petrie & Boggs, 2018),

a theme presented in a novel, such as innocence and corruption, may be rearticulated on screen through emphasis on power relations, identity construction, or moral conflict.

Petrie and Boggs (2018) argue that film conveys meaning not only through narrative structure and dialogue, but also through its visual and auditory elements. These cinematic techniques shape the audience's emotional response and contribute to the expression of the theme. The adaptation process thus allows for thematic expansion: by utilizing the film's sensory and symbolic resources, a director can highlight or reinterpret the story's central message in new ways. Studying thematic parallels and divergences between the literary and cinematic versions, such as in *The Witches*, can reveal whether the film preserves Roald Dahl's satirical critique of cruelty and greed or introduces new moral and cultural interpretations.

2.6 Previous Studies

Several studies have been conducted related to literary adaptation, particularly those that explore the transformation of novels into films. Adaptation research, as Hutcheon (2013) explains, views adaptation as both an act of interpretation and a process of creation. McFarlane (1996) similarly emphasizes that the challenge of adaptation lies in transferring narrative elements, such as structure, point of view, and language, across different media while maintaining the story's essence. Cartmell and Whelehan (2010) also discuss how filmmakers often revise or modernize classic stories to meet new audience expectations and cultural shifts. These foundational ideas establish a framework for understanding how texts evolve through adaptation.

While adaptation studies have frequently focused on canonical works such as *Pride and Prejudice*, *Harry Potter*, or *The Great Gatsby*, fewer have analyzed Roald Dahl's *The Witches*, especially its 2020 film adaptation directed by Robert Zemeckis. Most previous research on Dahl's works

concentrates on literary style, moral values, and children's literature perspectives rather than direct comparisons between novel and film. Consequently, a gap exists in analyzing how *The Witches* transforms in plot, setting, and theme when adapted for modern cinematic audiences.

To clarify the background of this study, several relevant articles and theses are reviewed below:

Studies Directly Related to *The Witches*

Suwastini, Utami, & Paramita (2024), *The Grand High Witch's Characterization in Roald Dahl's The Witches*, analyze the Grand High Witch's characterization as the main antagonist in Dahl's novel. Using Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña's interactive qualitative model, the researchers found that the Grand High Witch is portrayed as scary, cruel, and cunning traits that reinforce her role as the villain. The study also observes how Dahl uses grotesque imagery to instill fear and moral awareness in young readers. However, the research is limited to the novel and does not discuss the cinematic version.

Kuncoro & Hawasib (2022), *Adaptation of Novel The Witches by Roald Dahl to Graphic Novel by Penelope Bagieu*, examines narrative transformations between the novel and its graphic novel adaptation. The authors highlight the processes of addition, omission, and development as necessary adjustments for visual storytelling. The study contributes to adaptation discourse by showing how different media emphasize visual rather than linguistic expression. Although it focuses on graphic novels rather than the film, the findings are relevant to understanding medium-based transformation.

Mubasyira (2020), *Analysis of Didactic Aspects in a Novel Titled The Witches by Roald Dahl*, explores the moral and educational dimensions of the

novel using Bloom's taxonomy. The study concludes that *The Witches* promotes cognitive, affective, and psychomotor development through moral lessons about bravery, honesty, and empathy. This analysis supports the idea that Dahl's works carry strong ethical messages, which may be interpreted differently in film adaptations.

Risthayani & Maharani (2024), *Exploring Constituent Structure through Elliptical Sentences in The Witches Novel by Roald Dahl*, examine Dahl's use of elliptical sentences. The researchers argue that ellipsis enhances narrative rhythm and emotional impact, creating a concise yet vivid style suitable for young readers. While the study provides valuable insight into Dahl's language, it does not extend its analysis to film adaptation.

Surya, Nurhadi, & Musliman (2023), *A Critical Multimodal Analysis of Text and Images in Roald Dahl's Matilda and The Witches*, explore the interaction between text and Quentin Blake's illustrations. The findings show that visual elements reinforce the novel's themes of fear and resistance, suggesting that images contribute as much as text to the story's meaning. The study's focus on multimodality can inform the present research, particularly when analyzing how cinematic visuals reinterpret the original imagery.

Beyond direct analyses of *The Witches*, several adaptation studies provide theoretical and methodological frameworks that inform this research:

Kusumayanti, Setiani, & Wardhani (2022), *From Page to Screen: The Plot Transformation of Roald Dahl's Matilda into Matthew Warchus's Movie*, compare Dahl's *Matilda* novel and its film adaptation. It identifies narrative condensation and restructuring to suit filmic pacing, demonstrating how plot adjustments maintain thematic consistency while enhancing emotional appeal.

Soriano (2020), *Reimagining Roald Dahl's Fantastic Mr. Fox in the 21st Century: Wes Anderson's Film Adaptation*, discusses how Wes Anderson reinterprets Dahl's story through a unique cinematic style. The research

emphasizes that adaptation is not mere translation, but a creative re-articulation influenced by directorial vision and cultural context.

Kyрана & Hapsarani (2020), *Masculine Constructions: A Comparison of Roald Dahl's Novel and the Film Adaptation of Fantastic Mr. Fox*, focus on gender representation. It finds that the film adaptation introduces modern ideas of masculinity and family values absent in the original novel. Such findings can parallel the shift in *The Witches* (2020), where race and gender portrayals reflect updated social values.

Ebert (2020), *The Witches (2020) Review*, notes that the 2020 adaptation shifts the setting from Europe to 1960s Alabama, introducing an African-American protagonist and new racial undertones. The review highlights how such changes influence the film's tone and audience perception.

Hartati, Kustanti, & Permaludin (2024) *Adaptation of Twilight: From Feminism to the Idea of Masculinity*, illustrates how adaptation can alter ideological messages, turning a feminist narrative into one emphasizing masculinity. It serves as a model for examining how thematic reinterpretation may occur in *The Witches* (2020).

From these studies, it is evident that most research on *The Witches* centers on the literary text, its moral lessons, linguistic style, and characterization, rather than the transformation into film. Although *Matilda* and *Fantastic Mr. Fox* have received attention in adaptation studies, *The Witches* (2020) remains underexplored, particularly in terms of its altered plot structure, updated setting, and shifted thematic focus.

Therefore, the present study seeks to fill this gap by conducting a comparative analysis of *The Witches* (1983 novel) and *The Witches* (2020 film). It will examine how the characters, plot sequences, spatial and temporal settings, and underlying themes are reshaped through cinematic storytelling. Moreover, this research aims to interpret how these transformations affect the

work's moral and cultural meanings, drawing upon adaptation theory by Hutcheon (2013) and cinematic narrative principles from Petrie and Boggs (2018).

Through this approach, the study contributes to adaptation scholarship by showing how *The Witches* evolves from Dahl's imaginative yet grotesque children's literature into a visually rich, culturally updated film that communicates new perspectives to contemporary audiences.

