

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the Research

When British author Roald Dahl published his children's book *The BFG*—shortened from *The Big Friendly Giant*—in 1982, he introduced readers to a fascinating world where giants exist in the same universe as The Queen of England. The appearance of The Queen is not the only part of *The BFG* (1982) that features an aspect of England. Throughout the book, there are various references regarding the country. Fast-forward three decades later, renowned American moviemaker Stephen Spielberg directed the movie adaptation of the book, *The BFG* (2016). Staying true to Dahl's narrative, the movie heavily featured England and was released in 2016.

The BFG (1982) and its adaptation, *The BFG* (2016), share a similar premise. They explore the story of Sophie, a young orphan girl from an orphanage in England, and her giant friend, The Big Friendly Giant (later nicknamed The BFG). Sophie accidentally spots The BFG when she peeks outside her orphanage window during the witching hour. Noticing Sophie's presence, The giant snatches her out of her room and brings her to his place in a faraway land called the Giant Country. The BFG's reason for kidnapping Sophie is that he is concerned that she will expose the existence of the giants to the public. Later it is discovered that while other giants relish eating humans, The BFG does not. Thus, he has no interest in harming Sophie. Eventually, Sophie and The BFG strike an unlikely friendship and go on a quest to defeat human-eating giants with the help of The Queen of England and the military.

According to Roald Dahl's official website, the author dedicated *The BFG* (1982) to his daughter, Olivia Dahl, who passed away at seven due to measles encephalitis ("November 1962 - Death of Roald Dahl's Daughter Olivia."). It features illustrations by English cartoonist Quentin Blake. It is among Dahl's most notable works, winning him several awards, including the 1986 International Board of Books

For Young People Awards for Norwegian and German translations (Cullinan and Person 217). Additionally, in 2003, *The Guardian* listed the book as 88th in “The 100 Greatest Novels of All Time: The List” (McCrum).

In contrast to Dahl’s success, *The BFG* (2016) is not among Spielberg’s most thriving movies. As pointed out in 2016 by *The Hollywood Reporter*, the movie was considered a box office flop, earning only \$165.3 million worldwide against its \$140 million budget (McClintock). However, as noted by *IndieWire*, adapting *The BFG* (1982) into *The BFG* (2016) is a dream come true for Spielberg, who used to read the book to his children. He even waited for years for technological advances before he could visualize his visions for the movie (Winfrey).

Despite *The BFG*’s (2016) rather disappointing performance at the box office, the fact remains that it is one of the countless book-to-movie adaptations ever released in recent decades. While having the same premise, it takes advantage of creative liberties and modifies things to create a different yet undoubtedly similar narrative. This is often the case with numerous other adaptations. As in the words of Hutcheon, an adaptation is a derivation that is not derivative (9). Thus, while Spielberg’s *The BFG* (2016) is based on Dahl’s *The BFG* (1982), the former is not merely imitating the latter. Some interesting aspects in which Spielberg’s movie differs from Dahl’s book is how England and the English are portrayed in the text vs. on the big screen.

Movies like *The BFG* (2016) are examples of visual artwork that could influence human thoughts and behaviors. One particularly fascinating result of watching a movie is that it can cause viewers to form certain perceptions of the setting in which it was shot. This is a common occurrence, as indicated by Kotler; movies, among others, can serve as a promotion tool that can either help or hurt the image of a place (21). Therefore, a movie can conjure not only a positive image but also a negative image. Kotler further explains that people unfamiliar with a particular place can easily think negatively about the place and its community if they watch a movie portraying the place negatively. Negative images like this can be hard to shake (135). On the

contrary, movies (and television) can create a place image that is positive enough to the point that it becomes a potential tourist attraction (173).

The fact that England is the only human country featured in the movie makes it an interesting topic. The Giant Country is not a real place, but England is. Thus, the only identifiable place in the movie that viewers can visit, both in the movie and in real life, is England. Therefore, I believe that *The BFG* (2016) can be an effective image-formation tool influencing viewers' opinions on places in England and the English.

Furthermore, this research explores the portrayal of England in Dahl's *The BFG* (1982) and Spielberg's *The BFG* (2016). The analysis centers around the differences between the book's description of England and English society in the book in comparison to the movie. Also, it analyzes how the use of movie-making techniques in the movie results in certain images of England. I first analyze how the adaptation differs from its book's description of the country and its community. Afterward, I analyze the image of England and the English in-depth, based on the visuals that can be seen in the movie.

1.2. Identification of the Problems

Only a few articles have been written on *The BFG* (1982) and its adaptation, *The BFG* (2016). Therefore, I propose to study the works above, focusing mainly on the differences between the two mediums' portrayals of England. Furthermore, studies that interpret a country's image in a movie are lacking in the English Department of Andalas University. Thus, this analysis will bring novelty and be valuable to studies exploring the topic above. Additionally, this research will be a significant resource for analyzing the book-to-movie adaptation and movie interpretation.

1.3. Review of Related Literature

In this research, I conduct a review of related literature. The review aims to gain an in-depth understanding of the issues. Furthermore, I found several studies related to

the theories and the research objects. The studies are in articles collected from journals and online magazines.

First, I include a review of studies about *The BFG* (1982). The first study is a 2020 *EduLite* article by Joanna Deborah entitled "External Evaluation in Roald Dahl's *The BFG*." This research applies Labov's theory of narrative structure and Genette's theory of narratology to explore the narrative structure of *The BFG* (1982), focusing on the role of the narrator in external evaluation. Deborah finds that the narrator in *The BFG* (1982) successfully fulfilled its directing, communicating, testimonial, and ideological functions, which helps readers, especially young readers, comprehend *The BFG* novel (126-135). This article presents a concise evaluation of *The BFG*'s (1982)'s narrative structure. Despite the topic being unrelated to my research, this article provides insights into *The BFG* (1982)'s narrative.

The second previous study is "Racism in Roald Dahl's *The BFG*: A Social Criticism or White Supremacy Tendency?" by Jeanyfer Tanusy, published in 2020 by *Kata*, a journal of the English Department of Petra Christian University. Tanusy utilizes Barthes' five codes theory to analyze the possible hidden messages that Dahl subtly revealed in *The BFG*'s (1982) novel. The findings suggest that *The BFG* (1982) essentially contains semantic codes that hint toward either social criticism or white supremacy tendency (Tanusy 63-69). This study raises some appealing discussions regarding Roald Dahl's possible intention in writing *The BFG* (1982). While the research topic is mainly unrelated to my research, it gives me beneficial details regarding *The BFG* (1982) and its author.

In addition to studies about *The BFG* (1982), I also include studies that analyze *The BFG* (2016). The first source about the movie is an article by Kate Marrison and Nigel Morris entitled "Sophie's Voice? Dark Intertexts of *The BFG*", published in 2020 by *Jewish Film & New Media: An International Journal*. The researchers utilize psychoanalysis to analyze the dark intertexts of Spielberg's *The BFG* (2016). The findings indicate that *The BFG* (2016) may contain hidden messages about the Holocaust (Marrison and Morris 1-58). In addition, this study raises some appealing

speculations on possible influences behind the making of *The BFG* (2016). The research topic is primarily unrelated to my research, but it exemplifies *The BFG* (2016) and Spielberg as its director.

The following previous study is a 2018 article by Rena Al Asyifa Nur Ulfah and Resti Afrilia entitled "An Analysis of Flouting Maxim in The BFG Movie," published in *Project: Profesional Journal of English Education* of IKIP Siliwangi. In this article, the researchers examine *The BFG* (2016) to elicit its flouting maxim, using Grice's concept of conversational maxim. The findings reveal that the movie contains 24 flouting maxims (Ulfah and Afrilia 687-695). This article presents a stimulating view of the language and communication used in *The BFG* (2016). Even though the research focuses on the linguistic features of the movie, it delivers additional knowledge regarding *The BFG* (2016) movie.

Besides journal articles, I include movie reviews on *The BFG* (2016). The first review was written by Observer movie critic Mark Kermode and published in 2016 by *The Guardian*, titled "The BFG Review - a Scrumdiddlyumptious Feast." Kermode is pleased by the adaptation. He praises Mark Rylance for his marvelous portrayal of The BFG. He also applauds Ruby Barnhill for capturing Sophie's innocence and strength on screen (Kermode). This article presents a compelling review of the movie and a few criticisms of its weaknesses. Nevertheless, this article represents viewers' positive reactions to a movie adaptation.

The second article is "A BFG Review: Spielberg and Rylance's Delicate Touch Proves Hugely Charming" by *The Guardian* movie critic Peter Bradshaw, published in *The Guardian* in 2016. Bradshaw shows appreciation by giving this movie four stars out of five in his writing. He praises how Mark Rylance captures the spirit of the BFG and plays the role as naturally as a human being should. He notes that:

Without Rylance, the movie would certainly have the charm and sweetness it now displays in such abundance, but it might look a bit standard-issue..." (Bradshaw).

This article presents a more critical approach to the movie while still giving positive praise, especially for the casting choice. This article also gives me knowledge of how people react to the movie.

Furthermore, I also include previous studies that use the same theories as in my research. The first article uses Hutcheon's theory of adaptation, titled "Cinematizing the Victorian Novel to Cinema *Pride and Prejudice*," written by Nurul Aulia Rahmah and Diah Tjahaya Iman and published in 2022 in *Vivid: Journal of Language and Literature* of English Department of Andalas University. The article focuses on Joe Wright's adaptation of Jane Austen's 1813 novel *Pride and Prejudice* into a 2005 movie of the same title. It argues that while some scenes in the movie differ from the original story's settings, the movie is well adapted to the big screen. It also notes that the movie minimizes the conflicts of the original plot line by fixating more on the main couple's romance (Rahmah and Iman 51-58). This research provides an intriguing analysis of how a moviemaker takes creative liberties in adapting the elements of the original work. In addition, it gives me some insights into the cinematization of a novel.

The second research on adaptation is an article written by Masnia Rahayu. The title is "Stigmatization of Forced Marriage of Monty Tiwa's Adaptation of Gitlicious's *My Lecturer My Husband*," published on *JoRLE: Journal of Research on Language Education of Teknokrat University Indonesia*. It uses Hutcheon's adaptation theory and Judith Butler's theory of gender and sexuality expression to analyze the adaptation of *My Lecturer My Husband* from a Wattpad novel into a web series of the same title. The research, published in 2022 in the *Journal of Research on Language Education*, reveals that the adaption defies the source material in several aspects and contains the shift of value regarding forced marriage and gender expression (Rahayu 170-186). The research introduces an exciting example of how the transformation from text to visual arts may result in a shift of values. While the research object differs from mine, this article helps me understand the application of the adaptation theory.

The following is a 2021 study by Sri Purwati entitled "Intrinsic Review and *Mise-en-scène* Study of Good Will Hunting Movie," published in *Jurnal CULTURE (Culture et al.)* of AKI University. As the title suggests, the article applies the *Mise-en-scène* theory to examine the *Good Will Hunting* movie. The research reveals that the moviemakers used many different camera techniques in making the movie to convey the narrative to the audience (Purwati 170-185). The study gives an intriguing analysis of the art of movie making in a movie. While the research object differs from mine, this article helps me understand more how *Mise-en-scène* is implemented.

The last source is titled "Comparative Analysis of the Representation of Disney's White and Non-White Women in *Brave* (2012) and *Moana* (2016)", written in 2018 by Aulia Khairunnisa and published in *Passage*, a Journal of English Language and Literature Study Program of Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia. The results indicate that non-white women in Disney movies mentioned are less tame than the white women characters (Khairunnisa 19-39). This study offers an intriguing comparative analysis of how various ethnic backgrounds may have contributed to the development of various personalities. This study broadens my analytical study of various movies and complies with the *Mise-en-scène* theory.

1.4. Research Questions

I use the following questions to develop as well as to limit this research:

1. How does *The BFG* (2016)'s cinematic portrayal of England and the English differs from how they are portrayed in *The BFG* (1982)?
2. How does *The BFG* (2016) represent the image of England?

1.5. Scope of the Research

This research focuses on Roald Dahl's *The BFG* (1982) and its movie adaptation, *The BFG* (2016), directed by Stephen Spielberg. I limit this research to two discussions. Firstly, this research will compare the portrayal of England in the book with the movie.

Secondly, this research will further examine the techniques used in the movie to conjure specific images of England.

1.6. Objectives of the Study

1. Describe the differences between the portrayal of England and English in *The BFG* (1982) with the ones in *The BFG* (2016)
2. Examine the image of England in *The BFG* (2016)

