

CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the Problem

Literary works are frequently adapted into new media in order to address changing audiences and socio-cultural contexts. According to Hutcheon (2013), adaptation is not a process of simple reproduction, but one of reinterpretation shaped by the cultural and historical conditions of its production. As stories move across media, changes often occur in narrative emphasis, characterization, and modes of expression, allowing familiar texts to acquire new ideological meanings while remaining recognizable.

One literary work that has undergone significant adaptive transformation is *Matilda* by Roald Dahl, first published in 1988. The novel presents a child protagonist who resists authoritarian figures through intelligence, imagination, and moral judgment. Matilda's resistance operates primarily at an individual level, articulated through internal focalization and private acts of defiance against oppressive adults such as her parents and Miss Trunchbull. This portrayal positions childhood agency as personal and exceptional rather than collective.

Over time, *Matilda* has been adapted into various media, including the 1996 film directed by Danny DeVito and the stage musical created by Dennis Kelly and Tim Minchin, which premiered in 2010. The most recent adaptation, *Matilda the Musical* (2022), marks a significant shift in how resistance and agency are represented. As a musical film, the adaptation combines cinematic language with musical performance, enabling emotional, ideological, and political meanings to be expressed through song, choreography, and collective movement.

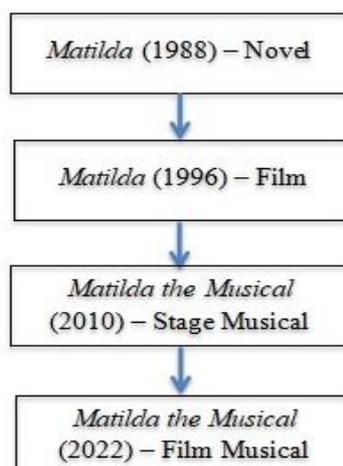


Figure 1. 1 Media Transformation of Matilda: From Novel to Musical Film (1988–2022)

As illustrated in Figure 1.1, the adaptive progression of *Matilda* across media culminates in the musical film adaptation, whose intermedial features and emphasis on collective resistance form the central focus of this study.

Unlike the novel, which relies on narration and internal reflection, the musical film externalizes thought and emotion through performance (Hutcheon, 2013; Bruhn et al., 2013). As a result, resistance is no longer framed solely as an individual moral stance but emerges as a collective and embodied experience, particularly within institutional spaces such as the school. Musical numbers—most notably *Revolting Children*—transform Crunchem Hall from a site of discipline and oppression into an arena of collective resistance, where children act together to challenge authority.

This shift highlights the importance of musical adaptation as a distinct mode of storytelling. Music, choreography, and audiovisual composition do not merely decorate the narrative but function as central meaning-making devices that redistribute agency from the individual protagonist to a broader collective. In this context, childhood resistance is reimagined as socially embedded and politically expressive rather than privately enacted.

This shift reflects broader trends in adaptation research that emphasize how medium-specific elements (e.g., music, choreography, spatial arrangement) influence narrative agency and ideological representations. For instance, studies in adaptation theory argue that adaptations do not merely transfer narrative content but also translate and transform narrative agency to resonate with different audience expectations and cultural norms, often foregrounding the expressive potentials of the new medium (Hutcheon, 2013; Perdikaki, 2022).

The adaptation of *Matilda* into a musical film thus raises important questions about how agency and resistance—initially framed as individual traits in the novel—are reoriented toward collective and performative expressions. This phenomenon calls for a re-examination of adaptation not just as narrative retelling, but as an active site of ideological negotiation that incorporates musical and cinematic conventions. Understanding this shift is essential for contemporary adaptation studies because it illustrates how adaptations engage with social and cultural discourses beyond the narrative concerns of the source text.

1.2. Identification of The Problem

Reflecting on the background the author has identified, this study addresses the shift in the representation of resistance between Roald Dahl's *Matilda* (1988) and its 2022 musical film adaptation. In the novel, resistance is shown through Matilda's individual and covert defiance, while the film emphasizes collective and overt action involving other students and characters. This difference raises questions about why the adaptation transforms individual struggle into collective resistance and what cultural and medial factors influence this change.

1.3. Review of Related Studies

The author reviewed a variety of academic texts on adaptation and contextualization within literature to film transitions, as well as for situating the pertinent scholarly literature. Such works assist in not only building the theoretical framework for the study, but also identifying the scholarly gaps that this research seeks to address.

In dealing with *Matilda the Musical* (2022), Agustina & Rofik (2023) use the sociological literary approach, in "*The Dehumanization of Educational Setting in Roald Dahl's Matilda the Musical (2022) Movie*," to describe the relation of power in the school system. The authors describe Trunchbull's Matilda's authoritarian practices and her resistance arc with her telekinetic powers. This research illuminates the resistance and oppression themes in the film, but her gaze is still limited to the school system and the characters' interconnections. This is unlike what the present study aims to do, which is to expand beyond character analysis to the cultural, temporal, and medium-specific contexts in which the film's adaptation techniques are set

Even more pertinent is the recent research conducted by Kusumayanti, D. D., Setiani, N., and Wardhani, R. A. (2025) called "*Plot Transformation and the Shifting of Ideology in Matilda the Musical (2022): An Adaptation Analysis*." This dissertation examines the ideological changes and adaptations of the 1988 novel by Roald Dahl and the 2022 film by Matthew Warchus, using Barthesian semiotics as adapted through the Hutcheonian approach to adaptation. Unlike the novel, the film takes a radical ideological shift by liberating the narrative from the conventional patriarchal confines and embracing feminist and pedagogical empowerment themes. Still, despite being focused on plot transformation and ideological renegotiation, it is less clear how this situates on a broader framework of intermediate and more

so patchwork cultural communication that most differentiates the musical adaptation as a distinct genre. In this study, the writer will fill this void through a synthesis of narrative theory, ideology critique, and the broader outlines of genre, including genre-specific constructs like musical dramaturgy, and a performative re-reading.

Next, Ann-Marie Hsiung (2021) in “*Mulan’s travel from ballad to movie: A case study of inter-modal translation*” analyzes the attempts to translate the Ballad of Mulan into various films. This work provides a rich case of new ecmm sodlogy analysis of the adaptation through an intermodal lens, particularly regarding the shifts in media types and the accompanying transformations in story structure, character integration and appropriation, and cultural signification. Hsiung’s focus on cross-cultural translation is particularly relevant to this research’s purpose to evaluate how Matilda’s adaptation illustrates a transformation in cultural discourse from the late 20th-century British literature to early 21st-century global cinema.

From a cultural adaptation perspective, Perdikaki (2017) in “*Film adaptation as the interface between creative translation and cultural transformation: The case of—Baz Luhrmann’s The Great Gatsby*” investigates how film adaptations can serve as acts of cultural reinterpretation. Her study of Luhrmann’s 2013 film adaptation demonstrates how contemporary music (e.g., hip-hop and R&B) is employed to modernize a classic literary narrative. This research foregrounds the role of cultural translation in adaptation, which is relevant to the current study’s aim to explore how the Matilda adaptation resonates with contemporary ideological contexts.

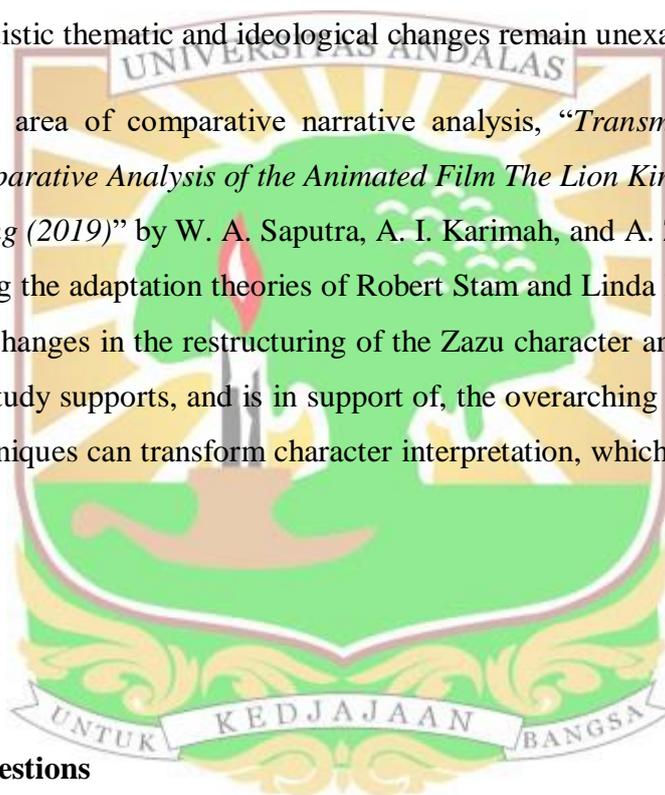
Similarly, “*Application of an Adaptation Approach through Narrative Comparisons in the Novel and Film Twilight*”, published in 2023 by Hartati, Y. A., Kustanti, D., & Permaludin, U., analyzes the film adaptation of the novel *Twilight* by the author Stephenie Meyer using the ecranization theory of Pamusuk Eneste and the narrative theories of Seymour Chatman. The authors focus on the narrative changes of additions and omissions in the transformation of the novel to the film and the impact of those changes on the characters and the plot of the story. The study is well done academically, however, it is lacking in contextualization components such as cultural or ideological changes.

Another significant contribution is “*The Intricateness of Adaptation of Literature to Film in Today’s Crisscrossed World*” by Pasopati et al. (2023). The article emphasizes that literary adaptations are not mere textual translations but rather reimaginings shaped by social,

ideological, and individual interpretive frameworks. It underscores how modern adaptations often reflect prevailing cultural landscapes. However, while the study effectively highlights the complexity of adaptation, it does not directly engage with musical adaptation as a specific medium, nor with children's literature.

"How existing literary translation fits into film adaptations: the subtitling of neologisms in *Harry Potter* from a multimodal perspective" by Siwen Lu (2023) discusses the impact of subtitled neologisms on the interpretive process and proposes a multimodal approach. While covering subtitling in film, it acknowledges the integration of seeing, hearing, and reading—a step beyond conceptual fidelity. Intermodal translation, though, remains in the realm of the linguistic; non-linguistic thematic and ideological changes remain unexamined.

In the same area of comparative narrative analysis, "*Transmutations of Plot and Characters: A Comparative Analysis of the Animated Film *The Lion King* (1994) and the Live Action *The Lion King* (2019)*" by W. A. Saputra, A. I. Karimah, and A. Z. Maahad also works on the subject. Using the adaptation theories of Robert Stam and Linda Hutcheon, the authors distinguish certain changes in the restructuring of the Zazu character and the cutting of some Zazu scenes. This study supports, and is in support of, the overarching concept that narrative and illustrative techniques can transform character interpretation, which is vital to the present research.



1.4. Research Questions

Based on the issues outlined in the background of the study, this research is guided by the following questions:

1. What transformations occur in the adaptation of Roald Dahl's *Matilda* (1988) into *Matilda the Musical* (2022), particularly in terms of narrative structure, characterization, and thematic emphasis?
2. How do musical and cinematic elements—such as songs, choreography, and film techniques—reframe childhood agency and resistance from an individual to a collective and performative mode in the 2022 film adaptation?

3. What are the ideological and cultural implications of this transformation for the representation of childhood agency, resistance, and institutional authority in *Matilda the Musical* (2022)?

1.5. Scope of the Research

This study focuses on the adaptation of *Matilda* from Roald Dahl's novel (1988) to the musical film *Matilda the Musical* (2022). The scope of the study is limited to an analysis of the transformation of narration, characterization, and themes, with particular attention to the use of music, choreography, and cinematic techniques in the film.

The study does not aim to provide a comprehensive musical analysis in technical terms, nor does it examine audience reception in a sociological or statistical manner. Instead, it concentrates on how the musical film medium reconfigures the representation of childhood agency, resistance, and institutional injustice within its narrative and visual framework.

1.6. Objective of the Study

This study intends to examine the manner in which the *Matilda* 2022 film musical, reinterprets the narrative, characters, and themes from Roald Dahl's 1988 novel through the intermedial process of adaptation from novel to musical film. Specifically, the objectives of this research are:

1. To identify and analyze the key narrative, character, and thematic transformations that occur in the adaptation from the novel to the musical film.
2. To examine how musical and cinematic elements function as intermedial strategies in reshaping meaning within the adaptation.
3. To explore how these adaptive strategies contribute to the reframing of childhood agency, resistance, and institutional injustice in a contemporary cultural context.

Taken together, these objectives guide the analytical direction of this study and lead to its central argument. Based on these considerations, this thesis argues that *Matilda the Musical* (2022) does not merely adapt Roald Dahl's *Matilda* (1988) at the level of narrative content, but reconfigures the representation of childhood agency and resistance through the musical film medium. The adaptation shifts resistance from an individual and introspective struggle into a collective and performative form of action, particularly within institutional spaces such as the

school. Through musical numbers, choreography, and cinematic techniques, the film redistributes agency from the individual protagonist to a broader community of children, while reframing institutional authority as a shared ideological challenge rather than a private moral conflict.

