

From Text to Performance: Adaptation of Roald Dahl's *Matilda* as Transformative Practice

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Abstract

This paper explores the transformation of Roald Dahl's *Matilda* (1988) into Matthew Warchus's *Matilda the Musical* (2022), examining how the narrative's essence of empowerment and imagination evolves across media. Drawing on Linda Hutcheon's *A Theory of Adaptation*, the study interprets adaptation not as imitation but as a process of creative reinterpretation shaped by medium, ideology, and audience. The research contrasts Dahl's ironic, text-centered narrative with the performative, communal expression of resistance in the musical film. While the novel centers on individual intellect as moral resistance against authority, the adaptation translates that defiance into collective empowerment through song, movement, and visual spectacle. The study argues that Warchus's film exemplifies Hutcheon's concept of "repetition with variation," maintaining the moral core of Dahl's story while reconfiguring its affective and ideological tone for contemporary audiences. Through comparative analysis, this paper demonstrates that adaptation is both homage and innovation, a recontextualization that preserves narrative integrity while reimagining its cultural resonance. *Matilda*'s journey from page to performance reveals how adaptation revitalizes classic narratives, enabling them to speak anew to evolving generations and artistic forms.

Keywords: Adaptation, Roald Dahl, *Matilda*, Linda Hutcheon, musical film, intermediality, transformation

Introduction

Adaptation has long been one of the most essential mechanisms through which narratives are preserved, reshaped, and reimagined across generations. Within literature and cinema, adaptation functions not merely as a replication of an original text, but as a sophisticated process of cultural translation that reconfigures meaning in response to shifting artistic, social, and ideological contexts. Stories are inherently dynamic; they endure through continual reinterpretation. In this regard, Roald Dahl's *Matilda* (1988) serves as a compelling example of a work that has undergone multiple transformations across diverse media over several decades. From its literary inception to its stage and cinematic reinterpretations, *Matilda* illustrates how adaptation operates simultaneously as an aesthetic endeavour and an ideological act, reflecting evolving conceptions of childhood, authority, and resistance. The most recent iteration, Roald Dahl's *Matilda the Musical* (2022), directed by Matthew Warchus, exemplifies how adaptation not only sustains narrative frameworks but also redefines the moral and emotional dimensions of its source material. Roald Dahl's *Matilda* emerged at the close of the twentieth century, a moment when children's literature was undergoing a profound transformation. The novel offers a darkly comic and morally charged narrative centered on a precocious young girl whose intelligence and imagination confront the cruelty and ignorance of the adults around her. Dahl's incisive wit and satirical tone elevate what might otherwise appear as a conventional tale of good versus evil into a trenchant critique of institutional authority. Through figures such as Miss Trunchbull and the Wormwoods, Dahl exposes both the absurdity of power and the precariousness of childhood under repressive systems. Yet, amid this darkness, the novel affirms intellectual curiosity, empathy, and the transformative potential of reading. For many readers, *Matilda* became emblematic of intellectual rebellion—a story in which knowledge and imagination triumph over ignorance and tyranny. This study contends that Roald Dahl's *Matilda the Musical* (2022), directed by Matthew Warchus, exemplifies adaptation as a process of creative and ideological transformation. The musical reconfigures the novel's central themes of imagination, rebellion, and empowerment through the expressive languages of music, performance, and film. Drawing upon Linda Hutcheon's theory of adaptation and Robert Stam's concept of intertextual dialogism, the analysis demonstrates that the musical operates not as a mere reproduction of Dahl's narrative but as a cultural re-articulation. In doing so, it aligns the story with contemporary values of inclusivity, collective resistance, and emotional authenticity.

I: From Text to Performance: Adaptation as Transformative Practice

The enduring popularity of *Matilda* made it a natural candidate for adaptation. Its themes of empowerment and moral courage resonate universally, while its vivid characters and fantastical elements lend themselves to visual and performative storytelling. The first major adaptation came in 1996 with Danny DeVito's film, which preserved much of Dahl's satirical edge while incorporating an American sensibility and cinematic realism. However, the story reached new expressive potential with the 2010 Royal Shakespeare Company stage musical written by Dennis Kelly with music and lyrics by Tim Minchin. This version infused the tale with theatrical energy, using song and movement to externalize Matilda's emotions and imagination. The 2022 Netflix adaptation of the musical, directed by Matthew Warchus, expanded this vision through the cinematic medium, translating the vibrancy of stage performance into an audiovisual experience accessible to global audiences. The journey from page to stage to screen thus represents not a linear process of reproduction but an ongoing dialogue between forms, each version reshaping the story to meet the cultural and emotional needs of its time. In the study of adaptation, scholars have long debated the relationship between a source text and its adaptations, with earlier critical approaches often emphasizing fidelity and measuring success by how faithfully the adaptation reproduces the original. However, contemporary theorists such as Linda Hutcheon and Robert Stam have challenged this notion, arguing that adaptation should be understood as an act of creation in its own right. Hutcheon's *A Theory of Adaptation* (2013) reframes adaptation as both a product and a process. She argues that each adaptation represents a "repetition without replication," where meaning is not simply transferred but reinterpreted within a new semiotic and cultural system. Similarly, Stam's concept of intertextual dialogism positions adaptation as a conversation among texts, suggesting that every adaptation participates in a broader cultural network rather than existing as a subordinate copy. Together, these frameworks provide valuable tools for analyzing *Matilda the Musical* (2022), which draws on its literary and theatrical predecessors while asserting its own creative identity through music, choreography, and filmic storytelling.

Applying Hutcheon's framework to *Matilda* reveals how adaptation transforms both the narrative structure and the thematic essence of Dahl's novel. The 2022 musical film reimagines the story's central conflicts not merely as personal

struggles but as expressions of collective resistance. The film retains Dahl's emphasis on imagination and moral intelligence, while amplifying the emotional dimension of rebellion by transforming defiance into a spectacle. Through song and movement, the adaptation gives voice to emotions that remain implicit in the novel's narration. Hutcheon's notion that adaptations are "palimpsestic" is particularly relevant here: the musical film layers its own aesthetic vision upon the familiar foundation of the source text. It invites audiences to experience the story anew, oscillating between recognition and surprise. The result is not a diluted version of Dahl's world but a renewed articulation that speaks to the values and sensibilities of the twenty-first century.

Robert Stam's theory further illuminates how *Matilda the Musical* participates in a web of intertextual and cultural dialogues. Stam emphasizes that adaptation should be understood in terms of transformation, not equivalence. He proposes that each adaptation draws upon a "mosaic of quotations" that reflects diverse cultural influences. The 2022 film engages in such intertextuality by referencing not only Dahl's text but also the performative traditions of British theatre and the cinematic language of contemporary musicals. The film's visual and sonic style evokes other modern musicals that celebrate youthful rebellion, including *Billy Elliot* (2000) and *School of Rock* (2003), positioning *Matilda* within a lineage of stories that valorize creativity and defiance. Through this intertextual layering, the adaptation transcends its literary origins and situates itself within a broader cultural conversation about freedom, imagination, and resistance. Another crucial dimension of this adaptation lies in its treatment of childhood and authority. In Dahl's novel, *Matilda*'s rebellion is individual mainly; she is an extraordinary child whose intelligence isolates her from the mediocrity of the adult world. Her triumph is both personal and moral, achieved through wit and intellect. In contrast, the 2022 musical film transforms rebellion into a collective act. The children of Crunchem Hall rise together against tyranny, transforming individual defiance into communal liberation. This shift reflects contemporary social values that emphasize solidarity, equality, and empowerment. It also underscores the capacity of adaptation to update ideological frameworks for new audiences. Where Dahl's novel was rooted in the late twentieth century's moral satire, Warchus's adaptation speaks to twenty-first-century concerns about inclusion and social justice. Through its musical and visual expression, the film translates the novel's moral clarity into a celebration of diversity and cooperation.

The transition from page to screen also redefines the sensory and emotional grammar of the story. In the novel, Dahl's narrative voice guides the reader through irony and moral commentary, using language to shape emotional response. In the film, meaning is conveyed through performance, through colour, sound, gesture, and choreography. Music becomes a vehicle for emotion, allowing internal states to manifest as collective expression. Songs such as "Naughty," "Quiet," and "Revolting Children" externalize Matilda's thoughts and feelings, transforming introspection into a shared performance. This shift from linguistic narration to multimodal storytelling exemplifies Hutcheon's idea of adaptation as "transcoding," the translation of meaning across semiotic systems. The adaptation does not merely illustrate the novel but interprets it through the expressive possibilities of cinema and music. The cultural significance of *Matilda the Musical* (2022) also lies in its global accessibility. Released on Netflix, the film reached an audience far beyond traditional theatre spaces, demonstrating how digital platforms have transformed the circulation of adapted works. The adaptation thus exists within both artistic and technological frameworks, reflecting how media convergence shapes narrative experience. Viewers engage with the film not only as spectators but also as participants in a shared cultural event. Hutcheon's concept of audience "oscillation" becomes especially relevant here, as viewers constantly negotiate their awareness of the original text and its reinterpretation. For long-time fans of Dahl, the film offers recognition and nostalgia; for new audiences, it provides a self-contained story of courage and imagination. The success of the adaptation lies in its ability to satisfy both impulses, blending fidelity and innovation in a balance that sustains the story's timeless appeal.

Moreover, the adaptation's emphasis on music and performance highlights the collective nature of storytelling itself. While Dahl's novel positions reading and learning as acts of personal empowerment, the musical film celebrates artistic collaboration and communal expression. This shift resonates with Hutcheon's assertion that adaptation is inherently social, involving the interplay of creators, performers, and audiences. In *Matilda the Musical*, rebellion becomes a dance, protest becomes a song, and knowledge becomes a rhythm. The boundaries between imagination and action blur, transforming Dahl's solitary reader into a community of participants. Through this transformation, the adaptation reaffirms the capacity of art to unite rather than isolate, to inspire empathy rather than superiority.

The relationship between adaptation and ideology is particularly evident in the film's handling of gender and power. Dahl's novel reflects the gender norms of its time, portraying Matilda's intelligence as exceptional but largely confined within domestic and educational spaces. The 2022 adaptation reinterprets this dynamic through a contemporary feminist lens, presenting Matilda's defiance as part of a broader critique of patriarchal and institutional control. Miss Trunchbull's authoritarianism becomes a caricature of toxic discipline, while Miss Honey's quiet strength embodies resilience and compassion. The film's narrative thus expands the moral discourse of the original, aligning it with present-day understandings of empowerment, diversity, and emotional intelligence. Adaptation here serves as cultural revision, transforming the text not only in form but also in ethical perspective. Taken together, these elements illustrate that adaptation is an evolving dialogue rather than a static act of translation. Dahl's *Matilda* has survived and flourished precisely because each new version finds fresh ways to reinterpret its core themes. The 2022 musical film represents the latest stage in this evolution, combining literary wit, theatrical dynamism, and cinematic expressiveness to reimagine rebellion for a new generation. Its success confirms Hutcheon's central insight that adaptation thrives on both memory and invention, engaging audiences through recognition while renewing meaning through transformation.

Adaptation is not simply a process of replication but an act of re-creation that embodies the dynamic relationship between texts, audiences, and cultural contexts. Linda Hutcheon's *A Theory of Adaptation* situates adaptation within an interpretive continuum where meaning is continuously reshaped by medium, ideology, and reception. For Hutcheon, an adaptation is both "a product and a process," an entity that simultaneously derives from and deviates from its source. This framework emphasizes the dialogic nature of adaptation as an act of reinterpretation rather than imitation. Roald Dahl's *Matilda*, first published in 1988, offers fertile ground for such a study because it has been repeatedly adapted for different audiences and formats, including the 1996 film directed by Danny DeVito, the 2010 stage musical written by Dennis Kelly with music and lyrics by Tim Minchin, and the 2022 Netflix film adaptation directed by Matthew Warchus. Each version interprets Dahl's original narrative through the lens of its own medium and sociocultural moment, transforming its moral and aesthetic meanings.

In the 2022 musical film, the transformative nature of adaptation is evident in the way Dahl's sharp wit and satirical prose are reconfigured into a sensory tapestry of movement, colour, and sound. Hutcheon's assertion that adaptations are inherently "palimpsestuous" (Hutcheon 6) resonates strongly here: the film bears the layered presence of both the original novel and its stage predecessor. It encourages audiences to participate in what Hutcheon describes as "oscillation," a process of continual comparison between the adaptation and its sources. The pleasure of recognition is central to this experience, yet the film simultaneously introduces a renewed emotional register and performative dynamism that open fresh interpretive pathways. In this way, the adaptation honours Dahl's narrative foundation while simultaneously articulating its own creative identity through the expressive languages of music and visual design. This palimpsestic layering underscores how adaptation functions as both preservation and transformation. Rather than erasing its sources, the film overlays them, creating a text that is at once familiar and newly resonant. Oscillation becomes a key mode of audience engagement, as viewers navigate between memory of the novel, recollection of the stage musical, and the immediacy of cinematic performance. Dahl's verbal satire is translated into embodied spectacle—through choreography, musical scoring, and visual grammar—demonstrating how adaptation shifts semiotic registers from textual to audiovisual. At the same time, the film asserts creative autonomy, reframing rebellion and empowerment not only as individual triumphs but as collective acts of resistance. In doing so, it extends Dahl's critique of authority into a more inclusive and emotionally authentic register, aligning the narrative with contemporary cultural values.

Robert Stam's theory of intertextual dialogism challenges the traditional focus on fidelity in adaptation studies by reframing adaptations as dynamic cultural conversations rather than derivative copies. Drawing on Bakhtin's concept of dialogism, Stam argues that adaptations engage not only with their source texts but also with a broader network of cultural discourses, genres, and audience expectations. In this view, a film or play adapted from a novel does more than "translate" its original; it enters into a multi-voiced dialogue with other texts and traditions, weaving together influences from cinematic conventions, social debates, and prior adaptations. This perspective complements Linda Hutcheon's framework of "recognition and novelty" by showing how adaptations achieve this balance through intertextual exchange, positioning them as living texts that evolve within a web of cultural

interactions rather than as static reproductions of a single source. In *Matilda the Musical* (2022), the adaptation functions as a layered cultural dialogue. On one level, it engages directly with the legacy of Roald Dahl's literature, retaining the recognizable moral binaries of good versus evil that define his narrative world. At the same time, it draws on the aesthetics of British theater—its traditions of staging, performance, and musicality—while also incorporating contemporary cinematic trends that highlight empowerment, inclusivity, and collective resistance. This makes the adaptation not only intertextual (in conversation with Dahl's text and other cultural works), but also intermedial (bridging theater and film), and ideological (reframing rebellion as a communal act rather than an individual one). In doing so, the film both preserves and critiques tradition, transforming adaptation into a site of negotiation where innovation meets continuity, performance meets text, and childhood innocence is reimaged through the lens of social critique.

II: Narrative Transformation and Thematic Expansion

The narrative of *Matilda* revolves around the tension between imagination and authority, a motif that persists across all adaptations. In Dahl's novel, *Matilda Wormwood's* extraordinary intelligence and telekinetic powers serve as metaphors for the transformative potential of knowledge. Her defiance against her cruel parents and the tyrannical headmistress Miss Trunchbull embodies the classic struggle of the powerless against oppressive institutions. The 2022 musical film retains this central conflict but amplifies its emotional and thematic resonance through the language of performance. By incorporating music, choreography, and collective movement, the film reimagines rebellion not merely as an individual assertion of self but as a communal uprising against injustice. The opening sequence, "Miracle," immediately signals this shift. Whereas Dahl's novel begins with the narrator's ironic commentary on parental neglect, the film opens with a dynamic musical number celebrating the birth of children as "miracles." The irony of this celebration quickly turns to satire as the song reveals parental vanity and societal hypocrisy. This musical framing transforms Dahl's textual wit into a performative critique that speaks to modern audiences. Similarly, the narrative arc of *Matilda's* journey from isolation to empowerment is visualized through ensemble choreography, suggesting solidarity among children who share her defiance. In this sense, the musical film foregrounds collective energy as the driving force of resistance.

The theme of education also undergoes significant reinterpretation. In the novel, education represents intellectual liberation, but it remains confined within the context of individual success. The film expands this notion to encompass creative expression and emotional resilience. Miss Honey's classroom becomes a space of inclusivity and imagination, contrasting sharply with the authoritarian regime of Crunchem Hall. Through this visual dichotomy, the film translates the novel's moral message into an aesthetic of light versus darkness, movement versus rigidity, song versus silence. Music itself becomes a metaphor for liberation, embodying what Hutcheon calls "the creative transposition" that defines adaptation. By replacing the narrator's descriptive commentary with songs like "Naughty" and "Revoltin' Children," the film externalizes interior emotions and transforms narrative exposition into performative expression. This transformation aligns with Robert Stam's argument that adaptations engage in "creative infidelity," where departures from the source enrich rather than diminish meaning. The musical film's ending, for instance, reimagines Matilda's triumph as an act of collective empowerment rather than an isolated victory. The final scenes of joyous choreography and communal celebration replace the novel's quieter resolution with an expression of social unity. In doing so, the film reframes rebellion as a shared ethical stance, consistent with twenty-first-century sensibilities about community, equality, and resistance to authoritarianism.

III. Characterization and the Politics of Representation

Characterization is central to the adaptive process because it mediates between textual identity and performative embodiment. In Dahl's novel, characters are constructed through exaggerated moral binaries that reflect the author's penchant for satire. The virtuous Miss Honey and the monstrous Miss Trunchbull represent opposing extremes of moral and emotional sensibility. The 2022 film retains this structure but humanizes the characters through performance and music, offering greater psychological depth and cultural nuance. Matilda herself undergoes a significant transformation. Matilda, as depicted in Dahl's novel, is primarily defined by her intellect and moral clarity; she is a prodigy whose rationality sets her apart. The musical film, however, presents her as both introspective and emotionally expressive. Alisha Weir's portrayal captures the duality of vulnerability and determination, bridging the gap between literary idealism and human realism. Her solos, especially "Naughty" and "Quiet," give voice to the internal conflicts that Dahl's narration only describes. In this way, the adaptation uses the musical form to translate thought into song, emotion into action, embodying Hutcheon's concept of

adaptation as “repetition without replication.” By foregrounding Matilda’s inner struggles and emotional resilience, the film reframes her rebellion not simply as intellectual defiance but as a deeply human act of self-expression. This shift underscores the adaptation’s commitment to inclusivity and emotional authenticity, positioning Matilda as a figure whose strength lies as much in her vulnerability as in her brilliance, and affirming the relevance of her story for contemporary audiences. Miss Trunchbull, played by Emma Thompson, embodies the film’s transformative approach to character development. While Dahl’s depiction borders on caricature, the film’s performance infuses the character with theatrical grandeur and dark humour. Thompson’s Trunchbull is grotesque yet magnetic, commanding the screen through physicality and voice. Her exaggerated movements and booming songs, such as “The Smell of Rebellion,” transform villainy into spectacle, exposing the absurdity of authoritarian power. This adaptation thus critiques the very systems it caricatures, aligning with Stam’s view that adaptation often operates as both homage and parody. Miss Honey’s characterization also benefits from this reimagining. In the novel, she is a figure of quiet goodness, almost passive in her moral virtue. In the film, however, she gains emotional complexity and narrative agency. Lashana Lynch’s portrayal highlights Miss Honey’s resilience, positioning her not merely as Matilda’s protector but as a survivor of systemic oppression. Her song “My House” becomes a powerful articulation of hope and self-worth, transforming her from a secondary moral guide into a co-protagonist in Matilda’s journey toward freedom. The expanded characterization underscores the adaptation’s commitment to emotional authenticity and inclusivity, reflecting contemporary values of representation and empowerment.

IV. Medium, Performance, and Musical Expression

Adaptation across media inevitably involves a change in sensory grammar. As Hutcheon observes, each medium possesses its own “modes of engagement,” shaping how audiences experience narrative and emotion. The transition from novel to musical film entails a fundamental shift from verbal narration to multimodal storytelling. In the book, readers construct meaning through imagination and language; in the movie, meaning emerges from the synthesis of sound, image, and movement. This shift enables the creation of a participatory emotional experience that transcends the boundaries of textual interpretation. The 2022 film exemplifies this through its meticulous choreography and cinematography. Numbers such as “When I Grow Up” and “Revolting Children” employ spatial dynamics to visualize liberation. The children’s synchronized movements against the oppressive architecture of

Crunchem Hall transform physical space into a metaphor for resistance. Cinematic techniques such as close-ups, slow motion, and aerial shots further enhance the immersive quality of these sequences, inviting the viewer into the rhythm of revolt. This use of filmic language corresponds to Hutcheon's assertion that adaptation involves "transcoding," a translation of meaning from one semiotic system to another. The film's use of music as narrative discourse also illustrates the adaptive potential of the musical genre. Songs function not merely as embellishments but as narrative devices that express psychological states and advance the plot. Tim Minchin's lyrics fuse humour with moral critique, preserving Dahl's satirical tone while expanding its emotional reach. The interplay of music and narrative embodies Stam's idea of intertextual layering, where each artistic mode contributes to a polyphonic dialogue of meaning. The choreography of rebellion thus becomes both literal and symbolic, merging physical expression with ideological commentary. The adaptation also benefits from the performative immediacy of musical theatre while exploiting the technological affordances of cinema. The camera's mobility allows for intimacy and spectacle in equal measure, shifting seamlessly from close emotional moments to grand ensemble scenes. This hybridity of theatricality and cinematic realism generates what Hutcheon describes as "aesthetic pleasure through recognition and novelty." (Hutcheon 4) The audience recognizes the familiar story yet experiences it through a renewed sensory vocabulary. The musical film thereby demonstrates how medium specificity can invigorate narrative tradition, allowing old stories to resonate with new vitality.

V. Intertextuality and Cultural Dialogism

Adaptations do not exist in isolation, but rather within a network of intertextual relationships. Robert Stam's theory of dialogism positions adaptation as a conversation among texts, genres, and audiences. (Stam 64) *Matilda the Musical* (2022) exemplifies this principle through its layered dialogue with the novel, the stage musical, and broader cultural discourses about childhood, authority, and empowerment. Each layer contributes to the film's intertextual richness and cultural relevance. The film explicitly references Dahl's narrative style through its tone of dark whimsy and moral clarity. However, it also interacts with the visual and musical traditions of British theatre, particularly the Royal Shakespeare Company's 2010 stage production. Many of Tim Minchin's songs and Dennis Kelly's dialogues are retained, but their cinematic execution alters their meaning. The editing rhythms, camera angles, and visual motifs of colour and motion infuse theatrical numbers with

cinematic intensity, transforming stage intimacy into visual spectacle. This intertextual transformation exemplifies Hutcheon's notion of adaptation as "a repetition with variation," where the recognition of prior versions heightens appreciation of difference. The film's dialogism extends to its engagement with contemporary social narratives. Its emphasis on inclusivity, diversity, and emotional intelligence reflects cultural shifts in the representation of children and authority. The casting of a diverse ensemble of children and the reimagining of Miss Honey's character signal an awareness of changing social values. This cultural dialogue situates *Matilda* not merely as a nostalgic retelling but as an ongoing conversation about resistance and imagination in modern society.

VI. Reception, Audience, and Contemporary Relevance

The reception of Roald Dahl's *Matilda the Musical* (2022) reveals how adaptation functions as a cultural event. Critics and audiences alike have responded to its blend of theatrical exuberance and emotional depth. Reviews in *The Guardian* and *The New York Times* highlighted the film's ability to balance spectacle with sincerity, praising its choreography, performances, and thematic coherence. This reception highlights Hutcheon's assertion that adaptations gain significance not only from their connection to source texts but also from their capacity to resonate within specific historical contexts. In the context of the 2020s, *Matilda the Musical* speaks powerfully to discourses of empowerment and resistance. The collective revolt of children against Trunchbull's tyranny mirrors contemporary movements that challenge hierarchical structures in education, politics, and culture. The film's emphasis on solidarity and creative agency resonates with younger audiences growing up in a world marked by digital activism and social awareness. This capacity to align a classic narrative with modern values illustrates the enduring relevance of adaptation as a means of cultural renewal. The film's reception also reflects a shift in how audiences engage with adapted works. Viewers familiar with Dahl's novel or the stage musical experience what Hutcheon describes as "adaptation pleasure," derived from recognition and reinterpretation. At the same time, new audiences encounter the story as an original cinematic experience, independent of its literary origins. This dual mode of engagement ensures the story's longevity, allowing *Matilda* to evolve with its audience. *Matilda the Musical* demonstrates that adaptation is a mode of cultural survival. It preserves the essence of Dahl's moral universe while reimagining its form and meaning for a new generation. By integrating the analytical frameworks of Hutcheon and Stam, the adaptation can be understood as both an homage and an

innovation. This text participates in a continuous conversation among literature, performance, and cinema. Its success lies in its capacity to make rebellion joyful, imagination revolutionary, and storytelling endlessly renewable. In doing so, the film shows how adaptations are not static reproductions but evolving cultural artifacts that respond to shifting social values and audience expectations. By transforming familiar narratives into sites of critique and empowerment, *Matilda the Musical* illustrates the enduring relevance of adaptation as a practice that both sustains tradition and redefines it for contemporary contexts.

Conclusion

The adaptation of *Matilda* from Roald Dahl's 1988 novel to Matthew Warchus's 2022 musical film demonstrates how storytelling evolves across different cultural, ideological, and artistic contexts. Although both versions share the same narrative foundation of a gifted child confronting injustice, their expressive forms and emotional tones differ significantly. Dahl's novel relies on wit, satire, and linguistic inventiveness to expose the cruelty of authority and to celebrate the liberating power of intelligence and imagination. The musical film, however, transforms these elements into a dynamic visual and auditory experience where music, choreography, and performance create an atmosphere of collective energy and emotional resonance. Through this shift, rebellion becomes not only a theme within the story but also a creative and communal act performed through art itself. Linda Hutcheon's theory of adaptation provides a valuable framework for understanding this transformation as a process of creative reinterpretation rather than imitation. She defines adaptation as "repetition without replication," emphasizing that every adaptation reimagines its source to engage new audiences and contexts. (Hutcheon 7) In this sense, *Matilda the Musical* does not simply retell Dahl's narrative but rearticulates its meaning for a contemporary world that values inclusivity and collaboration. Through its musical form, the film translates individual defiance into collective empowerment. Songs such as "Revoltin' Children" capture the shift from solitary resistance to unified action, expressing rebellion through rhythm, movement, and emotional release. The adaptation, therefore, preserves the spirit of Dahl's story while reframing its central message within the cultural logic of the twenty-first century.

Robert Stam's notion of intertextual dialogism further deepens this analysis by describing adaptation as a dialogue among texts and cultural moments. The 2022 film interacts not only with Dahl's novel but also with the earlier 1996 film and the stage musical adaptation. Each version reflects the values and artistic priorities of its time,

contributing to a broader conversation about power, education, and creativity. Warchus's film situates *Matilda* within contemporary debates about social cohesion, diversity, and empowerment. By blending humour with emotional sincerity, the adaptation transforms Dahl's satire into a narrative of hope and solidarity that is inclusive of all. This intertextual dialogue enables *Matilda* to remain culturally relevant, continually reshaped by shifting audience expectations and evolving artistic conventions. The adaptation also reveals the expressive power of the musical form as a mode of storytelling. Where Dahl's prose engages the intellect through irony and verbal play, the film appeals to the senses and emotions through performance. The choreography and cinematography visualize imagination as movement and colour, transforming rebellion into an experience that is both felt and understood. This transformation exemplifies Hutcheon's idea that adaptation involves both reinterpretation and re-experience. It invites audiences to inhabit the emotional world of the story through rhythm and collective expression rather than through reading alone. The musical thus becomes a celebration of performance as a means of resistance and renewal.

Despite these transformations, *Matilda the Musical* remains faithful to the ethical and imaginative essence of Dahl's vision. The core belief in the power of intelligence, empathy, and creativity as forces of liberation remains a defining aspect of the narrative. What has evolved is the form through which these ideas are communicated. The musical reinterprets Dahl's individualist notion of heroism in a manner that emphasizes collaboration and shared strength. It suggests that rebellion against injustice is most effective when it becomes a communal act rooted in compassion and unity. In this way, fidelity in adaptation is achieved not through exact replication but through the preservation of moral truth and thematic intent. *Matilda's* journey from page to performance reveals how adaptation revitalizes classic narratives, enabling them to resonate with evolving generations and artistic forms. As the 2022 adaptation unfolds, it not only preserves the moral core of Dahl's story but also reconfigures its themes of empowerment and rebellion to reflect today's social dynamics. In a world where children face a myriad of challenges, Warchus's interpretation encourages a collective sense of agency, illustrating how the power of imagination can unite individuals against oppressive structures. Furthermore, the vibrant musical numbers transform the narrative into an anthem of hope and resilience, inviting audiences to participate in *Matilda's* defiance. This renewed cultural

resonance highlights the significance of storytelling as a means of both reflecting and shaping societal values. As we continue to engage with and reinterpret such narratives, we affirm that literature and its adaptations are not merely artifacts of their time, but living texts that evolve alongside us, fostering a spirit of critical thought and collective empowerment in the face of authority. Thus, *Matilda* stands as a testament to the enduring power of stories to inspire, challenge, and unite, reminding us that through creativity and imagination, we too can defy the odds.

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