



Bakalářská práce

Cultural impact and children's fantasy: Ethnicity and special effects as a factor of popularity

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Cultural impact and children's fantasy: Ethnicity and special effects as a factor of popularity

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Zásady pro vypracování:

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá tématem dětské fantasy. Konkrétně se zaměří, jakým způsobem se pracuje s tematikou rasové odlišnosti a se speciálními efekty v adaptacích konkrétních filmů. Práce je rozdělena na dvě části. Teoretická část bude pojednávat o dětském fantasy žánru, zejména o důvodech, proč byl v posledních desetiletích přijat za mainstreamový. Dále bude pojednávat o teorii filmové adaptace, etniku a speciálních efektech.

V praktické části budou ilustrovány změny, vývoj v rámci žánru a praktický dopad prostřednictvím srovnávání filmových adaptací románu od Roalda Dahla Čarodějky (1990,2020). This bachelor thesis deals with the topic of children's fantasy. Specifically, it will focus on how to work with the theme of racial diversity and special effects in adaptations of specific films. The work is divided into two parts. The theoretical part will deal with the children's fantasy genre, mainly the reasons why it was accepted as mainstream in recent decades. It will also discuss the theory of film adaptation, ethnicity, and special effects.

The practical part will illustrate the changes, developments within the genre, and the practical impact through a comparison of film adaptations of the novel by Roald Dahl The Witch (1990,2020).

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Anotace:

Tato Bakalářská práce se zaměřuje na vývoj v žánru dětské fantasy. Její cílem je předvést tyto změny a poskytnout analýzu jejich dopadu na žánr. Zároveň probírá, zda jsou speciální efekty a etnikum důvodem popularity a prosazení se do mainstreamu.

Teoretická část obsahuje přehled vývoje dětské fantazie, konkrétně v kontextu USA a Evropy. Zaměření na dětskou fantazii v mainstreamu (TV, kino). Na následujících stránkách bude diskutovat o vývoji inkluze různých etnických skupin a speciálních efektech ve filmech. To bude podrobně prozkoumáno se zvláštním zaměřením na jejich použití a na to, jak přispívají k popularitě těchto filmů. Budou také diskutovány možné důvody těchto změn spolu s jejich praktickými důsledky pro průmysl. Doufáme, že prostřednictvím této analýzy lze získat hlubší porozumění vyvíjející se povaze dětských filmových adaptací spolu s důvodem, proč se dětská fantazie dostává do mainstreamu.

Praktická část se bude zabývat proměnami etnicity protagonisty a jeho rodiny ve dvou adaptacích Čarodějek od Roalda Dahla. Bude také zahrnovat vývoj ve využití speciálních efektů ve dvou adaptacích. Na závěr praktický dopad v kontextu filmů.

Klíčová slova:

Dětská fantasy, adaptace, mainstream, rozmanitost, speciální efekty, etnikum

Annotation:

This Bachelor thesis focuses on the changes in the genre of Children's fantasy. It aims to showcase these changes and analyse their impact on the genre. Discussing whether the special effects and ethnicity are the reason for the popularity and the push into the mainstream.

The theoretical part includes an overview of the development of children's fantasy, specifically in the context of the USA and Europe. Focusing on Children's fantasy in the mainstream (TV, cinema). In the following pages, the development of inclusion of diverse ethnic groups and special effects in movies will be discussed. This will be explored in detail, with a specific focus on their use and how they contribute to the popularity of these movies. Possible reasons for these changes and their practical implications for the industry will also be discussed. Through this analysis, it is hoped that a deeper understanding of the evolving nature of children's movie adaptations can be gained and the reason for children's fantasy coming into the mainstream.

The practical part will cover the changes in the ethnicity of the protagonist and their family in the two adaptations of *The Witches* by Roald Dahl. It will also include the development in the usage of special effects in the two adaptations. In the end, the practical impact in the context of the movies.

Keywords:

Children's fantasy, adaptation, mainstream, diversity, special effects, ethnicity

Content

1	Introduction.....	9
2	Children’s Fantasy and the Mainstream.....	10
2.1	Children’s Fantasy.....	10
2.1.1	Development in the Genre.....	11
2.2	Adapting Children’s Fantasy.....	14
2.2.1	Representing Diversity.....	16
2.2.2	Special Effects in Adaptations.....	18
2.2.3	Do these aspects impact each other?.....	20
2.3	Children’s fantasy coming into the Mainstream.....	22
2.3.1	Pretend play and special effects.....	23
2.3.2	Ethnicity as a factor of popularity?.....	24
3	A Tale of two adaptations.....	27
3.1	Overview of the Novel.....	27
3.2	The movie adaptations.....	27
3.3	Comparison of the two film versions.....	28
3.3.1	The Display of Ethnicity.....	29
3.3.2	Special Effects in the Two Adaptations.....	35
3.4	Practical Impact.....	43
4	Conclusion.....	45
5	Bibliography.....	46

1 Introduction

In the world of children's fantasy, special effects play a crucial role in bringing magical creatures and enchanting worlds to life. From the golden snitch in Harry Potter to the dragon in The Hobbit, special effects have allowed filmmakers to create captivating visuals that capture the imaginations of young audiences.

However, ethnicity can also influence the popularity of children's fantasies. In recent years, there has been a growing demand for greater representation and diversity in children's media, and this includes the inclusion of characters from a variety of ethnic backgrounds. This has led some filmmakers to cast actors from diverse backgrounds or create characters that reflect various cultural identities. Combining special effects and diverse representation can create a powerful variety that can appeal to a wide range of children and help foster a more inclusive and accepting society.

This thesis focuses on these two factors. Regarding ethnicity, there is a focus on the POC community, especially African Americans. First, it briefly shows the changes in the Children's fantasy genre from its beginning to contemporary. Then focuses on the adaptation aspect of children's fantasy, which needed to happen to become more popular. It also discusses whether these two factors impact each other when making movies.

In addition, it also discusses if these two factors are the reason for children's fantasy becoming more mainstream in recent years. This thesis does not try to reduce the pending underrepresentation of African Americans in popular media. It also tries to highlight the positivity of the inclusion of more diverse characters and stories.

The practical part applies the finding from the theoretical part. However, it mainly focuses on showing the changes in the two adaptations. Moreover, in the end, it discusses whether the later adaptation had a practical impact on the genre. Again, it shows the overall impact of the diverse stories being made in contemporary.

2 Children's Fantasy and the Mainstream

Fantasy is described as every literary genre representing the slight opposite of our world. It is a broad spectrum that involves many subcategories. A specific idea, image, or theme does not clearly connect these types. However, they can be similar and alike (Angelskår 2005).

Before the 1960's fantasy and the success of works such as J.R.R. Tolkien's *Hobbit*, or C.S. Lewis *Narnia*, the genre was narrower than it is nowadays. After the success of the previously mentioned works, the genre started to divide into subgenres. There are mainly two distinguished types of fantasy:

- *High/epic fantasy* like J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* (1954). Set in a magical environment with rules, physical laws, magical creatures, and others.
- *Low fantasy*, on the other hand, is set in the real world with an unexpected magical element that shocks the character, such as in *American Gods* by Neil Gaiman (2001).

From these, other subgenres are distinguished, such as horror, legends, adult fantasy, and, most importantly, children's fantasy (James and Mendlesohn 2014, 50–51).

2.1 Children's Fantasy

The term *Juvenile fantasy* or *Children's fantasy* emerged in the second half of the 20th century. It is defined as literature written for a younger audience, deals with themes children can comprehend, and involves a young character. Although written for children, it is also suited for adults and can influence children into adulthood. Its fantastical and imaginative elements define the genre, with mythical creatures, enchanted lands, and magical powers taking centre stage. It also must be acknowledged that children's fantasy is a subgenre belonging to the umbrella term children's literature. Other subgenres include picture books, traditional literature, poetry, and non-fiction (Treglown 1995, 322).

This genre often explores themes of good versus evil, the power of imagination, and the importance of friendship and teamwork. It can also allow children to explore and understand complex emotions and experiences, such as loss, grief, and growing up. (James and Mendlesohn 2014, 50–51). The genre (as any other) has gone through a development. This showcases the trends used in the written works and adapted works at later dates.

2.1.1 Development in the Genre

Until the period of Enlightenment (from the late 17th century to the ending of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815), no works were written specifically for children. There were so-called folk tales or fairy tales; however, their primary purpose was to educate, warn or entertain adults. The reason for the non-inclusion of children in literature was that childhood, in the Middle Ages, was perceived as an unimportant period in a person's life. Thus, there was no need for a specific literary genre aimed at children. Later Romanticism incorporated folklore and a child protagonist, innocent and untouched by society. (Šmelová 2004, 13–14).

The first internationally acknowledged fantasy explicitly written for children is *The Nutcracker and the Mouse King* (1816) by German author E.T.A. Hoffman (James and Mendlesohn 2014, 50–51).

Then from the end of the 19th century, the genre started to change, with Edith Nesbit (1858-1924) being one of the first to include modern themes. In her works, Nesbit incorporates clever princesses and dumb princes, modern appliances in a magical world, dragons being easily tamed, and more. An example is the book *The Last of the Dragons* (1899), where the prince comes to a battle in a motor car, and even the dragon transforms into an aeroplane (Nikolajeva 1987, 31-44).

Later authors like George Macdonald (*At the Back of the North Wind*) and J.M. Barrie (*Peter Pan*) also subdue more of the "traditional" fairy tales. In *Peter Pan* (1911) the play is

written for children, but the humour centres more on an adult's mockery of children's misunderstanding (Levy and Mendlesohn 2016, 38–41).

Other works dealt with the theme of anthropomorphic animals, such as the prose of Kenneth Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows* (1908) and A.A. Milne *Winnie-the-Pooh* (1926). Later one of the most prominent children's literature authors started to write and publish his work. Dr Seuss's debut novel was *Think That I Saw It on Mulberry Street* (1937). The same year J.R.R. Tolkien published *The Hobbit*, which started a series of books dealing with Middle Earth and its occupants (Rivera 2018).

In the 1950s, television became a popular form of entertainment. Children's television programs became an essential part of the programming landscape, offering a variety of shows that entertained and educated young viewers—in some cases, even combining the elements of fantasy and educational themes.

These programs include "*Howdy Doody*" (1947 till 1960). Other popular children's programs of the 1950s included "*The Mickey Mouse Club*," which premiered in 1955 and featured a cast of young performers known as Mouseketeers. Overall, the children's television programs of the 1950s provided young viewers with a wide range of entertainment and educational options. These programs helped shape the era's cultural landscape and set the stage for the many children's programs that would follow in the decades to come (Barnouw 1990, 100–115).

In British children's fantasy of the 1960s, the preferred setting of the book was in real life, such as the suburbs, inner cities, or rural areas. The protagonist would often be a white child from a middle-class family, typically on holidays in the place of the book or a newcomer to the area. Some of the works from this time were by Roald Dahl. These are *BFG* (1982), *Matilda* (1988), *Fantastic Mr. Fox* (1970), and *The Witches* (1983). Dahl's prose is usually not clearly defined by genre, and he uses many different elements of fantasy, genre

structure, and themes in his work. He was inspired by Scandinavian mythology (which he got from his Norwegian background), horror, fairy tales, and others. His works are also considered under the umbrella term Children's fantasy literature (Treglown 1995, 322).

Generally, Children's fantasy was more conservative in the past, not involving the child in complex problems like ecological disasters, political problems, gender or race identities, and others. This has immensely changed in the last few decades. (James and Mendlesohn 2014).

In the 1990s, a new trend emerged: adapting children's fantasy through mainstream media. With the movie adaptation of some of the children's literature. Such as *Stuart Little* (1999), *The Little Princess* (1995), *The Witches* (1990), and more. The success of adaptations like "*The Chronicles of Narnia*" and "*Harry Potter*" prompted studios to invest in other beloved children's books for the big and small screens. One of the most successful and enduring adaptations of the 1990s was the film version of Roald Dahl's "*Matilda*."

Some previously evil entities, such as witches or vampires, are now regarded as the main protagonists, such as *Harry Potter*, *Kiki's Delivery Service* (1989), and others. Alternatively, they are the supporting character who, instead of causing the child's demise, is there to help and guide them on their journey, such as in the movie *Halloweentown* (1998) (Guetebier 2022).

The trend of novel adaptations would continue into the 2000s and beyond, with franchises like *Nanny McPhee*, *Paddington*, and Disney adaptations of classic fairy tales (or being inspired by some) such as *Tangled*, *Frozen*, *Mulan* and more demonstrating the continued popularity of children's fantasy adaptations (Hatchett 2020).

2.2 Adapting Children's Fantasy

For Children's fantasy to develop further, there needed to be a shift in the medium in which how the juvenile audience consumes the formerly written work. This shift began with the film adaptation of Children's fantasy into movies and would, in the future, help the works become increasingly popular. However, what is an adaptation, and what aspects help the mainstemification of Children's fantasy?

Adaptation is a repetition, but it is a repetition without replication, meaning it can manifest in many different possibilities. To adapt means to alter, adjust, or make suitable, for example, in the contemporary context of our world ("Definition of ADAPT" n.d.). Adaptation in a media context is a shift of the media mentioned above- meaning poem into a novel, novel into a comics, novel into a movie, and many more varieties (Hutcheon 2006, 5–6).

The adaptation of the novel is mainly shown in cinemas or on television. In this case, we discuss the term film adaptation. Stated simply transfers a novel, poem, and others into a film. The film tells the same story from a different point of view. It could be creating a different setting, character variety, or trying to recreate the novel entirely. Although there always will be a variation due to the subjective point of view (Hutcheon 2012, 8).

Many children's fantasy novels, comics, and more have been adapted into films, tv shows, shorts, and more. This process presents unique challenges and opportunities. What new can the adaptation bring? Is it going to be likeable? Is it going to have an impact on the audience? Some of these are often included when the filmmakers are working on the adaptation. In addition, they also use some fundamental concepts, which are used when adapting works. An example of such are fidelity and the idea of adaptation as a translation.

The term fidelity refers to how much the adaptation remains true to the original work (novel, poem). This factor even determines whether the adaptation is successful or remembered enough to be successful in later years. Deviation from the original story can be

met with disappointment, criticism, or in better cases, praise. This is mainly when some previously sexist, racist, or homophobic concepts are erased in the adaptation (Harold 2018).

The idea of adaptation as a translation means it is taken as a literary element of a story and translated into either auditory or visual. In addition, these can even be an adaptation of movies (remakes), which with modern technologies, give more depth to the new film. These are used in fantasy, where many elements such as magic, fantastical creatures, and more are more suitable to be adapted into a movie (Perdikaki 2018).

These elements are considered when remaking an older movies. Translating it into a fresh new film, changing concepts, like ethnicity, gender shifting of the protagonist, change in tone and pace, or using innovative special effects to enhance the viewer's experience (Hutcheon 2012, 11-12).

An example is the movie *Little Mermaid* (1989), adapted from the novel of the same name by Hans Christian Andersen. In this adaptation, instead of the movie being dark and horror-like, when Ariel is forced to kill the prince to save her life. She instead gets a happy ending and defeats Ursula, the evil sorceress. In many movie adaptations, Walt Disney Studios made these changes to draw juvenile viewers. Alternatively, in the 2023 remake, Ariel and Eric's mother, both being a person of colour, and other changes (Musker and Clements 1989) (The Little Mermaid 1989,2023).

As mentioned, diversity is often used to have a fresh look or theme in the movie adaptation. These are mainly done by further including diverse characters in the movie or special effects added to the movie. These two aspects also impact each other.

2.2.1 Representing Diversity

Representing diversity in adaptations of children's fantasy is essential when adapting such works, as these can significantly impact young viewers' attitudes and beliefs. Including diverse characters and storylines in adaptations can promote acceptance and understanding of different cultures and lifestyles.

Children's fantasy should be inclusive and diverse to represent different ethnicities, abilities, genders cultures. This can help children see themselves and their experiences represented in the stories they read or watch. It also plays a significant role in the growth and development of children (Braga, 2022). Doctor Onnie Rogers, co-author of *The Inclusion Imperative: Why Media Representation Matters for Kids*, states:

While exposure to negative media depictions of their own ethnic-racial groups can undermine children's sense of self, high-quality children's media can promote positive ethnic-racial attitudes and interactions. For example, among Black elementary school girls, exposure to liked Black TV characters is associated with more positive feelings about their own status, appearance, and happiness. And studies going back decades have shown that programs like Sesame Street and Mister Rogers' Neighborhood can have positive effects on children's feelings about their own ethnic-racial group and on interracial relationships (Rogers 2021).

Thus, one of the main reasons for including diverse characters should be their impact on the young audience. In movie adaptations, representation can be done with the shift in the characters' ethnicity. In the context of this thesis, the term used is ethnicity or ethnic background instead of race. This is done since ethnicity is concerned with one's cultural identity (or background) and the expression of it. These are to be discussed in the practical part of the thesis. ("The Difference between 'Race' and 'Ethnicity'").

The importance of this term in the context of adaptation is to distinguish when in adaptation occurs transcultural adaptation, which means the shift from one culture to another. Hutcheon states that *adaptation from one culture to another is nothing new*, as the example shows that the Romans adapted Greek theatre (which was also adapted to many other cultures). Alternatively, in more extreme cases, the stealing of cultural heritage occurred. (Europeans from natives in America or Africa). These cultural shifts occur more often with time, although not always the adapter considers the cultural changes that occur. These movies often present these cultures' stereotypes (Hutcheon 2012, 145-146).

For Hollywood, transculturation means usually Americanizing a work that includes American actors and is mainly made in America. These are movies such as Lion King, an adaptation of Shakespeare's Hamlet, including African culture. Alternatively, this is done more in the horror movie genre, with main movies from Asia (general term) remade for the American audience. Quite a few times have been done in the horror genre, movies such as Japanese Ring (リング, Ringu) made in 1998, coincidentally adapted from a novel by Koji Suzuki (1991), and the American movie Ring from 2002.

In many cases, unfortunately, this means the whitewashing of movies. For example, in the movie adaptation of Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time, producers cast Jake Gyllenhaal, a white American actor, into the role of a Persian prince, effectively whitewashing a role that would be more suitable for a performer of Iranian descent—in the end, prompting a critical response from the audience (Sharf 2019).

Or in the movie Pan (2015), Rooney Mara, an American actress without Native American ancestry, was cast as Tiger Lily. Peter Pan's author describes this character as a Native princess, is described with feathers in her hair and a native clothing style. This move by director Joe Wright is being criticised. Even the actress herself regrets her casting (Klassen 2015).

Opposite to this is a newer trend, which some conservatives are calling "blackwashing" ("Urban Dictionary: Blackwashing" n.d.), or in some cases, race-swapping," the change of a white character into a different race (in the context of America). Usually, the white character is Black, Asian, or Native American. Some of these include (comic book adaptations) Aquaman in DCEU, who in the comic is white, is instead in the movies played by Polynesian actor Jason Momoa, which in the context of the original comics suits the character more.

Another famous comic book publisher, Marvel (MCU), characters such as Nick Fury, white in comic books, is played by Samuel L. Jackson, an African American actor in the MCU. Another more recent character is Baron Mordo (Dr Strange), played by Chiwetel Ejiofor, a British actor of Nigerian descent, in comic books again white villain. In these instances, there was hardly a need for change in the character's cultural background (Prasad Panda 2021).

In the context of the adaptation of children's fantasy into movies, a crucial factor impacts the children into adulthood: representation of their race/cultural background/ethnicity. These changes in adaptation are due to the changing political spectrum and can affect the popularity of children's fantasy and show how diverse characters can be shown on the screen.

2.2.2 Special Effects in Adaptations

Movies and other visual media are mainly to amaze and entertain. With the evolution of cinema, the terminology has evolved from what first were moving pictures and drawings to Special Effects and Visual Effects, which are increasingly used in contemporary movie making (Rickitt 2007, 9–15).

Special effects in movies are mechanical or artificial visual effects. These heavily contribute to the entertainment and the visual experience of the audience. To keep the audience entertained, filmmakers have to develop special effects further or know how and

when to use certain types of special effects. Special effects can include action, character design, the creation of new worlds and spaces, and many other aspects of the movie.

Special Effects, or SFX shortened, are illusions or visual tricks used in film, television, and theatre. These can vary from fake snow, prosthetic make-up, and unique creatures to buildings and sets. For example, most wounds and blood are made from prosthetics, zombie makeup, vampire fangs, and other special effects. The most common types of special effects are:

- CGI (Computer-generated imagery), a technique that delivers computer-generated images, commonly includes three-dimensional computer graphics.
- Stop-Motion Animation refers to objects that are moving. Filmmakers commonly use Clay, puppets, plasticine figures, or paper.
- Green Screen is a chroma-key composition visual effect where images, video, or video layers are projected into a background while the other objects are in front of the screen.
- Live special effects or practical effects. These could be make-up, pyrotechnics, prosthetics, weather, et (Knee 2022)

SFX is added during the movie's production. On the other hand, VFX (visual effects) is a creation made by a computer. These add effects to existing footage, combining computer-generated effects and real movie situations. These can add slow-motion bullets to movies like Matrix, flying dragons in Game of Thrones, Eragon, Hobbit, and others (Klush 2022).

All of these techniques have developed over time. In addition, this development and changes further help children's fantasy to come into the mainstream. Children are more likely to enjoy the media if it is to their liking. These media are either a representation of themselves or are used for entertainment. Ultimately, however, the child can see these changes thanks to the other developing mass media.

In children's fantasy adaptations, special effects are an excellent technique for showing variety. These can be utilised to create characters with distinct physical characteristics or talents, which can aid in deconstructing stereotypes and promoting understanding and acceptance of people with diverse abilities.

2.2.3 Do these aspects impact each other?

In movies, SFX enhances, changes, or creates new characters, buildings, landscapes, and more. In the context of ethnicity, special effects (especially makeup) were used in the past (circa the 1950s) in a racist way when making characters. In movies such as *Check and Double-check*, and children's cartoons such as *Mickey's Mellerdrammer*, special effects were used to create a black face, to create a caricature of a black person. Alternatively, they were used to exaggerate facial features or accents harmfully.

In addition, black characters appeared primarily in films set in the antebellum South as a native of Africa or permanent members of the American service class economy (i.e., maids, chauffeurs, train porters, chefs, or butlers). As a result, black representation ground to an aesthetic standstill. In a sense, there was no need to use special effects positively to highlight their features, culture, and others (Nama 2009).

The process of inclusion of diverse characters is a long one. However, nowadays, these are used mainly positively, enhancing and creating diverse backgrounds. SFX can be used to create fantastical creatures, characters, or environments that may not exist in the real world. When creating these elements, it is essential to consider the diversity of the audience and ensure that representation is thoughtful and respectful. For example, suppose a film includes a fantastical race of creatures. In that case, it is essential to consider whether their design perpetuates harmful stereotypes or if it includes elements that represent diverse cultures and experiences. By doing so, the movie can showcase the richness and diversity of

different cultures and provide representation for people who may not often see themselves reflected in mainstream media.

Characters with diverse physical looks, such as skin tones, facial features, or body kinds, can also be created using special effects. Furthermore, special effects can create fantastical worlds and monsters from other cultures and mythology. A story could include images and inspiration from Native American mythology, in movies and tv shows such as *Trickster* (2020) or Asian folklore, in *I am Nezha* (2016), in *Empress Chung* (2005), and more.

Alternatively, African folklore, like in the movies *Black Panther* (2018) and *Wakanda Forever* (2022), where the filmmakers were inspired by various African mythology and cultures such as the Ancestral Plane, inspired by the African belief system where life does not end with death, but continues (Ekore and Lanre-Abass 2016). Alternatively, in a tv show such as *American Gods* (2017-2021), the gods such as Anansi, Bastet, Anubis, and others were created in postproduction (Shapiro 2017).

Or, in the context of white ethnic characters such as Scandinavians, special effects are used to create mythological or cultural backgrounds, such as in movies like *Thor* (2011), *The Northman* (2022) or Tv shows *Ragnarök* (2022-) and *Vikings* (2013-2020) (“The Movie Database” 2013).

SFX can also impact how skin tones are represented in movies. The technique, called colour grading, is a post-production process. This can change the colour and tone of a character, which can perpetuate negative stereotypes. Alternatively, this can adjust the skin tone in the movie to correctly represent the character (Griggs 2020).

These movies, tv shows, games, and others can help children to experience other cultural traditions and build cross-cultural understanding. With the further inclusion of different cultural backgrounds and identities, children's fantasy is becoming more popular than ever, further helping them become mainstream and influencing the filmmaking industry.

2.3 Children's fantasy coming into the Mainstream.

Mainstream media is a means of communication that reaches many people, such as radio, television, news, video games, and others—these devices and means of entertainment influence viewers to consume tv shows and films more than ever. Thus, helping new film genres to gain consumers and, in the end, affecting them in their everyday lives (Peter Hodgson Collin 1989).

Since the early 20th century, machines have developed, enabling consumers to use these technologies. One of the first was radio, which as a mass media, was at its height in the 1920s and 1930s. After the second world war, television began to take over as the leading medium for consumers. This further developed with the invention of the world wide web, which enabled users to be more connected, informed, and entertained via videos, online streaming, and social media (Jens-Uwe Wunderlich and Meera Warriar 2010, 207).

The popularisation of Children's fantasy is attributed to J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series, published between 1997 and 2007. Each volume generates more excitement, interest in the genre, significant promotional activity, and sales. Although, it is easy to say that J.K. Rowling is the only contributor to the genre coming into the mainstream. With her many recent controversies, the author is not regarded as a good role model for young readers (Maybin and Watson 2009, 183).

Other more appropriate works which show a significant interest the consumers, for example, *Stuart Little* (1999), adapted from the novel of the same name, generated \$298,815,224 at the Worldwide box office, with a production budget of \$105,000,000

(worldwide box office is 2.8 times production budget) ("Stuart Little (1999) - Financial Information" n.d.). Or the beforementioned adaptation of the novel *Matilda* (Hatchett 2020).

This surge in the popularity of children's fantasy is also partially due to the rise of the "geek culture" phenomenon and the increasing mainstream acceptance of formerly niche interests such as video games, comic books, and fantasy literature. The most visible way that geek culture has become ingrained in popular culture. Comics companies such as Marvel, DC, and Charlton Comics have produced comic books since the 1940s (Szczerba 2022).

However, not only comic books or novels contribute to the recent popularity. Adaptations of books, comics, and others are the ones that push more content to juvenile consumers. Among the first adapted children's fantasy books are *Willy Wonka & the Chocolate Factory* (1971), *The Witches* (1990), *A Little Princess* (1995), *Matilda* (1996), *Stuart Little* (1999), and among the most profitable, the *Harry Potter* series (2001-2011) (Canfield 2022).

Other popular children's fantasy books adapted into movies or TV shows in the 2010s include *Percy Jackson*, *A Series of Unfortunate Events*, *The Hunger Games*, *The Chronicles of Narnia*, *His Dark Materials*, and more (Calvert 2008).

The rising popularity of the genre is also contributed to the fact that there is a call for more inclusive books, movies, and other media. This also ties in with the usage of special effects in the recent adaptation that make these movies enjoyable, including more fantastical effects. Children enjoy the movies because they cater to their imagination and allow them to be inspired by the new, more inclusive characters.

2.3.1 Pretend play and special effects.

Pretend play, also known as imaginative play or make-believe, is a form of play where children create imaginary scenarios and act out various roles and situations. This can involve

using props, costumes, and other materials to enhance the play experience. Pretend play can help children develop creativity, problem-solving, and social skills.

However, how does it relate to the further mainstreamification of the genre? In pretend play, children express their internal thoughts, hopes, creativity, and more. These skills combine a child's experience, which contemporary children get from tv, mobile phones, computers, and others. Tv is still being favoured among children (Khaleghipour 2020).

So, for a child to be entertained, in this case, filmmakers have to use visual and auditory special effects, animation, and others. In this case, these subjects see that the child favours the fantasy, prompting them to make more of these movies, tv shows, and others. Taggart (2019) writes that 70 % of children's shows are animated or a combination of live and animated features (7,8 %). The rest is live-action. Fantastical events in these, being done by special effects, are included in 65 % of researched shows (88 in total).

This means that the predominance of shows is done with special effects or animation in mind. In the end, shows that in the mainstream, there is the majority of these shows, and the inclusion of special effects pushes them further into the mainstream. However, can the same be said for including diverse characters in movies, novels, tv shows, and others? Or is there still a gap between including ethnic characters, specifically people of colour?

2.3.2 Ethnicity as a factor of popularity?

Over the past decade, there has been a conversation in academia about the racial and ethnic achievement gaps in literacy and television. Although there may seem to be a considerable increase in the inclusion of diverse characters, social movements, and others, the opposite is true (Thomas 2016).

Whilst in the late 1980s, 78,1 % of characters in primetime television were white; the rest comprised black (21,6 %), Latino (0%), or Native American characters (0%). Data then indicate a steady decrease in the portrayal of ethnic minorities. In the 1990s showing, the

decrease in the portrayal of Black characters to 16,8 %; in 2000, 's 12,2%, and 2010, the number dropped to 9,9 %. The other minority communities, not even being in less than 5%, and even Native Americans are almost absent (Tukachinsky, Mastro, and Yarchi 2015).

Meanwhile, in children's literature, this trend is quite similar. In 2008, diverse books comprised 13 % of children's literature in the USA. In 2013 there was a significant drop to 7%. However, since 2015's there has been a slight push for more diversity. This number is steadily rising, showing that in 2016 21% of all children's books consisted of diverse characters (Short 2018).

Recent studies show that on-screen talent in movies played by POC (either a lead or supporting cast) consists of around 15% of the movies being made. In 2019 around 14% of leads in tv shows were leady by a Black character. This showcases that even though there seems to be more representation in the mainstream, the numbers show a different reality (Dunn et al., 2021).

The continued lack of diversity is a devastating trend, as young readers and movie viewers rarely see and identify themselves in books and movies. These children, who are underrepresented, may take on a deficit societal notion of their culture or even see cultural literacy as irrelevant to their lives (Short 2018).

Luckily, there is still hope for a change. Some of the more famous works in children's fantasy are made, produced, and started by POC. In the case of movies being *Home* (2015), *A Wrinkle in Time* (2018), *Moana* (2016), *Encanto* (2021) and more, the film industry is on the right track. Production companies such as Shondaland, Tyler Perry Studios or Oprah' Harpo Production aim to create movies that include these diverse characters (Jones 2021).

In addition, since the 2010s, the rise of new independently owned animation studios began. These studios, in many instances, create new stories for children, including the still underrepresented minorities. Some of these studios even go on to win awards for their stories.

One of these is *Hair Love*, created by Matthew Cherry Studio. The short film about African American father struggling to do his daughter's hair even won an Oscar at the 2020 Academy Awards (Laporte 2020).

As for the representation in the literary sphere, some of these are *Aru Shah and the End of Time* by Roshani Chokshi (2018), *The Jumbies* by Tracey Baptiste (2015), or an ongoing *Mia Mayhem* series by Kara West (Dumas 2023).

In the context of children's fantasy, it is essential to have a representation of ethnicities (mainly people of colour). Studies show that nowadays, parents want their children to be exposed to new cultures, religions, and lifestyles. In mainstream media, the problem also lies in people of colour's mischaracterisation. Specifically, Black characters in shows consumed by children between the ages of 2-13 are more likely to be sexualised in the cases of female characters and males being depicted as violent (Media 2021).

Therefore, besides creating ethnic characters, filmmakers must create movies with positive representation. This includes hiring diverse actors and crew members, consulting with experts from different communities, and avoiding harmful stereotypes or caricatures. Positive representation can also help to foster a sense of belonging and self-worth in children from underrepresented communities who may not see themselves represented in mainstream media. By including diverse characters in children's fantasy movies, filmmakers can help to promote empathy, understanding, and acceptance of unfamiliar cultures and identities. Luckily many adaptations have a diverse cast in mind when creating new films, tv shows and more.

3 A Tale of two adaptations

This part of the thesis will discuss the changes and developments within the movie adaptation genre, especially in the context of ethnicity and special effects. This will be illustrated in the two-film adaptation of the novel *The Witches* by Roald Dahl.

3.1 Overview of the Novel

Both movies are based on the children's novel *The Witches* (1983). The narrator introduces the story, a little boy (nameless in the novel). The witches are creatures who hate children and want to end them. He warns the readers of the danger and that they are hard to spot. Then gives helpful tips on how to recognise the deadly witches.

The boy lives with his grandmom after his parents were killed in a car crash. When they learn that Grandma is sick and he encounters a dangerous witch, they go on a vacation to England. Accidentally in the hotel, he comes across an annual meeting of witches with their leader, The Grand High Witch. He overhears the witches discussing their plans to turn children in England into mice. He even sees one boy being turned into one (Bruno). The narrator then suffers the same fate.

The mice narrator then goes to his grandma, and they devise a revenge plan on the witches by stealing their mice-making formula and putting it into the witches' soup. Eventually, the witches are all turned into mice and are disposed of by the staff. After the events in the hotel, they go home, with the narrator stuck as a mouse. Together with his grandma, they decide to eliminate all the witches (Roald Dahl and Blake 2019).

3.2 The movie adaptations

The 1990 film adaptation of "The Witches" was directed by Nicolas Roeg and starred Anjelica Huston as the Grand High Witch. The film followed the novel's plot quite closely, with changes made to the ending. The special makeup effects were done by Christine

Beveridge and Stephen Norrington (makeup of the Grand High Witch). The remarkable puppeteering work was done by Sue Dacre, David Greenaway, Brian Henson, Robert Tygner, Steve Whitmire (Luke's mouse form), Anthony Asbury, and Don Austen (Bruno's mouse form). The special prosthetics makeup was done by Nigel Booth and Lindsay MacGowan ("The Witches (1990) - IMDb" n.d.).

The 2020 film adaptation of "*The Witches*" was directed by Robert Zemeckis and starred Anne Hathaway as the Grand High Witch. The changes in the adaptation are more significant, even changing the plot and setting. The movie's special effects were done with VFX/VFX animations. The Method studios and NVIZ were the animators who brought the witches' faces to life and the mice. Method's talented FX Animation teams were led by VFX supervisors Sean Konrad and Christian Emond (Failes 2021).

3.3 Comparison of the two film versions

Both movies follow the trend of the mainstream media in their contemporary time. The main one shown is the change of tone, with the 1990 adaptation of *The Witches* being more dark and scary. The story's focus is also more on the Witches and, in the end, the redemption of one. The boy also reacts more calmly to the witches' story, indicating he might have heard it from his grandmother before. The point of view is also first from the grandmother, then shifts to the boy, showing his horrifying experience with the witches. This trend of scary children's movies was quite popular in the 1990s, with more grainy textures on the screen, making them even scarier.

(Film grain used to be a natural part of filmmaking. That textured, "noisy" look of old movies was a side effect of shooting and recording onto celluloid film. It was a natural part of the process, so it became something viewers automatically associated with watching a movie) (Gula 2020).

The reason for this might be that at this time, the movies, even if said to be for children, were not written with them really in mind. In a way, the market was still catering to adults. This trend is also present with book series, such as *Goosebumps* (1992-2016), supposedly written for children. However, only a few parents would consider even buying them. Another example is movies such as *A Little Princess* (1990), where the threat of war is presented; not really a topic for children, but still, the movie is one. Alternatively, *Anastasia* (1997) is marketed as a Musical/family movie, but it deals with the horrific event of the Russian Revolution.

Whereas the 2020 adaptation of *The Witches* is more comedic and family-friendly. The movie is more vibrant and clean in texture (shot digitally) and is filled with colourful costumes reflecting 1960s Alabama and the Black community. Even the witches are more clamorous and fashionable. With a better sound, the movie included more songs. The narration is also done by the Hero Boy (voiced as an adult by Chris Rock), making the story more humorous and showing mainly his point of view (except for the stories told by his grandmother). The movie is also more family oriented. He was showing a strict but loving grandmother teaching her grandson about the unknown South, where he moves after the death of his parents. The titular villains are also less scary and more of a caricature of women. For example, when Bruno is turned into a mouse, Anne Hathaway's character makes jokes and even does a magic trick for him.

The industry changed immensely 30 years after the first movie, with new technologies, social shifts, and more. The focus specifically for this thesis is on the changes in ethnicity and special effects. These changes are the most prominent in the movies and even support further changes in the movies. The specific changes are indicated by time stamps, for example:

“From 2:15, it shows....”

3.3.1 The Display of Ethnicity

In the 1990 movie adaptation of *The Witches*, most of the characters were played by white actors. The main protagonist, Luke, a white boy with Norwegian heritage, was played by a white actor named Jasen Fisher. The witches were portrayed as a mix of ages, shapes, and sizes but were all played by white actors (in some cases, male cast members were playing witches).

The movie begins with the introduction of witches by Luke's grandma Helga Eveshim. Helga is formally from Norway, where Luke and his parents are on holiday. The choice for the grandma's ethnic background lies in the ethnicity of Roald Dahl, who was on his father's side from Norway. Her Nordic heritage is mainly present in the opening scene and a few times further into the movie. The movie is much slower than the 2020 version.

In contrast, the 2020 movie adaptation is a "*sociological spin on this kind of which story*," as said by Zemeckis, who changed the set to the Gothic South in the 1960s. The protagonist is only known as Hero Boy, played by Jahzir Bruno, and his grandmother (only known as Grandma) is portrayed as Octavia Spencer. In addition, the majority of the witches in the movie are portrayed as being of colour, with a focus on Black and Asian actresses. The more diverse cast reflects the shift in the entertainment industry towards more inclusivity.

In the 1990 adaptation, the ethnic background of Helga (the actress was from Sweden) can be first seen in the beginning, when she narrates the story of who are witches and how to spot them. From 2:15, it shows Old Bergen Museum, Norway, where the opening scene was shot. This scene lasts till 2.30 when the frame shows the wooden sign FOTOGRAFISK ATELIER.

As for the 2020 version, this adaptation begins with the narration by the Hero Boy. The narrator tells the kids about the witches, who they are, and how dangerous they are, then immediately, we are thrown into the death of his parents and Hero Boy being taken in by his

grandma. The viewer is immediately thrown into Dahl's story world, which is cruel and mystical and a "real world" set by the director Zemeckis and his co-writer Kenya Barris. They combine hearty ethnic backgrounds with some prejudicial and racial subjects by the white characters. This is done not for the sake of overly showing the racism prominent in the 1960s but showing the truth of the time in which the movie is set. This is a post-segregated Southern Alabama, where Black life is still radically unequal to white Southerners.

On the other hand, in the 1990 version, the narration is done first by Helga, then shifts in the middle to Luke's point of view. Coming back to the ethnic background, it is next showcased when Helga and Luke are making candles. Luke mentions that they are on holiday (he lives in America). Since the movie shows wintertime, the national holiday is Thanksgiving 1980s, which took place on the 27. November. Due to this reason, I suggest they prepare for a Christian holiday, celebrated widely in Scandinavia, called St. Lucia's Day, annually celebrated on 13th December. (Candles could also be used as protection against witches). The house in which Helga lives is also decorated with plates that carry Norwegian patterns.



Picture 1: Grandma and Luke in their House. Screenshot from The Witches 1990

Compared to the 1990 version, the newer movie is much richer in showcasing the black heritage of the boy and his grandma. The first immersion of the ethnic background can be seen when the boy moves into his new home.

At 4:00 mins in the movie, the Hero Boy, in a southern accent, calls his grandma Mamma's mamma (grandma from his mothers' side). Furthermore, he often uses black urban slang, a word like Big ol' hug (big hug), spankin', etc.

Next, grandmas background is shown through food, first when she offers the Hero Boy a fried chicken and cornbread. Fried chicken specifically was invented by enslaved Africans, combining Scottish frying techniques and African seasoning techniques. This food is a huge part of Black culture. It provided some means and an independent economy for enslaved Africans (mainly at the time of the Civil War). Also, the chicken was mainly used in African American cuisine because it was the cheapest and easiest to raise. Chicken raising is also shown in the movie when Grandma tells the Hero Boy a story about her friend, who was turned into one. Further showing how much a part of black culture this animal is.

However, in the contemporary context, it needs to be acknowledged that this food can be seen as a racial stereotype. For example, in "honour" of black history month 2022, a Massachusetts school faced backlash from black students when the meal was served in the beginning as a form of a celebration. One of the students pointed out that the school could present more food (Strozewski 2022).

In contrast to this scene, the 1990 version does not showcase the transformation of Helga's friend Erica into a painting (4:00-8:00). But it shows Erica's family background. Her father has a Norwegian accent, where he elongates vowels when telling Erica to buy milk. (Erica go to Larsen's). Erica also uses words like Ja, meaning yes, and Da or Pappa, meaning father. Lastly, the police, looking for Erica, have a car with Bergens Politi and a royal crest of Norway.

Helga's clothing is also shown to have a pattern of Norwegian Lusekofte on her nightgown and indoor clothing in the 18:00 min of the movie. The British doctor also mentions her surname Eveshim. Luke's ethnic identity is not presented majorly in the movie. It also does not play a massive role in the plot. Only at the end is a mention that they want to move to America to hunt all the witches there.

Continuing to the 2020 version, there are more examples of the ethnic background of the characters. The scene at 7:00 min shows music (mostly prayer music, blues) in which grandma tries to connect to her Grandsons and even tries to heal the trauma of his parent's passing.



Picture 2: Grandma and Hero Boy in their House. Screenshot from The Witches 2020

From generation-to-generation music has been utilised by the Black Community as a form of activism, healing, and freedom of expression. From the use of black spirituals to uplift the spirits of enslaved peoples to the arrangement of contemporary hip-hop tracks to call out systemic racism and oppression, throughout generations, music has been used by Black people to reflect their internal and external situations. ("Black History Month – Music as Medicine: Evolution of Music in the Black Community," 2021)

Next, at 19:00 min., the grandmother is shown to be using a voodoo ritual to determine whether her sickness is by nature or was done by a witch. However, the grandmother is also shown to be a Christian, attending church and other related activities. The usage of voodoo magic is again utilised later in the movie when Grandma tries to make anti-poison to cure the three mice.

This could be a subtle hint into the Black religious history in America. Most people were followers of traditional religion common in West Africa, including the use of herbal medicine and charms applied by specialists, who were believed to be able to heal disease, harm an enemy or make someone fall in love. This gave the enslaved people a sense of empowerment and control over their lives. However, the slaveholders wanted them to be Christian, and the interactions between enslaved people and Christian missionaries (and other evangelists) led to Christianity's spread among Black Americans. Thus, a combination of religions arose from the slavery times (Mohamed et al. 2021).

At 22:00 min., Grandma and Hero Boy arrive at the hotel, where they stay for the rest of the movie. The hotel's staff consists majorly of African American employees. The hotel porter is surprised that a black woman with her grandson will stay there. The scene continues with Stanley Tucci as Mr R. J Stringer III, the hotel manager, being prejudiced against the grandmother in the hotel and subtly showing the racist reality of the South.

In contrast to the first movie adaptation, here ethnicity is majorly presented in the movie and even does play a role in the plot. It is a racial allegory. The scene which signifies it most is at 17:00 min., the grandmother says:

"Witches only prey on the poor," warns the voodoo-dabbling grandma, played by Octavia Spencer. "The kids think nobody is gonna make a fuss about if they go missin'." Grandma sadly means the black kids (Zemeckis 2020).

The two movies showcase the evolution of children's fantasy in the sense of development in the representation of ethnicities. Since the 1990s, there has been a slight change in the inclusion of Black, Asian, and Native children in the movie industry. However, as stated in the theoretical part, there is a slight decline in this trend, which has devastating consequences on the child viewer (less inclusion in movies, prejudice from society etc.). These two movies, especially the 2020 version, show that including POC characters can be done positively. There is no need to include and show violence or any other dark themes, especially in children's fantasy movies.

3.3.2 Special Effects in the Two Adaptations

As for the special effects, both of the movies have their way how to showcase the witches, magic, and transformations. In the case of the 1990 movie, the filmmakers were limited to technology, such as prosthetics, real-life puppets, live animals, and simple VFX techniques.

On the other hand, the 2020 version relies on computer technology. Zemeckis's team used a combination of on-set optically based simulcam, LED wall technology, and Unreal Engine to pre-light/block the entire film and collaborate with the production designer on sets from the earliest stages of prep. They were previously used in movies such as *Allied*, *Welcome to Marwen*, and more (Failes 2021). This part will discuss five scenes where the two movies show the most special effects.

The 1990 adaptation mainly includes practical, animatronics, and simple computer effects in a few scenes. The effects are first used at 31:00 min when the transformation of the witches starts. The Grand High Witch's transformation starts with simultaneously taking off her wig and face, showcasing her horrific witch face. The actress had to spend up to 11 hours (6 hours to put it on and 5 to take off) each day of the filming.

The scene starts with Anjelica's orders to remove the other witches' shoes and their wigs and gloves as she does the same. Except she takes off her whole face and reveals her witch face. The Grand High Witch's prosthetics resemble a stereotypical witch face, with a long nose, long chin, and old pink, wrinkled skin on her face, hands, and torso. The prosthetics showcase the ribs and bones. Her makeup (on the prosthetics) consists of blue eyeshadow plastered all over the eyelids and bright red lips. In addition, her fingers are elongated with the help of prosthetics. The effect was done to show the elongation with the help of simple computer effects.



Picture 3: Grand High Witch transformation. Screenshot from The Witches 1990

Other witches also transform, although less horrifying than Anjelica's. They take off their wigs, showcasing their bald heads with scabs and scars from the so-called "witch scratch". And again, long fingers and feet without toes. This horrifying transformation showcases the appeal of this version of the movie. As much as it is horrifying, it is also a whimsical scene with Anjelica's and other witches' hilarious facial expressions and fake teeth.

In contrast, the 2020 adaptation starts using VFX effects quite early. At 13:00, the first special effect can be seen in the snake that emerges from the sleeve of the first Witch, which Hero sees. This scene is reminiscent of the same encounter in the 1990 version; however, they

used a real snake, and the scene was done quite differently. Being done outside, with the Witch luring Luke out of his tree house, instead of surprising him in a shopping aisle (like in the 2020 version). In addition, even before the transformation, the witches have so-called face slits, done by makeup prosthetics (“Anne Hathaway Talks about Getting into Costume for ‘the Witches’” 2020).



Picture 4: Grand High Witch transformation. Screenshot from The Witches 2020

However, the scene where the transformation starts is at the 36:09 mark. Compared to the 1990 version, the witches start to transform here. First, their hands, which are sort of a claw-like (causing controversy for the disability community- and a rightful backlash), these claws were done by taping the middle finger and ring finger with blue tape, then these two were erased in post-production, and the long claws were added.

Then their feet are shown, without toes (again done in post-production), and they take off their wigs. VFX almost entirely did the transformation, except that the bald heads used a bald cap on the actress, and prosthetics did the face slits.

Hathaway's transformation took 5 hours to do. Throughout most of the ballroom scene, the Grand High Witch is floating. This was done with wires. Her stunt double was

often used for these scenes due to Hathaway's pregnancy. The wires were then erased in the post-production (Failes 2021).

Moving further, the next scene with VFX effects starts at 40:20 when Hathaway's character destroys one of her followers with a blue laser beam from her eyes, and the follower is turned into a cloud of dust. Similarly to the 1990 version, the scene starts with the follower asking the annoying question, then at 33:36, using simple computer VFX, when The Grand High Witch destroys the follower with a purple laser beam that turns the Witch into dust. In this scene, a practical smoke effect is also used. This technique is also used with the eyes of the witches, which glow purple when they perform magic or get excited.

In the 1990 version, at 42:00 mins, the next memorable transformation starts when Bruno is turned into a mouse. As the Grand High Witch explains, to get rid of the children, they will put the magic formula 86 potion into candy bars, and the children will turn into mice. She adds that one bottle of the formula has 500 doses. One dose delays the effect by 5 seconds. More than five doses, and the formula works instantly. The bottle with the position here was done with a practical effect as a small blue made from glass. In the 2020 adaptation, the bottle is made with VFX effects in post-production and the blue effects of the smoke.

The transformation scene itself starts with Bruno coming to the hall and demanding the chocolate which the Grand High Witch promised, then he feels sick and starts to transform into a mouse, first a light effect, then prosthetics are put onto Bruno's face and teeth; also, mice squeaking effects were added. After that, green smoke starts to come out of him, signifying the transformation. In her book, Huston recalls that the smoke was oil-based, and it would obscure the contacts in her eyes, which then had to be flushed out by an expert.

As the scene progresses onto Bruno's face, more prosthetics like mouse ears, whiskers, teeth, and a hairy belly are added. In the end, they were completely turned into a mouse. The same fate comes upon Luke when he is, in the same sense, turned into a mouse. However, he

gives the witches a run for their life when they chase him around the hotel grounds before capturing him. He is forcibly fed the potion and then starts to transform, starting again with a prosthetic face with simple VFX effects he is transformed. The filmmakers first used puppets, showing Luke looking at the witches, then used live mice. Then the two heroes from the 50:00 min mark spent the rest of the movie as mice; the special effects artist switched between puppets and real mice in the scenes following the transformation.



Picture 5: Luke turned into a mouse. Screenshot from The Witches 1990

The special effects master Jim Henson said in interviews that he used three different-sized mice models. One standard size is seen when human characters are on the screen together. The others are medium-sized and giant mouse that is a size of a dog and is large enough to be controlled by hand. However, the design set made it look like a tiny mouse. These scenes took around 14 weeks to prepare for the mouse transformation. (Seen in the picture). The puppeteers operated the mice's movements, tails, facial expressions, and eye movements (Sledge 2020). Real mice were also used in some scenes in the basement, for example, when the boys go to the grandma's room at the 53:00 min mark. For the rest of the movie, the actors who played the two boys also voiced the mice.

Compared to this, the transformation in the 2020 movie is not shown, only that Bruno starts to shake, and then he is thrown into the air with purple-blue smoke. Then his empty clothes and Bruno came out of them as a brown mouse. Again, the scene was entirely made in post-production and with VFX.



Picture 6: Bruno transformed into a mouse. Screenshot from The Witches 2020

When the Hero Boy is transformed, the scene plays out differently than in the 1990 version; the Grand High Witch takes the Hero Boy out of the ventilation drain, and then the other witches hold him down as she pours the potion into his ear. He then starts to shake and is thrown into the air with purple smoke. His transformation is done in the air, as his face shows purple bubbles that transform him into the mouse. Starting with brown fur, then ears and teeth, and being completely turned into a mouse. Then he escapes to the drain, where Daisy and Bruno are waiting. Daisy then saves Hero Boy from the witches, and all three runners go to the vent together. Daisy is also a new addition to the movie; in the previous version, the two mice which belonged to Luke were only mice. In this version, Daisy is added character with a backstory when the witches also changed her into a mouse before the movie's events.

The scene continues when the Grand High Witch is chasing them with her hands, which are elongating. Ultimately, they escape, and the Grand witches obtain wounds from the vent. This scene was again done in the post-production with VFX.

All mice scenes were designed from start to end without concept shots. As Visual Effects, supervisor Kevin Baillie says:

Bob then shot virtual cameras in those scenes using a custom camera-like mount with a Vive puck on it, which fed into a custom NVIZ VCam plugin in Unreal Engine, spearheaded by Hugh Macdonald, that did everything from take management to lens swapping to character attachments to focus pulling. Bob could shoot up to 200 setups in a 4-hour session using this toolset, which then fed to editorial to create the previs cuts." (Failes 2021).

When the three mice come into the grandma and Hero Boys' room, together with the grandma, they hatch a plan to obtain the potion; however, they must hide from the repairers in grandma's bag. Again, filmmakers use the VFX effect, projecting the three mice onto the bag while the grandma deals with the maintenance specialists. In the 1990 version, there is no such scene. Instead, the scene with The Grand High Witch and Bruno's father plays and then continues onto the heist for the potion. Here utilising the smallest puppets and live mice when going down, showcasing the fight between the cat (live one) and Luke, again switching between the methods. At 1:00 hour, the scene shows Anjelica's facial prosthetics (for her regular face) in her room.

As for the 2020 version, similarly, the Hero Boy goes down to room 666 and gets the potion. This scene is slightly different from the 1990 version. Adding more suspense and tension when the Hero Boy Hero gets the potion. The Grand High Witches' presence is added, showing her wounded hands done by VFX and her one toe. Then Hero Boy gets the potion and nearly avoids the Witch, as similarly done in the 1990 version. Here the knitted socks are

caught by the Witch with Hero Boy in it; luckily, he is released and safely goes to grandma, with the help of interception by the hotel manager.

At 1:11 hour, the movie's climax comes when the Hero Boys put the mice potion into the witches' soup. Then the first witch transformation happens when she tastes the soup and is changed into a mouse. Her transformation is more expressive when she makes sounds and mannerisms like mice. Then prosthetics are shown on her face, green smoke, and in the end, she is transformed into a mouse, and killed by the Grand High Witch, after she stomps on her. Leaving a green substance on the ground, showing another masterful use of prosthetics and live animals. In the newer version, this is done similarly. Except for the transformation of the first Witch is not done.

At 1:19, the transformation of the rest of the witches starts. The witches' reactions to the position are much more severe than the Hero Boys, with screeching and mouse-like mannerisms. This is likely done to show that evil is defeated and punished.

The Grand High Witch was made a new puppet of the mouse, or in her case, a rat. Which at first resembles her Witch and then turns into a fur-less rat. In the end, Mr Springer kills the Grand High Witch with a meat chopper, and once again, a green substance is used as a practical effect here.

The 2020 version of the transformation of witches starts almost simultaneously. The exception here is that the Grand High Witch is not transformed, showing her "first showdown" with Grandma when she remembers how Grandma ran away from her grasp all those years ago. This also signifies the deeper relations between the Witch and Grandma. Changing the relationship from the previous movie. Meaning this is more oriented on the characters of Grandma and Hero Boy.

The transformation is also not as detailed as in the 1990 version, only showing how the Witch is shot into the air with a cloud of purple smoke and then turned into a hideous sewer rat.

Then, the showdown between the Grand High Witch and Grandma happens in the room. Here again, showing the closer personal revenge story between these two. The Grand High Witch is soon defeated and turned into a rat when the three mice shove the potion into her mouth. Moreover, in the end, she is eaten by her cat.

The VFX effect done here is the Grand High Witches' hands reaching into the grandma, her toe being caught in a mouse trap, and in the end, when she is turned into the rat. First, being stuck in the ceiling, then a chase scene between the kids and the mice, again her using humour to appeal to the juvenile audience. The mice also are laughing at the witch caught in the glass bottle, done here again with VFX effects.

The last scenes in the movie show the three mice having fun in the amusement park-like machine, then showing postcards with grandma and the three mice travelling all over the world with the help of the money they got from the Grand High Witch, done again with VFX effects. Furthermore, lastly is the scene where Hero Boy, here voiced by Chris Rock, is older and training the new generation of witch hunters. This ending is also done more faithfully than the ending of the original book.

The last of the effects is at the end of the movie 1990 when the new "good witch" turns Luke back into a Hero Boy. The effect is first laser-based, and green signifies the changed Witch. There are also mice puppets, operated mainly from the torso up, operating only hands and face. As a last trick, the witch magically gives Luke his glasses and gives him back his mice.

The change in VFX effects showcases the development in the 30 years when the two movies were made. While the 1990 version is more horror-like and heavy-toned, the new 2020 version is whimsical, colourful, and ultimately appealing to a juvenile audience. The

evolution of VFX helps to include more ethnic backgrounds of the characters, such as showcasing grandmas' home, her voodoo techniques, the witches' body effects and more.

3.4 Practical Impact

Children's representation in literature and media is essential for child development and growth because it helps children understand their world or discover different cultures, allowing them to develop empathy and appreciation for cultural diversity. Children's portrayal is crucial in shaping how children perceive their ethnic-racial group and others. (Rogers 2021).

In addition, the changes impact the job market, especially for actors, filmmakers, and special effects professionals. There is a higher demand from underrepresented groups due to their background. They can bring a more authentic feeling to these adaptations.

In terms of the movies, for example, actor Jahzir Bruno an upcoming actor went on to play in movies such as *The Christmas Chronicles: Part Two*, *The Loud House*, and more. Another actress Vivienne Acheampong went on to play Lucienne in Netflix's highly successful series *The Sandman* (2022-) (Braga 2022).

VFX effect supervisor Sean Konrad came to lead the team again in making TV shows such as *Ms Marvel* and *Loki*, both done by Marvel.

Special effects and ethnicity also impact each other in the movies, with the special effects enhancing characters, such as creating their ethnic background, in the case of grandma's house, or correctly showcasing their skin colour and utilising further inclusion of dark skin characters.

Overall, the changes in ethnicity and special effects in children's fantasy movies have practically impacted the industry. The impact of both movies was not as significant as the author thought before doing this thesis. However, her opinion shows the changes in the genre.

Including diverse characters, filmmakers, and more creates new opportunities for diverse talent. It drives innovation while appealing to a broader audience and promoting greater inclusivity and representation.

4 Conclusion

The main reason for this thesis was to highlight the changes and development in the children's fantasy genre. And to showcase how these changes impacted the genre. The author also briefly included adaptation and what aspects must be considered when making one and, in this case, representing diverse characters and using special effects. And how both of these affect the popularity of children's fantasy movies. These aspects were shown in the practical part on the two movies, *The Witches* (1990,2020).

Before doing this thesis, the author believed that ethnic characters, especially POC, were included much more in contemporary movies. This, as she discovered, was sadly not the case. The special effects had much more to do with the popularity of children's fantasy movies.

The analysed movies also only showcased these changes in the genre, but in the end, they did not significantly impact the genre itself. However, the 2020 version shows that the topic of a black child character can be done positively without stereotyping these characters.

The author also found that the two analysed aspects of ethnicity and special effects impact each other. They complement each other, with the special effects creating an ethnic background of characters, mainly including mythology and cultural customs. Ethnicity also pushes filmmakers to invest in new technologies that do not stereotype a character in the movies.

In addition, with these movies being made, there are more work opportunities for minority workers, such as actors, animators, directors and more. In the end, all of these factors have an impact on children. They can see themselves in movies, tv shows, books and other media, which prompts them to aim to become actors, filmmakers, and producers.

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