

# Dr. Seuss on screen

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## Sažetak

Cilj ovoga diplomskoga rada jest demonstrirati na koji je način slikovnica *How the Grinch Stole Christmas!* (*Kako je Grinch ukrao Božić*, 1957) autora poznatoga pod imenom Dr. Seuss adaptirana u animirani film *The Grinch* (2018) šezdeset godina kasnije. Adaptacija je proces u kojem se jedan oblik medija pretače u drugi, ovdje iz slikovnice na filmsko platno. Tijekom adaptacije, mnogi se aspekti pripovijedanja mijenjaju ovisno o strukturi početnoga i završnoga oblika medija. U radu se proučava način na koji je radnja izmjenjena kako bi odgovarala trajanju animiranoga filma. Zatim se razmatraju likovi i njihove uloge u slikovnici, odnosno u filmu, te se uspoređuje mjesto radnje i prijenos stihova iz slikovnice, a proučava se i na koji su način u filmskoj adaptaciji dodani elementi humora.

Ključne riječi: *Kako je Grinch ukrao Božić*, slikovnica, animirani film, adaptacija

## Summary

The aim of this thesis is to demonstrate the ways in which the picturebook *How the Grinch Stole Christmas!* (1957) by Dr. Seuss was adapted into the animated film *The Grinch* (2018) sixty years later. Adaptation is a process in which one medium becomes another, in this case from a picturebook to the movie screen. Many aspects change in the process of adaptation, depending on the structure of the original and the target type of the medium. The goal of this study is to establish how the plot of the picturebook has been changed to fit the length of the movie. Next, the characters and their roles in the picturebook and in the movie are analyzed, the settings are compared, as well as the transfer of poetic elements from the picturebook into the film. The way in which humour has been added to the adaptation is also considered. Because of the length of the movie, the plot has been expanded and scenes which enrich the story have been added.

Keywords: *How the Grinch Stole Christmas!*, picturebook, animated movie, adaptation

## 1. Introduction

Theodor Seuss Geisel, widely known as Dr. Seuss, was an American illustrator and children's author. He is well known for his picturebooks, some of which are *The Cat in the Hat* (1957), *Green Eggs and Ham* (1960), and *Lorax* (1971). His work gained popularity thanks to the simplicity of the stories, made-up creatures, and wordplay (Britannica, 2022). Theodore Geisel also wrote *How the Grinch Stole Christmas!* in 1957. Grinch's story has always been popular, but after the release of the animated movie adaptation in 2018, its popularity increased even more. There are three screen adaptations of the story, two of them being animated films (1966, 2018), and one live-action film (2000), two stage musicals (1998, 2006), a PlayStation video game (2000), and a section for a meet-and-greet in one of the Universal Studios theme parks (2018 – present). There were also some visits from the Grinch to American talk shows and an event promoting the opening of *Grinchmas* at Universal Studios Hollywood (NBC Universal Syndication Studios, 2019).

The aim of this thesis is to compare Dr. Seuss's *How the Grinch Stole Christmas!* (1957) and *The Grinch* (2018), and demonstrate the differences made in adapting the picturebook to the screen. After a theoretical overview of the theory of adaptation, *How the Grinch Stole Christmas!* (1957) is summarized and the original illustrations are analyzed in terms of color and their meanings. *The Grinch* (2018) is introduced as one of the adaptations and the animated movie is compared to the original picturebook. The main points of the comparison are characters, plotline, settings, cultural elements, poetry from the picturebook and humour. The thesis seeks to answer the following questions: How are characters presented to appeal to audience? Which characters were assigned bigger roles in the movie than in the picturebook? How has the plot been adapted to last a duration of a full-length film, and how have the setting and cultural elements been updated? How do the rhymes from the picturebook find their way as musical numbers in the movie? Did the directors respect the previous 1966 adaptation made with the help of Dr. Seuss himself? Finally, how much of the original has been visually and textually quoted in the adaptation?

Following an overview of relevant theoretical work on the theory of adaptation, the thesis offers detailed summaries of the picturebook and the movie. Next, the picturebook and the movie are compared in terms of the events, characters, settings and cultural elements, poetry and music, and humour. Direct textual quotation is exemplified by analyzing the texts from the picturebook and the movie, and direct visual quotation is identified. The last chapter

summarizes the comparison of the picturebook and the movie, answering the above mentioned research questions.



## 2. Theoretical background

Adapted stories “continue being reshaped and therefore live on”. In the adaptation, the form and content of a story are altered to the “assumed needs of a new audience” and to the changes in “social and cultural conventions” (Geerts & Van den Bossche, 2014, p. 5).

In *Never-ending stories* edited by Sylvie Geerts and Sara Van den Bossche, several authors discuss how some literary adaptations get modified because of the political situation of the people working on the adaptation (Lehtonen, 2014, Razaei & Hanif, 2014, Warnecke, 2014). Other authors give examples of how an adaptation can change the course of the original work to the extent of the original work becoming canon after being popularized, for example, in a new movie adaptation (Joosen, 2014, Van Coillie, 2014). Lester Asheim explains the theory of the plotline and the characters being simplified in order to appear suitable for a younger audience (Asheim, 1951). By the adaptation being simplified, it will become more popular because of the wider outreach and therefore lead to more profit. Linda Hutcheon states that a work of art will inevitably go through changes when being transferred into a different medium (Hutcheon, 2006, p. 114). She recognizes three categories of adaptations depending on the ways that participants consume certain medium (passive, active, or being fully immersed into the story).

In *Never-ending Stories*, Sylvie Geerts and Sara Van den Bossche identify three important aspects of adaptation: socio-political, socio-cultural, and transmedial (Geerts & Van den Bossche, 2014). They compile works from different authors who give examples of stories and their adaptations relating to each of these aspects. This chapter will explain the aspects noted by Geerts and Van den Bossche, as well as describe the industry of adaptation.

### 2.1. *Socio-political aspects of adaptation*

Assuming that children's literature is created by adults for children, it often conveys morals, beliefs, and similar ideological values that adults want children to acquire. Geerts and Van den Bossche state that “every text, understood as a way of explaining the world, guides readers' responses towards a particular position” (Geerts & Van den Bossche, 2014, p. 6). In an attempt at socializing children, a writer may promote certain views for the readers to align themselves with. As a result, every text that is being re-told (in any medium) shows a necessity to “revise the very tradition it adheres to” (Geerts & Van den Bossche, 2014, p. 8). For example,

Tarzan of the Apes in Africa, created by Edgar Rice Burroughs in 1912, becomes the bear-man Tarsa in Finland in the 1940s and fights the former colonizers of the northern forest, the Russians (Lehtonen, 2014). Geerts and Van den Bossche also state that canonical texts can “actively and overtly be employed to convey outspoken ideological messages” through means of adaptation. The characters may be ideologically modified by careful selection, omission, or transformation of the story. The re-teller may use the work to offer their position on a certain subject, but the reader or the viewer has the chance to either oppose or accept those ideologies in any text (Geerts & Van den Bossche, 2014, p. 8).

## 2.2. *Socio-cultural aspects of adaptation*

Canonical literature contains works that are considered influential, important, and representative of a certain time period or part of the world. They are read in primary and secondary schools and help students understand various periods in literary history. Some works become a part of canon posthumously since they were not recognized as sufficiently important in their own time. Socio-cultural aspects of adaptation are important because there are ways in which they can influence the processes of canonization. Canonization is often the result of an “interplay between academic and critical acclaim and wide popularity” (Geerts & Van den Bossche, 2014, p. 9). Adaptation is what makes canonical works available to larger audiences. Geerts and Van den Bossche also state that a canonical pre-text is considered “prestigious”, which is why adaptations are often considered unsatisfactory when compared to their original sources. However, the impact of adaptations speaks for itself: the transformations that the pre-text goes through keep the work available to generations. Linda Hutcheon even writes that adaptation “may keep that prior work alive, giving it an afterlife that it would never have had otherwise” (Hutcheon, 2006, p. 176).

## 2.3. *Transmediation*

Transmediation is the process of translating a work from one medium into a different one. It is “as old as adaptation itself” (Geerts & Van den Bossche, 2014, p. 12); the beginning of all literature is the transfer of oral stories into a written text form (ibid.). Maria Nikolajeva also writes about transmediation in *Aesthetic Approaches to Children’s Literature* (2005). She compares it to the term “adaptation”, but also adds that adaptation includes “all kinds of transformations performed on texts within the same medium” (Nikolajeva, 2005, p. 229) like

ensorial interference and general adjustment of text to the presumed audience (such as deletions, additions, explanations, purification and similar). Transmediation includes plays, radio plays, musicals, operas, ballets, films, television series, and computer games (Nikolajeva, 2005, p. 229). Transmediation can also impact canonization – Nikolajeva reminds the readers that some stories are better known in their transmediated form. For example, the ballet *The Nutcracker* (1892) is known better than the story it was based on, *The Nutcracker and the Mouse King* (1816) by the German writer E.T.A. Hoffman.

#### 2.4. “The Industry” and film adaptations

Lester Asheim states that the practitioners in film production refer to themselves as “The Industry” and that their main goal is to make a profit. “The major question is not ‘Is it art?’ but ‘Will it sell?’ and the question ‘Will it sell?’ refers to mass sales throughout the country at a comparatively low admission price” (Asheim, 1951, p. 292). Therefore, producers use the box office as a guide to rely on. Asheim explains that there is a theory that movie scripts are simplified because the audience as a group is incapable of “understanding material aimed higher than fourteen-year-olds”. He mentions simplifying the dialogue, keeping the actors’ lines short, and sometimes even changing the characters’ names to avoid confusion. Another point besides simplification is modernization: “It appears in all aspects of adaptation, and often its purpose is to assure complete understanding and empathy from a contemporary audience” (p. 294). Modifying slang expressions, jokes, altering costumes and time periods, and rewriting the dialogue are some of them. The next device for eliminating possible confusion is the reduction in the number of characters. An interesting point is that “a familiar trick of adaptation is to transfer the needed action to one of the retained characters, collapsing two into one” (p. 301). Characters that are not directly connected to the main plot line may often be omitted from novel-to-film adaptations. The last device that producers use is the film following a straight chronological sequence with careful insertion of flashbacks. The main point is to keep the characters’ relationships and incidents “explicit and clear” (Asheim, 1951, p. 302)

In the preface of her book *A Theory of Adaptation* (2006), Linda Hutcheon states that “theoretical clichés” need to be tested – and debunked – to see how different media can approach elements like point of view, interior motives, time, irony, ambiguity, metaphors, etc. “Because adaptation is a form of repetition without replication, change is inevitable, even without any conscious updating or alteration” (Hutcheon, 2006, p. XVI). She differentiates

three different modes of adaptation: some are used to *tell* (novels, short stories), some are used to *show* (performance media), and some allow people to interact with them (videogames, theme parks). Adaptation is similar to translation: “there is no such thing as literal translation, so there can be no literal adaptation” (p. 16). Sometimes that means cutting the plot short, removing characters, or having the action move faster. When talking about adapting short stories, their source material must be expanded considerably. Adapting a work from *telling* to *showing* means that description, narration, and thoughts must be translated into speech, actions, sounds, and visual images. Conflicts and ideological differences between characters must be visible and/or audible. Hutcheon also mentions the importance of music as “soundtracks in movies enhance and direct audience response to characters and action” (Hutcheon, 2006, p. 41).

### 3. The pre-text and re-tellings

As some adaptation theorists call it, the “pre-text” for all adaptations of the Grinch story is the picturebook *How the Grinch Stole Christmas!* (1957), written and illustrated by Dr. Seuss. The picturebook was first adapted into an animated television short in 1966 with Chuck Jones as the director. Next, Ron Howard directed a live-action movie *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* (2000) with Jim Carrey starring as the Grinch. Lastly, Yarrow Cheney and Scott Moiser directed an animated movie adaptation *The Grinch* (2018) which is the focus of analysis in this thesis. The Grinch is voiced by the famous actor Benedict Cumberbatch and the narrator is voiced by the singer Pharrell Williams. The film is 85 minutes long.

The story of the “pre-text”, Dr. Seuss’s *How the Grinch Stole Christmas!*, is told in 51 pages and is rather simple. The illustrations are drawn with black lines on a white background and Dr Seuss used only red to color in some details. “Color’s effect on us is very strong – stronger than that of other picture elements. We notice contrasts, or, put another way, contrast enables us to see” (Bang, 2000, p. 74). The red color seems to bring out the tension in the pages and catch the viewer’s attention. For example, at the beginning of the picturebook, the only details that have hints of red are the Grinch’s eyes and the windows of *Who*-ville (a town created by Dr. Seuss), which is what his eyes are looking at. As the story goes on, more details appear in color – toys, ornaments, boxes, Santa’s suit, a dog’s harness, a sled... depending on what is highlighted. Molly Bang posits that the color red brings action to a scene, tension, and passion. In the climax of the story, when the *Whos* sing and hold hands even though the Grinch stole everything from them, the pages are almost completely red. The red color indicates the Grinch’s disbelief that his plan did not work. Red is also one of the primary colors people associate with Christmas, along with green.

The Grinch is introduced to the readers standing in front of his dark cave, looking down at *Who*-ville and snarling at their Christmas preparations: “Every *Who* down in *Who*-ville liked Christmas a lot... But the Grinch, who lived just north of *Who*-ville, did NOT!”<sup>1</sup> (Seuss, 1957, pp. 1, 2). In the story, it is the day before Christmas, and the Grinch decides “to stop Christmas from coming” because the *Whos* open their presents on Christmas morning. While they do it,

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<sup>1</sup> In an interview for the *Redbook magazine*, Dr. Seuss revealed: “I was brushing my teeth on the morning of the 26<sup>th</sup> of last December when I noticed a very Grinch-ish countenance in the mirror. It was Seuss! So I wrote about my sour friend, the Grinch, to see if I could rediscover something about Christmas that obviously I’d lost” (Rutigliano, 2019).

they make noise, “the *one* thing he hated!” (Seuss, 1957, p. 4). Next, they sit around the table and feast on “*Who*-pudding, and rare *Who*-roast-beast, which was something the Grinch couldn’t stand in the least!” (Seuss, 1957, p. 6). Lastly, they gather around, hold hands, and sing, and the Grinch hates singing more than anything else. After fifty-three years of torture, he has decided to stop Christmas from coming once and for all. He has an idea – he makes a Santa Claus uniform and ties a big horn to his dog’s head. He gets into his sleigh and takes empty bags to *Who*-ville in the middle of the night. He rummages through all the houses, stealing everything – stockings, presents, food, Christmas trees, even logs for fire. One small *Who* wakes up in the middle of the night and asks the Grinch why he is stealing their Christmas tree. The Grinch replies that he needs to take it to fix the Christmas lights on it. After taking everything, he climbs to the top of the mountain, ready to throw away his stolen possessions. He stops for a moment to listen to the *Whos* waking up in despair and crying. Instead, he hears the happy sounds of the *Whos* merrily singing together “without any presents at all” (Seuss, 1957, pp. 44, 45). He is confused for three hours and then finally thinks:

“Maybe Christmas,” he thought, “*doesn’t* come from a store.”

“Maybe Christmas ... perhaps ... means a little bit more!” (Seuss, 1957, p. 46).

In that moment, his heart grows three sizes. He decides to return everything he stole that night. In the end, he celebrates Christmas with the *Whos*.

The opening scene of the movie introduces the viewers to the town of *Who*-ville and their residents five days before Christmas: we observe them opening their shops, hanging ornaments, children having snow-ball fights or ice-skating, and wives sending their husbands off to work. At the same time, the Grinch is woken up by Christmas songs from the radio, which makes him irritated. After ringing the bell, the Grinch calls for his dog Max who brings him coffee and the Grinch resumes with his morning routine. The two of them realize that they don’t have any more groceries at home and that they need to go to *Who*-ville to buy more. There, a busy mother called Donna is back from her night shift at work and is trying to make breakfast for her twin sons and her daughter, Cindy-Lou. Cindy-Lou *Who* is a young energetic tomboy who is on a mission to send an important letter to Santa Claus. On his way back to the cave, the Grinch has a brief encounter with Cindy-Lou and Bricklebaum, “the happiest *Who* alive” (Cheney & Moiser, 2018). He informs the Grinch that the mayor wants everything Christmas-related three times bigger this year. After seeing the enormous Christmas tree the *Whos* prepared for Christmas, the Grinch decides to sabotage their tradition of lighting up the

tree. He fails in his plan and instead turns out to be the person that presses the switch. Walking through the crowd, he has a flashback of his childhood: he was alone in the dark at Christmas wishing he would have everything the other children had. The Grinch finally comes up with his “wonderful, awful idea”, to steal Christmas. While the Grinch comes up with the strategy to disguise himself as Santa Claus, Cindy-Lou and her friends plan to meet Santa Claus in person. Cindy-Lou wants to tell Santa Claus her wish: she wishes for her mother to be happy and well rested after working very hard and taking care of the family. After a failed mission to acquire reindeer, the Grinch-obtains one huge, fat reindeer whom he then needs to treat like a pet. He steals a sleigh from Bricklebaum’s roof, sends his dog to gather information about the number of houses in *Who*-ville, and sews himself a Santa Claus outfit to wear. The sun sets and the Grinch starts to rummage through the city, stealing everything – from decorations to presents and food. The last house he robs is Cindy-Lou’s house, where he is trapped by her and her friend. Cindy mistakes him for Santa Claus and tells him her wish. As the Grinch goes home, he continues to think about what the little girl said Christmas means to her. In the morning, the *Whos* wake up. Even though all their belongings are missing, they still have each other so they gather to sing. The Grinch hears them and realizes what Christmas is about. He returns the items he stole and apologizes to the citizens. He returns to his cave, and a short time after that Cindy-Lou visits him to invite him to her family’s Christmas dinner. He accepts her invitation and finally enjoys the Christmas as he always wished.

## 4. Comparison

This chapter presents a comparison of the original picturebook and the 2018 film. The characters are analyzed, and the plot and differences in settings are compared. The music used in the movie is considered and the way humour is achieved is analyzed in both the picturebook and the movie. In the end, direct visual and textual quotation are explained and exemplified.

### 4.1. Characters

“Characters are the agents performing actions in a story: persons, personified animals, or objects” (Nikolajeva, 2005, p. 145). Nikolajeva states that there are numerous viewpoints from which the characters can be analyzed (sociohistorical, national, gender-wise, ethnic minorities, and so on). There are two types of characters in children’s literature when looking at “the most typical traits of all characters in children’s fiction” (Nikolajeva, 2005, p. 148): the underdog and the trickster. The underdog is someone who is unprivileged and often abandoned. In the end, they find fortune. The trickster is someone who likes mischief (p. 148). The most important character who will be described in detail is the Grinch. He can be characterized as both the underdog and the trickster. The Grinch from the picturebook is moody, grim, and constantly complains about things he hates. He has a sly expression – especially when stealing Christmas presents, ornaments, and food from *Who*-ville. When confronted by little Cindy Lou Who, his expression seems to be sincere and caring, but the narration states otherwise: “That old Grinch was so smart and so slick; he thought up a lie, and he thought it up quick! ‘Why, my sweet little tot’, the fake Santy Claus lied, ‘there’s a light on this tree that won’t light on one side’” (Seuss, 1957, p. 30). The picturebook Grinch is not likable at all, and there is no reason for readers to sympathize with him. Since the picturebook is black and white with red accents, only his eyes are red and expressive, but his skin has no color. His recognizable green color was first introduced in 1966, when the first screen adaptation aired.

The 2018 Grinch from the movie is different in some ways. He is still grumpy and has wicked ideas, but his character was given a depth that is not recognizable in the picturebook. There are a few added situations which encourage the viewers to slowly start to like the Grinch, even though he is mean to most people. One of the situations where he invokes the viewers’ affection is when he lets his pet dog and reindeer sleep next to him on his bed under the covers while he moves aside with no blanket. Even though he is vile, there is always a sense of



sympathy for his pet(s). He lets his only reindeer go when they meet the reindeer's family: the reindeer's mate and their baby. The Grinch lets his accomplice leave, wistfully looking after them, wishing that he also had a family. When confronted by Cindy Lou Who, the Grinch has a hard time coming up with a story about why he is stealing their Christmas tree. He seems uncomfortable when lying to her and gets emotional when she asks for happiness for her mother. When Cindy Lou hugs him, he is surprised, but also does not back away from her. Instances like these described accumulate throughout the movie and the Grinch's final change of heart does not seem unexpected. The directors carefully placed those scenes to elicit the viewers' sympathy for the Grinch, so that the climax of the story would feel right to them. Besides having emotional depth, the Grinch is also shown as an innovator. Not only is he an able tailor, but also a very skilled maker of contraptions. His cave is filled with his projects – designs for ways of making coffee without getting out of bed, playing instruments, getting from roof to roof on expandable shoe soles, and others. This side of his character may remind some viewers of Professor Baltazar, a character from a Croatian animated TV series (1967–1968).

In the picturebook, Cindy Lou Who is a naive little girl “who was not more than two” (Seuss, 1957, p. 28). She accidentally stumbled upon the Grinch stealing their Christmas tree, but then went back to bed when he told her a lie about fixing their lights. In the movie, Cindy Lou is much more than a minor character. As Tydecks writes, “some events and minor characters that are only briefly mentioned in the picturebooks have been elaborated in the film adaptations” (Tydecks, 2018, p. 497). Cindy Lou is around 6 years old and is a tomboy. She is characterized as adventurous, spontaneous, and fearless. She is also warm-hearted and is a catalyst for the Grinch's transformation. The Grinch admires her efforts of trapping him and asking for her mother's well-being instead of material presents. She is also the one who describes warm feelings the *Whos* feel when they are with their loved ones at Christmas.

Another minor character that was given a bigger role is Grinch's pet dog, Max. His facial expressions in the picturebook often seem to express fear of the Grinch. However, his actions prove that he is loyal by staying close to the Grinch and not abandoning him. The readers only see him after the Grinch ties a horn on his head to make him look like a reindeer and pull his sleigh. In the movie, Max is introduced at the same time as the Grinch. He is the only other character that the Grinch has a relationship with, his faithful sidekick and a friend. A sidekick is “another archetypal character that occurs almost as universally as the hero and who is a close companion or friend, usually understood to be in a subordinate or deferential position to another“ (Zimmerly, 2019, p. 189). Max is a faithful character, but also somehow

seems independent from the Grinch. Even though he has no lines in the movie, his actions show that he is faithful because he wants to be. In one scene, the Grinch yells at Max because he ruins his organ-playing session. Max is then offended and only joins the Grinch after he apologizes.

Some of the additional characters in the movie are Cindy Lou’s mother and twin brothers, Cindy’s friends who help her come up with a plan of trapping Santa, the reindeer, and Bricklebaum.

#### 4.2. Events

“Turning a picture sequence and its accompanying text into a feature film demands a substantial extension of the story line.” (Tydecks, 2018, p. 496). Adapting a 51-page picturebook to an 85-minute movie requires a story which will be interesting to the audience for the whole duration of the movie. As stated and described in the previous chapter, characters often take on a bigger role when appearing in adaptations, but the changes are also introduced to plotlines. *The Grinch* (2018) follows the original plotline accurately, but also adds scenes which invite the viewers into the storyworld, for a humorous effect, or to expand the story in terms of characters’ inner thoughts. One of the most important scenes that was added in *The Grinch* (2018) is the flashback scene of the Grinch’s childhood. It not only extends the movie, but also allows the viewers to see the Grinch’s intrinsic motivation for hating Christmas. Table 1 compares the sequencing of events in *How the Grinch Stole Christmas!* (1957) and *The Grinch* (2018).

Table 1. Sequencing of the events

The picturebook (1957)	The movie (2018)
- the Grinch looks down at <i>Who</i> -ville and thinks about the awful things the <i>Whos</i> do on Christmas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- introduction to <i>Who</i>-ville and the residents preparing for Christmas</li> <li>- the Grinch doing his morning routine after which he and his pet Max realize they have to go buy groceries</li> <li>- introduction of Cindy Lou’s family: her mother and twin brothers</li> </ul>

- the Grinch tells the readers about the noise, the feast, and the singing, and how he decided to ruin Christmas

- the Grinch decides to ruin Christmas by sabotaging their annual light-up of the tree, he fails

- walking home, he gets a flashback of his lonely childhood which is connected to noise, the feast, and singing that he hates

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- sewing the Santa suit and recruiting his dog as a reindeer to help him in the heist

---

- interchanging scenes of the Grinch planning to steal Christmas: failing to acquire reindeer, stealing a sleigh from Bricklebaum's roof, sending his dog Max to gather information about the number of houses in the town, sewing a Santa Claus outfit

- Cindy Lou Who planning to get her message to Santa Claus: she intends to give him her letter in person, then she figures out a way to trap Santa with her friends

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- the Grinch goes to the village in the middle of the night and steals everything from houses

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- the Grinch comes down to the village and spends the night stealing

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- the disguised Grinch meets Cindy Lou Who

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- Cindy Lou traps him in her home, and delivers her message for Santa Claus, which makes the Grinch think about the real purpose of Christmas

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- the Grinch brings the stolen items to the top of the mountain

---

- the Grinch brings the stolen items to the top of the mountain

---

- the Grinch hears the *Whos* singing and has a change of heart

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- he hears the *Whos* singing together even though he stole everything from them and has a change of heart

---

- the Grinch gives the toys and the food back, and even joins in the *Whos'* Christmas dinner

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- the Grinch gives everything back to the *Whos* and apologizes for stealing Christmas

- back in his cave, he gives a little Christmas present to his dog, and Cindy Lou comes over to invite him for dinner

- the Grinch spends his first Christmas being happy

The flashback scene occurs after the Grinch accidentally lights up the town's huge Christmas tree. As he walks home, he "felt downright scared, as he remembered that Christmas where nobody cared. (...) And as he watched other kids, one thing became clear: that this was the single worst day in the year" (Cheney & Moiser, 2018). He is portrayed as young and with eyes wide with wonder as he is seen standing outside, in the dark and the cold, looking inside brightly lit and joyful homes. The flashback scene is simple: it is added to the plot without any confusion to the chronological order of the events which was emphasized by Asheim (1951) and discussed in chapter 2.4. of this thesis.

From Table 1, it is clear that the movie is very similar to the picturebook in terms of the sequence of events. In the introduction, both audiences are introduced to the idea of the *Whos* adoring Christmas and the Grinch hating it. In the movie, there are additional scenes that help the directors introduce the town and show the setting of the story, as well as introduce the viewers to the characters. The story begins to complicate when the Grinch decides to ruin Christmas once and for all. In the picturebook, that happens after informing the readers about the *Whos'* tradition of making noise, feasting, and singing. In the movie, the Grinch decides to sabotage Christmas after he fails to stop the town's Christmas tree from lighting. He prepares a catapult to bring the tree down, but instead swings himself onto the tree and falls onto the switch button. After a flashback about his childhood, the Grinch tells the viewers what he hates about Christmas and decides to finally ruin it. The climax of the story, in both cases, is the Grinch hearing the *Whos* singing happily despite having their belongings stolen. His change of heart comes more unexpectedly in the picturebook than in the film, where it is foreshadowed throughout the story. The resolution of both stories is the Grinch giving back what he stole and celebrating Christmas like one of the *Whos*. The main events of the story have remained unchanged, but the movie added many new scenes. Nevertheless, those additional scenes do not take away meanings from the original story.

#### 4.3. Settings

When discussing the construction of the setting in a picturebook, Nikolajeva and Scott state that the setting is conveyed "by words that describe space, and pictures that make the space 'nonarrated'" (Nikolajeva & Scott, 2001, as cited in Narančić Kovač, 2018). Dr. Seuss

does not use his words to describe space and setting, but rather illustrates them with his pictures. Seuss created an imaginary town for his story – *Who*-ville. The Grinch lives just outside of the town, on the top of the mountain, and inside a cave. The readers never get to look inside his cave, they only see that it is dark and that he looks over the town from his “doorstep”. The town is shown as a few houses with smoke coming out of their chimneys. *Who*-ville is covered in snow, just like the rest of the trees and the mountain. Even though the town seems cold and calm, Grinch’s description and Dr Seuss’s illustrations show that the inside of those homes is very lively. When the families gather, the children run around playing and make a lot of noise. Tennis balls, arrows, drums, and bells can be seen everywhere. When Dr. Seuss illustrates the Christmas feast, he draws a long table with everyone (both young and old) sitting around it and waiting for the next meal. There is an abundance of food. The inside of their homes seems very comfortable: siblings sleep together in one bed under big covers. Dr Seuss paints a welcoming picture where everyone feels invited to the *Whos*’ celebrations. On the other hand, Grinch’s cave seems very uninviting – dark and cold.

Because there are more opportunities to create a whole new world, the movie builds on and enhances everything that Dr Seuss created in the picturebook. According to Marie-Laure Ryan, “The components of storyworlds include existents (characters and objects), the setting, physical laws, social rules and values, events (in a time-span frame), and mental events” (Ryan, 2014, as quoted in Narančić Kovač, 2018, p. 416). The viewers get to look around *Who*-ville and see inside the Grinch’s cave. *Who*-ville is upscaled in a way that the town is shown bigger and brighter than in the picturebook: it may remind some people of Mont-Saint-Michel in France, only situated in a rural area with mountains and forests. As the story leads the viewers inside the town, it is shown that it functions as any modern-day town: it has got shops, bakeries, flower shops, people walking in the streets, public transportation, and an administrative system – a mayor. The scenes are short, and the viewers can hear the typical sounds of traffic in a busy town. Grinch’s cave is explored thoroughly, and it is quite different from the dark and cold cave illustrated in the picturebook. First, it is not dark, but even inviting to children. Since the Grinch is an innovator, there are all sorts of fun projects around his cave. There are several floors which are connected by Grinch’s chair used as an elevator. There are rooms which seem to change so as to suit Grinch’s need at any given moment (music room, classroom, etc.). His kitchen looks like a standard family home, and even his dog has his own place set up under the counter.

#### 4.4. Cultural elements

The picturebook shows traditional values: family gathered around the table for a special Christmas dinner. There is an abundance of everything – the food is piled up on the table, the presents are under the Christmas tree, and the *Whos* are enjoying themselves and each other's company. The Christmas dinner itself reminds the audience of a typical Thanksgiving dinner in the United States: a big roasted turkey being carved by the head of the family or by a special guest. The families are big – there are five children illustrated sleeping in one bed. As opposed to big families, there is the solitary Grinch who only lives with his pet dog whom the Grinch does not consider a family member. There is one instance in which the Grinch compares his Santa Claus suit with Saint Nicholas, who is believed to be the origin of Santa Claus's character as he was the first one to leave presents for poor children.

*The Grinch* (2018) incorporates many more cultural elements into the story. The first difference is the way families are depicted, which has been modernized according to the theory described by Geerts and Van den Bossche (2014) explained in chapter 2.1. of this thesis. Cindy Lou is raised by her single mother with no mentions of her father. This modern representation of a traditional family has been changed to suit the divorce rates in recent times, which are higher than divorce rates in 1950s when Dr. Seuss wrote the picturebook. Cindy Lou also has twin brothers that are not more than one year old. Her mother works night shifts and is very tired from looking after her children. However, they are also her only source of happiness, and she is content with the life she has and would never change it. It might also be said that she is a representative of the American dream: “a happy way of living that is thought of by many Americans as something that can be achieved by anyone in the U.S. especially by working hard and becoming successful” (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). This detail is one of the socio-political aspects of adaptation also described by Geerts and Van den Bossche (2014), mentioned in chapter 2.1 of this thesis. As in the picturebook, the movie also shows a great number of presents, food, and material things such as decorations, lights, and red and green Christmas clothing. One specific character, Bricklebaum, is especially ‘Americanized’. Even though his skin color does not suggest it, his speech seems to be written to resemble the slang and tone of voice of an African American man. He is very joyful and likes to invite people to his home. He has a light sense of humour and is not frightened by Grinch's mean comments, but, instead, treats them as jokes. His house is fully covered with Christmas decorations, just like the stereotypical version of any American home at Christmas time.

#### 4.5. Verse and music

Seuss is a poet, as much as he is an artist. “The forward momentum and jazzy sound of Seuss’s verse reflect America at its best”, writes Donelle Ruwe in her chapter of *The Routledge companion to picturebooks*. One of the most important aspects of Seuss’s writing is his play on words and rhythmic rhyming that even beginner readers understand and enjoy. “Seuss’s verse features onomatopoeia, syntax reversals, tongue twisters, alliterative names, and syncopated repetitions” (Ruwe, 2018, p. 256).

And the more the Grinch thought of this *Who*-Christmas-Sing,  
The more the Grinch thought, “I must stop this whole thing!”  
“Why, for fifty-three years I’ve put up with it now!  
I must stop this Christmas from coming! ... But HOW?” (Seuss, 1957, p. 11)

Common rhyme patterns found in Seuss’s poetry are AABB (shown in the citation above), ABAB, and ABCB. Since the picturebook is mostly a narrative with simple dialogues and Grinch’s inner thoughts, the movie adaptation needed to introduce rhymed verse in some other way.

The best way to incorporate verse into a movie is by introducing songs, i.e. music, which is one of the forms of transmediality explained in chapter 2.3. The movie features a soundtrack consisting of 13 tracks performed by several artists. The first song in the movie is a 2018 version of *You’re a Mean One, Mr. Grinch*. The song is heard while the Grinch is getting ready in the morning. The song first appeared in the first adaptation of *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* back in 1966. Dr. Seuss himself wrote the lyrics to the song since he worked with the director on the short movie. *The Grinch* (2018) pays respect to Theodore Geisel by using his own words to bring the viewers closer to his character, but also adds something new by giving it a slightly new sound and adding additional lines by a famous rapper, Tyler the Creator. The extra lyrics further depict the Grinch as a grumpy character who is not appealing to children: “Who is this mean fellow with his skin all green and his teeth all yellow? Ewww. What’re you so mad for? Halloween come around and we ain’t knocking at your door.” (the Creator, 2018). Another example of a song from a previous work appearing in the 2018 movie is the song *Fah Who Foraze, Dah Who Doraze, or Welcome Christmas* (1966). The song lyrics were also originally written by Dr. Seuss for 1966 short, and the song was used in 2018 animated movie when the *Whos* gather around the Christmas tree, singing together.

The movie's allusion to another literary work is Ebenezer Scrooge, a character from Charles Dickens' novella *A Christmas Carol* (1843). The two similarly irritable characters who hate Christmas hear the same traditional song,<sup>2</sup> but react to it differently:

The owner of one scant young nose, gnawed and mumbled by the hungry cold as bones are gnawed by dogs, stooped down at Scrooge's keyhole to regale him with a Christmas carol: but at the first sound of

*'God bless you, merry gentleman! May nothing you dismay!'*

Scrooge seized the ruler with such energy of action, that the singer fled in terror, leaving the keyhole to the fog and even more congenial frost (Dickens, 1843, p. 20).

Here, the cynical and bitter Scrooge chases off a caroler upon hearing the first lines of the song. On the other hand, the same English traditional song is heard in *The Grinch* (2018), but the Grinch's reaction is completely different than that of Scrooge. When going to *Who-ville* to buy groceries, the Grinch passes a group of carolers who continue to follow him through the town. At first, he is annoyed and tries to escape them, but they follow him accompanied by a *crescendo* in the movie score. The tension in the music builds up as the Grinch becomes more and more distressed and scared. At last, he enters the store and shuts the door, breathing heavily.

#### 4.6. Direct textual and visual quotation

“By imitating or appropriating the style of writing and illustrating that made the name of Dr. Seuss famous, this new text (and others that have been produced after his death in 1991) reinforces the concept of author, by the signs (in this instance, specific poetic meters, cartoon-style illustration, humor) that refer to the author” (Mallam, 2018, p. 16). Even though Kerry Mallam discusses Seuss's posthumous literary works, the same can be said for the animated movie, *The Grinch* (2018). Most of the text and the illustrations from the picturebook have been incorporated in the movie, and the text from the picturebook is directly quoted in the lines spoken by the narrator. Since the movie's plot is more detailed than the picturebook's, the narrator is given additional lines inspired by Seuss's writing style. For example, this is the line written for the opening sequence of the movie:

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<sup>2</sup> The movie version of the traditional Christmas carol *God rest ye' merry gentlemen* is performed by an acapella group called Pentatonix (2016).



“Past the place that you come from, far beyond what you’ve seen,  
Is a town like your town, if your town was a dream.  
Only it’s not a dream, or a hoax, or a ruse.

It is Christmas in *Who-ville*, the home of the *Whos*.” (Cheney & Moiser, 2018).

This short example of the narrator’s lines clearly shows the famous AABB rhyme pattern that Seuss frequently used. In addition to direct textual quotations, direct visual quotations are also used in the movie. The *Whos* may not look like their picturebook representatives, but the movie version of the Grinch strongly resembles that of the picturebook. His fur is longer on the top of his head, his mouth is large and expressive, and his silhouette is that of a skinny man with a bigger belly. His fingers are also long and pointy, covered with fur.

The directors also decided to use Seuss’s framing of certain scenes. For example, Figure 1 shows an illustration from the picturebook in which the Grinch is seen standing on the top of the mountain, seconds away from tipping the sleigh to the ground. Figure 2 shows that same scene from the movie, which is a direct visual quotation of the image from the picturebook. Figures 3 and 4 show direct visual quotation of the Grinch’s face after he decides to steal Christmas, as well as Figures 5 and 6, which show the Grinch stealing Christmas trees. Figures 7 and 8 show the picturebook illustration and the movie version of the Christmas feast.



Figure 1. Picturebook sledge



Figure 2. Animated movie sledge



Figure 3. The Picturebook Grinch



Figure 4. The Animated movie Grinch



And the Grinch grabbed the tree, and he started to shove  
When he heard a small sound like the coo of a dove.  
He turned around fast, and he saw a small *Who!*  
Little Cindy-Lou *Who*, who was not more than two.

Figure 5. Picturebook heist



Figure 6. Movie heist

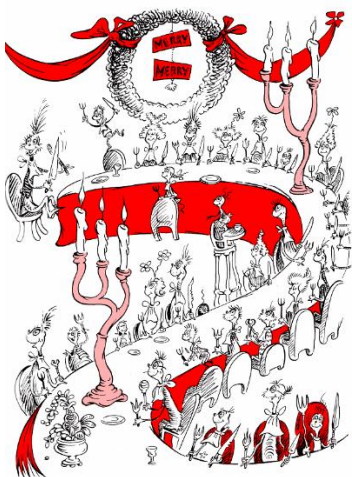


Figure 7. Picturebook feast



Figure 8. Movie feast

#### 4.7. Humour

Humour can be defined “as an experience which is either produced or appreciated and causes smiling and/or laughter – the social indicators of humor” (Loizou & Recchia, 2019, p. 1). Humour in the picturebook is mostly based on incongruity, a type of humour in which two things are incompatible in some way and therefore elicit laughter. As stated by Doris Bergen, “some incongruous events involve inappropriate juxtaposition or substitution of objects, and some involve unexpected consequences of some ordinary behaviors” (Bergen, 2019, p. 16). For example, there are a few instances in which there is incongruity in the sizes and relations of objects. On page 8 of *How the Grinch Stole Christmas!* (1957) the characters are shown carrying large pots and balancing numerous teacups and bowls one on top of another. On page 28, the readers see the Grinch stuffing a big Christmas tree into a fireplace as well as huge bags filled with Christmas presents. On pages 36 and 37, there is an obvious disproportion between the small dog pulling the enormous sledge packed with everything the Grinch stole. The Grinch’s face is comically grotesque – his face expressions are very clearly demonstrative of his feelings. Wordplay is also distinctive for Seuss’s work. The refrigerator illustrated in the picturebook is made by *General Who-lectric*, which is an allusion to General Electric, a multinational company. The presents under the Christmas tree are titled “for auntie Who” and “for uncle Who” which would mean that they are presents for any *Who* with nieces and nephews.

The animated movie adaptation is full of humorous scenes and humorous characters. Elements of humour which are shown in the picturebook are also in the movie alongside with other humorous elements. The Grinch’s face is grotesque, even more so because of the animation. Incongruity is a major part of the movie – for example, Grinch’s reindeer manages to stand on a thin and fragile construction for making coffee in his kitchen without collapsing to the ground. Wordplay is also present: in the scene where the Grinch approaches the last house in his heist, he sings a popular Christmas song, but changes the words to it: “Dashing through the snow, in a one dog open sleigh. One more house to go, and Christmas goes away!” (Cheney & Moiser, 2018). The two most important types of humor added and displayed in the movie are slapstick humour and a surprising turn of events. For example, when the Grinch sees a little boy struggling to put a carrot on his snowman, the Grinch takes the carrot and pushes the snowman’s head to the ground. After being called mean, the Grinch throws a snowball into the little boy’s face and knocks him down. In another scene, when the Grinch is trying to catch a reindeer, a goat appears and yells very loudly, annoying the Grinch. Just as the viewers forget

about the goat, it appears again and scares all the reindeer away. There are many more examples of characters falling, crashing into objects, or being hurt in some other way.

The surprising turn of events is used quite often – this non-aggressive type of humour is used the most. For instance, when the Grinch asks his dog about what he wants to do with his free time, the scene cuts to a short montage of the dog driving in a convertible with the Grinch sticking his tongue out like a dog, music blasting. The scene gets cut by the reality of the Grinch asking: “No idea, huh?”. Another example shows the Grinch asking a rhetorical question: “How much emotional eating have I been doing?” and the next few short scenes show him stuffing his mouth with spaghetti, cereal, and sweets. The scenes are interrupted again by the dog looking nervously to the side, not wanting to answer.

## 5. Conclusion

*How the Grinch Stole Christmas!* (1957) is a widely known picturebook sold in at least 7.5 million copies. Dr. Seuss's simple illustrations and clever text have been popular for more than 60 years. Grinch has become a household name, even having his own dictionary entry. Even though there are two more movie adaptations (1966, 2000), this work only analyzed one: *The Grinch* (2018).

The characters in the picturebook are the Grinch, his pet dog, and a little girl. They are very simple, and the readers do not experience their inner thoughts or motivation for their actions. The Grinch from the movie is shown as an individual with a difficult past who is worthy of the viewer's sympathy. The dog, Max, is a loyal friend who is often used to introduce humour through unexpected turn of events. Cindy Lou Who is shown as a playful girl on a mission to make her mother happy. In the end, she sparks Grinch's change of heart. Other characters are also added to the movie: Cindy Lou's family and friends, the reindeer, and Bricklebaum. The plot has been adapted to last a duration of a full-length film by adding new scenes, such as those presenting a glimpse of the lives of other characters in more detail. Some additional scenes have also been added for the viewers to sympathize and relate to the characters, such as the flashback to the Grinch's childhood. Cultural elements in the story have been updated to fit the modern society: there is a single mother taking care of her family and the characters cherish typical American traditions. The rhyme and the rhythm of the picturebook are incorporated in the movie as music – some songs were written by Seuss himself for the 1966 adaptation. The verses written by Dr. Seuss are directly quoted in the movie through the narrator's lines. Visual quotation can be seen in the framing and the design of some scenes. Humor from the picturebook is kept in the movie, but some more elements are added, such as slapstick humour and a surprising turn of events. Even though the plot of the movie is slightly altered in comparison to the original, the ending remains true to the pre-text: the Grinch's heart changes, and he is accepted into the community where he feels like a family member.

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## **Izjava o izvornosti diplomskoga rada**

Izjavljujem da je moj diplomski rad izvorni rezultat mogega rada te da se u njegovoj izradi nisam koristila drugim izvorima osim onih koji su u njemu navedeni.

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