

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the research background, research problems, research objectives, research significance, previous studies, and definition key of terms.

1.1 Research Background

A television series is an audiovisual narrative form that presents stories through a sequence of interconnected episodes organized into one or more seasons. Unlike standalone films, television series allow narratives to unfold gradually, enabling characters, conflicts, and themes to develop over an extended period of time. Each episode functions as part of a broader narrative structure, contributing to cumulative storytelling and sustained audience engagement. Mittell (2015) explains that serialized television facilitates complex narrative construction by distributing story information across episodes, thereby supporting long-term character development and layered thematic exploration. Within this framework, television series provide a narrative space in which meaning is constructed through the interaction of visual imagery, dialogue, sound, and performance, positioning them as significant narrative texts within contemporary literary and media studies.

The increasing recognition of television series as objects of literary study emerges from the understanding that narrative meaning is no longer produced exclusively through written texts. In contemporary narrative theory, stories are defined not by their medium but by their capacity to organize events, construct characters, and communicate themes.

Television series fulfill these criteria by employing narrative structures, character development, conflict, and symbolism in ways comparable to traditional literary forms. Mittell (2015) argues that serialized television operates as a complex narrative system in which meaning is generated cumulatively across episodes through sustained storytelling, character

evolution, and thematic coherence. As a result, television series function as narrative texts that invite interpretation, critical reading, and theoretical analysis, positioning them within the expanding domain of literary and cultural studies rather than merely as forms of popular entertainment.

The development of television series cannot be separated from broader cultural changes associated with postmodern media. Strinati (1995) argues that television plays a central role in postmodern culture by reshaping how meaning is produced and consumed through continuous flows of images, genre hybridity, and fragmented yet interconnected narratives. In this context, television series have evolved from simple episodic programs into complex narrative forms that blend realism and fiction, entertainment and social commentary.

The increasing use of serialized storytelling allows television series to construct layered narratives, recurring themes, and evolving character identities across extended time frames. As a result, contemporary television series function not merely as entertainment but as cultural texts that generate meaning, explore moral and ideological questions, and invite critical interpretation, reinforcing their relevance as objects of literary and cultural analysis.

Written texts are no longer the sole medium through which narrative meaning is produced. Audiovisual works, including films and television series, construct narrative through images, sound, music, and dialogue. These components create coherent meaning and allow viewers to interpret story, conflict, and character development. Contemporary narrative theory argues that narrative structure is not limited by medium. Hutcheon (2006) argues that a story may take shape through visual or auditory forms as long as it presents an organized sequence of events and communicates identifiable themes. Metz (1974) explains that cinematic elements such as camera movement, shot composition, and sound design function as signifying devices that contribute to narrative interpretation.

The decision to focus on a television series rather than traditional literary forms emerged from a process of eliminating other narrative media such as novels, short stories, poetry, and drama. While these written forms offer rich

textual complexity, they do not fully capture the multimodal experience that contemporary audiences, particularly those from Generation Z, often seek.

Film was also excluded as an option because its narrative is typically compressed into a single, continuous arc, offering limited space for prolonged curiosity and episodic suspense. Mittell (2015) argues that television series provide a sequential structure that encourages sustained engagement, with each episode inviting continued anticipation and deeper emotional investment. My personal experience aligns with this characteristic, watching a series consistently evokes curiosity about what unfolds next an interpretive impulse less prominent when viewing a self-contained film.

Furthermore, growing up within a generation that gravitates toward visually driven storytelling has shaped my preference for narratives that combine written elements with aesthetic visual presentation. Cardwell (2020) states that the layered visuality of television series its cinematography, mise-en-scène, color design, and symbolic imagery provides fertile ground for analytical interpretation that is similar to, and in many ways broader than, traditional literary texts. This combination of episodic narrative, visual richness, and cultural relevance ultimately positions the television series as a compelling and methodologically suitable object of study.

Among the ten television series that have been previously examined such as *Breaking Bad*, *Game of Thrones*, *Better Call Saul*, *The Queen's Gambit*, *Prison Break*, *Black Mirror*, *Stranger Things*, *The Walking Dead*, *Moon Knight*, and *Loki*. The uniqueness of this study lies in its selection of *Better Call Saul* as the object of analysis, as the series offers an exceptionally nuanced and sustained portrayal of character transformation rarely found in contemporary television narratives. Unlike many series that depict character change as sudden or event-driven, *Better Call Saul* constructs Jimmy McGill's transformation gradually through long-form storytelling, allowing moral decline to emerge through accumulated choices, interpersonal conflicts, and structural pressures.

This focus on *Better Call Saul* is further justified by the distinctive narrative position of its central character within the broader universe established by

Breaking Bad. In Vince Gilligan's *Breaking Bad* (2008–2013), the character of Saul Goodman portrayed by Bob Odenkirk functions as a recurring supporting figure whose role, while memorable and narratively significant, remains peripheral to the central arc of Walter White's transformation. Saul Goodman in *Breaking Bad* is largely presented as a fully formed persona: the fast-talking, morally unscrupulous criminal lawyer whose identity appears fixed and whose past remains largely unexplored. *Better Call Saul* fundamentally inverts this dynamic by positioning the character here reintroduced as Jimmy McGill, the man who would eventually become Saul Goodman as the unambiguous center of the narrative. What was a minor character in one series becomes the protagonist of another, and in doing so, *Better Call Saul* transforms a figure previously understood only through the narrow lens of utility into a fully rendered human being with a coherent history, a complex psychology, and a moral trajectory that demands sustained examination. This inversion not only expands the narrative universe of *Breaking Bad* but also creates a uniquely rich analytical opportunity: the audience arrives at *Better Call Saul* already knowing who Jimmy McGill will become, and the dramatic tension of the series derives precisely from watching how and at what cost that transformation unfolds across six seasons of meticulously constructed long-form narrative.

The evolution from an idealistic yet struggling lawyer into the ethically ambiguous persona of Saul Goodman functions not merely as a plot device but as the core narrative mechanism of the series. This distinctive narrative design positions *Better Call Saul* as a uniquely rich text for academic analysis, particularly in examining how cinematic characterization is developed through dialogue, visual symbolism, performance, narrative pacing, and the reactions of surrounding characters within a complex sociocultural framework.

The series offers a uniquely rich dramatic structure characterized by intricate interpersonal conflicts, gradual character transformation, and sustained moral tension that unfolds across multiple episodes. This serialized construction supports a depth of narrative analysis not always achievable in genres driven primarily by spectacle or episodic closure.

Newman and Levine (2012) along with Mittell (2015) note that character-centered dramas with cumulative storytelling frameworks provide fertile ground for examining psychological complexity, ethical ambiguity, and long-form narrative design. Within this context, *Better Call Saul* presents a multilayered dramatic text in which conflict operates not only at the level of plot but also within the protagonist's evolving moral and professional identity. The combination of critical prestige, narrative complexity, and sustained dramatic conflict makes *Better Call Saul* a particularly suitable and academically productive object for literary and media analysis.

Better Call Saul is an American crime drama series developed by Vince Gilligan and Peter Gould as both a prequel and a spin-off to *Breaking Bad*. The series follows the trajectory of Jimmy McGill, a struggling small-time lawyer attempting to build a legitimate legal career while confronting moral pressures, professional conflicts, and complex personal relationships, ultimately transforming into the more cynical and manipulative legal persona known as Saul Goodman. Airing on AMC from 2015 to 2022 and consisting of six seasons with a total of sixty-three episodes, the series was produced through the collaboration of High Bridge Productions, Crystal Diner Productions, Gran Via Productions, Sony Pictures Television, and AMC, reflecting a significant production scale within contemporary television.

Mittell (2015) and Newman and Levine (2012) emphasize that serialized dramas enable uniquely nuanced depictions of psychological evolution, making them particularly effective for studying character transformation as a literary and audiovisual phenomenon. Within this framework, Jimmy McGill functions as a paradigmatic figure whose identity is continuously negotiated, destabilized, and reconstructed across the series, rendering his transformation a compelling subject for examining how contemporary television employs characterization to articulate themes of morality, ambition, and the fragility of personal ethics.

Within literary and audiovisual analysis, characterization and transformation serve as essential conceptual tools for understanding how narratives construct and develop complex human identities. Characterization

refers to the array of techniques through which a character is shaped, revealed, and interpreted, and in audiovisual texts, this process extends beyond verbal description to encompass visual and performative cues. Boggs and Petrie (2018) argue that characters in film and television are not merely textual constructs but cinematic creations formed through appearance, dialogue, external and internal actions, the reactions of other characters, and dramaturgical devices such as contrast, caricature, and leitmotif. These techniques collectively enable viewers to infer a character's psychological depth, moral disposition, and motivational orientation.

Nurgiyantoro (2012) explains that transformation denotes the dynamic progression a character undergoes as the narrative unfolds, where shifts in behavior, worldview, or ethical stance arise from narrative conflict, external pressures, and internal dilemmas.

1.2 Research Problem

The formulation of the research problem in this study is grounded in the central focus of analyzing Jimmy McGill's progressive transformation as constructed through cinematic characterization in *Better Call Saul*. By framing the inquiry within the domain of cinematic characterization, the study seeks to identify how specific filmic elements such as dialogue delivery, visual symbolism, mise-en-scène, and character interactions serve as indicators of Jimmy McGill's shift toward the persona of Saul Goodman.

Accordingly, the research is guided by the following question:

1. How does transformation Jimmy McGill manifest through characterization in *Better Call Saul*?
2. What narrative factors drive Jimmy McGill's character transformation into Saul Goodman?

1.3 Research Objective

The primary objective of this study is to examine how Jimmy McGill's character transformation into Saul Goodman is constructed through the techniques of cinematic characterization in *Better Call Saul*.

To achieve this aim, the research pursues the following specific objectives:

1. To analyze how Jimmy McGill's transformation into Saul Goodman is constructed through the characterization described by Boggs and Petrie.
2. To identify and explain the narrative factors that drive Jimmy McGill's transformation into Saul Goodman in *Better Call Saul*, particularly those related to conflict, professional pressure, and interpersonal relationships across the series.

1.4 Research Significance

This research provides academic value because it offers a way to read audiovisual works through the lens of cinematic characterization. Everyone can see how visual elements, dialogue, and actions shape Jimmy McGill's identity throughout the story. This approach makes the analysis of the series more focused because each scene can be understood as part of the character's transformation process.

This research also expands the scope of literary studies by positioning television as a narrative text that deserves analysis. Series such as *Better Call Saul* have strong story structures, symbols, conflicts, and character development, allowing them to stand alongside modern literary texts. This analysis provides a foundation for further studies that aim to position television within literary and cultural scholarship.

1.5 Previous Studies

Schubert (2017), in a study entitled *Constructing the Antihero: Linguistic Characterisation in Current American Television Series*, published in the

Journal of Literary Semantics Vol. 46(1), examines the ways in which morally ambiguous criminal figures in contemporary American fiction television series are linguistically constructed as compelling and even likable figures for broad audiences. The study draws on a dataset comprising the first thirteen episodes of *Breaking Bad*, *House of Cards*, and *Dexter* respectively, adopting approaches from cognitive semantics and register theory to uncover the equivocal status of the protagonists. The central finding of this study reveals that the blending of mental spaces in the characters' utterances underscores the fact that they oscillate between various social and cognitive domains, while the protagonists prove highly versatile in accommodating their linguistic registers to shifting situational contexts, thereby being framed as shrewd, multifaceted, and captivating individuals.

The similarity between Schubert's study and the present research lies in its focus on characterization techniques within contemporary American crime drama television series, with objects of study situated within the same narrative universe that is, the work of Vince Gilligan. The difference lies in the approach and analytical focus: Schubert employs a linguistic and cognitive semantic approach to examine character construction through verbal utterances, whereas the present study utilizes the cinematic characterization framework of Boggs and Petrie (2018), which encompasses the visual, performative, and narrative dimensions in a more comprehensive manner. Furthermore, Schubert examines three series simultaneously, whereas the present study focuses in depth on a single series, namely *Better Call Saul*.

Rush (2014), in an article entitled "*Want to Cook?*": *Static and Fluid Layering in The Sopranos and Breaking Bad*, published in the *Journal of Screenwriting* Vol. 5(3), examines how the story structure of television series layers characters against generic tropes and the consequences of this for character development. The study proposes two character layering strategies: a static strategy, in which the trope remains constant throughout the narrative, and a fluid strategy, in which the character moves from one trope to another across the course of the story. Using *The Sopranos* as an example of static layering in

which Tony Soprano always returns to his trope despite his efforts to resist it and *Breaking Bad* as an example of fluid layering in which Walter White is allowed to move through a series of tropes and thus genuinely develops as a character the study demonstrates how serialized structure either enables or constrains the depth of character transformation.

The similarity between Rush's study and the present research lies in the use of *Breaking Bad* as an object of analysis a series situated within the same narrative universe as *Better Call Saul* as well as in its attention to the structural mechanisms that enable or constrain character transformation within the long-form serial format. The difference lies in the focus and approach: Rush employs a Neo-Baroque framework and the concept of structural layering to analyze two series simultaneously from the perspective of screenwriting, whereas the present study uses the cinematic characterization framework of Boggs and Petrie to analyze character transformation in depth within *Better Call Saul* from the perspective of literary and media studies.

O'Meara (2015), in an article entitled *Changing the Way We Think About Character Change in Episodic Television Series*, published in the *Journal of Screenwriting* Vol. 6(2), challenges the common assumption that characters in episodic television series are static and do not undergo meaningful change. The study identifies three types of on-screen character change: experiencing significant life events, expressing intense emotions, and displaying behavior that contrasts with prior conduct. Textual analysis of popular crime dramas and sitcoms demonstrates that characters in television series do indeed continue to change dynamically across episodes.

The similarity between O'Meara's study and the present research lies in its central focus on character change and transformation within the television serial format, as well as in its use of textual analysis as a method for identifying and demonstrating such change. The difference lies in the scope and specificity of the object: O'Meara examines a range of episodic television series comparatively in order to construct a general theoretical framework for character change, whereas the present study applies the cinematic

characterization framework of Boggs and Petrie specifically to Jimmy McGill's transformation in *Better Call Saul* as a single object of in-depth analysis.

Montoya (2020), in an article entitled *It's (Not) All Good, Man: Better Call Saul and the Nostalgic Reconstruction of an Ever-Longing Character*, published in the journal *Adaptation* Vol. 13(3) by Oxford University Press, examines the construction of Jimmy McGill/Saul Goodman/Gene Takavic as a figure who perpetually longs for his past identities. The study demonstrates that the alter egos of Saul Goodman in *Better Call Saul* namely Jimmy and Gene are defined by a profound longing for past identities displayed recursively across different periods of his life, and that character construction is not the only locus of nostalgia in the series, as its condition as an audiovisual multiplicity also produces its own nostalgia for the narrative and aesthetic devices of *Breaking Bad*.

The similarity between Montoya's study and the present research is particularly significant given that both use the same object of study *Better Call Saul* with a focus on the construction and transformation of Jimmy McGill/Saul Goodman as the central character. The difference lies in the analytical framework and thematic focus: Montoya employs a nostalgia framework and intertextual analysis between *Better Call Saul* and *Breaking Bad* to examine the recursive construction of character identity, whereas the present study employs the cinematic characterization framework of Boggs and Petrie to examine how Jimmy's transformation is constructed visually and narratively across six seasons of the series.

Pierson (2022), in an article entitled *Resentment and Ressentiment as Motivating Forces in Better Call Saul*, published in the *Journal of Popular Television* Vol. 10(3), examines the role of resentment and *ressentiment* as affective forces that drive characters within television melodrama. The study concludes that externally directed resentment can function as an empowering and creative force in a character's life, and that for Jimmy McGill, resentment serves as the primary catalyst for his transformation into the unethical yet prosperous criminal lawyer known as Saul Goodman.

The similarity between Pierson's study and the present research is particularly strong given that both use the same object of study *Better Call Saul* with a focus on Jimmy McGill's transformation as the central character. Both studies also examine the driving factors that propel this transformation. The difference lies in the analytical approach: Pierson adopts a psychological and televisual philosophy perspective, drawing on Nietzschean concepts to analyze the emotional motivations of the character, whereas the present study employs the cinematic characterization framework of Boggs and Petrie to examine how the transformation is manifested and constructed cinematically through visual and narrative techniques.

Lawson and Pearce (2023), in an article entitled *Serial Characterization as a Feminist Ethics of Care in Better Call Saul*, published in the *Journal of Popular Television* Vol. 11(3), examine the consequences of temporal complexity for character development in *Better Call Saul*. The study attempts an Aristotelian reading of the series but subsequently identifies a number of deficits arising from the application of this methodology to theatrical characters as opposed to serial televisual characters. It proposes an ateological understanding of serial character development and introduces the relevance of feminist ethics of care as a more appropriate framework for the moral evaluation of serial characters.

The similarity between Lawson and Pearce's study and the present research lies in their shared object of study *Better Call Saul* and in the central attention both give to character development within the temporally complex long-form serial format. The difference lies in the perspective and theoretical framework: Lawson and Pearce employ feminist ethics of care and a philosophical approach to evaluate characters morally within the context of televisual seriality, whereas the present study employs the cinematic characterization framework of Boggs and Petrie to analyze how character transformation is constructed visually and narratively across six seasons of the series.

Ianniello (2023), in an article entitled *Character Composition: A New Framework for TV Serial Drama Characters*, published in the *Journal of*

Screenwriting Vol. 14(2), proposes a new framework for analyzing and understanding characters in television serial drama that moves beyond the film paradigm that has long dominated discussions of character development. The study asserts that in serial drama, the physical or plot journey of a character runs linearly and horizontally across episodes and time, while the emotional or thematic journey runs vertically providing depth to the layering of character. The proposed *character composition* framework enables writers and analysts to monitor the emotional and physical orchestration of characters across individual episodes, seasons, and the series as a whole.

The similarity between Ianniello's study and the present research lies in its focus on the mechanisms of character development and transformation within the long-form television serial drama format, as well as in its recognition that characters in television series operate within a temporal dimension far more complex than other narrative forms. The difference lies in orientation and analytical framework: Ianniello proposes a new framework from the perspective of screenwriting, aimed at assisting writers in constructing serial characters, whereas the present study employs the established cinematic characterization framework of Boggs and Petrie to analyze the transformation of an existing character within the audiovisual text of *Better Call Saul*.

1.6 Definition Key of Terms

The "definition of key terms" tool provides assistance in giving concise and accurate definitions of the important terms used in the study. In addition to preventing ambiguity or misinterpretation, the purpose of providing this definition is to guarantee that the reader is aware of the researcher's meaning behind any term used in the context of the study.

1.6.1 Characterization

Characterization refers to the array of techniques through which a character's identity, personality, psychological depth, and moral disposition are constructed and communicated to an audience within a narrative. In the context of

audiovisual narratives, characterization extends beyond verbal description to encompass a broad range of visual, performative, and cinematic strategies.

Boggs and Petrie (2018) define cinematic characterization as the process through which characters in film and television are constructed through deliberate choices in appearance, dialogue, external and internal actions, the reactions of surrounding characters, and dramaturgical devices such as contrast, caricature, and leitmotif.

1.6.2 Character Transformation

Character transformation refers to the significant, permanent, and narratively meaningful change that a character undergoes in terms of personality, values, moral orientation, or worldview as a direct result of the events, conflicts, and pressures experienced throughout a narrative. Nurgiyantoro (2012) explains that transformation denotes the dynamic progression a character undergoes as the narrative unfolds, where shifts in behavior, worldview, or ethical stance arise from narrative conflict, external pressures, and internal dilemmas.

Boggs and Petrie (2018) distinguish between static characters, who remain essentially unchanged by the events of the story, and dynamic or developing characters, who undergo important and permanent changes as a result of the narrative's action.

1.6.3 Cinematic Characterization

Cinematic characterization refers to the specific set of techniques employed in film and television to construct character identity through the deliberate use of audiovisual and narrative elements. Unlike literary characterization, which operates primarily through language, cinematic characterization integrates visual components such as costume, lighting, framing, and mise-en-scène with performative elements such as dialogue delivery, gesture, and movement to produce meaning about a character's psychology and moral orientation. Boggs and Petrie (2018) emphasize that in film and television, characters are cinematic creations

whose identities are shaped through the interplay of appearance, action, speech, and dramatic framing rather than through textual description alone.

1.6.4 Television Series

A television series is an audiovisual narrative form that presents a sustained story through a sequence of interconnected episodes organized into one or more seasons. Mittell (2015) explains that serialized television facilitates complex narrative construction by distributing story information across episodes, thereby supporting long-term character development and layered thematic exploration. Unlike standalone films, television series provide an extended narrative space in which characters, conflicts, and themes develop gradually over time, enabling a depth of psychological and moral complexity that shorter narrative forms cannot fully accommodate.

1.6.5 Narrative Factors

Narrative factors refer to the specific elements embedded within the story structure of a narrative that function as catalysts or conditions for a character's transformation. These include, but are not limited to, interpersonal conflict, professional pressure, the reactions and influences of surrounding characters, moral dilemmas, and significant plot events that force a character to make choices that reveal and reshape their identity.

1.6.6 Better Call Saul

Better Call Saul is an American crime drama television series developed by Vince Gilligan and Peter Gould, aired on AMC from 2015 to 2022, consisting of six seasons and sixty-three episodes. The series functions as both a prequel and spin-off to *Breaking Bad* and follows the trajectory of Jimmy McGill, a struggling small-time lawyer who gradually transforms into the morally compromised criminal attorney known as Saul Goodman.

1.6.7 Jimmy McGill / Saul Goodman

Jimmy McGill is the central character and protagonist of *Better Call Saul*, whose gradual transformation into the persona of Saul Goodman constitutes the primary subject of this study. At the beginning of the series, Jimmy is portrayed as an earnest yet financially struggling public defender with a history as a small-time con artist, attempting to build a legitimate legal career under the shadow of his accomplished brother. Saul Goodman is the professional alter ego that Jimmy progressively adopts as his moral boundaries erode through accumulated conflicts, compromises, and losses across the series.

