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Bakalářská práce

Female Characters and the Relationship of Women to Children in Roald Dahl's Children's Fiction

Pojetí ženských postav v tvorbě
Roalda Dahla a jejich vztah k dětským
hrdinům

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Anotace

Cílem bakalářské práce je literární analýza charakteristiky ženských postav v tvorbě Roalda Dahla určené dětskému čtenáři. Roald Dahl proslul jako autor groteskní prózy pro dospělé a pro jeho tvorbu pro děti je příznačný černý humor, nadsázka, groteskní prvky a určitá kontroverze jeho děl (Čarodějnice, Jirkova zázračná medicína, aj.). Práce nejprve představí Roalda Dahla a jeho dílo v jednotlivých kategoriích čtenářů (dětský a dospělý čtenář) a následně se bude zabývat tématem antifeministického přístupu autora k ženským postavám, a to především v Dahlově próze Čarodějnice (The Witches). Teoretickým základem práce bude srovnání pojetí ženských postav v klasické pohádce bratří Grimmů (Bettelheim) a charakteristika ženských postav v Dahlově tvorbě pro dětské čtenáře. Praktická část práce dále posoudí vliv vzorů a modelových postav na dětského čtenáře v Dahlově tvorbě pro děti včetně možných kontroverzí ve výkladu a interpretaci čtení. Role humoru, nadsázky a grotesky bude předmětem závěrečných zkoumání v rámci bakalářské práce.

Klíčová slova: Roald Dahl, Čarodějnice, groteska, černý humor, humor, kontroverze, nadsázka, antifeminismus, ženské postavy, klasická pohádka, děti, dospělí, Bratři Grimmové, charakteristika, ženy

Abstract

The aim of the Bachelor thesis is a literary analysis of the characteristics of female characters in Roald Dahl's work for children's readers. Roald Dahl became known as the author of grotesque prose for adults, and his work for children is characterized by black humour, hyperbole, grotesque elements and some controversy of his works (The Witches, George's Marvellous Medicine, etc). The work will firstly introduce Roald Dahl and his work in different categories of readers (children and adult readers) and then will deal with the topic of the author's anti-feminist approach to female characters, especially in Dahl's prose The Witches. The theoretical basis of the work will compare the concept of female characters in the classic fairy tale by Grimm Brothers (Bettelheim) and the characteristics of female characters in Dahl's work for children's readers. The practical part of the work will further assess the influence of role models and model characters on the child reader in Dahl's work for children, including possible controversies in the reading and interpretation. The role of humour, hyperbole and grotesque will be the subject of final analysis within my research as part of the Bachelor thesis.

Key Words: Roald Dahl, The Witches, grotesque, black humour, humour, controversy, hyperbole, antifeminism, female characters, classic fairy tale, children, adults, Grimm Brothers, characteristics, women

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1 Introduction

In my bachelor thesis I will mainly deal with an analysis of the characteristics of female characters in Roald Dahl's work for children and teenagers. The analysis of female characters concentrates on Dahl's books *The Witches*, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, *The Twits*, *James and the Giant Peach*, *George's Marvellous Medicine* and *Matilda*. All female characters from these books will be analysed in terms of their physical appearance, behaviour and mainly of their attitude towards children's characters.

In the beginning of my thesis, I will shortly introduce Roald Dahl and his life, and my main focus will be on his childhood as there are many events that influenced his writing career and many motives were used in his work for young readers, but also for adults, and I will look at some autobiographical features in his work for children.

In next chapter, I will deal with the grotesque, hyperbole, humour and black humour and its significant features, as Roald Dahl is famous for this style of writing. Dahl's work for children is also known as very controversial and I will deal with possible impact on children and on controversial topics mainly in *The Witches* and *George's Marvellous Medicine*, but I will shortly mention his other stories and their controversy as well.

Then I will deal, as I already mentioned, with Dahl's stories and their female characters and their characteristics individually. In *Matilda* I will focus on characters of Miss Trunchbull, Miss Honey, Mrs Phelps, Matilda's mother and Matilda herself. In *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* I will describe Charlie's mother and his grandmothers together with other children's mothers. In *The Twits* I will deal with an only female character Mrs Twit and in *James and the Giant Peach* I will shortly describe James' aunts and then female insect-like creatures. The chapter about *The Witches* will deal with characteristics of main protagonist's grandmother and witches including The Grand High Witch and my focus will then turn to the topic of Dahl's anti-feminist approach to female characters in *The Witches*.

At the end of my thesis, I will focus on the comparison of the concept of female characters in the traditional fairy tale by Grimm Brothers and Dahl's depiction of female characters, mainly witches in his stories for young readers, and I will shortly mention Bruno Bettelheim's psychoanalytic view on women in traditional fairy tales.

2 Roald Dahl-A Writer of Children's Fiction and Short Stories for Adults

2.1 Life of Roald Dahl

Roald Dahl was born in Llandaff (Cardiff) on 13th September 1916 to Norwegian parents, Harald Dahl and Sofie Magdalene Hesselberg. His father Harald came from a lower-middle-class family, but he made a very successful career. When he was forty his first wife Marie who was twenty-nine died and he was left alone with their two children Ellen and Louis. In 1911 four years after Marie's death, he married Sofie Hesselberg who came from a bourgeois family. In 1912 his first daughter Astri was born and after two years she was followed by her sister Alfchild. Two years later their only son Roald was born, and he was named after a famous Norwegian explorer Roald Amundsen who was the first person that reached the South Pole. Then Roald's younger sister Else was born and the family moved to Radyr in 1918 at the of the First World war. After one year another baby girl Asta was on her way and was born in autumn 1920 but this year was a really unhappy for a Dahl's family. Roald's sister Astri died in February of appendicitis and his father died of pneumonia two months later. Sofie who was left alone with their six children, sold the house after her husband's death, and they moved back to Llandaff. Thanks to Harald, who left over a big amount of money to his family, they didn't have any financial problems. All of their children were provided to go to boarding school and also to buy a house when they grew up.¹

As his father had wished, the children went to English schools. Roald himself attended the local Llandaff Cathedral School and then he started his schooling at St Peter's, Weston-Super-Mare. Dahl's mother wanted the best for him, so she sent him to Repton where he completed his education. At Repton Roald experienced many memorable events that were later written down in his stories. His *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* is inspired by a Cadbury chocolate company which invited Repton students to take part in a testing of their new chocolate

¹ TREGLOWN, Jeremy. *Roald Dahl: a biography*. London: Faber and Faber, 1995. ISBN 0-571-16572-9.

bars. After he finished at Repton, he started to work for a Shell Oil company and travelled to Africa.²

When World War Two started he joined the Royal Air Force (RAF) when he was twenty-three. In 1940 he crashed with his aircraft in Libya, and he suffered from several head injuries and it left him temporarily blind. After his recovery he started flying again, but blinding headaches appeared as a consequence of his previous accident. He went back home to Britain and his career in RAF was over. In 1950 he started to miss the New York's life, so he applied for a permanent American visa which he got. One year after moving to New York he met his future wife Patricia Neal who was an American actress and three years later they got married and had five children together.³

At this time Roald was still writing stories for adults but as he was spending so much time with his family it probably led him to also start writing children's literature and in 1961 his children's book *James and the Giant Peach* was published and from this time, he established himself as a children's writer.⁴

Patricia and Roald got divorced after thirty years in 1983 and the same year he married his second wife Felicity Crosland who was twenty-two years younger than him. Between the years 1961 and 1990 he published large number of his other children's books as *Charlie and Chocolate Factory* (1964) followed in 1970 by *Fantastic Mr. Fox*. *The Twits*, *Revolting Rhymes*, *The BFG* and *The Witches* were published in 1980. Roald Dahl is also an author of screenplays for James Bond and many adult novels such as *Kiss Kiss*. Five years before his death and despite his illness he published two of his autobiographical books *Boy* and *Going Solo*. Famous *Matilda* was published in 1988.⁵

² *Roald Dahl: Official Website* [online]. [cit. 2021-02-21]. Dostupné z: <https://www.roalddahl.com>

³ HOWARD, Kristine. *Roald Dahl Fans.com* [online]. 1996 [cit. 2021-02-21]. Dostupné z: <https://www.roalddahlfans.com>

⁴ STURROCK, Donald. *Storyteller: the authorized biography of Roald Dahl*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010. ISBN 978-1-4165-5082-2.

⁵ *Roald Dahl: Official Website* [online]. [cit. 2021-02-21]. Dostupné z: <https://www.roalddahl.com>

On 23 November 1990 Roald Dahl died at the age of seventy-four and was buried in the parish church of St Peter and St Paul in Great Missenden and the Roald Dahl's Museum and Story Centre was opened in his honour nearby.⁶

After his death *The Minpins* and *The Vicar of Nibbleswicke* were published and his belongings were divided by Felicity into two halves. The first half was given to Dahl's children and the second half was used by Felicity to set up a foundation in Roald's name. Every year this foundation is focused on different problems which affected Roald's life.⁷

2.2 Roald Dahl Writes for Adults

Roald Dahl is now mostly known for his excellent children's books so it can be quite surprising that his first published children's book *The Gremlins* (1943) had almost no success. *The Gremlins* were originally meant to be used by Walt Disney who wanted to make it into the film, but it never happened. After the failure he left children's stories for a while and he turned his attention on writing stories for adults. His first collection of stories for adults called *Over to You* was published in 1945.⁸

Over to You is a collection that consist of ten unique short stories that don't carry Dahl's classic writing patterns. Most of them are set in wartime, inspired by flying and flyers and especially times, when Dahl served as a pilot during The Second World War. In this collection we can find a story named *A Piece of Cake* which was the first story he was paid for and firstly it was published in American magazine *The Saturday Evening Post*. Other stories that are included in collection: *An African story, Madame Rosette, Katina, Yesterday Was Beautiful, They Shall*

⁶ *Roald Dahl: Official Website* [online]. [cit. 2021-02-21]. Dostupné z: <https://www.roalddahl.com>

⁷ TREGLOWN, Jeremy. *Roald Dahl: a biography*. London: Faber and Faber, 1995. ISBN 0-571-16572-9.

⁸ WEST, Mark I. *Roald Dahl: Twayne's English Authors Series*. New York: Twayne Pub, 1992. ISBN 978-0805770193.

*Not Grow Old, Beware of the Dog, Only This, Someone Like You and Death of an Old, Old Man.*⁹

And because Dahl was really good in telling stories and it was a great source of money and fame it was no wonder, he continued to write short stories for adults in the following years.¹⁰ In 1953 the collection *Someone Like You* was released consisting of eighteen stories which later appeared in TV in series called *Tales of the Unexpected* same as eleven stories from a collection *Kiss, Kiss* that was published few years later in 1960. Although these collections are very well known, his later ones as *Switch Bitch, Tales of the Unexpected* or *My Uncle Oswald* belong to the best-selling ones. We can count that Dahl himself wrote thirty-nine works during his life.¹¹

As it was already said, Dahl really liked stories. What is more important he was a great collector of contemporary legends, folklore and stories that people told him and he was a fan of a good practical jokes. He always paid a good attention to having a unique plot and as it can sometimes be really difficult to find interesting plots, he sometimes used the same plot repeatedly.¹²

Almost all of his stories carry a typical Dahl's structure. At the beginning he introduces to his readers ordinary characters and common environment, but during the story he leads them towards surprising twist and unexpected disclosure. In this way the reader works through a thrilling process full of emotion, dark humor, horror, absurdity and irony. At the very end the reader is

⁹ *Roald Dahl: Official Website* [online]. [cit. 2021-02-21]. Dostupné z: <https://www.roalddahl.com>

¹⁰ BURGER, Peter. *Contemporary Legends in the Short Stories of Roald Dahl: Contemporary Legend n.s. 5*. The Journal of the International Society for Contemporary Legend Research. The Netherlands: Leiden University, 2002, 136-158.

¹¹ *Roald Dahl: Official Website* [online]. [cit. 2021-02-21]. Dostupné z: <https://www.roalddahl.com>

¹² BURGER, Peter. *Contemporary Legends in the Short Stories of Roald Dahl*, p. 136-158

in shock and begins to retrospectively reconsider his attitudes and views from a different perspective toward the main characters and plot.¹³

It may look like Dahl wrote only short stories, but it is not true. In 1948 his fantasy novel *Sometime Never* about nuclear war was published but it was not that successful as he expected to be. After thirty years he published another novel called *My Uncle Oswald*. Unfortunately, it was completely the same case as with the first one. At this point Dahl understood that he would never be recognized as the author of famous novels for adults.¹⁴

In 1960 after the publication of *Kiss Kiss* he decided to write stories for children. Dahl himself said that this decision came in New York, when he couldn't invent a good plot for his next short story, so he gave it a chance. And as he always told bed-time stories to his kids he had many ideas and stories that will be later known by children all over the world.¹⁵ Although he wrote mostly children's literature at the end of his life, he still saw himself as a writer for both audiences.

2.3 Roald Dahl Writes for Children and Teenagers

As I already mentioned Dahl's first children's book *The Gremlins* published in 1943 wasn't successful at all so he left writing for children for a while. In 1960 he returned actively to writing children's literature, mostly between the ages seven and eleven, and the main reason was as it was said before that he had his first own children that time. At the very beginning he wrote stories only for his kids especially Olivia and Tessa when they were five and three years old and he didn't intend to publish them but that changed over time. His dedication to his children and children in general lead him to write and publish many children's stories from 1960 until his death. His journey as a children's author

¹³ RAMACHANDRAN, Sandhya. *The Delightful And The Dark: Exploring Roald Dahl's Adult Fiction*. *The Curious Reader* [online]. Mumbai: AFD Pharma Pvt., 2017, September 11, 2018 [cit. 2021-03-04]. Dostupné z: <https://www.thecuriousreader.in/features/roald-dahl-adult-fiction/>

¹⁴ MIDDLETON, Haydn. *Roald Dahl: an unauthorized biography*. Illinois: Heinemann Library, 1999. ISBN 1575726939.

¹⁵ WEST, Mark I. *Roald Dahl: Twayne's English Authors Series*. New York: Twayne Pub, 1992. ISBN 978-0805770193, p. 60

started quite unexpectedly, when he sent a typescript of *James and the Giant Peach* dedicated to Olivia and Tessa to Alfred Knopf, who was his publisher. As Knopf wasn't primarily focused on juvenile fiction, he firstly had to test it on his children's book editor Virginie Fowler. She was thrilled and it encourage Dahl to continue writing. *James and the Giant Peach* was then published in 1961 and meanwhile he finished a draft of his second story which was originally named *Charlie's Chocolate Boy*. This story was dedicated to his only son Theo who was born that year. Many people around Dahl's family thought that he got along well with children and that he always told exciting stories and loved to communicate with them.¹⁶

Next years were harsh for Dahl. His son Theo was injured and almost died when he was hit in his carriage by a car and daughter Olivia actually died because of measles in 1962. To make matters worse his wife Patricia had a stroke. Dahl was devastated and stopped working on his children's books for a few years. When he put himself together from a long mourning he returned to his latest story and renamed it *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* which was finally published in 1964 and later followed by another story but this time for younger children called *The Magic Finger* (1966). Dahl became famous and successful, he felt stronger and was more determined than before and his books become popular bestsellers. 1970s were fruitful in terms of the number of published books. *Fantastic Mr. Fox* dedicated to Dahl's daughter Olivia was published in 1970 and it was the most autobiographical of all his children's stories.¹⁷

The sequel of *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* named *Charlie and the Great Glass Elevator* was published in 1972 and was followed by *Danny the Champion of the World* in 1975 which is about father-son relationship and by reading it we will learn that no father is perfect, but every child wants a parent that is sparky. This story is an allegory of Dahl's household and carries a symbolic meaning

¹⁶ TREGLOWN, Jeremy. *Roald Dahl: a biography*. London: Faber and Faber, 1995. ISBN 0-571-16572-9, p.123-141

¹⁷ STURROCK, Donald. *Storyteller: the authorized biography of Roald Dahl*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010. ISBN 978-1-4165-5082-2.

for him. It is dedicated to his whole family including his wife Patricia, daughters Tessa, Ophelia and Lucy and his only son Theo.¹⁸ The last story published in 1970s was *The Enormous Crocodile* (1978) in which we can notice Dahl's connection to Africa where he lived when he was a young man. It was the first picture book for slightly younger children between the ages of around three and seven that Roald ever wrote and also first of his stories illustrated by Quentin Blake. This is the time when they firstly met, and their long cooperation began and continued until Roald died.¹⁹ Dahl himself found it very hard to write books for nippers²⁰ because as he said, it is problematic to find a good plot that will hold young kid's attention. But what makes a big difference is when you put illustrations in it. Another thing that Dahl found very important in his books for younger children was insertion of moral message. In 1990s he wrote last two stories for nippers *Esio Trot* (1990) and posthumously published *The Minpins* (1991).²¹

During the 1980s, Dahl was also very productive and some of his most famous and best stories saw the light of day mainly because at that time he was married with his second wife Felicity and she created environment that Dahl needed for his work. Among these books appeared: *The Twits* (1980), *George's Marvellous Medicine* (1981), *The BFG* (1982), *The Witches* (1983), *The Giraffe and the Pelly and Me* (1985) which is another picture book for little children and is dedicated to Dahl's stepdaughters and finally the last one was *Matilda* (1988).

¹⁸ TREGLOWN, Jeremy. *Roald Dahl: a biography*. London: Faber and Faber, 1995. ISBN 0-571-16572-9, p.186-191

¹⁹ *Roald Dahl: Official Website* [online]. [cit. 2021-02-21]. Dostupné z: <https://www.roalddahl.com/>

²⁰ Nippers is an expression that Roald Dahl used for younger readers between the ages of around three and seven

²¹ WEST, Mark I. *Roald Dahl: Twayne's English Authors Series*. New York: Twayne Pub, 1992. ISBN 978-0805770193, p. 94-95

These stories were also completed with excellent Blake's drawings and it helped to soften the way that Dahl's stories spoke to children.²²

Besides writing children's books Dahl is also an author of teenage fiction and three collections of poems. These collections of poems include *Revolting Rhymes* (1982), *Dirty Beasts* (1983) for younger children and *Rhyme Stew* (1989) which is for adolescents.²³ For this group of readers Dahl wrote these books: *The Wonderful Story of Henry Sugar and Six More* (1977) which is an autobiographical piece and is a collection and *The Vicar of Nibbleswicke* (1991) published shortly after his death and devoted to The Dyslexia Institute.²⁴

One of the main reasons Dahl's books are so popular among teenagers is that he had the same sense of humour and perception of society and authorities as they do. In his books, adults are very often portrayed as negative entities and because adolescents experience revolt against authorities at a certain age they sympathize with his stories. Another element which is appealing for this group of readers is punishment of evil at the end of his stories which is possible mainly because of typical independence of main protagonists. This element is very important as it can encourage young readers to be more confident.²⁵ At the very beginning of writing children's literature Dahl's goal was to entertain his young readers but during the lifetime he focused more on moral message and also on helping children become readers and not to be scared of books.²⁶ From my point of view Dahl accomplished successfully his goal, because his books showed many children and teenagers, that they can enjoy reading and enchanting world of books.

²² TREGLOWN, Jeremy. *Roald Dahl: a biography*. London: Faber and Faber, 1995. ISBN 0-571-16572-9, p. 209-220

²³ WEST, Mark I. *Roald Dahl: Twayne's English Authors Series*. New York: Twayne Pub, 1992. ISBN 978-0805770193, p. 112-113

²⁴ *Roald Dahl: Official Website* [online]. [cit. 2021-02-21]. Dostupné z: <https://www.roalddahl.com/>

²⁵ TELGEN, Diane. *Something about the author: 73*. New York: Gale, 1993. ISBN 978-0810322837, p.39-45

²⁶ WEST, Mark I. *Roald Dahl: Twayne's English Authors Series*. New York: Twayne Pub, 1992. ISBN 978-0805770193, p. 130

Even though Roald Dahl wrote huge number of books, this thesis will now deal only with six of them including: *James and the Giant Peach* (1961), *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (1964), *George's Marvellous Medicine* (1981), *The Witches* (1983), *The Twits* (1980) and *Matilda* (1988).

2.4 Autobiographical Features in Dahl's Work for Children and Teenagers

As it was mentioned several times before, Dahl's work is full of autobiographical features. Dahl himself admitted this fact at the beginning of his book *Boy* from 1984 saying that over his school years many unforgettable events happened to him which he remembered for his whole life. These events remained in his memory and he didn't have to search for them even after decades when he wanted to write them down or use them in some of his stories. Some of these memories are happy and some of them are not, sometimes they are painful and as he said this is probably the reason why he never forgot them.²⁷

One of Dahl's first memories which will occur later in his stories were from the time, when he attended Llandaff Cathedral School. As he mentioned in his autobiographic book called *Boy*, every day after going from school he and his friends went to a little sweetshop, in which as Dahl called her a disgusting old hag was selling their beloved sweets. This is the beginning of Dahl's sweet tooth and love for everything sweet and it occurred as a motif later in *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* and was also supported by the fact that when Dahl attended Repton school in his later school years, Cadbury chocolate factory was sending new chocolate bars to school to let pupils test their new flavours and inventions. But back to the sweet shop. As Dahl and his other friends hated this woman so much, one day they put a dead mouse into a jar with sweets as a joke. After this event came another, but this time a very nasty one. As a revenge she went to a headmaster of their school and wanted them to be punished. Her wish was granted, and these little boys were spanked on their bottom many times with a cane by a headmaster. This motif from a school environment introducing cruel adults to readers is strongly used in *Matilda* where is also a harsh headmaster

²⁷ DAHL, Roald. *Boy: tales of childhood*. New York: Puffin Books, 2009. ISBN 978-0142413814.

who likes to physically punish pupils. But these nasty experiences with cruel adults didn't end on Llandaff Cathedral school. When Dahl attended St Peter's boarding school, he met other cruel adults. This time it was the Matron of their dormitories who ruled with a hard hand and enjoyed punishing little boys, Captain Hardcastle not being better than her and the Headmaster who again liked to use a cane on naughty boys. But it is very important to add that at that time physical punishment was normally allowed. For Dahl himself it was something he could never get over.²⁸ These unpleasant events from schools he attended during his childhood caused Dahl's negative feelings towards teachers, school, authorities and adults in general and we can notice them almost in all of his stories.

In Dahl's stories despite everything he experienced, there are not only mean adults. As a model for his good and kind adult characters, he used his teacher of mathematics from Repton public school which he attended after St Peter's. This teacher was Dahl's most favourite, as his classes were funny, and he knew how to keep pupils entertained.²⁹ This is very much similar to Dahl's story *Matilda*, where is a figure of very kind class teacher.

Another connection between Dahl himself and his story *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* is in one of the main characters called Willy Wonka. This connection can be seen in the fact that when Dahl was in his garden hut sitting in his old chair, he felt like he is in his own factory making things that would please children and he didn't really care about adults same as Willy Wonka. Although Dahl's childhood was quite positive, many traumatic events also happened to him. The most important one is connected with the death of his father. His heroines and heroes always follow the positive pattern same as Roald and his sisters established after his death. This fact can be seen for example in his books *James and the Giant Peach*, *The Witches* but mostly in *The BFG* where is a young heroine that is an orphan and she does not miss her parents at all, because she doesn't

²⁸ DAHL, Roald. *Boy: tales of childhood*. New York: Puffin Books, 2009. ISBN 978-0142413814, p. 27-148

²⁹ DAHL, Roald. *Boy: tales of childhood*, p. 150-153

remember them as they died when she was very young. This is the same case with Dahl himself as he never experienced to miss his father at all because he lost him when he was little. Next feature, but this time a positive one inspired by Dahl's childhood, can be noticed in *The Witches* in an image of the main character's Norwegian grandmother. This motif comes from Dahl's Norwegian mother who told him the mythology of Norway. As same as Dahl loved his mother, the grandmother in this story also loves his grandson unconditionally.³⁰ And because Dahl's mother still had her relatives in Norway, she always took there all her kids during summer holidays. For young Dahl it was an amazing journey and he remembered Norway as an idyllic place. In his memories pictured in *The Witches* by the main character were also Norwegian dishes and traditions which he himself experienced.³¹

Dahl's another annoying experience, if we go back before Dahl's attendance to Llandaff Cathedral School, is pictured most prominently in *James and the Giant Peach*. It comes again from the times when his newly widowed mother sold their farm in Radyr as she didn't have enough funds to manage it, especially with so many children. But for the kids the farm and Radyr itself was an idealized paradise and they suddenly had to leave it and move to Llandaff. This kind of loss is pictured at the beginning of James's story, where he loses his perfect life together with his parents when they are eaten by an angry rhino in London. As we may think it was an unpleasant experience for his parents, Dahl saw it in a different light. From a long-term perspective, he saw it as more unpleasant for James, as he was left alone in a cruel world with his mean relatives.³²

But there are not only experiences from Dahl's childhood but also from his young adulthood that inspired him when he was writing his stories for young readers. When he finished Repton School, he started to work for the Shell Company, and

³⁰ STURROCK, Donald. *Storyteller: the authorized biography of Roald Dahl*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010. ISBN 978-1-4165-5082-2, p. 40-44

³¹ DAHL, Roald. *Boy: tales of childhood*. New York: Puffin Books, 2009. ISBN 978-0142413814, p. 53-66

³² STURROCK, Donald. *Storyteller: the authorized biography of Roald Dahl*, p. 45-46

they send him to Africa which was his big dream for a long time. There he met many exotic and deadly animals as lions, crocodiles, elephants and venomous snakes. He loved it and his memories were used as the motif that can be found in his book for very young children *The Enormous Crocodile*. In his first book ever *The Gremlins* he drew on his life when he left Shell and joined RAF as a fighter pilot during World War II.³³ Story is about little creatures called gremlins who are known from RAF folklore and they like to make defects on airplanes. But their malice is seen through by ex-pilot Gus and later they are tamed by him and persuaded to help him flying again.³⁴ This picture of returning to flying is inspired by Dahl's own after he survived a crash of his own airplane in Western Desert when he was forced to land because of low fuel and bad navigation. After he recovered from head injuries and blindness in hospital, he could get back to flying again but at the end he was send back home because of returning headaches.³⁵

His story for little kids *Fantastic Mr Fox* is said to be the most autobiographical one. The figure of main character Mr Fox carries same qualities as the author. Mr Fox is flexible, tough, inventive and he never gives up no matter what the conditions are. Dahl spent a lot of time with his own family, even during working days and at this time it was something quite unusual for men. This story is Dahl's glorification of family life and stability. Even though Mr Fox's family faces to something unpleasant, they still come together and stay strong together.³⁶

Dahl's last book for children *The Minpins* which was published posthumously in 1991 was inspired like many of his other books by nature and countryside around their house in Great Missenden. There was even a forest next to their house that was called the Minpin forest. Other connection can be seen

³³ DAHL, Roald. *Boy: tales of childhood*. New York: Puffin Books, 2009. ISBN 978-0142413814, p. 166-176

³⁴ *Roald Dahl: Official Website* [online]. [cit. 2021-02-21]. Dostupné z: <https://www.roalddahl.com>

³⁵ DAHL, Roald. *Going solo*. London: Puffin Books, 2008. ISBN 9780141322742, p. 97-103

³⁶ STURROCK, Donald. *Storyteller: the authorized biography of Roald Dahl*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010. ISBN 978-1-4165-5082-2, p. 444-448

in creatures from *The Minpins*, because they are also mentioned in his story *Charlie and the Great Glass Elevator*.³⁷

The last book that I will mention in this chapter is *George's Marvellous Medicine*. It is again about a nasty adult, this time it is a hero's grandma. As she is very grumpy and vicious as some evil witch and her grandson George doesn't like it, he comes one day with a great idea how to cure her from her attitude.³⁸ He decides to make a medicine that would blow her away, but not exactly, and he uses everything that he can find in their house. These things were taken from kitchen, bathroom, his mother's bedroom, laundry room and many other rooms and were put into a big saucepan.³⁹ This mixing is very similar to Dahl's, because he also enjoyed mixing various potions. He gave them to his kids before going to bed. These potions were made of better things than George's medicine so nothing bad happened. He put into them tinned fruit and milk and he also coloured them with food colouring.⁴⁰ At the beginning of *George's Marvellous Medicine* is even a statement from Dahl himself, that nobody should try to make this medicine at home as it could be very dangerous.⁴¹

In Dahl's stories there is one most important pattern which I see as very sympathetic for his readers. His heroines and heroes are usually poor orphans or comes from a bad family. But during the story they always deal with it with grace. Children always win against the world of adults, evil is defeated, and bad people are punished. And because Dahl was able to become a little boy again when writing stories in his little hut, they are full of fantasy, adventure and they reflect the author's, definitely not boring life.

³⁷ Roald Dahl: *Official Website* [online]. [cit. 2021-02-21]. Dostupné z: <https://www.roalddahl.com>

³⁸ Roald Dahl: *Official Website* [online]. [cit. 2021-02-21]. Dostupné z: <https://www.roalddahl.com>

³⁹ DAHL, Roald. *George's Marvellous Medicine*. London: Puffin Books, 2016. ISBN 978-0-141-36550-3, p. 12-37

⁴⁰ Roald Dahl: *Official Website* [online]. [cit. 2021-02-21]. Dostupné z: <https://www.roalddahl.com>

⁴¹ DAHL, Roald. *George's Marvellous Medicine*.

3 Humour, Grotesque, Hyperbole and Controversy in Dahl's Children's Literature

Roald Dahl is very well known for his characteristic malicious sense of humour. Grotesque and hyperbole are also an integral part of his stories. Some people may say that the content of his stories is too harsh and violent for such young readers but in my opinion, this is the reason why his work is so appealing and not only for children. He breaks down borders of social norms and he writes about many taboos as evil adults in education, incompetent parents, bad behaviour and he serves them in a funny way. But every one of us have slightly different limit of what we find funny and especially there is a huge difference between children's and adult's sense of humour.⁴²

Some situations and jokes and Dahl's stories in general are seen by many adults as tasteless although children find them funny. This is caused not only by a different taste in humour, but mostly by psychological differences of children and adults. This fact leads us to an explanation why children admire Dahl's stories so much and why some adults hate them.⁴³

When Dahl was asked by Todd McCormack during the interview in 1988 how he keeps his young readers entertained, he answered, that he is lucky that he laughs at the same jokes as children and that makes him able to do it. Stories as he claimed have to be exciting and fast, with good plot but mainly they have to be funny, especially funny. On the other hand, as he adds, you have to be aware where is the line between crying with laughter and real crying because it is a catastrophe.⁴⁴

⁴² WEST, Mark I. *The Grotesque and the Taboo in Roald Dahl's Humorous Writings for Children*. Children's Literature Association Quarterly. Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990, 115-116. ISSN 1553-1201. Dostupné z: <https://doi.org/10.1353/chq.0.0822>

⁴³ WEST, Mark I. *The Grotesque and the Taboo in Roald Dahl's Humorous Writings for Children*, p.115-116

⁴⁴ *Roald Dahl: Official Website* [online]. [cit. 2021-02-21]. Dostupné z: <https://www.roalddahl.com>

In this chapter I will briefly describe standard features of humour, grotesque and hyperbole and then I will focus on a Dahl's usage of these tools in his stories to entertain young readers.

3.1 Humour and Black Humour

Since the ancient times, writers and philologists thought about the concept of humour and its exact meaning. There were questions as what makes something funny, why laughter is a response and what laughter does to people. According to Raskin, humour appears when two scripts that shouldn't be in the same place, are put in the same place, and somehow, they make sense within that place. This is the case when two completely opposite things are put together, but at the end they make something funny.⁴⁵ We also need to be aware that different people find different things to be funny. Nevertheless, the ability to enjoy humour is shared by all people, even though they appreciate different kinds of humour. Reacting to humour is a part of every human behaviour and ability, but what actually makes something humorous is the perceiver who laughs at it. To be more exact It is the stimulus and the human participant who brings humour about. This stimulus is described as a new utterance or situation that should be responded to humorously. Some other things that make humour more effective are shared social norms, values between perceivers and life experience. This is why children's sense of humour tends to be so different from the adult's one. As we grow from children to adults our sense of humour changes.⁴⁶

Humour and black humour in literature can generally help us with dealing with our problems and anxieties which are a part of human's life. Especially it is very helpful for maturing children as it can help them with their anxieties.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ RASKIN, Victor, ed. *The Primer of Humor Research*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 2008. ISBN 978-3-11-018616-1.

⁴⁶ RASKIN, Victor. *Semantic Mechanisms of Humor*. Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1984. ISBN 978-94-009-6474-7, p.1-5

⁴⁷ ALSTON, Ann a Catherine BUTLER, ed. *Roald Dahl*. United Kingdom: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012. ISBN 978-0-230-28360-2, p.32

Black humour is according to Patrick O’Neill something that allows us to envisage the facelessness of the void and yet be able to laugh rather than despair. Nowadays it is very common to use the phrase “black humour” in everyday conversation and in literary criticism but there is no general description what it actually is and what it means. What may be surprising is fact that people usually know that it is dark humour if they come into contact with it. When we say “black humour” we can mean many different things as humour which is macabre, sick, horrid, ironic, satirical, spiteful, absurd and variously grotesque and also it can be a mixture of all of these. Definition from 1975 says that it is a grotesque and morbid humour that expresses absurdity, paradox, cruelty of the world and insensitivity. Black humour is the humour of lost norms, confidence and it is a humour of disorientation. It deals with topics as death, skin colour, religion, sex and taboo in general. Between black humour and something that is actually horrifying is a very thin line and Henninger sees black humour as a way how we defence against horror and taboo. But this way of interpreting black humour is very limited as there are many degrees of black humour and it also depends on the point of view of each person.⁴⁸

It is important and it was mentioned many times to realize that some people find different things and jokes funny or disgusting. This connection between disgust and humour is used as a literary technique to create humour and it triggers our social boundaries, limits and perception of what we find acceptable and unacceptable. This usage of humour and disgust together can define acceptable behaviour but also makes us to adopt it.⁴⁹

3.2 Humour and Black Humour in Dahl’s Stories for Children

As Dahl himself claimed many times, and it can also be found in his stories he thought about humour as it is something very important for young readers because they can release their internal struggles through laughing. In his book

⁴⁸ BLOOM, Harold, ed. *Dark Humor: Bloom’s Literary Theme*. New York: Infobase Publishing, 2010. ISBN 978-1-60413-440-7, p. 79-100

⁴⁹ ALSTON, Ann a Catherine BUTLER, ed. *Roald Dahl*. United Kingdom: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012. ISBN 978-0-230-28360-2, p.31

Matilda there is even a dialogue between Matilda and her teacher Miss Honey about importance of laugh:⁵⁰

"Tell me one that you liked."

"I liked The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe," Matilda said. "I think Mr C. S. Lewis is a very good writer. But he has one failing. There are no funny bits in his books."

"You are right there," Miss Honey said.

"There aren't many funny bits in Mr Tolkien either," Matilda said.

"Do you think that all children's books ought to have funny bits in them?" Miss Honey asked.

"I do," Matilda said. "Children are not so serious as grown-ups and they love to laugh." (Matilda, p.80-81)⁵¹

Roald Dahl in his stories connects pleasure of humour and disgust to entertain his young readers. Although Dahl's books are acknowledged as very humorous and even Roald Dahl Funny Prize was established to appraise funny children's books every year his stories are very frequently seen especially by adults as not funny at all, plain, silly and with distaste. This critique is based mainly on the fact that Dahl makes fun of things that parents usually teach their children not to laugh at as physical appearance, weight, disability or gender. Dahl's readers laugh and cringe at the same time when reading his stories as he uses his humour together with abuse, cruelty, disgust and taboo.⁵²

Black humour is very often present in Dahl's work for children. He introduces cruel adults, vicious witches and evil to his young readers. It is quite difficult to use black humour in children's literature and author has to handle it very carefully. If it is used well, it can open serious issues like death, abuse, tragedies

⁵⁰ ALSTON, Ann a Catherine BUTLER, ed. *Roald Dahl*. United Kingdom: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012. ISBN 978-0-230-28360-2, p.31,32

⁵¹ DAHL, Roald. *Matilda*. New York: Scholastic, 1996. ISBN 0-590-99683-5, p.80-81

⁵² ALSTON, Ann a Catherine BUTLER, ed. *Roald Dahl*, p.31,32

or violence and it can help children to cope with these issues in a humorous easy way.⁵³

The dark theme of an abuse is held most strongly in Dahl's story *Matilda*. There is headmistress of the school Miss Trunchbull and she is a pure evil and she is very abusive against pupils in her school. She does horrible things to them and say inappropriate things. Some of her evil acts and inventions are for example "The Chokey" that is used to punish naughty pupils,

„The Chokey,” Hortensia went on, “is a very tall but very narrow cupboard. The floor is only ten inches square so you can’t sit down or squat in it. You have to stand. And three of the walls are made of cement with bits of broken glass sticking out all over, so you can’t lean against them. You have to stand more or less at attention all the time when you get locked up in there. It’s terrible.”

“Can’t you lean against the door?” Matilda asked.

“Don’t be daft,” Hortensia said. “The door’s got thousands of sharp spiky nails sticking out of it. They’ve been hammered through from the outside, probably by the Trunchbull herself.” (Matilda, p.104)⁵⁴

or her ruthless punishment of boy called Bruce Bogtrotter:

“It’s good, isn’t it?” the Trunchbull asked.

“Very good,” the boy said, chewing and swallowing. He finished the slice.

“Have another,” the Trunchbull said.

“That’s enough, thank you,” the boy murmured.

“I said have another,” the Trunchbull said, and now there was an altogether sharper edge to her voice. “Eat another slice! Do as you are told!”

“I don’t want another slice” the boy said.

⁵³ Adding Humour in Children's book. *Maa Illustrations* [online]. 2017 [cit. 2021-03-30]. Dostupné z: <https://www.maailustrations.com/blog/article/adding-humour-in-childrens-book/>

⁵⁴ DAHL, Roald. *Matilda*. New York: Scholastic, 1996. ISBN 0-590-99683-5, p.104-105

Suddenly the Trunchbull exploded. "Eat" she shouted, banging her thigh with the riding-crop. "If I tell you to eat, you will eat! You wanted cake! You stole cake! And now you've got cake! What's more, you're going to eat it! You do not leave this platform and nobody leaves this hall until you have eaten the entire cake that is sitting there in front of you!" (Matilda, p.127)⁵⁵

These described events of abusing pupils are just horrid. But Dahl's cope with these dark events very carefully and makes them humorous and he always stay on the side of grotesque and never goes behind the border of actual horror. There are no physical consequences and no real harm on the children. Every child that is abused by Miss Trunchbull is always all right as if nothing happened. These acts are usually accompanied by Miss Trunchbull's statement when she speaks like a normal adult and this fact makes the whole act funny especially when we consider what hideousness just happened to the kids.⁵⁶

3.3 Grotesque

It is not very easy among modern writers to agree on examples and conception of grotesque. But it is important to take into account historical development, usage, meaning and past concepts of word grotesque as it can help to understand this term. Nowadays the concept of grotesque is significantly different from than it was in the past. In the twentieth century many different opinions on the term grotesque appeared but for my analysis it is more important to know major characteristics of the grotesque. According to Thomson these include disharmony, the comic and the terrifying, extravagance and exaggeration, abnormality, a definition and the satiric and the playful grotesque. The disharmony is the basic feature of grotesque and it is focused mostly on reactions that the work evokes. Next feature is the contrast between the comic and the terrifying, which was used separately by many authors, but these days it is usually combined together. Extravagance and exaggeration are features which always

⁵⁵ DAHL, Roald. *Matilda*. New York: Scholastic, 1996. ISBN 0-590-99683-5, p.127

⁵⁶ ALSTON, Ann a Catherine BUTLER, ed. *Roald Dahl*. United Kingdom: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012. ISBN 978-0-230-28360-2, p.34-35

belonged to the grotesque. Grotesque is always extravagant, and extreme. Another feature is abnormality, and it is described as the reaction to the grotesque including amusement, disgust, horror and laughter. These reactions can resonate together at the same time, for example when comic aspect is also disgusting.⁵⁷

3.4 Grotesque in Dahl's Stories for Children

In Dahl's work for children there are many grotesque features, especially when we focus on his characters. When we look at Dahl's story *The Twits* it starts with a defamation against Mr. Twits beard and beards in general. There is also a description of some bits of food that stuck in Mr. Twits whiskers like mouldy old cornflake or slimy tails of a tinned sardine. Mr. and Mrs. Twits are disgusting, dirty vicious people and they do evil jokes to each other.⁵⁸

Mrs. Twit for example replaces spaghetti with worms and serves them to her husband or puts Mr. Twit's glasses into his beer but Mr. Twit is not any better. One day he puts frog into her bed, or he puts many strings with balloons on her hands and she flies into the air. But they are not evil only to each other but also to animals especially birds and their pet monkeys. Every Wednesday after Mr. Twit catches birds by putting a glue on an old tree they have a special Bird Pie for supper.⁵⁹ These pranks and practical jokes and inventions seem funny to children and are very grotesque.

Another of his stories *George's Marvellous Medicine* is quite similar in grotesqueness. The most grotesque feature is again a character and this time it is an old grandma. She is the most grotesque character of the story. This grandma is disliked by her grandson George as she was selfish and grumpy, and she has small puckered-up mouth like dog's bottom and pale brown teeth. She never

⁵⁷ THOMSON, Philip. *The grotesque*. London: Methuen, 1972. ISBN 0416981703, p. 10-27

⁵⁸ WEST, Mark I. *The Grotesque and the Taboo in Roald Dahl's Humorous Writings for Children*. Children's Literature Association Quarterly. Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990, 115-116. ISSN 1553-1201. Dostupné z: doi: <https://doi.org/10.1353/chq.0.0822>

⁵⁹ DAHL, Roald. *The Twits*. New York: Scholastic, 1980. ISBN 0-590-13601-1.

smiles and is always complaining and doesn't care about anyone except herself. To her grandson she is very mean. Her behaviour leads George to his idea of grandma's remediation, so he comes with a plan to create her a medicine. He creates it with using many various products that he can find at home as shoe-polish, canary seeds, lipsticks, gloss hair shampoo or the box of super white for automatic washing-machines saying on the label that dirt will disappear like magic. At the end grandma gets George's medicine and she undergoes many hilarious and ridiculous transformations.⁶⁰

This whole story deals with serious aggression of this little hero but it is served in such a humorous and grotesque way that children find it entertaining. Dahl offers them some form of pleasure that can't be found in many other's children's books, using same humour as kids have and he sympathizes with them in their resistance to parents. As Dahl himself said, he writes for children that are in the process of civilization and as their parents and teachers take place in this process, children tend to see adults as enemies. He sees this children's attitude as natural and he works with it in his stories, and this is why his adult characters are silly and grotesque.⁶¹

In *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* we can also find many grotesque situations that are this time connected with children's maturing issues as are body transformations. These grotesque transformations are related to Violet Beauregarde and Mike Teavee as their bodies go through the process of expansion and development.⁶² Many other grotesque events also happened in this story. One of them is when Veruca Salt is punished for being arrogant and spoiled and is carried away by many, at the first sight cute little squirrels and she

⁶⁰ DAHL, Roald. *George's Marvellous Medicine*. London: Puffin Books, 2016. ISBN 978-0-141-36550-3.

⁶¹ WEST, Mark I. *The Grotesque and the Taboo in Roald Dahl's Humorous Writings for Children*. Children's Literature Association Quarterly. Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990, 115-116. ISSN 1553-1201. Dostupné z: <https://doi.org/10.1353/chq.0.0822>

⁶² ALSTON, Ann a Catherine BUTLER, ed. *Roald Dahl*. United Kingdom: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012. ISBN 978-0-230-28360-2, p.32

ends up in rubbish chute and covered in its contents.⁶³ All the other kids are also punished in a grotesque way, but they end unharmed, except Charlie who is not punished because he is kind, caring and selfless. These events work as a moral lesson for young readers not to behave badly.

3.5 Hyperbole

The term hyperbole in the sense of exaggeration is used for a very long time and it comes from a classical Greece and these days it is a part of our everyday speech. Basically, it is a way of describing something in exaggerated form used for either comic, ironic or serious effect. Hyperbole is connected with the cognitive structuring of our own experience, evaluation, understanding and with perception of the concept of size. Hyperbole most frequently expresses some extreme, and in this case, it is the most obvious one to recognise. It expresses something bigger, larger, more. It is basically overstatement of some fact or possibility but there has to be a significant contrast between the normal state and exaggeration, because if not the hyperbole is not recognised and is not interesting for the reader. In other words, the contrast between hyperbolic and literal expression triggers the transferred interpretation. This interpretation depends on our own emotional and attitudinal subjectivity and context exists only in the form in which it is perceived by reader. On the other hand, the contrast shouldn't be too exaggerated as well. Hyperbole is also used when we want to catch the reader's attention more effectively and it is achieved by twisting of the truth.⁶⁴

It is not a new information, that children enjoy exaggerating, and this is probably the biggest difference between them and grown-ups. Some parents emphasized that "tall tales" and exaggerations are inappropriate for young readers. According to Messlin, hyperbole is a figure of exaggeration and deviation from the norm, and it exceed the boundaries. Sendak for example shows a deviant power

⁶³ DAHL, Roald. *Charlie and the chocolate factory*. New York: Puffin Books, 1998. ISBN 0-14-130115-5.

⁶⁴ CLARIDGE, Claudia. *Hyperbole in English: A Corpus-based Study of Exaggeration*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011. ISBN 978-0-521-76635-7.

of hyperbole. Hyperbole is able to create a dramatic effect same as represent children's darkest feelings. Taboo, gore, grotesque and laughter in children's books are possible thanks to hyperbolizing. Roald Dahl himself declared that all children are cruel and have a vulgar sense of humour and they see their own lives quite exaggerated through fantasy.⁶⁵

3.6 Hyperbole in Dahl's Stories for Children

In Dahl's book *Matilda* there is especially one very grotesque character. It is a school headmistress called Miss Trunchbull. He describes her as a formidable female who could bend iron bars or tear telephone directories in half. She looked like an eccentric and bloodthirsty follower of the staghounds. She is also described as a fierce tyrannical monster or gigantic holy terror.⁶⁶

This Miss Trunchbull also uses a lot of exaggerations and hyperboles as:

"I don't like small people. Small people should never be seen by anybody. They should be kept out of sight in boxes like hairpins and buttons. I cannot for the life of me see why children have to take so long to grow up. I think they do it on purpose." (Matilda, p.151)

"This clot, this blackhead, this foul carbuncle, this poisonous pustule that you see before you is none other than a disgusting criminal, a denizen of the underworld, a member of the Mafia!" (Matilda, p. 120)

"It makes me vomit to think that I am going to have to put up with a load of garbage like you in my school for next six years. I can see that I am going to have to expel as many of you as possible as soon as possible to save myself from going round the bend." (Matilda, p. 141)

⁶⁵ FLEGAR, Željka. *Nine Deviations of Childlike Language*. Croatian Journal of Education: Hrvatski časopis za odgoj i obrazovanje. Croatia: University of Josip Juraj Strossmayer in Osijek, 2016, 71-84. Dostupné z: doi:10.15516/cje.v18i0.2101

⁶⁶ DAHL, Roald. *Matilda*. New York: Scholastic, 1996. ISBN 0-590-99683-5.

"You are a vile, repulsive, repellent, malicious little brute!" (Matilda, p. 162)⁶⁷

Another Dahl's book *The Witches* contains many hyperboles as well as *Matilda*. In this book there are witches that hates children tremendously in it is described by Dahl like this:

"A REAL WITCH hates children with red-hot sizzling hatred that is more sizzling and red-hot than any hatred you could possibly imagine." (The Witches, p.1)

"A REAL WITCH spends all her time plotting to get rid of the children in her particular territory. Her passion is to do away with them, one by one. It is all she thinks about the whole day long. Even if she is working as a cashier in a supermarket or typing letters for a businessman or driving round in a fancy car (and she could be doing any of these things), her mind will always be plotting and scheming and churning and burning and whizzing and phizzing with murderous bloodthirsty thoughts." (The Witches, p.1)⁶⁸

Dahl's exaggerated violence and grotesque in his stories is very often criticized by adults, because they interpret it too literally and also because it is focused on them. As Dahl claimed and sees this natural, children tend to resist to their parents, and they see them as their enemy. He makes young readers laugh at the things that are disgusting, unacceptable and revolting and he jokes about grown-ups and their power. Although exaggeration and extreme in general is a natural for children's language and it is a tool of experimentation, freedom and empowerment helping them grow up, it also causes censorship of many children's books.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ DAHL, Roald. *Matilda*. New York: Scholastic, 1996. ISBN 0-590-99683-5, p.151, 120, 141, 162

⁶⁸ DAHL, Roald. *The Witches*. London: Puffin Books, 2001. ISBN 0-141-31139-8, p.1

⁶⁹ FLEGAR, Željka. *Nine Deviations of Childlike Language*. Croatian Journal of Education: Hrvatski časopis za odgoj i obrazovanje. Croatia: University of Josip Juraj Strossmayer in Osijek, 2016, 71-84. Dostupné z: doi:10.15516/cje.v18i0.2101

3.7 Controversy

Roald Dahl's stories belong to the best-sellers and he was the best-selling children's author in Britain, but his books are also seen negatively by many critics, mainly because of his cynical view of society and authorities, vulgarity, literary technique, violence, racism, sadism, occult overtones, promotion of criminal behaviour and antifeminism.⁷⁰ Landsberg Michele claims that she was told by many parents, that Dahl's stories for children makes them uneasy. She says that Dahl wins his young readers mainly because he supports children's impulses to aggression and revenge, and this is why his books are so appealing.⁷¹

Dahl's writing over the years was very often dismissed as vulgar, meretricious, racist, misogynistic, full of violence and grotesque humour that is seen by many critics as inappropriate for such young readers. His most famous stories as *James and the Giant Peach*, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* and *Matilda* are regarded as controversial even nowadays by many people. Dahl is even claimed to glorify violence and even criminality.⁷² According to Mark I. West the most controversial Dahl's stories of all the time are *The Witches* and *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. *Charlie* went through many attacks in sixties and seventies for being racist and even was labelled as "one of the most tasteless books ever written for children." *The Witches* on the other hand attracted a wrath of many feminists and the story was claimed to be misogynist and even campaign was led with effort to ban this book from libraries in England.⁷³

⁷⁰ CULLEY, Jonathon. Roald Dahl: "It's About Children and It's for Children"-But Is It Suitable? *Children's Literature in Education* 22. 1991, 59–73. Dostupné z: <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF01139908>

⁷¹ LANDSBERG, Michele. *The world of children's books: a guide to choosing the best*. London: Simon & Schuster, 1988. ISBN 0-671-65477-2, p. 88

⁷² ALSTON, Ann a Catherine BUTLER, ed. *Roald Dahl*. United Kingdom: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012. ISBN 978-0-230-28360-2, p.1, 11

⁷³ WEST, Mark I. *Roald Dahl: Twayne's English Authors Series*. New York: Twayne Pub, 1992. ISBN 978-0805770193, p.71

Landsberg claims that in *The Witches* a pure hatred directed towards children is depicted. She claims that there are many well-written children's books for every age, which are rich in humour of genuine, humane, affirmative kind. They are not full of hatred and dog's excrements as *The Witches* are and teachers and parents shouldn't succumb the commercial success and popular comic style of an author whose works may trouble them, and they find them destructive. From her perspective "*Humour can sputter with indignation and rage, and often does, but hatred is not funny.*"⁷⁴

Boy's grandma in *The Witches* advises her grandson that he should never take a bath as it can be dangerous because he will smell like "*dogs droppings*" and she claims: "*The cleaner you happen to be, the more smelly you are to a witch.*" and "*The dirtier you are, the less you smell.*" She is also very keen in smoking cigars and she even offers them to her grandson.⁷⁵ This grandma's behaviour is seen by many people as non-educational as she guides him in totally opposite direction of what is right in our society.

"Would you like a puff of my cigar?"

"I'm only seven, Grandmamma."

"I don't care what age you are," she said. "You'll never catch a cold if you smoke cigars." (The Witches, p.15)

George's Marvellous Medicine is criticised mainly for particular criminal aspects. Dahl was accused of advocating murder of annoying family member and even making it acceptable as same as teaching young children that their old grumpy relatives deserve to be killed and poisoned. Dahl dismissed this accusation and claimed that children would never interpret the book too literally.⁷⁶ Although

⁷⁴ LANDSBERG, Michele. *The world of children's books: a guide to choosing the best*. London: Simon & Schuster, 1988. ISBN 0-671-65477-2, p. 90

⁷⁵ DAHL, Roald. *The Witches*. London: Puffin Books, 2001. ISBN 0-141-31139-8, p.15, 20-21

⁷⁶ WEST, Mark I. *Roald Dahl: Twayne's English Authors Series*. New York: Twayne Pub, 1992. ISBN 978-0805770193, p.81

George creates medicine to make his nasty and cruel grandma a better person his father obviously hates her and wants to use a later version of medicine on his mother-in-law as he knows it will shrink her and then she will disappear forever. This act is seen as *“an act of deliberate murder.”* This story is also criticised for the fact that grandma is depicted as a *“negative representation of old age”* and she is totally unwanted by her family.⁷⁷ The family in Dahl’s stories is another controversial theme. *“The sweetness of family is confused, abstract and often discarded as cultural myth.”* Single adults usually women and couples without children are presented in very negative way. In *The Witches*, a single women is depicted as someone who is consuming children. Miss Trunchbull in *Matilda* is a single woman who is *“sadistically violent”* and couple in *The Twits* is childless and they are pictured as *“self-obsessed and destructive.”* Dahl’s non-parental figures who neglect children are depicted as most guilty. These figures *“tend to be women who refuse to embrace their traditional caring roles.”* This type of female figures can be found in *James and the Giant Peach*, where two aunts are abusive, and they neglect his nephew. In Dahl’s stories *“women who refuse to embrace their roles as the fertile producers and carers of children are depicted as sterile, repulsive characters.”*⁷⁸

Dahl’s treatment of race is also often discussed as a controversial aspect in his stories for children. His portrayal of original Oompa-Loompas in early editions of *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* was criticized for racism and it was altered after National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People complained about it when *Charlie* was planned to be turned into a film and there was even a protest against this portrayal. The original Oompa-Loompas were described as African fuzzy-headed pygmies who made a deal with Willy Wonka to be taken to work in his factory in exchange for cacao beans, but they were mostly seen as Wonka’s slaves.⁷⁹ Roald dahl himself admired that he *“portrayed blacks*

⁷⁷ ALSTON, Ann a Catherine BUTLER, ed. *Roald Dahl*. United Kingdom: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012. ISBN 978-0-230-28360-2, p.127

⁷⁸ ALSTON, Ann a Catherine BUTLER, ed. *Roald Dahl*, p.86, 88-89

⁷⁹ ALSTON, Ann a Catherine BUTLER, ed. *Roald Dahl*, p.3

unfavourably” so the attack against an image of Oompa-Loompas was reasonable so he revised *Charlie* and portrayed Oompa-Loompas as pink creatures from a remote island.⁸⁰ According to Landsberg Michele the description of Veruca Salt’s family is very “*close to a common anti-Jewish stereotype.*” Mr Salt smokes cigars, his daughter gets everything she wants, and Mrs Salt is extremely fat. In the story they are punished by being dropped to a rubbish chute that leads to the furnace. The theme of being punished by fire is claimed by Landsberg to be very distasteful as she connects it with Holocaust and Dahl’s anti-Semitic comments in the past.⁸¹

In 1961 *James and the Giant Peach* became a subject of sniffy critique from Library Journal. Although there were some interesting and original elements, they still complained about violent language and grotesque depiction of James’ aunts.⁸²

Another controversial aspect is seen by many critics in a description of main character Mr Twit in *The Twits*. In this story the narrator is suspicious of men with beards as there are lot of them around us and they hide their faces under their hair, and nobody knows how they really looks like. Another commentary is about the problem of washing their face and narrator also gives us an example of this particular type of men introducing nasty Mr Twit. This description according to some critics contains elements of racism and Dahl’s own prejudice against men with beards.⁸³

Dahl’s story *Matilda* didn’t escape a criticism either. It was criticised for its depiction of grown-up characters. They were depicted as evil, and without

⁸⁰ WEST, Mark I. *Roald Dahl: Twayne's English Authors Series*. New York: Twayne Pub, 1992. ISBN 978-0805770193, p.72

⁸¹ LANDSBERG, Michele. *The world of children's books: a guide to choosing the best*. London: Simon & Schuster, 1988. ISBN 0-671-65477-2, p. 88-89

⁸² STURROCK, Donald. *Storyteller: the authorized biography of Roald Dahl*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010. ISBN 978-1-4165-5082-2, p.492

⁸³ ALSTON, Ann a Catherine BUTLER, ed. *Roald Dahl*. United Kingdom: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012. ISBN 978-0-230-28360-2, p.3-4

emotions which was considered as harmful. Grown-up characters in Dahl's stories are often victims of violence and death and it doesn't matter if they are innocent or not. The theme of neglected child that punishes her ignorant parents and people who harm her and potential harmful effect then it can have on young readers were the main topic for its criticism.⁸⁴ Almost every of Dahl's teachers are as well as other adults depicted as cruel and are "*associated with sadism and small-mindedness.*" When Miss Trunchbull is taken out of a humorous context she is seen as a clear representation of sadism, and this is the reason why the story is criticized as very unpleasant. She physically and verbally abuses children and even Miss Honey, and the theme of violence is too opened, as many critics claim. There is a real child abuse in school, crime, violence and even murder from which Miss Trunchbull is suspected. The book and its themes and content are said by many critics to be more for adults than children.⁸⁵

The discomfort of many critics is probably a response to "*Dahl's rejection of the idealised world that parents and other adults prefer to offer the child reader.*" Many authors tend to present a world to be better than it actually is but that's not Dahl's style. Dahl offers to his young readers dark humour, parody and the cruelty of adults. Family, home and school are mostly presented as places where misery and torture take place. His work for children is based on grotesque and according to critics his characters are seen as too clear in a classification of being good or bad.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ ROYER, Sharon E. Roald Dahl and Sociology 101. *The ALAN Review*. 1998, (26). Dostupné z <https://doi.org/10.21061/alan.v26i1.a.6>

⁸⁵ ALSTON, Ann a Catherine BUTLER, ed. *Roald Dahl*. United Kingdom: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012. ISBN 978-0-230-28360-2, p.77, 129-130

⁸⁶ ALSTON, Ann a Catherine BUTLER, ed. *Roald Dahl*, p.88

4 Matilda

Dahl's book *Matilda* tells a story about a young girl called Matilda who is a brilliant and extraordinary child. She lives with her parents Mr and Mrs Wormwood and brother Michael who is a normal boy with no special talent. Matilda's parents show no interest in their kids, especially to their daughter. Because of that, she runs away from boring life of her parents to a wonderful world of literature. And when Matilda is old enough, she attends the school where headmistress Trunchbull rules with a firm hand and who hates children. But where is evil, there is also good and that also applies here. At school Matilda has a very kind teacher Miss Honey, who later becomes her close friend and they together get rid of Miss Trunchbull and they do it with Matilda's newly discovered supernatural powers. With her superpower to move objects only by force of her will she punishes and teaches moral lesson not only Miss Trunchbull but also her parents who at the end move away with their son and they leave Matilda with Miss Honey to be her guardian.⁸⁷

4.1 Matilda Wormwood

Matilda is the main protagonist in this story, and she is put in contrast to her selfish and ignoring parents. As I already mentioned she is a little genius who is not aware of it, who loves books and world of literature and is brilliant in mathematics. She learns on her own how to read and as she is ignored and neglected by her ignorant parents her passion for books leads her to a town library where she can undisturbedly escape to the world of fantasy. And because her mother doesn't treat her well, she is sad about it and tells her feelings to Mrs Phelps in library "*She doesn't really care what I do.*"⁸⁸

After Mrs Phelps tells her that she can borrow books from library, she does come only once a week to return books and borrow new ones. She really enjoys her time reading books alone in her room because "*the books transported her into*

⁸⁷ DAHL, Roald. *Matilda*. New York: Scholastic, 1996. ISBN 0-590-99683-5, p.16

⁸⁸ DAHL, Roald. *Matilda*.

*new worlds and introduced her to amazing people who lived exciting lives. She travelled all over the world while sitting in her little room in an English village.”*⁸⁹

To her parents she is pleasant, but in return she is called by nasty names as a “scab”, or “ignorant little twit” and she is told to be “too stupid”, but she knows that she isn’t. Nobody care about her opinion, every time she wants to say something, she is silenced with words like: „Be quiet!” or “Just keep your nasty mouth shut, will you!” That evokes that Matilda has no right to have her own opinion nor to tell it, and I personally see this very frustrating. Matilda also “could feel the anger boiling up inside her” but she was still very aware that “it was wrong to hate her parents like this”, but it was very hard for her to let it go.⁹⁰

Matilda is also very fair and honest, and she doesn’t like the way her father treats his costumers. She despises her father’s job and his personality as a salesman. She has her own opinion on his manner, and she is not afraid to tell her dad truth “But Daddy, that’s even more dishonest than the sawdust. It’s disgusting. You’re cheating people who trust you.”⁹¹ After telling the truth, she is rebuked as always.

Ugly behaviour of her parents and power-based authority drives her crazy, so one day she decides to give them a lesson. “She decided that every time her father or her mother was beastly to her, she would get her own back in some way or another. A small victory or two would help her to tolerate their idiocies and would stop her from going crazy.” (Matilda p.29) At this point she allows herself to be angry on them and she comes with a punishment in the form of jokes. She is very determined and quite satisfied about her power of being smart and in my opinion, she enjoys her rebellion. It is her own way how to cope with her parent’s relationship to her and make it more bearable and it was “her safety-valve, the thing that prevented her from going round the bend.” She turns these

⁸⁹ DAHL, Roald. *Matilda*. New York: Scholastic, 1996. ISBN 0-590-99683-5, p.21

⁹⁰ DAHL, Roald. *Matilda*, p.10, 22, 26, 37, 28

⁹¹ DAHL, Roald. *Matilda*, p.25

punishments into fun and even asks her dad in the provoking way, why he has a superglue on his head, and that he looks like he has got lice.⁹²

When she starts to attend school, she is very happy from the new environment and it was easy for her to make new friends. If you had the opportunity to meet her *“you would have thought she was a perfectly normal five-and-a-half-year-old child.”* On the first day of school, she is asked many questions by Miss Honey and she always *“spoke quietly and politely and without any sign of showing off.”* She speaks very softly and wise. For her it is something natural that she can work out some mathematical examples and that she can read. When she has to read her limerick to Miss Honey, she did it *“very slowly, very nervously.”* That is the sign she is also quite shy, and she is characterised by Miss Honey as *“very quiet and gentle”* and *“not a bit stuck up in spite of her brilliance”*. All other adult except Miss Honey underestimated her abilities.⁹³

When she has honour to meet Miss Trunchbull her view on school changes immediately. After some nasty events that happen to her and her classmates with Miss Trunchbull and when she is accused of things that she never did, she finds out that she established a superpower of moving objects by her will. From this time, she is not only a little innocent defenceless girl because she starts to prepare a marvellous plan of her revenge and she perfects her powers with help from Miss Honey. She is determined to defeat cruel Miss Trunchbull and help her lovely teacher.⁹⁴

Although it is obvious that Matilda is a very unique brilliant child, she is always humble, selfless and very sensitive and never shows off. As Miss Honey says she is a *“grown-up child.”*⁹⁵

⁹² DAHL, Roald. *Matilda*. New York: Scholastic, 1996. ISBN 0-590-99683-5, p.49

⁹³ DAHL, Roald. *Matilda*, p. 72, 79, 91, 101

⁹⁴ DAHL, Roald. *Matilda*.

⁹⁵ DAHL, Roald. *Matilda*, p.195

4.2 Headmistress Trunchbull

Miss Trunchbull is the main story antagonist. She is the headmistress of the school where Matilda attends and she is also the aunt of Miss Honey and her legal guardian. She is the complete opposite of Miss Honey. She is described as a *“gigantic holy terror”, “a fierce tyrannical monster.”* She was that kind of person who always scared children but also teachers, and everyone around her could feel the *“dangerous heat radiating from her.”*⁹⁶

When it comes to her physical features she is depicted by the narrator as a *“formidable female”* with clearly evident muscles that could be seen practically on every part of her body. If you look at her, *“you got the feeling that this was someone who could bend iron bars and tear telephone directories in half.”* If we focus on her face *“she had an obstinate chin, a cruel mouth and small arrogant eyes.”* Her voice was *“deep and dangerous”* and *“she never spoke in a normal voice”* she rather shouted or barked.⁹⁷

She wore clothes that were *“extremely odd.”* Her everyday outfit contained of a brown cotton smock, wide leather belt with enormous silver buckle, bottle-green breeches, green stockings with turn-up tops and on her feet, she wore flat-heeled brown brogues with leather flaps. To be more exact *“she looked, in short, more like a rather eccentric and bloodthirsty follower of the stag-hounds than the headmistress of a nice school for children.”*⁹⁸

For her inner qualities, she didn't possess any that would indicate, that she has something in common with pedagogy and education. Her perfect idea of school *“is one that has no children in it at all.”* She wasn't sympathetic, she didn't understand children and didn't care about children and pupils in general. She was especially biased on small girls saying that *“a bad girl is a far more dangerous creature than a bad boy what's more, they're much harder to squash.”* More interesting is that she also added that she is glad that she *“never was one.”* This

⁹⁶ DAHL, Roald. *Matilda*. New York: Scholastic, 1996. ISBN 0-590-99683-5, p.67

⁹⁷ DAHL, Roald. *Matilda*, p.82, 83, 85

⁹⁸ DAHL, Roald. *Matilda*, p.83

statement says that she is completely out of her mind, when it comes to growing up and perception of herself.⁹⁹

Headmistress especially hates little pupils and *“she thinks five-year-olds are grubs that haven’t yet hatched out.”* She has many rude nicknames for them as blithering idiot, festering gumboil, fleabitten fungus, stagnant cesspool, bursting blister, moth-eaten maggot, mangled little wurzel and many more.¹⁰⁰

When she is told by Miss Honey that Matilda is a genius, that she can read Miss Trunchbull says *“so can I.”* She completely denies everything as she is already told by Matilda’s father that his kid is a gangster. She doesn’t care about Miss Honey’s opinion, nor she wants to make her own and right from the start she things about Matilda in a bad way because she is a child. She uses phrases like *“I am never mistaken”* or *“not another word!”* when somebody want to argue with her, so she doesn’t even let them speak.¹⁰¹

Miss Trunchbull is also very abusive towards her pupils and even towards Miss Honey. She enjoys punishing her students for things that they did, but also for things they never did, and she doesn’t care about the truth. Miss Trunchbull likes physical punishment and even has a special techniques and inventions to torture them. She has *“a lock-up cupboard in her private quarters called The Chokey.”* This Chokey is a very narrow cupboard, with broken glass and spiky nails on the walls, where she puts naughty pupils to punish them.¹⁰² From my point of view, it basically reminds me an iron maiden.

Although she has this special tool to punish her pupils, she enjoys more to punish them personally. One day she caught a boy eating during the lesson and she simply picked him up by one arm and flung him out of the open window. After this she declared that *“from now on, anybody caught eating in class goes straight*

⁹⁹ DAHL, Roald. *Matilda*. New York: Scholastic, 1996. ISBN 0-590-99683-5, p.159, 85, 86

¹⁰⁰ DAHL, Roald. *Matilda*, p.102

¹⁰¹ DAHL, Roald. *Matilda*, p.86, 88

¹⁰² DAHL, Roald. *Matilda*, p.104

out the window.” She is very proud of her skills as she threw hammer for Britain in the Olympics. As a part of her training, she even said that „*a large boy is about the same weight as an Olympic hammer and therefore he’s very useful for practising with.*” And as she can’t stand pigtails on little girls, she once throws up Matilda’s schoolmate Amanda using them. After dusting her hands, she says “*Not bad, considering I’m not in the strict training. Not bad at all.*” ¹⁰³

Another significant punishment is connected with little boy who ate her chocolate cake. She punishes him by ordering another, but this time very huge chocolate cake and he had to eat the whole cake. But for her unpleasant surprise he really did it and as other pupils started to celebrate their little victory, she “*grabbed the large empty china platter on which the cake had rested. She raised it high in the air and brought it down with a crash right on the top of the wretched Bruce Bogtrotter’s head and pieces flew all over the platform.*” (Matilda, p.133) This indicates that she has no problem with harming little kid, even though he actually won this little battle, and she is not able to admits it. And because she doesn’t go far for physical punishment there were many other nasty situations like forcing kids to stand in the corner on one leg, lifting them by their hair into the air or holding them by their ears or legs. ¹⁰⁴

As I said before, Miss Trunchbull is a legal guardian of Miss Honey. Through the years she dominated her and makes Miss Honey to be her slave. She is controlling, abusive, aggressive and awful person who loves to rule everything. She is always right, and nobody can’t oppose her. At school she in not any better to Miss Honey. She always makes her to look like a fool and stupid, she is making fun of her and shows no respect. She devalues Miss Honey’s work by saying to her pupils “*She’s taught you nothing!*” She always finds something that she can criticize, and when there is nothing wrong, she adjusts the situation for herself.

¹⁰³ DAHL, Roald. *Matilda*. New York: Scholastic, 1996. ISBN 0-590-99683-5, p.110, 116

¹⁰⁴ DAHL, Roald. *Matilda*, p.133, 144-155

But as she is a very strong personality and is a respected person in community and has a lot of influence, she can do evil things without being punished.¹⁰⁵

4.3 Miss Jennifer Honey

Miss Honey is twenty-three years old teacher in the local school. She is the second important protagonist together with little Matilda. She is the first person who really is interested in Matilda and her abilities. She is very poor, but her heart is made of gold.

Her physical features are connected very tightly with her nice personality and from her face some kind of *“curious warmth”* shone on her little pupils. Narrator describes her, as a woman with *“lovely pale oval madonna face.”* Her eyes were blue, and her hair was light brown. Her body appearance reminded of some *“porcelain figure”* as she was very slim and looked very fragile.¹⁰⁶

Miss Honey’s possessed inner qualities that every adult and especially teacher should possess. She was sympathetic and fair, and never raised her voice but also almost never smiled like she had some inner trouble. Her little pupils and children in general adore her as she understands to their struggles and insecurities and fears. She was able to assure young children who came to school for the first time that everything will be fine, and they don’t need to worry.¹⁰⁷

When she was in her class teaching, she was strict, but she meant well with her pupils. As she told them one day that *“I want to help you to learn as much as possible while you are in this class.”* (Matilda, p.69) She always warns her pupils about Miss Trunchbull’s behaviour and she gives them advice what they shouldn’t do when she is present. When she finds out that Matilda is really good at mathematics, she is absolutely amazed, but she didn’t show it as her other pupils may feel inferior and it is inappropriate. But she can’t help herself, she wants to explore more of Matilda’s qualities but is aware that she should pay

¹⁰⁵ DAHL, Roald. *Matilda*. New York: Scholastic, 1996. ISBN 0-590-99683-5, p.193-246

¹⁰⁶ DAHL, Roald. *Matilda*, p.66, 67

¹⁰⁷ DAHL, Roald. *Matilda*, p.67

attention also to her other students, so she pretends to address her whole class. She smiled of a pure pleasure for the first time, when Matilda made a limerick about her. ¹⁰⁸

She was really scared of Miss Trunchbull, her aunt. She usually kept a long distance away from her. But as she was really excited about Matilda, she would take on anybody and she was very determined and “*stood resolutely*” before her. But at the end of their discussion, she felt helpless and useless but definitely not defeated. ¹⁰⁹

She is very aware that she has to do something about this little girl so she borrows some textbooks from her colleagues, from senior classes and offered them to Matilda saying, “*at the end of the lesson you can come up to me with your questions if you have any and I shall try to help you.*” Another attempt to inform about Matilda’s intelligence went also wrong. This time she tried to convince Matilda’s parents about their daughter brilliant brain. She was very confident about convincing her parents, but she was very wrong. At least, she didn’t lose her patience. ¹¹⁰

When her class has to face to Miss Trunchbull’s terror she tries to protect and defend them, she also tries to beg her not to hurt them, but same as her pupils she is also a Trunchbull’s target. And as she had grown up with Miss Trunchbull to be her legal guardian, she became very frightened by her because all the time, she was bullied by her and at the end she became her slave. ¹¹¹

She even tells Matilda that she wished her to ask about her troubles as she wanted to tell her struggles to somebody. As she says, she “*was never a strong character*” and her life with her aunt was a nightmare and she lived in fear. She was totally dominated and controlled by her she obeyed all her orders. Miss

¹⁰⁸ DAHL, Roald. *Matilda*. New York: Scholastic, 1996. ISBN 0-590-99683-5, p.68-80

¹⁰⁹ DAHL, Roald. *Matilda*, p.85-89

¹¹⁰ DAHL, Roald. *Matilda*, p.90-100

¹¹¹ DAHL, Roald. *Matilda*.

Honey was so miserable her whole life and she wasn't brave enough to speak about her problems nor complain as she couldn't face the embarrassment and lacked the courage. As she said, she turned into a jelly.¹¹² She was in a total resignation as are victims of abusive parents and relatives.

Her life turned for the better when she gained enough courage to leave her aunt and she was very proud of herself, she even calls it her "*greatest triumph*." But as her salary was still controlled by Miss Trunchbull, she couldn't afford many things, but she was finally free. In Matilda's eyes she was a heroine as she lived in a small cottage without tap water, bed, furniture and with almost nothing to eat. She is asked by Matilda why she doesn't leave her job and draw unemployment money as it would be a lot better, but Miss Honey loves her job so much she would never do that.¹¹³

In the whole story, Miss Honey acts as a motherly figure, which Matilda lacks in her real mother. She is sweet and kind, she loves her job and children, and she would never leave it even though she herself struggles in her life.

4.4 Mrs Wormwood

Matilda's mother, who is another main antagonist in the story. Her physical features are described by narrator in parallel to her negative soul. Matilda's mother, Mrs Wormwood "*was a large woman whose hair was dyed platinum blonde except where you could see the mousy-brown bits growing out from the roots. She wore heavy make-up and she had one of those unfortunate bulging figures where the flesh appears to be strapped in all around the body to prevent it from falling out.*" (Matilda, p.27)¹¹⁴

Mrs Wormwood and her husband are most of the time described together as a one unit. They are portrayed very aptly by narrator when it comes to their ignorance to their daughter Matilda. "*Mr and Mrs Wormwood were both*

¹¹² DAHL, Roald. *Matilda*. New York: Scholastic, 1996. ISBN 0-590-99683-5, p.193-205

¹¹³ DAHL, Roald. *Matilda*, p.201-203

¹¹⁴ DAHL, Roald. *Matilda*, p.27

so gormless and so wrapped up in their own silly little lives that they failed to notice anything unusual about their daughter." There we can see their complete lack of some interest, affection or love to their daughter. ¹¹⁵

Matilda's parents are figures that do not respect their daughter, and they don't care about her abilities or feelings as normal parents would do. Their authority is based on power and not on respect. Their lack of respect and appreciation is described by a narrator *"Parents, instead of applauding her, called her a noisy chatterbox and told her sharply that small girls should be seen and not heard."* ¹¹⁶

Mrs Wormwood always stay with her husband and his opinion, usually she adds something like *"Quite right, Harry."* And when she is talking to her daughter, she uses phrases like *"You've got a nerve talking to your father like that."* (Matilda, p.26) Or she gives her orders *"Now keep your nasty mouth shut so we can all watch this programme in peace."* One day they discuss Matilda's schoolmate picking his nose and her mother is disgusted saying *"he shouldn't have put his finger up there in the first place, it's a nasty habit"* but Matilda says to her, that grown-ups do it too and that she saw her doing it in the kitchen her mother turns pink saying *"that's quite enough from you"* without arguing with her daughter as she totally lacks some self-reflection. ¹¹⁷

Mrs Wormwood also lacks any sign of a maternal love. She is only hooked on playing bingo and watching soap opera. In general, she doesn't care about her daughter and has no problem to leave her alone at home. When she is said by Miss Honey that her daughter is brilliant, she doesn't care about it, as her favourite tv show goes on and she doesn't want to miss it. Everything she says is that *"I'm not in favour of blue-stockings girls. A girl should think about making herself look attractive so she can get a good husband later on. Looks is more important than books."* This tells us that she is a shallow person who is interested

¹¹⁵ DAHL, Roald. *Matilda*. New York: Scholastic, 1996. ISBN 0-590-99683-5, p.10

¹¹⁶ DAHL, Roald. *Matilda*, p.11

¹¹⁷ DAHL, Roald. *Matilda*, p.26, 34

only in herself and her look. She is also rude to Miss Honey when saying that she chooses looks and Miss Honey books and that is why Miss Honey is slaving teaching nasty kids and not sitting in a nice house. Mrs Wormwood's opinion on the whole situation is that *"A girl doesn't get a man by being brainy."*¹¹⁸

She is also quite mean when it comes to her husband and she probably disregards man in general. When Matilda asks her about her father doing silly things she answers *"I'm afraid men are not always quite as clever as they think they are. You will learn that when you get a bit older, my girl."* On the other hand, she calls her husband *"treasure"* which is quite grotesque.¹¹⁹

4.5 Mrs Phelps

Mrs Phelps is a local village librarian. She is the type of adult's authority which is based on respect together with Miss Honey's. She is nice and kind, she respects Matilda and is actually interested in her feelings and thoughts. At the beginning of their friendship, she treats her as a little kid, and she can't understand how it is possible that Matilda reads books for adults without problems. She helps her with her love to reading by choosing her new books to read, she also cares about her coming alone into the library and is protective. She is a complete opposite of Matilda's parents because she is caring, and she shows some concern. She asks her about her family and finds out that Matilda's parents are ignorant. But all the time she minds her own business even though she is fascinated by this little girl and her family and is very aware that in most cases it is not worth it to challenge some parent's authority and talking with them about their poorly attitude to their child.¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ DAHL, Roald. *Matilda*. New York: Scholastic, 1996. ISBN 0-590-99683-5, p.97-99

¹¹⁹ DAHL, Roald. *Matilda*, p.60, 65

¹²⁰ DAHL, Roald. *Matilda*, p.12-19

5 Charlie and the Chocolate Factory

Charlie and the Chocolate Factory is a story about a boy called Charlie Bucket who lives with his parents and grandparents in a small cottage, and they are very, very poor. Charlie goes to school in town where is the biggest chocolate factory in the world which belongs to Willy Wonka. Grandpa Joe tells Charlie a story that happened in the past about how Willy Wonka shut down his factory, because other chocolate makers stole his special recipes and started to use them. After some time, the factory was again making chocolates, but there were no employees. One day Willy Wonka announces that there are five golden tickets hidden in his chocolate bars and who finds the ticket, wins a prize and will be allowed to visit his factory. Charlie has a great luck, and he finds golden ticket as other four children. On the day of the visit, they are revealed many secrets of the factory including Oompa-Loompas, and many new Wonka's inventions. During their tour, four of the children are one by one expelled in a comical way because of their manner. Charlie is the last one who remains till the end and is said that he wins the whole chocolate factory and will be Wonka's next successor. At the end Charlie's family comes to live with Charlie and Wonka to his factory.¹²¹

5.1 Charlie's Mother

Mrs. bucket is Charlie's mother. She is very kind and gentle, and really loves her son whom she calls "*my darling*" and her family. She is very caring, and always serves grandparents their meals, and even when the whole family begin to starve, she tries to give Charlie her piece of bread for breakfast, but he doesn't eat it. Charlie's mother doesn't have a job. In the whole story, she doesn't speak a lot and, she usually stays inside the door, and is listening to stories with her husband. She is very supportive when Charlie is opening his birthday gift telling him that "*You mustn't be too disappointed, my darling, if you don't find what you're looking for underneath that wrapper. You really can't expect to be as lucky as all that.*" Another sign of her being very gentle, kind and loving is when she puts her arms around Charlie's shoulders and, she is always the first person to whom

¹²¹ DAHL, Roald. *Charlie and the chocolate factory*. New York: Puffin Books, 1998. ISBN 0-14-130115-5.

Charlie runs after. When Charlie finds the last golden ticket, she reminds very calm and realistic, probably most of them all and she is saying to grandpa who is very thrilled *“Now don’t over-excite yourself, Grandpa”* and *„And don’t fluster poor Charlie. We must all try to keep very calm. Now the first thing to decide is this who is going to go with Charlie to the factory?”* She even suggests her husband at the first place to go with Charlie *“How about you, dear? Don’t you think you ought to go?”* but she is assured by her husband that Grandpa Joe is probably the best choice and she answers him *“Yes... perhaps you’re right after all. Perhaps Grandpa Joe should be the one to go with him. I certainly can’t go myself and leave the other three old people all alone in bed for a whole day.”*¹²²

5.2 Charlie’s Grandmothers

Grandma Josephine is mother of Mr. Bucket, and Grandma Georgina is mother of Mrs. Bucket. Both grandmothers are very old around ninety, and very tired, and they never leave their bed. As they lay all day in their bed, they always wear night caps to keep their heads warm. For their physical features, narrator describes them as *“shrivelled as prunes, and as bony as skeletons.”* Together with grandfathers they always tell stories to Charlie and it is the brightest moment in their whole day. When Charlie comes to visit them in the evening, and they hear his voice, all of them are suddenly more active. As narrator says their *“Old wrinkled faces would light up with smiles of pleasure.”* They really love little Charlie as he is the only sparkle in their everyday life, and they look forward the whole day to see him and talk to him in the evenings. These moments made the whole family happy as they could forget for a second, how poor and hungry they actually are. When it comes to their miserable poor life, they are helpless, as one day Grandma Josephine says: *“What can one do?”*¹²³

When they speak with Charlie, they sound very excited and happy especially when he asks them if Wonka’s Factory is really the biggest in the whole world:

¹²² DAHL, Roald. *Charlie and the chocolate factory*. New York: Puffin Books, 1998. ISBN 0-14-130115-5, p.15-27, 51-53

¹²³ DAHL, Roald. *Charlie and the chocolate factory*, p.8, 40

"Of course it's true! Good heavens, didn't you know that? It's about fifty times as big as any other!" They are very often asked by Grandpa Joe if something he says is fact or true and they usually answer *"Absolutely true. Just as true as can be."* or *"Perfectly true!"* or *"Quite right!"* Grandma Josephine also uses questions like *"Isn't that so, Grandpa Joe?"* Grandma Josephine also gives suggestions on what Grandpa Joe should talk about *"Tell Charlie about that crazy Indian prince"* and *"He'd like to hear that."*¹²⁴

Grandma Josephine has very straight opinion on Willy Wonka's personality, and she says about him that *"The man's dotty!"* when she finds out about the event with golden tickets. She even says that *"It makes me quite ill to think of it"* when they are discussing that every kid will get a supply of chocolate for their life. At the end of the story, she calls Willy Wonka *"crazy man"* and she firstly refuses to go with Charlie and Wonka to their factory saying: *"I'd rather die in my bed!"* But after they get into the lift, she asks them if there is some food because she is starving and so her family.¹²⁵

Grandma Georgina loves her grandson and is very optimistic and supportive. She uses phrases like *"You never know, darling"* and *"You have as much chance as anybody else"* to encourage him. The positivity can be also seen in her statement *"The thing to remember is that whatever happens, you'll still have the bar of chocolate."*¹²⁶

When they read newspaper informing about first two finders of the golden ticket Granma Josephine and Grandma Georgina are very angry and disgusted by Gloop's family. Grandma Josephine says: *"What a revolting woman."* and Grandma Georgina adds *"And what a repulsive boy."* And after reading about second finder Veruca Salt they don't leave it without commentary *"That's even worse than the fat boy"* says Grandma Josephine and Grandma Georgina again

¹²⁴ DAHL, Roald. *Charlie and the chocolate factory*. New York: Puffin Books, 1998. ISBN 0-14-130115-5, p.9-12

¹²⁵ DAHL, Roald. *Charlie and the chocolate factory*, p.20, 154, 155

¹²⁶ DAHL, Roald. *Charlie and the chocolate factory*, p.21, 27

adds *"She needs a really good spanking."* When another two finders are announced in newspaper introducing Violet Beauregarde both grandmas have apt comments on her. Grandma Josephine calls her *"beastly girl"* and as always Grandma Georgina comes with a statement *"She'll come to a sticky end one day, chewing all that gum, you see if she doesn't."* And when they get to the last finder Mike Teavee, Grandma Josephine declares in advance that it will be *"Another bad lot, I'll be bound"* and she is actually right. They both hate these nasty children and are very disappointed as they find it very unfair.¹²⁷

5.3 Other Children's Mothers

Mrs Gloop, Augustus's mother is very proud at her son. She tells the newspaperman that she knew he will find the golden ticket as he eats so much chocolate that it was clear he will find it. Eating is her son's hobby, and she is glad that he is interested in eating as she said it is better *"than being a hooligan and shooting off zip guns and things like that in his spare time."* Her opinion on her son's eating is that it is all vitamins and *"he wouldn't go on eating like he does unless he needed nourishment."* She uses at the end of every of her statement rhetoric question like *"would he?"* or *"isn't it?"* and to me it evokes that she is not at all so sure about what she is saying, and she assure herself this way. When her son sneaks to the chocolate river she is not able to order him not to do it and instead of it she says *"Augustus, sweetheart, I don't think you had better do that."* But he doesn't care what his mom is saying to him as he is not well behaved. When Augustus is drowning, she screams, shouts and waves with her umbrella and orders her husband to help him. But he is than sucked by the huge pipe and she screams *"Help! Murder! Police!"* and *"Call the fire brigade!"* but it is useless. She then goes totally crazy, and she calls Wonka *"You monster!"* and *"You think it's a joke, do you?"* instead of she should be angry on her naughty boy.¹²⁸

¹²⁷ DAHL, Roald. *Charlie and the chocolate factory*. New York: Puffin Books, 1998. ISBN 0-14-130115-5, p.23, 25, 32

¹²⁸ DAHL, Roald. *Charlie and the chocolate factory*, p.22, 71-76, 91

Mrs Salt, mother of Veruca is very rich and her daughter is very spoiled mainly by her father. She is described by a narrator as a *“great fat creature with short legs, and she was blowing like a rhinoceros.”* When Willy Wonka tells the story about Oompa-Loompas and Oompaland she says quite bossy: *“There’s no such place”* and *“I’m a teacher of geography.”* She even says to her daughter *“Veruca, darling, pay no attention to Mr Wonka! He’s lying to you!”* She calls her daughter sweetheart and *“my pet”* and when Veruca wants squirrel she gets one as Mrs Salt says: *“Mummy’ll get you a squirrel just as soon as she possibly can.”* When is her daughter evaluated as rotten nut and goes to the rubbish chute she screams and shouts *“My darling Veruca! She’ll... she’ll... she’ll be sizzled like a sausage!”*¹²⁹

Mrs Beauregarde, Violet’s mother has a quite right opinion that it is not ladylike and looks ugly when girls chew too much. But her saucy daughter says: *“who’s she to criticize, anyway, because if you ask me, I’d say that her jaws are going up and down almost as much as mine are just from yelling at me every minute of the day.”* This statement signalize that her mother is not any better than her daughter. When they are in the room of inventions, she tells her daughter at first *“don’t let’s do anything silly”* with the chewing gum but then it changes to *“You are a clever girl.”* At the end it is again the same case as with other children and Mrs Beauregarde starts shouting, shrieking, screaming and she even says *“Mercy! Save us!”* and the most grotesque thing that she says: *“But I don’t want a blueberry for a daughter!”*¹³⁰

Mrs Teavee, Mike’s mother is not described by a narrator at all. Actually, she seems to be quite a normal woman who only struggles with upbringing her son who is addicted to television. When her son runs towards the camera to be send by television she only screams *“Stop! Come back! You’ll be turned into a million tiny pieces!”* but he doesn’t care about his mother. After her son is sent by television, she is desperate as he is very little and as she says: *“He won’t be able*

¹²⁹ DAHL, Roald. *Charlie and the chocolate factory*. New York: Puffin Books, 1998. ISBN 0-14-130115-5, p.68, 107-113

¹³⁰ DAHL, Roald. *Charlie and the chocolate factory*, 31, 95-99

to do anything!” She is not even mad at Willy Wonka and she just asks him if he can do something with her son and she even thanks to him so to me personally, it looks like that she is polite who only has problems with her growing kid. ¹³¹

¹³¹ DAHL, Roald. *Charlie and the chocolate factory*. New York: Puffin Books, 1998. ISBN 0-14-130115-5, p.131, 134

6 The Twits

Twits are a very hideous, cruel and disgusting couple. They hate each other and they play vicious practical jokes on each other their whole life. Their cruelty and jokes are endless as same as their hatred to animals and practically everything that is alive. As they are ex circus trainers, they keep a pet monkeys and they make them to stay on their head many hours. Every week they also have a bird-pie for their supper. They trap birds using a strong sticky glue on a tree on their garden. At the end the monkeys manage to warn birds and together they came up with the plan using the same super glue to get rid of Mr and Mrs Twit.¹³²

6.1 Mrs Twit

Mrs Twit is a wife of Mr Twit and she is not any better than him. She is fearfully ugly, nasty, evil, hideous but as narrator says *“the funny thing is that Mrs Twit wasn't born ugly. She'd had quite a nice face when she was young. The ugliness had grown upon her year by year as she got older.”* (The Twits, p.8) As explanation he states that *“If a person has ugly thoughts, it begins to show on the face. And when that person has ugly thoughts every day, every week, every year, the face gets uglier and uglier until it gets so ugly you can hardly bear to look at it.”* (The Twits, p.9) So when your thoughts are good you will never be ugly as Mrs Twit. She is also described as a dirty old hag with an itching tummy.

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She always carries a walking stick, and the reason is that she likes to hit dogs and cats and even small children with it. She hates small children so much that she grows plenty of spiky thistles around her house to keep them away. One of her eyes is made out of glass and it always looks in a different direction. One day she even uses her glass eye to prank her husband and she puts it into his mug with beer. Another of her pranks is even more evil as she cooks spaghetti and mixes them with worms from their garden. Her evil reaction on her successful prank

¹³² DAHL, Roald. *The Twits*. New York: Scholastic, 1980. ISBN 0-590-13601-1.

¹³³ DAHL, Roald. *The Twits*, p.8, 9, 13

consisted of a lot of clapping and stamping feet on the floor and rocking with horrible laughter and she looks unbelievably satisfied.¹³⁴

Her only positive feature is that she is not stupid at all and when her husband sends her to the sky using balloons, she has an idea:

"If I can get rid of some of these balloons,' she said to herself, 'I will stop going up and start to come down.'" When she is landing, she shouts many nasty words on her husband: "Here I come, you grizzly old grunion! You rotten old turnip! You filthy old frumpet!" and "I'll get you for this!" and "I'll swish you to a swazzle! I'll swash you to a swizzle! I'll gnash you to a gnozzle! I'll gnosh you to a gnazzle!" (The Twits, p.30, 31)¹³⁵

Only once Mrs Twit is able to cooperate with her husband and looks like she cares about him a little bit, and it is when they come back home from town with new guns and birds drops their droppings, actually it was glue, on their heads. She then says to him *"Don't touch it! You'll get it all over your hands! Come inside and we'll wash it off at the sink!"¹³⁶*

¹³⁴ DAHL, Roald. *The Twits*. New York: Scholastic, 1980. ISBN 0-590-13601-1.

¹³⁵ DAHL, Roald. *The Twits*, p.28-30

¹³⁶ DAHL, Roald. *The Twits*, p.67

7 James and the Giant Peach

In this story a young and orphaned boy called James is the main protagonist. His parents are eaten by angry rhino when they go shopping to London. Before this nasty event James lived a normal and happy life and had plenty of friends to play with. But everything changed and he has to move and live with his two nasty evil aunts. They are very cruel on him and he is very lonely. But James life changes forever when he meets a mysterious man who gives him some magical green things. James is told to put them in water and drink them and later fabulous things will happen. James is so excited that he runs back to house, but he stumbles over, and all magical things fall, and they burrow into the ground. After this, some peculiar things start to happen. On the top of dead peach tree in their garden starts to grow a peach and it is larger and larger in every minute. One day he comes to see the peach secretly and he finds out a hole leading into the peach, so he crawls inside. When he gets to the stone, he finds there a group of insect-like creatures who introduce themselves. Together with James they start to plan an escape. They are successful and the peach starts to roll off the hill and during their brilliant escape both James's aunts are smashed. On their journey to a better life, they face to many obstacles and at the end they land in New York City, they become successful and live there happily ever after.¹³⁷

7.1 Aunt Spiker and Aunt Sponge

These two women are James's aunts. According to narrator they are called as "two ghastly hags" and "they were both really horrible people". They were selfish and lazy and cruel, but they loved money a lot." They are mainly very cruel and vicious to little James and very often beat him and punish him for no reason at all. They don't call him by his name, and they are using many other nasty nicknames as "*you disgusting little beast*" or "*you miserable creature.*" These two never buy James any toys, books and he has no friends to play with and his room is totally empty. They never allow him to go alone anywhere for a walk nor they

¹³⁷ DAHL, Roald. *James and the Giant Peach*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002. ISBN 0-375-81424-8.

go with him. Aunts often threat with a nasty punishment if he dares to go behind the fence.¹³⁸

Aunt Sponge and her physical features are described by narrator as she *“was enormously fat and very short. She had small piggy eyes, a sunken mouth, and one of those white flabby faces that looked exactly as though it had been boiled. She was like a great white soggy overboiled cabbage.”* (James and the Giant Peach, p.5-6)¹³⁹

Aunt Spiker when it comes to her physical appearance was a complete opposite. She is described as *“lean and tall and bony, and she wore steel-rimmed spectacles that fixed on to the end of her nose with a clip. She had a screeching voice and long wet narrow lips, and whenever she got angry or excited, little flecks of spit would come shooting out of her mouth as she talked.”* (James and the Giant Peach, p.6)¹⁴⁰

Both of them like to talk about themselves as they are beautiful, and Aunt Sponge even has a small mirror always on her lap and she likes to look at herself in it. Aunt Sponge sees herself very differently from what reality is. She says:¹⁴¹

*“I look and smell as lovely as a rose!
Just feast your eyes upon my face, observe my shapely nose!
Behold my heavenly silky locks!
And if I take off both my socks
You’ll see my dainty toes.”* (James and the Giant Peach, p.7)

But Aunt Spiker has a different opinion on her appearance, and she is quite rude when saying that Aunt Sponge shouldn’t forget that her tummy is huge. And as Aunt Spiker doesn’t want to lose this “who is more lovely” battle, she says:¹⁴²

¹³⁸ DAHL, Roald. *James and the Giant Peach*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002. ISBN 0-375-81424-8, p.2-4, 6

¹³⁹ DAHL, Roald. *James and the Giant Peach*, p.2-4, 6

¹⁴⁰ DAHL, Roald. *James and the Giant Peach*, p.6

¹⁴¹ DAHL, Roald. *James and the Giant Peach*, p.6-7

“Behold my gorgeous curvy shape, my teeth, my charming grin!

Oh, beautiful me! How I adore

My radiant looks! And please ignore

The pimple on my chin.” (James and the Giant Peach, p.7)

As Aunt Sponge doesn't want to be left behind with criticism, she calls Aunt Spiker and *“old trout”* and adds that she is *“only bones and skin.”* She sees herself as a Hollywood star, but Aunt Spiker sees her as *“a lovely Frankenstein.”* They have no problem with insulting and criticizing each other, and they were self-absorbed and didn't care about anything else, nor their nephew. ¹⁴³

7.2 Miss Spider and Ladybird

Miss Spider and Ladybird are female insect-like creatures that were magically enlarged by tiny green things that James got from an old man when he was alone in the garden. They are discovered by James in a middle of a Giant Peach. Both Miss Spider and Ladybird are as big as James himself and in the beginning, they appear to be terrifying as Miss Spider says: *“I'm hungry!”* and Ladybird adds *“So am I!”* while staring hard on little James. ¹⁴⁴

Ladybird, as narrator describes her is *“obviously a kind and gentle creature”* that has *“nine spots on her scarlet shell.”* Miss Spider has a long black tongue, so she looks quite spooky, but she is caring when asking James *“Aren't you hungry?”* but unfortunately in that moment James thinks that they want to eat him. When Ladybird finds out that James is very frightened as he thinks that they want to eat him, she calls him *“the poor thing”* saying *“You mustn't be frightened”* and adding *“We wouldn't dream of hurting you. You are one of us now, didn't you know that? You are one of the crew. We're all in the same boat.”* (James and the Giant Peach, p.35) This signalize that Ladybird is very caring as she smiles on James and from my point of view, she replaces in the story motherly love to him and always

¹⁴² DAHL, Roald. *James and the Giant Peach*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002. ISBN 0-375-81424-8, p.7

¹⁴³ DAHL, Roald. *James and the Giant Peach*. p.7-8

¹⁴⁴ DAHL, Roald. *James and the Giant Peach*, p.33-35

informs him about all plans. When James speaks and someone wants to interrupt him, she says: *“Let him finish.”* She also is very kind and protective to other creatures, for example she defends Earthworm before Centipede by saying: *“Stop pulling the Earthworm’s leg.”*¹⁴⁵

Miss Spider has a *“large black murderous-looking head, which to a stranger was probably the most terrifying of all”* but she is also very kind to James and others as she makes them their beds using her threads and she always asks them how they would like their beds to be. Although she is a lovely personality it was a horrid business to get tangled in her legs. Miss Spider is also quite brave as she suggests to others *“Why don’t I go over the side and make an inspection?”* and she jumped of the peach that was hovering in the air.¹⁴⁶

Glow-worm is another female creature who is *“very shy and silent.”* She is not described much by a narrator, but she is also very kind and polite, and always smiles on James. When they first meet, she says: *“I didn’t see you come in. Welcome, my dear boy, welcome – and good night!”*¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁵ DAHL, Roald. *James and the Giant Peach*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002. ISBN 0-375-81424-8.

¹⁴⁶ DAHL, Roald. *James and the Giant Peach*.

¹⁴⁷ DAHL, Roald. *James and the Giant Peach*, p.42, 80

8 The Witches

At the beginning of this story, we are introduced an unnamed protagonist who is called the boy. After his parents dies in car accident he becomes and orphan, so he moves to her grandmother's house to live with her. Grandmother who is a Norwegian tells him stories about witches as she knows a lot about them, and she teaches him how to recognize them and how to stay safe from them. She even tells him about The Grand High Witch, who is a leader of all witches in the world and is the most wicked of them all. One day the boy and grandma go together on holiday on the seaside where is a very fancy Hotel Magnificent in Bournemouth. He even gets a present of two little mice from grandma, so he takes them with him. In the hotel The Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children has an annual meeting but the boy later finds out that this society consist only of witches and he sneaks into the meeting. This meeting is led by Grand High Witch herself and she introduces her evil plan and her new invention Formula 86 which is a potion for turning children into mice. She plans to put the potion into candies and other witches will sell them in their sweetshops and children worldwide will be turned into mice. During this meeting as an example, she turns a little boy called Bruno into a mouse and after that they also find the boy hiding and listening, so he is turned also into mouse. From this time the boy, Bruno and grandma start to plan how to get rid of these nasty witches. Their plan consists of stealing Formula 86 and adding it to the witches' supper and turning all of them into mice. Their plan is successful, all witches including the Grand High Witch turns into mice and then they are smashed by guests and hotel staff. After this event the boy, still being mouse and grandma returns home and starts making another plan on how to get rid of every witch in the world. At the end they are both happy, and mainly the boy as he will live as long as his grandmother now when he is a mouse.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁸ DAHL, Roald. *The Witches*. London: Puffin Books, 2001. ISBN 0-141-31139-8.

8.1 Grandma

The grandmother is more than eighty years old lady, who is called "Grandmamma" by the boy, is a Norwegian and this is why she knows everything about witches. She is the only relative of the whole family and comes from mother's side. She speaks Norwegian and also English. The boy himself said: *"I felt closer to her than to my mother."* When boy's parents died, he and grandmother stayed in the house and she was holding the boy tightly and they cried the whole night. When he asks her, what will happen next, if he goes back to England, she says *"I could never do that. Heaven shall take my soul, but Norway shall keep my bones."* This phrase shows how much she loves and cares about her grandson and also the fact that she calls him *"my darling"* and saying *"I love you and I want you to stay with me."*¹⁴⁹

She is a wonderful storyteller, and her stories are enthralling and all of them are based on the truth. She is as she claims herself *"retired witchophile"*¹⁵⁰ and she travelled the whole world to track down The Grand High Witch when she was younger. As I already said she is an expert on the subject of witches, and she warns her grandson *„you won't last long in this world if you don't know how to spot a witch when you see one"* and *"You must remember everything I tell you. After that, all you can do is cross your heart and pray to heaven and hope for the best."* (The Witches, p.8) She even claims that *"Children should never have baths. It's a dangerous habit."* This is because children smell like dog droppings to witches when they are perfectly clean, so they can easily find them and catch them.¹⁵¹

For her physical features, she is described by her grandson as *"tremendously old and wrinkled, with a massive wide body which was smothered in grey lace."* She always sits majestically in her armchair filling every inch of it. She has old and wrinkled lips, and hand with the missing thumb. She smokes cigars that smells

¹⁴⁹ DAHL, Roald. *The Witches*. London: Puffin Books, 2001. ISBN 0-141-31139-8.

¹⁵⁰ Witchophile is a person who studies witches and knows a lot about them

¹⁵¹ DAHL, Roald. *The Witches*.

like burning rubber and she offers them to her grandson saying: *"Would you like a puff of my cigar?"* and as he refuses, she adds *"I don't care what age you are,"* she said. *"You'll never catch a cold if you smoke cigars."* Before she goes on holiday with her grandson, she gets pneumonia and becomes very ill but as she is a strong lady, she says to doctors that *"she simply had to get better because she had to look after you.* Even her nurse says that *"She's a tough old bird."*¹⁵²

She is not only tough lady but also stubborn and insistent and she doesn't like to lose a quarrel. When they arrive on their holiday in hotel there is a manager who doesn't allow her grandson to take his mice with him and she opposes him: *"How dare you say that when your rotten hotel is full of rats anyway! I saw one this very morning. It was running down the corridor into the kitchen! You had better get the rat-catcher in at once, before I report you to the Public Health Authorities. I expect there's rats scuttling all over the kitchen floor and stealing the food off the shelves and jumping in and out of the soup! If you're not careful, the Health people will be ordering the entire hotel to be closed before everyone gets typhoid fever."* (The Witches, p.46-48) After this the manager knows that he is beaten so he allows her grandson to keep his mice in the hotel.¹⁵³

When the boy is turned into a mouse and comes to tell her, she is completely shocked and *"Every part of her body, her fingers and hands and arms and head became suddenly as stiff as a marble statue."* But we already know that she is tough, and she manages to put herself together, but she is very sorry for her grandson saying: *"Oh, my poor sweet darling. What have they done to you?"* but she is assured that he is perfectly fine, and he will be if she looks after him in the future. And as she loves him unconditionally even as a mouse, she answers *"Of course I'll look after you."* And she really keeps her promise.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵² DAHL, Roald. *The Witches*. London: Puffin Books, 2001. ISBN 0-141-31139-8, p.9, 15, 26, 42, 44,

¹⁵³ DAHL, Roald. *The Witches*, p.46-48

¹⁵⁴ DAHL, Roald. *The Witches*, p.118-120

Grandmamma is also very inventive, brave and clever and has good ideas as putting her grandson into sock and lowering him down to the Grand High Witch's balcony to get her Formula 86. She is very dedicated and passionate to help her grandson in the battle against witches. She says to him: *"It's fantastic! It's tremendous! We'd get rid of every witch in England in one swoop! If we brought this off, it would be the greatest triumph in the whole history of witchery!"*¹⁵⁵

8.2 Witches and The Grand High Witch

As narrator himself says, he is not talking about witches from fairy tales who *"wear silly black hats and black cloaks"* and are riding on broomsticks, but he talks about real witches from the real world. Witches come from Norway, more precisely from Norwegian *"black forests and icy mountains"* but are spread all over the world and witches in every country are completely different but *"English witches are probably the most vicious in the whole world."* Witches even has *"a Secret Society of Witches in every country."* One thing that is common for every witch in the world is that they hate *"children with a red-hot sizzling hatred that is more sizzling and red-hot than any hatred you could possibly imagine."*¹⁵⁶

It is very important to describe how real witch looks. *"A witch is always a woman."* Real witches are very hard to catch and recognize as they don't look dangerous, they talk like normal women, do ordinary jobs, live in ordinary houses and they *"dress in ordinary clothes and look very much like ordinary women."* But there are some signs as they always were gloves even in house and in summer, because they don't have fingernails and instead of them, they have *"thin curvy claws, like a cat."* They don't have a single hair on their heads and are always *"Bald as a boiled egg."* And as they want to hide it, they wear first-class wigs, but as they wear them on naked scalp *"it causes nasty sores on the head"* and witches call it wig-rash. Another significant physical feature is that *"Witches have slightly*

¹⁵⁵ DAHL, Roald. *The Witches*. London: Puffin Books, 2001. ISBN 0-141-31139-8, p.127, 129

¹⁵⁶ DAHL, Roald. *The Witches*, p.1, 6, 29, 32,

larger nose-holes than ordinary people. The rim of each nose-hole is pink and curvy, like the rim of a certain kind of seashell. This is because they have *“the most amazing powers of smell”* and they can smell especially clean children for miles as they smell like *“Dogs’ droppings.”* Witches’ eyes are completely different from others. Normal people have a black dot in the middle, but witches’ dot is always changing its colour, and fire and ice are dancing in the very centre of it. Another thing about witches is that their *“feet have square ends with no toes on them at all.”* And last thing about witches that is probably the most peculiar is that *“Their spit is blue.” “They even use it to write with. They use those old-fashioned pens that have nibs and they simply lick the nib.”* All witches are also very powerful. They have magic in their fingers and devilry is dancing in their veins. Their *“magic powers are very frightening.”*¹⁵⁷

When it comes to witch’s behaviour *“A witch will never do silly things like climbing up drainpipes or breaking into people’s houses.”* As I said before, English witches are the most vicious on the whole world, they are all friends, they even swop deadly recipes and *“their favourite ruse is to mix up a powder that will turn a child into some creature or other that all grown-ups hate.”* They turn them into slug or flea and adults then get rid of them by squishing them or using flea-powder without knowing that these creatures are their children. American witches turn children into hot-dogs which are eaten by their own parents.¹⁵⁸

The Grand High Witch Of All The World is a leader and ruler of all witches around the world. She is called by other witches *“O Brilliant One”* and *“O Brainy One”* *“She is all-powerful. She is without mercy. All other witches are petrified of her. They see her only once a year at their Annual Meeting. She goes there to whip up excitement and enthusiasm, and to give orders. The Grand High Witch travels from country to country attending these Annual Meetings.”* (The Witches, p.32-33) Grand High With is also very rich and she is *“Simply rolling in money.”* She wears a mask on her face to hide her frightful and frightening face. Here face is

¹⁵⁷ DAHL, Roald. *The Witches*. London: Puffin Books, 2001. ISBN 0-141-31139-8, p.1, 3, 18-22, 24-25

¹⁵⁸ DAHL, Roald. *The Witches*, p.17, 30, 32-33,

*“crumpled and wizened, so shrunken and shrivelled, it looked as though it had been pickled in vinegar.” “It seemed quite literally to be rotting away at the edges, and in the middle of the face, around the mouth and cheeks, the skin all cankered and worm-eaten, as though maggots were working away in there.” (The Witches, p.60)*¹⁵⁹

She has snake eyes, and her voice is very loud and harsh, hard and metallic. *“It rasped. It grated. It snarled. It scraped. It shrieked. And it growled.”* She has something very peculiar in her voice. *“There was some sort of a foreign accent there, something harsh and guttural, and she seemed to have trouble pronouncing the letter w. As well as that, she did something funny with the letter r. She would roll it round and round her mouth like a piece of hot pork-crackling before spitting it out.”* (The Witches, p.63-64) This is the way she speaks to her audience of other witches *“You may rree-moof your vigs!”* and *“Vitches of Inkland!”* and *“Miserrable vitches!”* She even calls other witches *“Useless lazy vitches! Feeble frrribbling vitches! You are a heap of idle good-for-nothing vurms!”* This is because she is angry as there are too many smelly children on the world and that *“Vun child a veek is no good to me!”* and as there is another witch arguing they can’t simply get rid of every child The Grand High Witch says the spell and she simply vanishes her.¹⁶⁰

“A stupid vitch who answers back

Must burn until her bones are black!”

“A foolish vitch without a brain

Must sizzle in the fiery flame!”

“An idiotic vitch like you

Must rroast upon the barbecue!”

“A vitch who dares to say I’m wrrrong

Vill not be vith us very long!” (The Witches, p. 68-69)

¹⁵⁹ DAHL, Roald. *The Witches*. London: Puffin Books, 2001. ISBN 0-141-31139-8, p.32, 34, 60, 73, 76

¹⁶⁰ DAHL, Roald. *The Witches*, p.62-64, 66-67

At the end of this terrible incident, she says “*I hope nobody else is going to make me cross today.*” She shows no mercy to other witches same as children, but children, she really hates the most. It makes her sick only thinking and talking about them and she calls every child a “*smelly little brrrat*” and “*the greedy little brutes.*” She is evil and vicious, and she wants to get rid of them using her fearful plan including Formula 86 Delayed Action Mouse-Maker that turns everything into mouse, and other witches who will be selling sweets filled with formula in their sweetshops. When buying sweetshops, money is not problem as she makes them illegally at home. After turning all children into mice, mousetraps come next and as she says “*mouse-trrrraps is going snappety-snap and mouse-heads is rrrolling across the floors like marbles.*”¹⁶¹

8.3 Antifeminism

The Witches were in 1983 recognized as one of the best books for children by The New York Times and the American Library Association and in the same year the book won the Whitbread Award and the Federation of Children’s Books Group Award in the United Kingdom. As soon as the book became a subject of interest, it also very quickly became the subject of controversy among readers and reviewers, and it was one of the most criticized and challenged books in nineties in United Kingdom and even in the United States. Dahl’s black humour, dreadful witches and fantastical features attracted many children, but on the other side adults, who wanted to censor it.¹⁶²

According to Michele Landsberg critique, Dahl’s most disturbing motif in his stories is misogyny and antifeminism. In many of his stories there is still the same plot including small boy that fights with a cruel adult woman and at the end he punishes her or kills her. This motif is significant in *James and the Giant*, *George’s Marvellous Medicine* and most strongly in *The Witches*. In *Games and the Giant Peach* the young boy squishes his evil aunts that are bullying him with a giant

¹⁶¹ DAHL, Roald. *The Witches*. London: Puffin Books, 2001. ISBN 0-141-31139-8, p.70-78

¹⁶² OLIVER, Elizabeth. Boil, Boil, Toil and Trouble: a critical look at the controversy over Roald Dahl's *The Witches*. *Looking Glass: New Perspectives on Children's Literature*. 2008, (12).

peach. In *George's Marvellous Medicine* young boy is again tormented by his old nasty grandma, whom he calls "*grizzly old grunion of Grandma*," so he decides to make a potion to get rid of her. Landsberg adds that as he mixes the potion "*some of the details are explosive with explicit sexual disgust and rage.*" After giving grandma the potion her physical sufferings as "*There's squigglers in my belly! There's bangers in my bottom!*" are described by Landsberg as a parody of rape. When grandma is completely destroyed George feels some kind of pleasure as he nearly touched the edge of a magic. This moment of orgasmic pleasure seems obscene to Landsberg when she realizes what actually happened to grandma before. The stereotype of seeing a woman as something evil is most significant in *The Witches*. This depiction of an evil witch is presented as children's humour but to adults it seems to be "*pervaded with a chilling vein of hatred and fear.*"¹⁶³

The Witches is, as I already mentioned, seen by many critics as the most sexist of all of his children's work. Dahl's witches are seen as "*parodies of second-wave feminist, who have been caricatured by conservatives as women dabbling in the occult and who violently hate children.*" (Alston, Butler, p.143) As narrator says witches are like any other ordinary women but they are different in one thing- to get rid of every child on the planet. According to critics, these witches are simply "*devouring mothers who only pretend to love children in order to do them harm.*"¹⁶⁴

Dahl himself has even been accused of sexism and antifeminism by many English feminists and criticised in United States by witches' societies for his negative portrayal of witches. This critique was mainly focused on this description of witches:¹⁶⁵

¹⁶³ LANDSBERG, Michele. *The world of children's books: a guide to choosing the best*. London: Simon & Schuster, 1988. ISBN 0-671-65477-2, p. 89, 90

¹⁶⁴ ALSTON, Ann a Catherine BUTLER, ed. *Roald Dahl*. United Kingdom: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012. ISBN 978-0-230-28360-2, p.143

¹⁶⁵ TELGEN, Diane. *Something about the author: 73*. New York: Gale, 1993. ISBN 978-0810322837, p.39-45

“A witch is always a woman.

I do not wish to speak badly about women. Most women are lovely. But the fact remains that all witches are women. There is no such thing as a male witch.

On the other hand, a ghoul is always a male. So indeed is a barghest. Both are dangerous. Bu neither of them is half as dangerous as a REAL WITCH.” (The Witches, p.3) ¹⁶⁶

But there is one important contradiction in their criticism. They very often ignore the passage saying *“On the other hand, a ghoul is always a male. So indeed is a barghest.”* Dahl himself defended *The Witches* pointing out the character of kind grandmother, so there are not only evil women. ¹⁶⁷ Although ghouls and barghest are always males, they are not *“as dangerous as a real witch”* and these bad reactions against female witches were because of the time when the book was released. As I already mentioned It was published in 1983 in the time when second-wave feminism *“was robust and prosperous, fighting issues of unofficial inequalities and sexist structures.”* ¹⁶⁸

In *The Witches*, there is another controversial aspect that is connected with misogyny and many female teachers see this description as an insult. It can be seen in narrator’s suggestion that even female teacher in your school can be a witch. Narrator particularly says: ¹⁶⁹

“she might even be your lovely school-teacher who is reading these words to you at this very moment.”

¹⁶⁶ DAHL, Roald. *The Witches*. London: Puffin Books, 2001. ISBN 0-141-31139-8, p.3

¹⁶⁷ TELGEN, Diane. *Something about the author: 73*. New York: Gale, 1993. ISBN 978-0810322837, p.39-45

¹⁶⁸ OLIVER, Elizabeth. *Boil, Boil, Toil and Trouble: a critical look at the controversy over Roald Dahl's The Witches. Looking Glass: New Perspectives on Children's Literature*. 2008, (12).

¹⁶⁹ ALSTON, Ann a Catherine BUTLER, ed. *Roald Dahl*. United Kingdom: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012. ISBN 978-0-230-28360-2, p.4

"I am not, of course, telling you for one second that your teacher actually is a witch. All I am saying is that she might be one. It is most unlikely. But--- and here comes the big "but"--- it is not impossible." (The Witches, p.5)

According to Bird Anne-Marie, Dahl's Grand High Witch is relatively asexual. She is described in a conventional feminine way using terms as tiny, quite young, very pretty and stylish. But when she takes her mask off, she is depicted as *"frightful and frightening"* and looking at her was *"fearsome and ghastly."*¹⁷⁰ According to this horrific depiction of Grand High With, Dahl's *The Witches* still has *"some sense of duality"* as there is a contrast between prettiness when wearing a mask and total horror when the mask is removed.¹⁷¹

The whole coven of witches has only one goal in Dahl's book. Their desire is to get rid of every child in the world and as many critics say this is the representation of the anti-maternal attitude as all of them are single without their own children. They are the total opposite of a kind and caring mother and her maternal feelings. The Grand High Witch is also financially independent, and it is portrayed as something frightful as it gives her and coven endless power and because of that they are uncontrollable. This is the reason why The Grand High Witch is never tracked down by any witchophile. This theme of women having too much money and power is highlighted as something that should make others anxious as they can't be controlled. Basically, women who fight not to be restricted are portrayed as evil witches. These witches are a parallel of the most dangerous women who are anti-maternal and single. More precisely women who choose a different lifestyle, being single and childless are seen as less valuable and are a parable of evil nasty witches.¹⁷²

¹⁷⁰ DAHL, Roald. *The Witches*. London: Puffin Books, 2001. ISBN 0-141-31139-8.

¹⁷¹ BIRD, Anne-Marie. Women Behaving Badly: Dahl's Witches Meet the Women of the Eighties. *Children's Literature in Education*. 1998, (29), 119–129. Dostupné z: <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1022445204446>

¹⁷² BAKER, Kerry Maureen. Representations of Witches and Witchcraft In Children's Literature. 2019. Master's thesis. California State University San Marcos. Supervisor Heidi Breuer.

According to Mitchell, social expectations of women including feminine appearance are strongly intensified in the conversation between Grandmamma and her grandson. They talk about recognizing witches and one of the main factors how to recognize them is that they are bald. Grandma and her grandson have very specific opinion on bald woman: “*There is something indecent about a bald woman.*” and “*how horrid!*” and “*Disgusting.*”¹⁷³ This dialogue carries narrator’s discomfort about bald women and sees hair as something essential for women’s femininity but even describes bald women as offensive and unnatural. This attitude to femininity is seen as very insulting.¹⁷⁴

Mitchell declares *The Witches* being misogynistic in the way Dahl’s characterise physical features of his witches. There is only one exception in this pattern, and it is the figure of grandmother who doesn’t fit into standard feminine role. She has masculine features and even her behaviour is not typical for older woman.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷³ DAHL, Roald. *The Witches*. London: Puffin Books, 2001. ISBN 0-141-31139-8.

¹⁷⁴ MITCHELL, Jennifer. "A Sort of Mouse-Person": Radicalizing Gender in *The Witches*. *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts*. 2012, (23), 25-39. Dostupné také z: <https://www.thefreelibrary.com/%22A+sort+of+mouse-person%22%3A+radicalizing+gender+in+The+Witches.-a0298173243>

¹⁷⁵ MITCHELL, Jennifer. "A Sort of Mouse-Person": Radicalizing Gender in *The Witches*.

9 Female Characters in the Classic Fairy Tale Versus in Dahl's Work for Children

The Brothers Grimm's fairy tales are based on oral traditions and were obtained mostly from German women who were spinners. These women kept themselves awake by telling stories during spinning. As these stories were told by females it is very likely the reason, why the main characters in Grimm's fairy tales are women. There are various female characters in their fairy tales, and readers are able to recognize their moral characters by observing their physical features. Happiness and future are connected with character's attractiveness and youthful appearance, worthiness, morality and these are the most important features, that women can possess in the world of fairy tales. On the other hand, "*women that are not beautiful are a source of suspicion.*" Cinderella and her stepsisters are perfect example of this theory. The beauty of Cinderella and her character itself, is a victim of her unattractive stepsisters. Even Cinderella's little feet present her innocence and beauty.¹⁷⁶ For me personally it evokes the situation in *The Witches*, where grandma describes her grandson that "*Witches don't have toes, just square feet.*" and it is a symbol of something evil and bad.¹⁷⁷

A heroine is always described as a beautiful and good person who usually waits for her saviour, doesn't take any actions. Passivity of female characters is also very significant. *Sleeping Beauty* is passive during the whole story as she is under the spell and sleeps and she is still the main protagonist.¹⁷⁸ Evil female character is always described as a complete opposite. "*Lazy girls and older women are generally ugly, evil and determined to take advantage of the heroine.*" These antagonists are always "*strong, determined and even greedy.*" And women who are somehow strong and have some power for doing good things are usually asexual fairies. In fairy tales there is a parallel between "*empowered female*

¹⁷⁶ NEIKIRK, Alice. "'... Happily Ever After' (or What Fairytales Teach Girls About Being Women).." *Hohonu: A Journal of Academic Writing*. 2009, (7), 38-42.

¹⁷⁷ DAHL, Roald. *The Witches*. London: Puffin Books, 2001. ISBN 0-141-31139-8.

¹⁷⁸ KHAN, Munejah. *The Politics of Children's Literature: Constructing Gender Identities through Fairytales*. 2019, (19). ISSN 1930-2940.

sexuality and evil."¹⁷⁹ This parallel can be seen also in Dahl's witches, where The Grand High Witch is a strong character who has power and money and is very evil. In the fairy tale *Sleeping Beauty*, there is also "evil female fairy" with "dark hair" who is older, asexual and "contains hostility towards the fair princess." This attitude to female characters who differ somehow from the standard of good, young and beautiful women, and based on that they are seen as antagonists and evil hags plants a seed of this bad attitude in young readers and their perspective of reality.¹⁸⁰

As I already mentioned, female characters in fairy tales who are not feminine enough are seen as evil and "undesirable, ugly and usually are represented as witches, stepmothers and stepsisters." In *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* there is a stepmother who is a witch and who wants to kill Snow White as she is jealous of her beauty. Snow White escapes into the woods and stays in Dwarf's house in a condition of taking care of the household. This by society expected female's role of staying at home and doing housework without complaining is similar to another fairy tale *Cinderella* including her evil stepmother, and Dahl's *Matilda* where Miss Honey stays with her evil aunt Miss Trunchbull and is forced to do all the housework.¹⁸¹

Most often these evil female characters in fairy tales are stepmothers who represent maternal figures, and usually at the same time witches or they possess some kind of magical powers. Magical powers and witchcraft itself are represented as something evil, and it is connected only to females. These aggressive female characters are described as ugly and repulsive and witch-like who only seek for power and are determined to get it and are very often

¹⁷⁹ NEIKIRK, Alice. "'... Happily Ever After' (or What Fairytales Teach Girls About Being Women).." *Hohonu: A Journal of Academic Writing*. 2009, (7), 38-42.

¹⁸⁰ NEIKIRK, Alice. "'... Happily Ever After' (or What Fairytales Teach Girls About Being Women).."

¹⁸¹ KHAN, Munejah. *The Politics of Children's Literature: Constructing Gender Identities through Fairytales*. 2019, (19). ISSN 1930-2940.

punished, or they have very unhappy endings.¹⁸² Snow White's stepmother for example, uses her witchcraft to kill her. The magic of evil stepmothers-witches is seen as dark and unnatural, and their wickedness is described in which way they use their power.

Bruno Bettelheim was an Austrian children psychologist who found traditional fairy tales very valuable in terms of upbringing children. His psychoanalytical approach to the reason, why stepmothers are always depicted as evil characters in traditional fairy tale, was that *"the typical fairy-tale splitting of the mother into a good (usually dead) mother and an evil stepmother serves the child well. The fantasy of the wicked stepmother not only preserves the good mother intact, it also prevents having to feel guilty about one's angry thoughts and wishes about her."* (Bruno Bettelheim, p.69) Vicious females are always punished, or they suffer at the end of the story for their transgressions. They are punished for their immoral behaviour and it leads to satisfying victory of the main protagonist. These punishments are usually equal to the villain's transgressions as in *Hansel and Gretel* where is the witch who wants to bake Hansel, but she is herself baked in her furnace as a punishment. Bettelheim's witch knows only her own desires, and she *"acts on them, without regard to any consequences"* and is always in confrontation with the poor and weak child. Witch is also seen by Bettelheim as the creation of our wishes and anxieties. He also claims that the image of evil stepmother and parents in general in fairy tale can be helpful to children as they can better cope with their struggles with their real parents and disappointment.

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Evil females, witches and stepmothers in Brothers Grimm's fairy tales are very often connected with a tendency towards cannibalism and this theme can be seen in *Snow White* and also in *Hansel and Gretel*. Evil stepmother in *Snow White* orders huntsman to kill Snow White and brings her lungs and liver and after that

¹⁸² QUIMET, Kerstina Reba. *A Grimm Reminder: Representations of Female Evil in the Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm*. 2015. DOI:10.14288/1.0221649. Undergraduate research. University of British Columbia.

¹⁸³ BETTELHEIM, Bruno. *The uses of enchantment: The uses of enchantment*. New York: Vintage Books, 1977. ISBN 0-394-72265-5, p.69

stepmother eats them. Bettelheim claims that this is a traditional conception of gaining someone's beauty and strength by eating the part of their body that symbolizes feature that we want to absorb from them. This is the reason why Snow White's wicked stepmother wants to eat her organs as she is jealous of her beauty. In *Hansel and Gretel* there is a witch in the gingerbread house who also inclines to cannibalism as she wants to eat Hansel. At first the witch pretends to be good and friendly elderly woman but when she lures two siblings into her gingerbread house, she becomes a complete opposite.¹⁸⁴ She evokes in children some fake sense of safety, so they trust her. This reminds the reader of *The Witches*, where The Grand High Witch speaks with soft and gentle lovely voice to Bruno Jenkins who came to their meeting in order to get the promised chocolates but instead of that he is turned to a mouse because he trusts her as she looks like a nice lady.

Dahl's witches on the other hand appear to be regular women, who have ordinary physical features and are described as nice ladies at first, but they hide their identities. They all lie about their work for the Royal Society of Prevention of Cruelty to Children. There is the irony of the whole description of witches as they in fact plan to get rid of every child in the world. The Grand High Witch is a figure who has ultimate power and money, which is quite similar to evil stepmothers in traditional fairy tale, but Dahl's witches are described in a very grotesque way when it comes to their physical features. The witches are dehumanized by Dahl's grotesque description and even are compared to cats, which is a stereotypical image of witches.

In Dahl's *The Witches*, the witch is described as a woman with unnatural femininity and with grotesque facial features as it can be seen in description of The Grand High Witch. Her face is pictured as decayed and rooting away at the edges. Her mouth and cheeks look like they were eaten by worms and it symbolises death and witches' desire to eat children, which is parallel to traditional perception of witches, and even their decision of being childless.

¹⁸⁴ BETTELHEIM, Bruno. *The uses of enchantment: The uses of enchantment*. New York: Vintage Books, 1977. ISBN 0-394-72265-5.

These childless women who refuse their roles of being mothers are pictured as sterile and repulsive characters.¹⁸⁵ This picture of evil childless female characters who are very with-like is very common in Dahl's work for children. They are always described in a grotesque way and have very ridiculous physical features. We can find repulsive women characters in already mentioned *Matilda* where is the cruel Miss Trunchbull who is harsh on Miss Honey and children. In *James and the Giant Peach* where two nasty aunts are cruel on their nephew. In *The Twits*, where is a disgusting Mrs Twit who hates children and likes to beat them with her rod and in *George's Marvellous Medicine* the nasty old hag-grandma torments her grandson. These females are always punished at the end for their immoral behaviour as same as it is in a traditional fairy tale.

Another difference between Dahl's witches and witches from classic fairy tale is that in *The Witches*, real world is connected to the world of fantasy and Dahl's witches live among normal people from a normal world and basically every woman can be a witch as they are able to hide their real faces. They are totally different from traditional fairy tale witches because their evil self is hidden, and a traditional witch is always seen in the first place as antagonist. Although Dahl's witches are so different from traditional ones, they still lack emotions and are only capable to feel hatred. This hatred mainly toward children is in traditional and Dahl's witches the same as it is groundless and unreasonable, but it is very intense. Another difference in Dahl's witches is that they tend to associate with other witches from the country, even have meetings and they make evil plans together, but the traditional witch is always alone.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁵ ALSTON, Ann a Catherine BUTLER, ed. *Roald Dahl*. United Kingdom: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012. ISBN 978-0-230-28360-2.

¹⁸⁶ HAVLÍNOVÁ, Magdaléna. *Postava čarodějnice ve světové fantasy*. Plzeň, 2018. Bakalářská práce. Západočeská univerzita v Plzni. Vedoucí práce Mgr. Vladimíra Brčáková.

10 Conclusion

In the first part of my thesis, I covered Roald Dahl's biography, based on authors as Donald Sturrock, Jeremy Treglown or Mark West. Many interesting facts came up from Dahl's biographies, especially from his childhood, and I found out that there were many more events that inspired Dahl's work for children, in particular his service in Royal Air Force started up his writing career, especially as a children's author because his first topic was connected to RAF folklore. Then I considered the autobiographical features in his work more closely, and I shortly mentioned his work for adult readers. Dahl's dedication to his own kids is also very fascinating when we realize that all his stories for young readers, were originally written for them.

Defining themes like humour and black humour, grotesque and hyperbole was rather difficult as there are many concepts and definitions from different authors. I found it especially difficult to define black humour and humour in general as in my opinion, there are not many sources dealing with this question. It was very interesting how Dahl was able to work with these features and how masterfully he used them in his stories for young readers. As Dahl's work for children is known as very controversial, especially *The Witches* and *George's Marvellous Medicine* and *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, I dealt with this topic in more detail, and I focused on possible interpretations and influence that Dahl's characters and themes may have on young readers.

The main core of my thesis was an analysis of the female characters and it was also the central aim of my bachelor thesis. I focused on the characteristics of female characters in Roald Dahl's work for young readers, mainly in *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, *The Twits*, *James and the Giant Peach*, *George's Marvellous Medicine* and *Matilda*. I mainly focused on their physical features, their behaviour and their attitude to children's protagonists and it was very interesting to see how Roald Dahl characterised his evil female characters in the same patterns as all of them are pictured in a grotesque and funny way.

My interest then turned on one of Dahl's most controversial book *The Witches*. I analysed the interesting figures of Dahl's witches as they are pictured as ordinary women set in the normal world. Then I looked more closely at the figure of The Grand High Witch and I focused on a very discussed and controversial topic of antifeminism which is associated with this book.

At the end of my bachelor thesis, I compared the concept of female characters in a classic fairy tale by Grimm Brothers and Dahl's grotesque characteristics of his female characters in his work for young readers. Then I shortly focused on Bruno Bettelheim's psychoanalytic approach to fairy tales and depiction and role of women in a traditional fairy tale.

Although Roald Dahl is seen by many adults as a controversial author of children's books without taste, there is no doubt about his narrative skills, understanding and empathy to all children and their possible struggles. Topics in his books are still relevant between children's and adult worlds, and I would highly recommend to everyone and not only to children but also to their parents, to read some of his stories that I mentioned in my thesis.

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