

T.C.
ISTANBUL KÜLTÜR UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTE OF GRADUATE STUDIES

THE RISE OF THE FEMALE VOICE IN ROALD DAHL'S *MATILDA* AND *ESIO TROT*

Master of Arts Thesis by

Ada Basariia
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Department: English Language and Literature
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Supervisor: Dr. Öğr. Üyesi Özlem Gülgün Güner

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PLAGIARISM

I hereby declare that all information in this document has been obtained and presented in accordance with academic rules and ethical conduct. I also declare that, as required by these rules and conduct, I have fully cited and referenced all material and results that are not original to this work.

Ada BASARIIA

29. 05.2025

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ABSTRACT

THE RISE OF THE FEMALE VOICE IN ROALD DAHL’S *MATILDA* AND *ESIO TROT*

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This thesis analyzes the rise of the female voice in children’s literature in relation to the construction of femininity within the sociopolitical and sociocultural context of 1980s-1990s Britain – a period marked by economic instability, neoliberal policies, and gender conservatism. Focusing on how patriarchal structures shape the conceptions of femininity, motherhood, intellectual autonomy, and “natural caregiving”, this thesis analyzes these constructs within a feminist theoretical framework to demonstrate that female identity is not fixed but multiple, fluid, and elusive in its resistance to the patriarchal structure. In this context, Roald Dahl’s *Matilda* and *Esio Trot* embody these arguments in narrative forms that reflect contrasting demonstrations of female agency. Viewed through a feminist lens, Dahl’s *Matilda* presents a portrayal of female agency through the protagonist named Matilda – a child in the pre-operational stage of cognitive development who acquires her “telekinetic” powers as a consequence of her inner rage in response to patriarchal oppression in both domestic and public spheres. Her “telekinetic” powers, creative and analytical mind consequently become a weapon that helps Matilda resist the oppression of patriarchal authority. Matilda gains agency through emotional resilience and empathy that she acquires through autodidactic learning, which gradually shapes her identity and compensates for the neglect of her parents, Harry and Zinnia

Wormwood. In addition to autodidacticism, the growing solidarity between Matilda and her teacher, Miss Honey, functions as a tool of subversion of patriarchal norms and gender expectations, such as passivity and conformity conveyed through her parents and the headmistress of Crunchem Hall, Miss Trunchbull. Analyzed through a feminist perspective, this novel highlights the vital importance of female solidarity and the presence of female agency, which are fundamental for the empowerment of the female voice across future generations. Dahl's *Esio Trot* is the second key source for this thesis, offering a different image of female agency through the character of Mrs Silver, a middle-aged widow. Although the novella is written in the third-person narrative, it mostly focuses on the thoughts and ambitions of Mr Hoppy, Mrs Silver's neighbor. Mr Hoppy is portrayed by Dahl as a shy retired man who longs for Mrs Silver's affection. However, from the feminist standpoint, Mr Hoppy is perceived as the representative of the patriarchal structure who aspires to fit in the constructed concept of masculinity, which is traditionally defined by physical power, dominance, and control. Once he is asked for assistance, Mr Hoppy uses the alternative, symbolic form of dominance characterized by strategic thinking and subtle manipulation. It is this third-person narrative that makes it plausible to analyze Mrs Silver's performance of "natural caregiving" prescribed to females by the patriarchal system through a feminist lens in relation to ethical vulnerability and the embodied language of care which therefore gives the presence of agency to Mrs Silver and functions as a form of subtle resistance to the patriarchal oppression. This thesis aims to analyze particular ways in which the children's literature fosters distinct types of female subjectivity, tailored to the cultural setting of their time as well as to compare two different images of female agency (open resistance to patriarchal structures in *Matilda* and strategic forms of adaptation and resistance in *Esio Trot*) within the feminist theoretical framework.

Key Words: Motherhood, "Natural Caregiving", Female Agency, Patriarchal Structure, Subtle Resistance, Roald Dahl, Empathy, Autodidacticism, Feminism, Masculinity, Femininity, Children's Literature, *Matilda*, *Esio Trot*

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ÖZET

ROALD DAHL'IN *MATILDA* VE *ESIO TROT* ESERLERİNDE KADIN SESİNİN YÜKSELİŞİ

Ada BASARİİA

Bu tez, 1980-1990'lar Britanya'sının sosyopolitik ve sosyokültürel bağlamı içinde, çocuk edebiyatında kadın sesinin yükselişini ve kadınlık kavramının kültürel inşasını analiz etmektedir. Bu dönem, ekonomik istikrarsızlık, neoliberal politikalar ve cinsiyet muhafazakârlılığıyla şekillenmiştir. Tez, ataerkil yapıların kadınlık, annelik, entelektüel özerklik ve “doğal bakım rolleri” kavramlarını nasıl şekillendirdiğine odaklanmakta ve bu yapıları ikinci ve üçüncü dalga feminist kuramsal çerçeveye inceleyerek kadın kimliğinin sabit değil; çoklu, akışkan ve ataerkil yapılara direnen bir yapıda olduğunu ortaya koymayı amaçlamaktadır. Bu bağlamda Roald Dahl'ın *Matilda* ve *Esio Trot* adlı eserleri, kadın özneselliğinin farklı anlatı biçimleriyle bu tartışmaları yansıtır. Feminist bir bakış açısıyla incelendiğinde, *Matilda* adlı eser, ana karakteri Matilda aracılığıyla kadın özneselliğinin güçlü bir temsilini sunar. Bilişsel gelişimin erken evresinde olan Matilda, ev içi ve kamusal alanlardaki ataerkil baskıya içsel öfkesiyle tepki verir. Telekinetik güçleri, yaratıcı zekâsı ve analitik düşünme becerileri, ataerkil otoriteye karşı direnç göstermesini sağlar. Matilda, öz eğitim, empati ve duygusal dayanıklılık yoluyla güç kazanır ve kimliğini kademeli olarak inşa eder. Öğretmeni Bayan Honey ile kurduğu dayanışma, ataerkil normlara ve cinsiyet beklentilerine karşı bir direniş aracı haline gelir. Feminist bir perspektifle ele alınan *Esio Trot* ise, dul ve orta yaşlı Bayan Silver karakteri üzerinden kadın ajansının daha dolaylı bir biçimini sunar. Romanın anlatısı büyük ölçüde Bay Hoppy'nin düşünce ve arzularına odaklanır. Bay

Hoppy, Dahl tarafından utangaç bir emekli adam olarak tasvir edilse de, feminist bakış açısından ataerkil düzenin temsili olarak okunur. Fiziksel güç yerine stratejik sabır ve ince manipölasyonla “sembolik tahakküm” uygular. Bu çerçevede Bayan Silver’ın ataerkil yapı tarafından kadınlara atfedilen “doğal bakım” performansı, etik kırılma ve bakım dili üzerinden incelemeye açılır. Bu temsil, ataerkil baskıya yönelik ince, dolaylı bir direniş biçimi olarak yorumlanır. Bu tez, çocuk edebiyatında dönemsel kültürel bağlamlara göre şekillenen kadın özneselliğinin farklı temsillerini analiz etmeyi amaçlamakta; *Matilda*’daki açık direniş ile *Esio Trot*’taki uyum ve stratejik direniş biçimlerini feminist kuramsal yaklaşımlar doğrultusunda karşılaştırmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Cinsiyet muhafazakârlığı, Annelik, “Doğal Bakım Roller”, Kadın Öznelliği, Ataerkil Yapı, İnce Direniş, Roald Dahl, Empati, Öz eğitim (Autodidaktizm), Feminizm, Erkeklik, Kadınlık, Çocuk Edebiyatı, *Matilda*, *Esio Trot*

INTRODUCTION

In this thesis, the rise of the female voice in children's literature is examined in a novel and novella by Roald Dahl, *Matilda* (1988) and *Esio Trot* (1990) through the analysis of stereotypes of gendered roles in relation to how and why the intelligence of one gender is feared by the other in these particular texts. This thesis aims to examine how representations of female subjectivity are developed and expressed in *Matilda* and *Esio Trot* within the socio-cultural context of the 1980-1990s. The goal of this thesis is to analyze particular ways in which the children's literature foster distinct types of female subjectivity, tailored to the cultural setting of their time as well as to compare two different images of female agency (open resistance to patriarchal structures in *Matilda* and strategic forms of adaptation and resistance in *Esio Trot*) with reference to feminist theoretical frameworks.

Roald Dahl (1916-1990), the author of fairy tales and short stories, the poet and the screenwriter, was born in Wales to a family of Norwegian immigrants and spent most of his life in England. While serving in the Royal Air Force during the Second World War as a pilot, he suffered a severe head injury as a result of a plane crash. In the period of his rehabilitation, Dahl wrote a series of military tales that include his own experience. Gradually, he started creating children's novels full of elements related to the notion of mystery, magic and adventures. Dahl's *Matilda* and *Esio Trot* help the reader understand the gender role depiction in children's literature based on stereotypes that are directly linked to the historical and cultural background.

Using the elements of magic and descriptive language, Dahl reflects the sociopolitical and sociocultural circumstances of Britain 1970s and 1980s - a period during which both *Matilda* and *Esio Trot* were published. The gradual development of Matilda's identity in *Matilda* that Dahl provides the reader with reflects the societal norms, social class structure, and educational system. In *Esio Trot*, the ideas of strategic adaptation and subtle resistance to prescribed gender ideologies are emphasized through the character of Mrs Silver who navigates the social expectations indirectly but rather effectively. This thesis aims to give a deeper insight into the issue of the rise of the female voice, and the representation of strategic agency, which leads to a better understanding of how female characters adapt themselves within the socio-cultural framework in children's literature. Therefore, for a better understanding of

how these issues are revealed in Dahl's novels, it is necessary to delve into the multifaceted meaning of children's literature based on the sociopolitical and sociocultural history of Britain in 1970s and 1980s that construct the setting of the novels.

The authors of children's novels do not only provide young readers with a children's story with the help of colorful illustrations but also with a multifaceted layer of meanings based on the cultural and social background. This is why it is often stated by the adult generation of readers that one same book they read once in their childhood as an adventurous story happens to carry a rather deeper meaning that changes their whole perception of it as they grow up and read the same book one more time (one of the examples of intertextuality can be *The Little Prince* written by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry). This may trigger off the argument that all literature can be called "children's literature" once the book for adults is read by the child, or, in opposition to this, the children's book becomes "adults' literature" once read by the adult, as it is continually reshaped and reinterpreted depending on the context and purpose. However, one should keep in mind that this categorization can be better defined if the children's literature is applied to only "books which are good for children, and most particularly good in terms of emotional and moral values"¹. In other words, children's literature is the literature containing the ideas that are specialized and appropriate for the age group and the consciousness of the reading child.

There are specific criteria for children's literature when it comes to its content: simple language should be used for the better understanding of the reader, the story told should consist mainly of dialogues that draw the attention of the reader and help the child delve into the story and be able to place himself/herself in the place of the protagonist. One of the main characteristics of children's literature is the placement of a child at the very centre of the story, the optimistic, and, in most cases – the magical and fantastic one. At the same time, the content that appears in adults' literature, such as poverty, harsh conditions of life and cruelty is also used by the authors of children's literature. In most cases such aspects are used as the means of showing how the

¹ It is explained by Peter Hunt, that, in addition to the categorization idea: " 'children' and 'literature' – within the label 'children's literature' cannot be separated and traced back to original independent meanings, and then resembled to achieve a greater understanding of what 'children's literature' is.....Within the label the two terms totally qualify each other and transform each other's meaning for the purposes of the field". Hunt, Peter. *International Companion Encyclopedia of Children's Literature*. 1st ed., London, Routledge, 1996, p 18.

protagonist manages to overcome all of these complex issues which makes him/her the ultimate hero in the eyes of the young reader². Hence, children's literature does not exclude the content of adults' literature, but rather uses it to combine the fantasy world with the challenging realities of life, where the story told to the child reading it carries the entertaining purpose that aligns with the sociocultural background that children's literature is based on.

Considering the sociocultural background used in children's literature, it is natural to assume that children's literature aims to not only entertain young readers but also educate them through the implementation of socio-cultural values³. The particular cultural values and social norms conveyed through children's literature depend on the country the children's literature is produced in. As a consequence, children are introduced to specific social norms that help them develop their identities and socialize with the knowledge of what is considered appropriate and inappropriate according to the social norms and values⁴. The understanding of this makes it easier for children to be integrated into the society⁵ as well as to cultivate such senses as empathy⁶, justice, and loyalty. Therefore, this process of education through children's literature is also interpreted as a tool of cultural politics, where each culture, with the help of children's literature reflects particular socio-cultural values. Such a method of education also posits a negative aspect: the reinforcement of stereotypes of gender roles.

² (*Oliver Twist* by Charles Dickens may serve as a good example of the protagonist staying true to his moral values and kindness in opposition to the violence he faces. In the end, the protagonist is rewarded with a happy life for overcoming all the harshness he has faced.

³ In their research concerning the links between the children's literature and society, Lea Baratz and Hanna Hazeira claim that in most occasions the aim of children's literature is: "...the assimilation of socio-cultural values". Baratz, Lea and Hanna Hazeira. "Children's Literature as an Important Tool for Education of Sustainability and the Environment". *International Electronic Journal of Environmental Education*, vol. 2, no. 1, 2012, p 31.

⁴ "...the urge to instruct the young is deeply built into human nature, and at all times there have been supposedly recreational books which have had, consciously or unconsciously, a didactic element. This remains true today". Hunt, Peter. *International Companion Encyclopedia of Children's Literature*. 1st ed., London, Routledge, 1996, p 677.

⁵ Even though children's literature varies from culture to culture, its main aim is to offer to children "the promise of inclusion in a literate community (something regarded as culturally valuable, at least nominally). The critical apparatus surrounding children's books offers an intellectual understanding of what inclusion means and how it might be achieved", according to Hunt, Peter. *International Companion Encyclopedia of Children's Literature*. 1st ed., London, Routledge, 1996, p 102.

⁶ Empathy is defined as: "...[A]n affective reaction that stems from the apprehension or comprehension of another's emotional state or condition, and that is identical or very similar to what the other person is feeling or would be expected to feel". Zhou, Qing, et al. "The Relations of Parental Warmth and Positive Expressiveness to Children's Empathy-Related Responding and Social Functioning: A Longitudinal Study." *Child Development*, vol. 73, no. 3, 2002, p. 893.

The vital importance of to-be-looked-at-ness for a female, as it is depicted in *Snow White* by Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm serves as an example supporting this suggestion. Given that the Grimms' collections are rooted in folklore and reflect the values and norms transmitted across generations, such tales preserve social norms and gender ideologies. The female figure, as it is evident in children's tales, is: static, visible, sexually appealing and rescued. As a consequence, the female figure is associated with passivity and a reward through the male gaze, which eradicates the female subjectivity by positioning the female character in the role of passivity (the sleeper in *The Sleeping Beauty*, the mutely suffering female in *The Six Swans*, the prized wife in *Cinderella*, *Rapunzel*, *Beauty and the Beast*, etc.). In the case of young male readers, the imposed stereotype is that of an always brave and strong nature of a valiant knight, in control of his emotions. When female protagonists are expected to be beautiful and male protagonists are expected to take the role of saviors and defenders, such stereotypes develop insecurities in young female readers and challenge the emotional development of young male readers due to the expectation of constant readiness to take the responsibility of a defender (the one seeking for protection is usually a female). Hence, the imposition of stereotypes present in children's literature creates a chain of expectations of the society concerning gender roles, which limits the image of the identity of both male and female individuals. Such stereotypes used to be displayed more explicitly in earlier centuries. However, contemporary children's literature challenges these stereotypes and introduces to young readers male and female protagonists with diverse interests and characteristics. Stereotypical images of gender roles are still present in modern children's literature, although used in accordance with the changes of cultural values and views, as a tool that demonstrates the break from the old stereotypes. In such cases, gender roles are challenged in modern children's literature.

In order to acquire a better comprehension of how such issues are revealed in Dahl's *Matilda* and *Esio Trot*, one must delve into the sociopolitical and sociocultural backdrop of Britain in the 1970s and 1980s, which constitutes the setting for them. This period in the history of Britain is directly linked with Thatcherism, a political ideology introduced by Margaret Thatcher, the leader of the Conservative Party.

Thatcherism, the concept of which was the reduction of the role of the government and the expansion of free markets, operated from 1979 to 1990. The key

elements of Thatcherism that helped reach the aim were the interest of the individual over the society as a whole and the replenishment of the overall financial welfare of the country via the reduction of taxes.

However, with the interest of the individual in financial wealth, children became perceived as a “burden” on the way to economic success, since they could not financially be independent from their parents at a young age. The policies of Thatcherism such as the reduction of expenditures on education, health and housing resulted in the perception of children as such. The privatization caused unemployment, which led the low-income families to financial pressure due to the lack of the government’s support in social services. The reductions of the expenditures on education only widened the gap between the lower-middle-class families and the upper middle-class families: the access to education for children became unequal⁷ as a consequence the privatization policy that facilitated the establishment of private schools that the lower-middle-class parents could not afford financially⁸.

One of the most notable events of British foreign policy of the 20th century taking place during the leadership of the Conservative Party by Margaret Thatcher (1979-1990) was The Falklands War between Britain and Argentina. Starting from the 1960s, Argentina intensified diplomatic efforts to end colonial rule in the Falklands⁹ and extend its sovereignty to the islands. However, in the 1970s, the British government refused to grant Falklanders the same rights as British citizens and denied them the right to own property on the islands. The Anglo-Argentine relations deteriorated upon the rise of the Conservative Party’s power as well as the British government’s decision to send a commission led by Lord Shackleton¹⁰ to conduct research on the sovereignty of the Falkland Islands¹¹. On April 30, England imposed a

⁷ “[C]hildren from a working-class background are less likely to reach a certain level of education than children from service class background”. Ianelli, Christina. “*Expansion and Social Selection in Education in England and Scotland*”, *Oxford Review of Education*, Vol. 34, No. 2 (Apr., 2008), p. 187.

⁸ “Thatcherite descriptions of poor people’s culture often suggested that the poor had ‘the shortest time-horizons and the least self-discipline’, compared with the middle classes’ ‘further time-horizon’ and ‘willingness to defer gratification’”. Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, Florence. “Neo-Liberalism and Morality in the Making of Thatcherite Social Policy.” *The Historical Journal*, vol. 55, no. 2, 2012, p. 514.

⁹ The Falkland Islands (Malvinas) are an archipelago in the southwestern Atlantic Ocean consisting of two large islands - East Falkland (Soledad) and West Falkland (Gran Malvina) - and about 200 small islands and rocks.

¹⁰ Sir Edward Arthur Alexander Shackleton, Lord Shackleton of Burley (1911-1994), was an explorer, geographer and was a Labor MP from 1946 to 1955.

¹¹ The “study of the origins of the South Atlantic War may prove especially valuable theoretically as an analytic model applied to potential conflicts between rising regional states and (relatively) declining greater powers striving to maintain their global reach”. Arquilla, John, and María Moyano Rasmussen.

complete military and naval blockade of the Falklands. The battle between Britain and Argentina over the Falkland Islands lasted 74 days resulting in the victory of the former¹².

Upon the successful result of the Falkland's War in the eyes of the Conservative Party, Margaret Thatcher earned additional voters, which allowed the Party to be elected as the leading Party in 1983. The Conservative Thatcherite government of the 1980s endorsed a financial method that was based on suspending governmental intervention in the markets. This decision lessened the political role of trade unions, which eventually led to a higher level of unemployment. The result of the "de-industrialization" of Britain led to the changes in the number of unemployment rates. Margaret Thatcher, who took the position of Prime Minister, introduced the privatization of state-owned industries and the reduction of the income tax. Consequently, British Gas, British Telecom, and British Airways were also privatized. With such changes, the employers became the sole regulatory figures for the process of employment.

Trade union membership during the 1980s faced a decline due to mass unemployment and socioeconomic restrictions of the Conservative government. Conservative Party policies increased the propensity of those who had stable employment after leaving the unions to vote Conservative. This was achieved by warning the owner of privatized shares of their potential losses¹³. The Labor Party led by Neil Kinnock from 1983 to 1992 prioritized the higher taxation of large incomes and the provision of the financially vulnerable (due to privatization policies) nation with working places. The Labor Party's ideology was the Conservative Party's alternative: instead of privatization and the reduction of taxation social justice could be reached by the support of unions and the government's financial involvement in social welfare and education. Taxation would supposedly guarantee equivalent living conditions for all and a decrease in social injustice in the nation.

"The Origins of the South Atlantic War." *Journal of Latin American Studies*, vol. 33, no. 4, 2001, p. 741.

¹² For further explanation see Arquilla, John, and María Moyano Rasmussen. "The Origins of the South Atlantic War." *Journal of Latin American Studies*, vol. 33, no. 4, 2001, pp. 739–75.

¹³ "...[T]he government devoted considerable resources in the 1987 election campaign to warning owners of privatized shares of their potential losses should Labour have won the election and renationalized industries". Garrett, Geoffrey. "The Political Consequences of Thatcherism." *Political Behavior*, vol. 14, no. 4, 1992, p. 363.

Considering that the cost of privatization had been reduced and privatization had subsequently grown, owners of privatized properties believed that it was beneficial to vote for the Conservatives. One of the main motivations for their decision was a reduction of taxes, which favored them. In turn, tenants would have voted for the Labor Party. The privatization resulted in the loss of the Transport Workers Union and the Union of Engineering Workers caused by unemployment. The unions were the Labor Party's biggest supporters, meaning that as a consequence of the privatization policy, over two million workers decreased to less than 40% of the labor force¹⁴. Those who obtained permanent employment outside of unions would not have voted for the Labor Party, preferring the Conservatives for increased wages.

Consequently, the government reforms influenced electors' perceptions¹⁵. However, the Labor Party amended its position on privatization and expressed the intention of allowing the less financially secure individuals to buy their own homes, which became a prerequisite for the Labor Party's triumph over the Conservatives in 1997.

With the rise of socioeconomic inequality as the outcome of privatization policy, discontent among the younger generation and the working class, who lost job stability, escalated substantially. The Punk Movement was formed to express their dissatisfaction with government actions that resulted in social injustice. This movement intended to resist the ideology of Thatcherism, which eventually led to increased unemployment and inequality¹⁶.

¹⁴ "Council house buyers, privatized share purchasers, and employed union leavers were all more likely to assume the more market-oriented policy positions favored by the Conservative party". Garrett, Geoffrey. "The Political Consequences of Thatcherism." *Political Behavior*, vol. 14, no. 4, 1992, p. 374.

¹⁵ "The government changed the socioeconomic status, material interests, political attitudes, and electoral allegiances of a significant portion of the electorate". Garrett, Geoffrey. "The Political Consequences of Thatcherism." *Political Behavior*, vol. 14, no. 4, 1992, p. 376.

¹⁶ "The riots of 1981 expressed the convergence of explosive development in four principal contexts: law and order (and in particular changing styles and methods of policing), racial conflict, the disaffection of working-class youth and the decay of inner-city areas". Unsworth, Clive. "The Riots of 1981: Popular Violence and the Politics of Law and Order." *Journal of Law and Society*, vol. 9, no.1, 1982, p. 65.

In contrast to the conformism of Thatcherite ideology, Punk activists¹⁷ sought self-expression and individuality through music¹⁸, fashion, and art. The aim of the Conservative government to intensify the politicization faced the resistance, therefore the police: "...provided the front of an authoritarian reaction, exerting renewed pressure on the potentially lawless"¹⁹. Local officials attempted to prevent Punk concerts, but police brutality²⁰ only aggravated the activists' discontent. The summer riots in England during the 1970-1980's were initiated by socioeconomic factors, the unequal treatment of the population of inner cities, police harassment and a high level of poverty. Moreover, it was a complex response to social inequality and political marginalization especially to teenagers yet to vote²¹. Thus, the Punk Movement was not a simple rejection of Thatcherite policies but a revisiting of political participation²², through the transmission of more profound information about political principles in

¹⁷ "Alienated from the cultural environments in which they find themselves, in the school, home, church, neighbourhood and workplace, working-class youths seek to carve out their own culture, in their own spaces; a culture which they feel at home within, which offers them the meaning, identity and status otherwise lacking in their lives, and which allows them to resist the bourgeois cultural hegemony and age-based authority structure of working-class culture that are imposed upon them". Crossley, Nick. *Networks of Sound, Style and Subversion: The Punk and Post-Punk Worlds of Manchester, London, Liverpool and Sheffield, 1975–80*. Manchester University Press, 2015. p. 50.

¹⁸ "Sex Pistols in 1975–76 offered a critical moment of departure that has since come to shape our understanding of the 1970s. The Pistols tore open the cultural fabric, trashing the past and confronting the present to better refine the future". Worley, Matthew, *No Future: Punk, Politics and British Youth Culture, 1976-1984*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press. 2017. p. 3.

¹⁹ "...[I]n the period leading up to the riots, the police provided the front line of an authoritarian reaction, exerting renewed pressure on the potentially lawless, especially, as we shall see, in the inner cities. ". Unsworth, Clive. "The Riots of 1981: Popular Violence and the Politics of Law and Order." *Journal of Law and Society*, vol. 9, no.1, 1982, p. 68.

²⁰ According to Unsworth, there was the equal level of aggression between the police and the rioters: "The police were not in the role of victims in the riots, rather they were active participants in a series of urban battles. The complex pre-history of the riots generated a mutual alienation of police and sections of multi-racial working-class inner-city communities. The tactics of the police in the riots and their aftermath paralleled the rioters' own methods of expressing hostility". Unsworth, Clive. "The Riots of 1981: Popular Violence and the Politics of Law and Order." *Journal of Law and Society*, vol. 9, no.1, 1982, p. 73.

²¹ "Many rejected politics altogether, revealing a sense of disengagement that suggested the machinations of parties and government were either irrelevant or detrimental to their everyday lives". Worley, Matthew, *No Future: Punk, Politics and British Youth Culture, 1976-1984*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press. 2017, p. 139.

²² "Punk was genuinely provocative; exciting many, terrifying others. It incited young people to rebel and authority figures to condemn it and defend their position. It could not be ignored by the powers that be in the way that popular music currents so often are. Whatever the motivations of individual pioneers, which were varied, punk generated debate about moral, political and aesthetic ideas...". Worley, Matthew, *No Future: Punk, Politics and British Youth Culture, 1976-1984*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press. 2017. p. 3.

creative expression. Punk bands²³ and their fans used their music and fashion²⁴ as a showcase of resistance to the challenging norms questioning the economy, law and racism²⁵ of the prevailing structures of power. The inner cities showed the highest level of resistance during the Summer of 1981. Eventually, the lack of social investment together with the racial discrimination and police authoritarianism that caused the Punk Movement led to changes in anti-discrimination policies as well as community engagement.

Among the changes in the policies and the changes within the society for common citizens, car ownership became recognized as of: "...major importance in terms of access to both jobs and leisure, social and other facilities"²⁶ due to the increased cost of the public transportation. By the year of 1981, the car ownership levels: "...increased from 30%(1961) to 61%"²⁷. However, the changes did not touch upon the inner cities "...trapped there with little in the way of future prospects"²⁸. Even though the recorded crime rates in England inclined between the years of the mid-

²³ "...[T]he main innovators were: the Sex Pistols, the Clash, the Damned, Buzzcocks, Subway Sect, Siouxsie and the Banshees, the Slits, Chelsea, Generation X, the Stranglers and Slaughter and the Dogs". Worley, Matthew, *No Future: Punk, Politics and British Youth Culture, 1976-1984*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press. 2017. p. 10.

²⁴ "...[P]unks modified existing clothing, bought from jumble sales or army surplus stores, by ripping and painting on it; and following the lead of Malcom McLaren and Vivienne Westwood, who in turn borrowed from designer, John Sutcliffe,² they appropriated ideas from gay, fetish and sadomasochist subcultures (e.g. rape masks, bondage, chains, bumflaps, nipple-less bras), redefining these as items of everyday wear. And, most famously, they turned the everyday safety pin into a symbol of rebellion, using it as jewellery, and pinning their ripped clothes together with it". Worley, Matthew, *No Future: Punk, Politics and British Youth Culture, 1976-1984*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press. 2017. p. 23.

²⁵ Clive Unsworth examines this case closely, referring to "Rivers of Blood" speech by Enoch Powell and the limitation of immigration by the Conservatives, claiming that "...[S]ince the immigration laws have been administered and policed with unprecedented vigour and rigidity, and the Nationality Act has redefined citizenship according to criteria which have been widely condemned as racist". Unsworth, Clive. "The Riots of 1981: Popular Violence and the Politics of Law and Order." *Journal of Law and Society*, vol. 9, no.1, 1982, p. 80.

²⁶ The connection between unemployment and car ownership is explained by Hamnett as such: "Where the level of household car ownership or, to be percentage of households lacking a car is concerned however, the relationship with the level of male unemployment is much more clear cut. Car ownership has long been recognized as of major importance in terms of access to both jobs and leisure, social and other facilities, particularly where public transport is poor or expensive". Hamnett, C. "The Conditions in England's Inner Cities on the Eve of the 1981 Riots." *Area*, vol. 15, no. 1, 1983, p. 11.

²⁷ "...[W]hereas national car ownership levels have increased dramatically from 30% of households in 1961 to 61% in 1981, it would appear that this doubling of the level of car ownership in only twenty years has not filtered down into the inner cities". Hamnett, C. "The Conditions in England's Inner Cities on the Eve of the 1981 Riots." *Area*, vol. 15, no. 1, 1983, p. 11.

²⁸ With the high level of unemployment that caused the lower level of car ownership, as Hamnett states: "...[I]t would not be over-exaggerating to suggest that many of the residents in the inner cities are literally trapped there with little in the way of future prospects". Hamnett, C. "The Conditions in England's Inner Cities on the Eve of the 1981 Riots." *Area*, vol. 15, no. 1, 1983, p. 12.

1970s up until the early 1990s, and declined towards the middle of 1990s, the rates of imprisonment rose by two-thirds in the middle of 1990s²⁹. The reason of such change in the rates was the shift in the Counting Rules system. If the previous Counting Rules system evaluated multiple offenses committed by one same individual as a single offense, the new method was aimed to treat each individual offense as a separate entity. The distinction between the old Counting rules system and the modified one was that the previous Counting Rules system lacked precise crime classification and placed emphasis on indictable offenses. With the modification of the Counting Rules system the recording and classification of criminal acts were changed, leaving no choice for less significant (than the indictable) crimes to be disregarded. Such shift in the Counting Rules eventually became the reason of the rapid change in the rates of imprisonment, prioritizing public safety.

There was an expectation that the nation's crime rate would decline as a consequence of the new legislations³⁰. However, the prison population increased rapidly³¹. This significant increase was the result of monetary penalties reduction³² that occurred due to the poor economic conditions of the time and the high rate of unemployment which led to "tough sentencing". However, some of the crime suspects fled the country in advance before they were added to the rising number of the imprisoned, which makes one assume that the real number was even higher than the registered.

²⁹ "...[T]wo main political parties locked themselves into a second-order consensus around the need to be seen to be "tough on crime." The result has been a general ratcheting-up of punishment—both community and custodial—with a two-thirds increase in the prison population in little over a decade", explains Newburn, Tim. "'Tough on Crime': Penal Policy in England and Wales." *Crime and Justice*, vol. 36, no. 1, 2007, p. 426.

³⁰ Newburn explains the changes in the Counting Rules system as follows: "In particular, these changes to the counting rules expanded the numbers of crimes recorded by including a greater number of more minor, or summary, offenses particularly in the categories of less serious violent crimes (common assault), fraud, and drug offenses". Newburn, Tim. "'Tough on Crime': Penal Policy in England and Wales." *Crime and Justice*, vol. 36, no. 1, 2007, p. 429.

³¹ "There was anticipation in some quarters that the prison population might fall during the 1980s. Not only did this not occur, but the numbers steadily increased: from 42,000 at the beginning of the decade to over 48,800 by its end". Newburn, Tim. "'Tough on Crime': Penal Policy in England and Wales." *Crime and Justice*, vol. 36, no. 1, 2007, p. 434.

³² The high level of unemployment made the monetary penalties for crime "less plausible", as Newburn states. He proceeds with the explanation of the inclined rates of imprisonment claiming that: "...[F]or a combination of reasons the fine increasingly lost credibility as a sanction, and from a position in which it accounted for almost half of all sentences for indictable offenses, it has now fallen to below one-quarter and has been replaced by custody as the most popular sanction for such offenses". Newburn, Tim. "'Tough on Crime': Penal Policy in England and Wales." *Crime and Justice*, vol. 36, no. 1, 2007, pp. 446-447.

Given the sociopolitical and the sociocultural circumstances of Britain in 1970-1980s, it is easier to notice how Roald Dahl's *Matilda* and *Esio Trot* criticized the social politics in each narrative, and put emphasis on the rising power of the female voice (*Matilda*) and the subtle, strategic forms of female agency (*Esio Trot*). In the scope of the sociopolitical and socioeconomic background provided earlier one may say that the Punk Riots brought change into the upcoming generation³³. The Punk Movement also brought change into literature; fiction written for the young generation rejected prescribed gender roles within the society. It can be suggested that the Punk Movement had a direct influence on fiction for children in particular. This becomes evident due to the depiction of protagonists who challenge the established norms and fight for freedom of self-assertion. Thereby, the interplay of the gradual development of identity and the presence of strategic adaptation to social expectations (particularly visible in *Esio Trot*) is reflected in the contrasting frameworks of *Matilda* and *Esio Trot*.

Matilda is a children's novel written by Roald Dahl and published in 1988 and voted as "Nation's Favorite Children's Book" in BBC Bookworm Poll (UK 1998). The protagonist of the novel, a young girl named Matilda, acquires her "telekinetic" powers as a result of the inner rage she has no right to express as a child: the girl feels the burn in her eyes whenever she is provoked by her neglectful parents, Harry and Zinnia Wormwood, as well as her school principal, Miss Trunchbull.

Matilda grows up isolated from the society, which impacts on the development of her identity: having no friends and being left alone in the house five days a week, the remarkably intelligent child finds solace in the books she reads and develops her sense of independency by going to the library unaccompanied by adults. Using Mrs Wormwood's comment on "blue stocking girls", Dahl draws the line between the stereotypical depiction of females, placing her as the embodiment of the patriarchal ideal of passive female subjectivity – a female shaped by the concept of "to-be-looked-at-ness". This positions Mrs Wormwood as the traditional stereotype - oriented society being challenged by Matilda.

³³ "Finally, in developing their own style, subcultural pioneers break free, to some extent, from their dependence upon the music and fashion industries – and, by extension, capitalism. They refuse to be dictated to, preferring to exercise their own agency and creativity". Worley, Matthew, *No Future: Punk, Politics and British Youth Culture, 1976-1984*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press. 2017. p. 25.

After being sent to school, Matilda acquires friends and a mother figure: her teacher, Miss Honey, who eventually adopts the child upon the unexpected departure of Matilda's parents to Spain. Dahl's depiction of Miss Honey in this novel using descriptive adjectives is based on traditional patriarchal stereotypes of what a "good" woman is, and how she should "look like" as opposed to the portrayal of what a "bad" woman may be (Mrs Wormwood and Miss Trunchbull). Miss Honey helps Matilda find balance between the world of her imagination and the real world, in which the child suffers from the authoritarian position of Miss Trunchbull, the school principal, who literally suffocates children in a dangerous construction named "chokey". The constant flout that Matilda experiences incites her "telekinetic" abilities which she chooses to use as her weapon when asserting herself against the challenges of the society she lives in. Using the creativity of her mind, Matilda outsmarts the antagonists, her father and Miss Trunchbull, and helps Miss Honey in returning Miss Honey's house. As the antagonists disappear from the life of Matilda, the child starts losing her "magic" powers. However, she gains a loving mother, Miss Honey, and lives happily with her.

The film adaptation of the novel appeared on the screen in 1996 for the first time, directed by Danny DeVito under the TriStar Pictures label of Sony Pictures Releasing. The film adaptation uses the "powers" of the girl to make it more interesting for the younger audience which makes the film a family comedy. In addition to using the "power" of her eyes, Matilda also outwits her father in a creative and original way (bleaching his hair or applying superglue on his hat). Matilda, played by Mara Wilson is perceived by the audience as a positive, savvy character ready to help everyone around her, just like she helps Amanda Thripp, her classmate, who is literally thrown over the school gates by Miss Trunchbull on the first day of school. Matilda is depicted as a precocious girl who stands up for herself against Miss Trunchbull in the film adaptation, not being scared by the principal's aggression and hatred towards children. The popularity of the film adaptation still remains high: Danny DeVito's film adaptation is on the Top 10 list on Netflix.

The female protagonist of *Matilda* is one of the most recognizable characters from the works of Roald Dahl in terms of the cultural context and the dynamics of his approach towards the stereotypical depiction of women using it as the weapon to challenge the societal norms and gender roles.

Esio Trot is a children's novella written by Roald Dahl and published in 1990. The title of the novella is an anagram of "tortoise". Contrasting with *Matilda* and some other Roald Dahl's novels full of action and "magic"³⁴, *Esio Trot* is portrayed as a calm and romantic love story, featuring three central characters: Mr Hoppy, Mrs Silver, and her beloved tortoise named Alfie. Although *Esio Trot* is framed as a romantic narrative with the help of the changes of the publishers, some of the phrases used in the original text are found to be rather sexist and misogynistic. Despite Roald Dahl's reluctance to accept any alterations to his work, some of the lines of *Esio Trot* were eventually changed, including the reference to Mrs Silver being "attractive" that was edited to "kind"³⁵. Additionally, the phrase "I'll be your slave for life" was revised to "You'll be the hero for my life"³⁶. Mr Hoppy's internal reaction was also changed from "Your slave for life, he kept repeating to himself. What bliss!" to "My hero for life, he kept repeating to himself. What bliss!"³⁷. These changes reflect an effort of the publishers to make the text more acceptable to the audience. They also facilitate the acknowledgement of the evolution of socio-cultural changes. *Esio Trot* does not imply any "magic" other than that achieved simply by human action and imagination.

Mr Hoppy is an elderly and shy man who lives alone on the top floor of an apartment complex. His main interests are limited to two particular activities: watering the flowers on his balcony and secretly being in love with his neighbor, Mrs Silver. Mrs Silver is a kind and gentle widow who lives alone with her pet, a little tortoise named Alfie. Although Mr Hoppy occasionally initiates small talks about the weather while watering the flowers on his balcony, he lacks the courage to express his feelings for Mrs Silver for several years.

During one of these short conversations Mrs Silver expresses her desire for Alfie to increase in size, mentioning that despite all of her attempts, her pet remains as small as it had been before. This is a significant turning point for Mr Hoppy, who has spent the last few years fantasizing of becoming a hero in Mrs Silver's eyes. Mr Hoppy

³⁴ *The Witches* is another children's novel written in a dark fantasy. *The Witches* has been critiqued by the audience for the elements of misogyny and sexism present in the description of witches. For such critiques, the novel held the 22nd spot on the *American Library Association's* list of most challenged books from 1990 to 1999.

³⁵ Cumming, Ed. et al. Roald Dahl Books Rewritten to Remove Offensive Language. *The telegraph*, Feb 24, 2023.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

concludes that the greatest approach for achieving her love is to fulfill Mrs Silver's desire. So he develops a plan to "help" Alfie "increase" in size, according to which Mrs Silver is only required to repeat the "magic spell" he provides her with. Over the next two weeks, Mr Hoppy secretly replaces Alfie with larger, store-bought tortoises as Mrs Silver recites the "magic spell". Consequently, Mrs Silver is delighted with the "result", and gives Mr Hoppy a chance, and the narrative concludes with their engagement.

In 2015, a film adaptation of *Esio Trot* was released as part of the BBC One Christmas programme. Adapted by Richard Curtis and Paul Mayhew-Archer, the film adaptation of *Esio Trot* was well received by both the audience and critics³⁸ in comparison to some other film adaptations of Dahl's novels³⁹. Although the adaptation of the novella does not deviate significantly from the original, a certain distinction does exist. Mr Pringle (Mr Hoppy's opponent for Mrs. Silver's affection) is not mentioned in the novel, but appears in the film adaptation. In the novella, it is not stated openly whether or not Mrs Silver finds out that Mr Hoppy exchanges the tortoises; it becomes a rather open question for the readers. However, in the film adaptation she learns of Mr. Hoppy's plan, but ultimately marries him anyway.

³⁸ "Everything about the film is beautiful. Every line shines, every moment is polished, the slight plot unfolds smoothly and sweetly – everything is done to a turn". Mangan, Lucy. *The Guardian*. Jan 2, 2015.

³⁹ The film adaptation of the novel *The Witches* appeared on the screen in 1990 as a dark fantasy comedy horror directed by Nicolas Roeg from a screenplay by Alan Scott. Although the film received positive reviews from the critics and the audience, Roald Dahl disliked the adaptation for its ending which contrasts with his novel: the original text did not contain the character of a good witch, Miss Irvine (the reformed witch after the death the Grand High Witch), who transforms the boy into his human shape again. Another adaptation of the novel, *The Witches* was co-produced and directed by Robert Zemeckis, who co-wrote the screenplay with Kenya Barris and Guillermo del Toro. The film was distributed by Warner Bros. Pictures and was criticized again this time for its writing. Richard Roeper, an American journalist and film critic of Chicago Sun-Times, called the 2020 film adaptation of *The Witches* "far too disturbing for young children and not edgy enough to captivate adults.". However, Manohla Dargis, the New York Times critic, calls the 2020 film adaptation of *The Witches* "modern riff on a grim fairy tale", having more emotion and "heart" than the previous adaptation. Thus, both of the film adaptations have received mixed critical reviews despite the remarkable cast and use of special effects.

CHAPTER I:
THE SUPPRESSION OF THE FEMALE VOICE IN ROALD
DAHL'S *MATILDA*

2.1 Plot outline of *Matilda*

Roald Dahl's *Matilda* is a precocious young girl who finds solace in books. At the age of three, she can already read, and towards the age of five, she can multiply large numbers in her mind. Almost every day, the protagonist of the novel is left alone in the house and commutes to the library to read the books that help enrich her imagination. Her parents, Mr and Mrs Wormwood, neglect their daughter and her eagerness to study, making the expansion of their wealth their primary focus. Mrs Wormwood plays bingo and prioritizes physical appearance over education, and her husband, Mr Wormwood, is involved in the illegal business of selling cars with manipulated mileage.

After being sent to Crunchem Hall, Matilda faces the public sphere and the oppression of it embodied in the main antagonist of the novel, the headmistress, Miss Trunchbull. Despite Miss Trunchbull's tyrannical behavior, Matilda acquires a mother figure, Miss Honey, her school teacher, who, as it is explained later in the novel, is the niece of Miss Trunchbull. Miss Honey supports and guides Matilda when she is at school and encourages her to study and enrich her knowledge.

When she is at home, Matilda outwits her parents and "punishes" them using superglue and the neighbor's parrot as her response to the oppression she faces in the domestic sphere of her life. Mr Wormwood sells one of the old cars to Miss Trunchbull, requiring from her that his daughter should be treated as strictly as possible. Even before meeting Matilda, Miss Trunchbull relies on Matilda's father's portrayal of her, and, during one of the lessons, she provokes Matilda to "use" her "powers" by knocking the glass of water off the table with her eyes. Thus, as the conditions in the school become more and more challenging for her, the young girl acquires "telekinetic" abilities to "oppose the oppressor".

Gradually, the connection between Matilda and Miss Honey develops, and Matilda is invited to the latter's house and is shocked by the conditions she lives in: her school teacher does not even have chairs to sit on. After Miss Honey shares the

story of her life, throughout which she had been mistreated by Miss Trunchbull. Matilda decides to help her regain the house she had lost and tries to train her “telekinetic” power to later use it against Miss Trunchbull. She uses her “power” again, and “writes” Miss Honey’s father’s name on the blackboard during the lesson, threatening Miss Trunchbull.

Eventually, Miss Trunchbull leaves Crunchem Hall and the city, leaving the last will of Miss Honey’s father for her, according to which Miss Honey can live in her house. Matilda’s family flees the country to Spain together in fear of being sentenced due to the illegal activities of Mr Wormwood. Matilda chooses to stay and live with Miss Honey which does not meet with her parents’ refusal. Matilda overcomes neglect and abuse, is adopted by Miss Honey and lives a happy life of a “normal child”, after being placed in a healthier domestic and public sphere and “losing her telekinetic power”.

2.2 The Suppression of Matilda's Voice

Living in a village in England the name of which is not mentioned, the protagonist of Dahl's novel *Matilda*, a five-year-old female child named Matilda is passionate about reading books and expanding her imagination. Her innate world is different from her parents' point of view on life, which makes her a misfit within her own family. When reading this novel, one should remember that the characters in it are allegorical, either ultimately evil or kind. Dahl creates his allegorical characters whose main function is to represent the negative societal and cultural inclinations. Each of the characters in *Matilda* serves either as "bad" or "good", with no in-between. This is done deliberately to make it easier for children to comprehend the moral and social issues of the socio-cultural settings. The virtuous and kind protagonists of the novel fight against cruel and selfish antagonists, which promotes critical thinking in readers. This simplification is the easiest way to achieve this goal and help the child shape his/her identity based on the values conveyed by the author.

The domestic and public life of Matilda shapes her identity. Her mother, Zinnia Wormwood, is a housewife who plays bingo⁴⁰ five times a week, making it her way of earning money. The family law under the Thatcher government implemented individual autonomy and prioritized the interests of individuals over those of society. Mrs Wormwood seems to be the embodiment of such ideology, neglecting her children⁴¹ and making bingo her main focus, since earning money gives her a feeling of being a financially independent woman. It does look like permanent work as well, since Mrs Wormwood "...was hooked on bingo and played it five afternoons a week." (8).

Mrs Wormwood's deep interest to playing bingo can be analyzed through the lens of The Matrimonial and Family Proceedings Act of 1984, the main focus of which

⁴⁰ Bingo is considered to be a low-priced gambling. Vineet Maheshwari reveals the statistics of bingo players, stating that: "...roughly 70-85% of bingo players in the world are female" due to a lower probability of experiencing financial losses, which he explains as the major brain chemistry difference between the male and female gamblers.

⁴¹ Adrienne Rich explains motherhood as a "magnetic field" women live in, which is rather a patriarchal imposition on women than a natural phenomenon. Further in her explanation she claims: "...tradition-heavy form in which I found myself cast as the Mother seemed, then, as ineluctable as the tides". Rich, Adrienne. *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*. Norton & Company. New York. 1976, pp. 23-24.

was the financial provisions, such as property settlements and provisions for the maintenance as well as the welfare of children in case the parents decided to divorce. In “Family Law under the Thatcher Government”, Gillian Douglas examines the possible actions of women according to the Act of 1984 claiming:

...[I]f they are sensible, they will not stay at home to be home-makers, but will keep up their careers or employment, in case their marriage fails (and four in ten will). The last thing they should do is to become dutiful housewives to their loved ones”. (Douglas 414-416)

Although playing bingo can be considered neither a career nor a form of employment, and Mrs Wormwood certainly does not mention any will to divorce her husband, she is still portrayed as a character struggling for individual financial stability and independence, which results in her neglecting her children, which makes her an ambiguous character. From the perspective of the Matrimonial and Family Proceedings Act, her attraction to playing bingo can raise a question of whether or not it is possible that, observing the illegal business of her husband, Mrs Wormwood is preparing for the consequences the couple may face due to his involvement in criminal activities. The context of the 1984 Act also suggests that women at the time were encouraged not to abandon professional development as “...they might need it in due course” (Douglas 416). Mrs Wormwood, in her conversation with Miss Honey, Matilda’s school teacher, mentions that she “...chose looks” (94) over books, claiming that it is the major reason for her marriage to a so-called businessman. In *The Second Sex*, Simone De Beauvoir claims that the woman’s use of clothes indicates that:

If the toilette has so much importance for many women, it is because in illusion it enables them to remould the outer world and their inner selves simultaneously.....The life of society demands that she ‘make a showing’, that she put herself on exhibition, but not that she establish any true communication between herself and others: since it “does not take her out of isolation”. (De Beauvoir 505-517)

Mrs Wormwood epitomizes De Beauvoir’s statement. She is convinced that “choosing looks over books” allows her control the world around her. However, this is merely a facade of control, created to compensate for her inner hollowness and insecurity. Mrs Wormwood, who does not concentrate on self-improvement and does

not celebrate her daughter's accomplishments, utilizes her external appearance as a means of self-affirmation. This also indicates that, unlike Miss Honey, Mrs Wormwood has given up her autonomy. Her "choosing looks over books" becomes an instrument to meet the patriarchal expectations and imposed ideals. Therefore, her marriage to a businessman is presented as her only available way to gain social recognition, which reinforces Adrienne Rich's suggestion of male power explained as following:

To have some link with male power has been the closest that most of us could come to sharing in power directly; to have no link with any form of male power, however petty and corrupt, has meant that we lived unprotected and vulnerable indeed. (Rich 70)

Having no profession and being detached from her children, Mrs Wormwood does not, however, stop herself from playing bingo devotedly, which is emphasized by mentioning the specific distance of eight miles she travels daily. Whenever Matilda's mother leaves her at home alone, there is no mention of her cleaning the house or cooking food, which contradicts patriarchal society standards. Mrs Wormwood does not feel guilty about not being present with her children. Matilda's mother contradicts patriarchal notions of what a nurturing role a mother should play in her child's upbringing. Her devotion to gambling as the only source of earning money can thus help her gain at least a slight feeling of independence from her husband. As an allegorical character in the novel, she is consequently seen as a mother who neglects conventional maternal roles of emotional presence and caregiving⁴²: she is incapable of empathy and care, she emphasizes her materialistic values and is focused on herself rather than on her children. She is a woman who prioritizes her own interests above society. The society in question is her own family, since Matilda is left alone in the house nearly every day. Matilda herself tells Mrs Phelps, a librarian, that her mother "does not really care" (12) about her.

What Mrs Wormwood cares about, based on her own statement during the conversation with Miss Honey is that "...a girl doesn't get a man by being brainy"

⁴² Adrienne Rich gives an open commentary on what the patriarchal society expects from women: "I have a very clear, keen memory of myself the day after I was married. I was sweeping a floor. Probably the floor did not really need to be swept; probably I simply did not know what else to do with myself. But as I swept that floor I thought: "Now I am a woman. This is an age-old action, this is what women have always done." I felt I was bending to some ancient form, too ancient to question. This is what women have always done". Rich, Adrienne. *"Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution"*. Norton & Company. New York. 1976, p. 25.

(95). Mrs Worwood endeavors to comply with the norms of the patriarchal society she lives in: she constantly bleaches her hair with peroxide to look more attractive physically, follows the trends, and keeps Bovril⁴³ in the house, as is evident at the beginning of the novel. Matilda sometimes prepares herself a mug of hot chocolate when she is left alone, but Dahl names Bovril as her occasional choice: "...she made Bovril"(17). This struggle to conform to the patriarchal portrayal of a physically attractive housewife makes Mrs Wormwood vulnerable since she is described by Dahl as 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. (23)

However, even though her description does not sound appealing and conforming to the "ideal" type according to the patriarchal society, Mrs Worwood still insists on her "luckier" position as opposed to Miss Honey, an unmarried young teacher. As Adrienne Rich asserts in *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*, women have continually been told that their:

...intellectual or aesthetic creations were inappropriate, inconsequential, or scandalous, an attempt to become "like men", or to escape from the "real" tasks of adult womanhood: marriage and childbearing". (Rich 40)

Mrs Wormwood's "luckier" position, therefore, is realized through her marriage. Hence, even though she praises her husband, Mr Wormwood, within the framework of Rich this praise is part of the expected attitude by the patriarchal society towards the husband and the idea of a woman's duty to comply with it. However, Mrs Wormwood still seems to hold some power over her husband, which is evident when she tells Matilda: "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" (61). The power in question is, in accordance with Rich, a reflection of women's internalized strategies for navigating male-dominated structures. In order to maintain agency within the constrained gender role, females, as Rich asserts, "...have learned how to manipulate and seduce" (Rich

⁴³ Bovril is a salty meat extract that was in the 1980s referred to as a substance that can be beneficial when one tries to fit the patriarchal expectation of "beauty".

68). Although she does not manipulate or seduce Mr Wormwood directly, Mrs Wormwood, within the constrained gender role that is imposed on her, through her beauty rituals, conforms to the patriarchal idea of “feminine”. Such compliance, together with her excessive praise of Mr Wormwood and her distancing from intellectual females (Miss Honey), reinforces her role since compliance does not threaten Mr Wormwood’s authority.

Mr Wormwood, Matilda’s father, holds an illegal business of selling cars with worn-out gears, manipulating mileage on the speedometer backward with the use of sawdust, oil, and high-speed electric drills. Tim Newburn’s statistics of the new Counting Rules⁴⁴ explain the reason why Mr Wormwood decides to flee the country in a rush together with his family: “We’re leaving for the airport in half an hour so you’d better get packed” (226). Since the priority of the government was the individual’s financial gain over providing for the needs of the child, it is easier to understand the reason why Mr and Mrs Wormwood were not against Matilda staying in the village with Miss Honey when they were leaving for Spain. It is also evident why Mr Wormwood had been preparing to leave for several years before eventually doing so: the criminals had been feeling the consequences of the change in the Counting Rules system and preparing for the avoidance of the punishment of the government. Miss Honey, Matilda’s school teacher, says that:

...somebody’s probably tipped him off that the police are on to him and he’s doing what they all do, running off to Spain where they can’t get him. He’ll have been sending his money out there for years, all ready and waiting for him to arrive. (229)

The capitalist desire to expand his economic wealth detaches Mr Wormwood from his family the same way it happens in the case of his wife. However, as opposed to her, he is perceived as the family’s main provider of income, since “...*his* work, *his* professional life, was the real work in the family” (Rich 27), as a male living in a patriarchal society. Mr Wormwood’s obsession with accumulating his income is demonstrated to Matilda and her brother, Michael when he is both teaching the son how to calculate income and reflecting the traditional patriarchal view on females⁴⁵

⁴⁴ For the Counting Rules system see the Introduction section above.

⁴⁵ “Patriarchy could not survive without motherhood and heterosexuality in their institutional forms; therefore they have to be treated as axioms, as “nature” itself, not open to question...”. For further

concerning a working position when Matilda, who says that she would love to know how to arrange business: “You couldn’t...But I don’t mind telling young Mike here about it seeing he’ll be joining me in the business one day” (18). Mr Wormwood also adds that Matilda is “too stupid” (18) for it, which can be interpreted in two different ways. Firstly, he is the embodiment of the capitalist perception of children as being a burden to parents due to their incapability of earning money. Secondly is the thought of him being a typical future patriarchal figure of empowerment⁴⁶, for which the female subject is not assigned⁴⁷.

Mr Wormwood’s business is primarily based on the exploitation of society: his main target is the customers who trust the businessman and the lies he tells them about the cars he sells to them. He is a rather predictable (even for a child) person with unsettling personality traits. He is expected to fulfill his parental responsibilities, but instead of doing so, he only creates unease by doing the complete opposite from the parental expectations. He lies to Matilda’s school principal, Miss Trunchbull, about the car he had sold to her, saying that it was only used by an old lady once a week or a month to go to the grocery store, and treats all his other customers in the same way: “He sold me a car. Almost new. Only done ten thousand miles. Previous owner was an old lady who took it out once a year at the most. A terrific bargain” (81). Therefore, both of Matilda’s parents are only focused on their financial well-being, which is typical of the Thatcherite capitalist society.

The public sphere of Matilda is shown through her school, Crunchem Hall, where the kids are systematically humiliated by the headmistress, Miss Trunchbull. As an abusive headmistress, Miss Trunchbull stands as a threat to future generations, depicted through the eyes of Matilda. Her brutal manner of humiliating children, such as putting them in a ‘chokey’, as a metaphor for imprisonment, literally throwing

explanation of the argument see Adrienne Rich, “*Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*”. Norton & Company. New York. 1976. p. 43.

⁴⁶ “If the girls want to struggle with the boys and fight for their rights, they are reprimanded. They are doubly envious of the activities to the boys: first, because they have a spontaneous desire to display their power over the world, and, second, because they are in protest against the inferior status to which they are condemned”. De Beauvoir, Simone. *The Second Sex*. ed. by H.M. Parshley. Jonathan Cape, 1953. p. 261.

⁴⁷ Adrienne Rich criticizes the patriarchy to be demanding of women complete obedience and silence, explaining her argument as follows: “...a majority of that species— women—shall remain essentially unquestioning and unenlightened. On this “underemployment” of female consciousness depend the morality and the emotional life of the human family.” (p 43). For further explanation of the argument see Adrienne Rich, “*Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*”. Norton & Company. New York. 1976.

Amanda, Matilda's classmate, over the school gates, or lifting the boy in the class upside down negatively inflicts the psychological and physical well-being of the children⁴⁸ while their parents remain ignorant to their children's complaints: the desire to expand their economic standing distracts the parents from the basic care for their children in this novel. Matilda's parents were "...both so gormless and so wrapped up in their own silly little lives that they failed to notice anything unusual about their daughter" (6). Mr Wormwood's ways of pursuing wealth and providing the family with finance and Mrs Wormwood's neglect of prescribed motherhood cause failure of parenting and the creation of a dysfunctional family life in which Matilda finds herself devoid of attention and support⁴⁹.

The capitalist perception of life and the prioritization of one's financial well-being results in the disregard of children, which is further displayed through the educational system: Miss Trunchbull's harshness and obsession with discipline in school leads to the discouragement of the children's enthusiasm for self-expression and need for showing the creativity of their artistic minds by learning new information through songs and interaction. Miss Honey, Matilda's school teacher, involves music in her lessons, to help the children remember the spelling of words. Matilda's classmate, Nigel, explains it as a "...little song about each word" which they sing "all together" and "...learn to spell in no time" (141). Miss Trunchbull is disgusted with such an approach to studying, finding it "perfectly ridiculous" and directing Miss

⁴⁸ School is believed to be the environment that plays a key role in the development of the child's resilience. Schools also play an integrative role of the provider of: "...[O]pportunities for children to experience challenge, master failure, succeed, learn from role models, and benefit from mentors and supportive adult relationships via classroom interactions, sports, music, and community programs". All of the mentioned aspects pose threat to Miss Trunchbull's authority, which becomes the reason why any kind of artistic interactions that provoke the child's *healthy* cognitive development is prohibited by the Headmistress. Such punishment as the 'chokey' provokes the feelings of anxiety and fear that prevents the children from the healthy adaptation to the school environment, suppresses the development of their resilience and makes it easier for Miss Trunchbull to control them. For further explanation see Sippel, Lauren M., et al. "How Does Social Support Enhance Resilience in the Trauma-Exposed Individual?" *Ecology and Society*, vol. 20, no. 4, 2015.

⁴⁹ "According to family systems theories, resilient family systems promote individual resilience. Like resilience at the level of the individual, family resilience has developmental points and transitions related to the life course of the family members, pointing again to the importance of type and timing of social support... Although individual resilience can be enhanced through personal skill development and training in a variety of areas, such as cognitive reframing, mindfulness meditation, and physical fitness, it can also be enhanced through increasing the individual's positive interactions with family...". Matilda is devoid of any positive interactions with her family as she is constantly rejected by both of her parents. This is why her self-esteem is damaged long before she meets with Miss Honey, who later provides her with essential feelings such as confidence and empathy through guidance and social support. Sippel, Lauren M., et al. "How Does Social Support Enhance Resilience in the Trauma-Exposed Individual?" *Ecology and Society*, vol. 20, no. 4, 2015.

Honey to “cut it off” next time (141). This is seen as an atmosphere in which the children were expected to conform to a specific and narrow set of rules eliminating the creativity of the growing minds of children.

As a woman of the working class, Miss Honey is also depicted as one with an income so low that it is hardly enough for her to survive on it. The insufficient amount of money she earns, as well as the house she lives in, which is depicted through the eyes of Matilda, is hard to be considered by anyone as adequate conditions for living: the teacher cannot even afford a chair in the house she rents, therefore she uses boxes instead:

The room was as small and square and bare as a prison cell. The pale daylight that entered came from a single tiny window in the front wall, but there were no curtains. The only objects in the entire room were two upturned wooden boxes to serve as chairs and a third box between them as a table. That was all. There were no pictures on the walls, no carpet on the floor, only rough unpolished wooden planks, and there were gaps between the planks where dust and bits of grime had gathered. The ceiling was so low that with a jump Matilda could nearly touch it with her finger-tips. (185)

The house of Miss Honey is the replication of the “chokey” of Crunchem Hall, in which the children are constantly locked and forced to stand in one position to survive through the “punishment”. When telling the story of her life to Matilda, Miss Honey mentions that her father was a doctor in the village and they “...had a nice old house, quite large, red-brick” (191). Upon the mysterious death of her father, Miss Honey loses the house and is obliged to live with her aunt until it gets unbearable to the point where she has no other choice but to live in the dwell she rents now. The loss of her house to Miss Trunchbull, who represents the Thatcherite system, can be interpreted as the changes within the society that the ideology brought such as privatization.

Harsh conditions of the working class are displayed through Miss Honey who says that one “...can’t imagine what it’s like to be completely controlled like that by a very strong personality” (195). After getting a job, Miss Honey hears from Miss Trunchbull that she owes her money for being fed and dressed throughout the years, and forces her to pay a larger amount from her income to cover the expenses. By doing

so, Miss Trunchbull becomes the representation of the individual gain over the well-being of Miss Honey. Miss Honey cannot afford butter and therefore consumes margarine, a substitute for butter, which is believed to be a product of capitalism: "...*Margarine*, Matilda thought. She really must be poor" (184).

The house Miss Honey lives in depicts not only the general representation of the working class's conditions of life during the Thatcherite period but is also portrayed as the "proof" of Mrs Wormwood's words upon marriage, where Miss Honey would not have to work and would live a happier life after becoming a housewife instead of a working woman. The "happier life", as explained by Mrs Wormwood upon Miss Honey's visit, is to focus on gendered bodily aesthetics more than on intellectual empowerment, since "a girl doesn't get a man by being brainy" (95). There exists a contradiction between the educated woman and the woman who is "imprisoned in the household role" where the latter is perceived by society as a luckier one:

And who's finished up the better off? Me, of course. I'm sitting pretty in a nice house with a successful businessman and you're left slaving away teaching a lot of nasty little children the ABC. (94)

Functioning as an affirmative restructuring of female agency with the public sphere, Miss Honey firmly asserts that she would never stop teaching, even when Matilda states that "...[she] would be a lot better off... if ...[she] gave up ...[her] job and drew unemployment money" (199). Hence, Miss Honey, maintaining her convictions despite the financial instability, is a promising and positive character. She prioritizes the well-being of the growing younger generation. As an allegorical character that opposes the cold and violent headmistress, Miss Honey is a supporting, nurturing, encouraging, and kind teacher.

All of the characters that have already been observed are the fundamental elements of Matilda's domestic and public sphere. Even with the support of Miss Honey, who stands as a mentor to Matilda, the protagonist of the novel is still mostly surrounded by the oppressive forces that deter her voice from being heard. The main oppressive forces that are in charge of that are the following: her own parents, Miss Trunchbull, the educational system, and the social expectations.

To begin with, Matilda's family is the first oppression she faces in her life together with the social expectations from children during the Thatcherite period. Her father, Mr Wormwood, becomes infuriated with Matilda's preference for reading a book instead of having dinner with her family in front of the TV. If one considers the individual to be shaped by the family⁵⁰, it is obvious why Mr Wormwood is so anguished to see Matilda read, and asks her: "Do you *ever* stop reading?" (35). His opinion towards education is depicted through his conversation with Matilda's school teacher, Miss Honey when he openly says: "We don't hold with book-reading... We don't keep them in the house" (92-93). Such a neglectful attitude towards his child is shared by Matilda's mother, who underestimates her intelligence, telling Miss Honey that he is not at all intrigued by Matilda's knowledge, adding that she is also "not in favor of blue-stockings" (93). Emotionally, Matilda is not connected to any of them apart from her brother, Michael, who, throughout the whole novel, speaks only once, and that is when the father tells him to count the numbers. The social expectations of the girls in that time are explained to Miss Honey by Mrs Wormwood referring to the woman on the TV screen where:

... a bosomy female was being embraced by a craggy actor in the moonlight. 'You don't think she got him to do that by multiplying figures at him, do you? Not likely. And now he's going to marry her, you see if he doesn't, and she's going to live in a mansion with a butler and lots of maids. (95)

Mr Wormwood "points out" Matilda's place according to such social expectations, telling her not to interfere in their conversation, because, as he says: "Don't butt in... your brother and I are busy with high finance" (49). Matilda's voice is disregarded from the very beginning of the novel, when she is described by Dahl. The knowledge of the protagonist is not perceived by her immediate circle as something exceptional, but rather disturbing. If her brother, Michael, is described as a "...perfectly normal boy" (7), then Matilda herself is seen as "...something to make your eyes pop" (7), which can be interpreted as a threat of symbolic castration to the

⁵⁰ Christina Iannelli's explanation of the individual being shaped by the family can be looked at from the social status of the parents when it comes to the capitalist society: "Social class of origin is measured by the higher of the occupational statuses of mother and father or, when one parent was unemployed or economically inactive, by the status of the employed parent" (p 182). For further explanation of the argument see Christina Iannelli, "Expansion and Social Selection in Education in England and Scotland", *Oxford Review of Education*, Vol. 34, No. 2 (Apr., 2008), pp. 179-202.

patriarchal society. In *The Uncanny*, Sigmund Freud explains the meaning of eyes in their relation to castration as following:

There is a common saying that one will 'guard something like the apple of one's eye'. The study of dreams, fantasies and myths has taught us also that anxiety about one's eyes, the fear of going blind, is quite often a substitute for the fear of one's castration.....One finds it understandable that so precious an organ as the eye should be guarded by a commensurate anxiety. Indeed, one can go further and claim that no deeper mystery and no other significance lie behind the fear of castration. Yet this does not account for the substitutive relation between the eye and the male member that is manifested in dreams, fantasies and myths. Nor can it counter the impression that a particularly strong and obscure emotion is aroused by the threat of losing the sexual organ, and that it is this emotion that first gives such resonance to the idea of losing other organs. (Freud 139-140)

Mr Wormwood's main focus in life is his material success, which represents his dominance over Matilda. His main anxiety, therefore, is to lose all his power and status due to Matilda's high level of intelligence and her sense of justice. They can lead to the exposure of his fraudulent activities. The uncanny in such situation lies in the obvious contrast between Mr Wormwood's confidence that is demonstrated when he talks to Matilda and Michael, and his fear of symbolic castration, which he tries to avoid when he does not let Matilda interfere in his business. The material success is Mr Wormwood's measure of masculinity. Hence, the symbolic castration would ruin his self-image of a successful man as well as his public image (in the eyes of the patriarchal society, his material wealth is equal to the perfect image of the main provider for the family) and reputation, his control and dominance over Matilda and her mother.

Even though Matilda does not feel emotionally connected to any of her parents, the description of their feelings towards her are the reason for that and the embodiment of the capitalist ideology:

Mr Wormwood looked forward enormously to the time when they could pick their little daughter off and flick her away, preferably into the next country or even further than that. (6)

This quotation describes the general vision of the materialistic society, in which Matilda, compared to her brother, Michael, does not fit in due to both her gender and age. Her voice is constantly marginalized. This can be an explanation as to why Matilda chooses Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations* to read when she is at the library. The social identity and moral development are primary aspects of *Great Expectations*, which brings one to the idea of Matilda exploring her own character and place in society through the book, even though the plot speaks of the 19th century in England: the Victorian Era (1837-1901), in which women's rights were limited and women conformed to traditional gender norms, such as a woman prioritizing marriage and motherhood. If Mrs Wormwood does not prioritize her motherhood, she does prioritize marriage, which is obvious from her words, and that is the expectation she has of her own child, neglecting her exceptional skills.

Matilda is never heard by her parents: as a child, she understands from her father's words, that she will not be listened to: "You're just an ignorant little squirt who hasn't the foggiest idea what you're talking about!" (21). In addition to that, Mrs Wormwood's ignorance towards the child's achievements when Miss Honey visits their house to praise Matilda creates an obvious detachment from her daughter. As a mother, she fails to be the initial nurturing figure that the patriarchal society expects her to be, given that women:

...were expected to fill both the part of the Victorian Lady of Leisure, the Angel in the House, and also of the Victorian cook, scullery maid, laundress, governess, and nurse. (Rich 27)

The child's development takes its roots from the parents first place⁵¹. If one looks at how Matilda is oppressed by her parents, it is easier to understand it through the lens of Jean Piaget's examination of the adult-child relationship. Jean Piaget's examination of the adult-child relationship is explained by Rheta DeVries in "Piaget's Social Theory" through the types of morality of the adult-child relationship:

⁵¹ "...[T]he most effective way to enhance individual resilience is to provide a safe, stable, loving environment that promotes the child's natural protective systems, i.e., brain, cognitive, emotional, and physical systems, to develop and operate effectively". Sippel, Lauren M., et al. "How Does Social Support Enhance Resilience in the Trauma-Exposed Individual?" *Ecology and Society*, vol. 20, no. 4, 2015.

The first type is one of coercion or constraint in which an adult prescribes what a child must do by giving ready-made rules and instructions for behavior. In this relation, respect is a one-way affair. That is, the child is expected to respect the adult, and the adult uses authority to socialize and instruct the child. The adult controls the child's behavior. (DeVries 4-17)

In the case of *Matilda*, Piaget's theory applies to both the public and the domestic spheres, where the child's voice is constantly silenced. The dictatorship of Miss Trunchbull, together with the educational system, is another example of oppression in the novel. As a headmistress, Miss Trunchbull regulates her own rules, according to which the children shall not even make a sound unless she commands it. Her portrayal is that of a woman that would make even an adult want to avoid going to the school where she teaches, because: "She was a gigantic holy terror, a fierce tyrannical monster who frightened the life out of the pupils and teachers alike." (63). Miss Trunchbull is the main antagonist of the novel, who views girls as a "...far more dangerous creature than a boy. What's more, they're much harder to squash" (82).

It is no surprise that Miss Trunchbull rejects the idea of Matilda being called a "genius" (83) by Miss Honey since the woman represents the Thatcherite system in which the child is not perceived as such. Miss Honey warns the children to be cautious when speaking to Miss Trunchbull and explains her character as follows:

The Headmistress is very strict about everything. Make sure your clothes are clean, your faces are clean and your hands are clean. Speak only when spoken to. When she asks you a question, stand up at once before you answer it. Never argue with her. Never answer back. Never try to be funny. If you do, you will make her angry, and when the Headmistress gets angry you had better watch out. (129)

In fact, it is not only Matilda's voice that is being neglected in the public sphere, but all other children as well: Bruce Bogtrotter, Amanda Thripp, and other classmates of Matilda all suffer from the authoritarian system of Crunchem Hall ruled by Miss Trunchbull. The very name of the primary school bears the meaning of something to be "crunched", or, "squashed", as Miss Trunchbull explains it to Miss Honey. This "something" is the children that are forced to be changed by the system. Thus, the very name of the school foreshadows its oppressive environment and the nature of the

educational system of the Thatcherite period embodied in the character of Miss Trunchbull.

The word “Hall”, then, can stand as the representation of the discipline of the place. Hence, Crunchem Hall, as the representation of the educational system, explains Piaget’s theory of inequality between an adult and a child⁵². This inequality is obvious from Miss Honey’s portrayal of Miss Trunchbull, as a woman who shall not be spoken to, unless she asks a question. The authoritarian system that the children of Crunchem Hall face is that of an adult who “does not feel *obligated* to respect the child by accepting the child’s propositions/beliefs”⁵³. As a consequence of such a system, the children are seen to be in the middle of nowhere: between their ignorant parents who are self-oriented due to the individual’s interest over society, and the educational system of the Thatcherite period, which restricts the creativity of mind and the child’s right to speak: “You’ve got to hammer it into them. There’s nothing like a little twisting and twiddling to encourage them to remember things. It concentrates their minds wonderfully” (p 149).

In her *Content Analysis and Gender Stereotypes in Children’s Books*, Frank Taylor suggests that children learn the culture and the social setting around them through learning how to read. Therefore, once a child learns how to read, the child then automatically adapts to the social regulations of the place he/she lives in, which also takes into consideration the gender ideologies of a specific society. Taylor’s description of value acquired from learning how to read is that of an “...important mechanism through which culture is transmitted from one generation to the next” (Taylor 301). The idea of the mechanism, according to Taylor, is the implementation of gender ideologies during children’s role playing. Thus, if learning how to read is considered to be one of the fundamentals of culturalization, then it is understandable why Miss Honey chooses her way of teaching the spelling that infuriates Miss Trunchbull. Teaching the spelling with each letter of the alphabet being a “...Mrs D, Mrs I, Mrs FFI...” (141) is not accepted by Mrs Trunchbull, and is called “perfectly ridiculous” (141) for all of the letters having been transformed into married women. As it is asserted by Taylor, the portrayal of women in the 1980s was still conforming

⁵² “...the child also may not even think whether he or she agrees with the adult’s proposition, but may simply agree to be compliant, also an instance of inequality in the relationship” (p 10). Rheta DeVries, “Piaget’s Social Theory.” *Educational Researcher*, vol. 26, no. 2, 1997, pp. 4–17.

⁵³ Rheta DeVries, “Piaget’s Social Theory.” *Educational Researcher*, vol. 26, no. 2, 1997, pp. 4–17.

to patriarchal ideologies according to which marital status was of high importance. Ironically, all of these married *women* in the song for the spelling create the word “difficulty”, which brings back to the words Miss Trunchbull said earlier about girls being seen as harder to squash. In this case, one may agree with Taylor that the expectations of society from women and men are as different as the standards that are prescribed for them.

Moreover, the children of Crunchem Hall are perceived as “small people” who “...should never be seen by anybody. They should be kept out of sight in boxes like hairpins and buttons” (145). The children that are locked in the Chokey describe it as a narrow space in which one has no option but to refuse to move in order to survive through the hours of imprisonment in the box. It is reasonable to interpret Chokey in *Matilda* as both emotional and social constraints. The darkness and the confined space of the Chokey impacts on the emotional state of the child: the feeling of fear and anxiety are sensory and primordial. Matilda finds out that children that are locked in the Chokey are the ones who try to challenge the authority of Miss Trunchbull. The symbolic interpretation of the Chokey, therefore, is of a place that suppresses the individuality, which makes it the physical manifestation of the controlling and oppressive educational system.

It is possible to draw a parallel between the Chokey and the Thatcherite educational system, then, since both represent strict discipline and a tough, restricting environment for a child to develop in. Consequently, such systematic punitive attitude can eventually force the child to conform to the norms and expectations of both the educational system and the societal rules, where there is no place for creativity of mind.

In other words, such an educational system becomes so common in *Matilda*, that the parents would never believe their children, even if they complained about it: “No parent is going to believe...not in a million years. Mine wouldn’t. They’d call me a liar” (112). These words of Matilda are proof of how both the public and domestic spheres neglected and marginalized children in the period of Thatcherism.

Despite the complicated circumstances Matilda finds herself in, her voice is repeatedly described as peaceful and kind, demonstrating empathy for other characters. However, despite expressing her compassion towards other characters in the novel, her

voice is consistently silenced by peers⁵⁴ and adults. A notable example of peers silencing Matilda is Hortensia, a “rugged ten-year-old with a boil on her nose” (98). Although she is only several years older than Matilda and her friend, Lavender, she does not hesitate to bully both of them at any chance she gets to do so.

Matilda meets Hortensia at the playground, and the first words she hears from her are: “...[N]ew scum, I suppose” (98). Another definition of the word, according to the Cambridge dictionary, is “a layer of unpleasant or unwanted material that has formed on the top of a liquid”. Therefore, one can assume that the age difference between Hortensia and Matilda can represent the adults’ vision of children in the capitalist society: a human being that is unwanted due to lack of ability to increase the family's income. In this case, Hortensia, “...looking down from her great height” (98), embodies the adults’ attitude towards children.

Further in their conversation, Hortensia uses every opportunity to demonstrate her maturity and intelligence compared to the younger girls when she explains how she managed to outsmart Miss Trunchbull:

...I poured half a tin of Golden Syrup on the seat of the chair the Trunchbull was going to sit on at prayers. It was wonderful. When she lowered herself into the chair, there was a loud squelching noise similar to that made by a hippopotamus when lowering its foot into the mud on the banks of the Limpopo River. But you’re too small and stupid to have read *the Just So Stories*, aren’t you? (p 101)

The *Just So Stories* by Rudyard Kipling is a collection of stories about “How the Whale Got His Throat”, and other stories. When Matilda says that she has read it before, she is immediately called a liar because she “...can’t even read yet” (102). Hortensia here acts as a typical adult from the social circle of Matilda. In particular, she repeats the same phrase Matilda’s father tells Matilda when she counts the numbers

⁵⁴ Interaction with peers plays one of the key roles in the process of integrating the child into society. “Common ways in which children may conduct themselves toward others are empathically, aggressively, conformingly, coyly, jealously, cooperatively, competitively, submissively, assertively, avoidingly, etc.”. The child’s intelligence, motivation, and values, combined with a favorable or unfavorable environment, contribute to the acquisition of social behavior. Thus, by adapting to factors such as the environment (in Matilda’s particular case, the school environment), the child goes through intellectual stages of understanding the social world, which helps him/her integrate into society later. For further explanation of the argument see Meyers, Andrew and W. Edward Craighead. *Cognitive Behavior Therapy with Children*. Plenum Press. New York. 1984.

of income faster than Michael does. Mr Wormwood even repeats it and tells his wife that Matilda is "...a cheat and a liar" (51).

Even though Hortensia tells Matilda and Lavender: "It's a tough life. We all try to support each other" (105), she contradicts herself the very second she is told that it is safe to rely on the younger ones. Lavender says that "...making her height of three feet two inches stretch as tall as possible" (105), is a metaphor for being an adult. Hortensia does not see the reason to trust as she says to Matilda and Lavender that they are "only shrimps" (105). However, she sees the potential in them, stating that they might be needed one day.

Hortensia's method of silencing Matilda is also of a caring nature when it comes to her telling the story of how exactly Miss Trunchbull abuses children and how she "...once threw the hammer for Britain in the Olympics" (106). Hortensia, as a ten-year-old, is an adolescent, which is considered to be a period in which it challenging for a child to express his/her own feelings⁵⁵, that is why she expresses herself to Matilda and Lavender in a rather mocking and humiliating form. She also addresses Amanda Thrupp as: "...that idiot Amanda" (108), which can be explained through such case as her inability to express sorrow and choosing anger to mask her feelings. The details that Hortensia describes are supposed to make Matilda terrified and silent so that she does not get hurt later the way she has been hurt by being locked in the Chokey.

This act of suffocating the youngsters in the Chokey causes fearful children to shatter psychologically and therefore attempt to conform to the headmistress's strict regulations as well as to be reluctant to defend one another when they witness abuse. Amanda Thrupp is "...screaming blue murder" (109) when Miss Trunchbull lifts her off the ground and swings her "...round and round her head, faster and faster" (109), and when she eventually throws her "...like a rocket right over the wire fence of the playground and high up into the sky" (110), Amanda does not get any support from her peers. Instead, the child whose name is not mentioned in the novel, invigorates Miss Trunchbull by shouting "Well thrown⁵⁶, sir!" (111).

⁵⁵ The adolescence stage is explained as such: "feelings of shame or sorrow, which are usually expressed with passive strategies, are often more difficult to express and may be masked as anger". Trice-Black, Shannon, et al. "Play Therapy in School Counseling." *Professional School Counseling*, p 306.

⁵⁶ "Many students advocate standing up to bullies; other strategies they report include ignoring the bully, walking away.....[M]aking a friend of the bully...". Children in Crunchem Hall are aware of the impossibility of making a friend of Miss Trunchbull. However, their cheering is the demonstration of

Ironically, Hortensia's words are later vocalized once again by Miss Trunchbull herself when she accuses Matilda of lying. She even uses the word "shrimp" to show her disapproval of Matilda and children in general, since she considers them to be small and unimportant people:

'You are lying to me, madam!' the Trunchbull shouted, glaring at Matilda. 'I doubt there is a single child in the entire school who has read that book, and here you are, an unhatched shrimp sitting in the lowest form there is, trying to tell me a whopping great lie like that! Why do you do it? You must take me for a fool! Do you take me for a fool, child?' (p 150)

As previously mentioned, Miss Honey teaches spelling to pupils in an interactive manner⁵⁷. At the age of Matilda and her peers, such a method of instruction has a beneficial effect on the child both from a social and academic point of view⁵⁸. The underlying reason of such sort of activity is that Matilda and other children of similar age depend on creative self-expression utilizing play to process sophisticated information (in this particular case, the sophisticated information in question is spelling difficult words) at a more elementary and age-appropriate level. Miss Trunchbull does not allow such type of education in Crunchem Hall. She refuses to take into consideration this fact, supporting her idea of a strict learning system saying: "...nasty dirty things, little girls are. Glad I was never one" (82). Thus, the way of self-expression and acceptance of information coming from the school teacher is reduced to the bare minimum by the headmistress, leaving the children no chance but to obey and conform to the norms of Miss Trunchbull.

The supremacy that the adults have in comparison with Matilda is openly shown by Mr Wormwood who tries to silence when she complains about cheating: "If you don't like it then don't eat the food in this house" (21). Mr Wormwood here uses his income as a source of manipulation since Matilda has no choice but to live with

their fear of becoming the next victim. Fried, SuEllen. "Bullying: Children Abusing Children". *Children's Voice*, vol. 9, no. 2, 2000, p. 26.

⁵⁷ Miss Honey's way of instruction is explained with the given example in a previous section of this thesis.

⁵⁸ "The use of play in the school setting, specifically by school counselors, can help students as they strive to overcome many challenges that may impede social and academic growth and success. School counselors are charged with providing services and programming for students that are "comprehensive in scope, preventative in design and developmental in nature". Trice-Black, Shannon, et al. "Play Therapy in School Counseling." *Professional School Counseling*, p 303.

the given conditions. However, when she tries to stand up for herself, her mother supports Mr Wormwood: “You’ve got a nerve talking to your father like that. Now keep your nasty mouth shut so we can all watch this programme in peace” (22). For Mrs Wormwood, the income of her husband is the provider of a prosperous living, so Matilda’s words about morals and values do not mean much to any of her parents, who consistently silence her. It is clear that Matilda infuriates her father for not conforming to gender performativity⁵⁹, if one examines Mr Wormwood’s attitude towards his daughter’s behavior through the lens of Judith Butler’s “*Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist*”, in which it is claimed that:

... gender is instituted through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and enactments of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gender. (Butler 519)

Her behavior challenges the prescribed gender norms, which leads to her voice being silenced since she is considered a threat to societal norms. Matilda’s curiosity and intellect do not fit into the obedient role that the adults constantly impose on her.

⁵⁹ According to Butler, “...[g]ender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being.”. Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. Routledge, 2006. p 33.

CHAPTER II: THE RISE OF THE FEMALE VOICE IN ROALD DAHL'S *MATILDA*

2.3 Matilda's Intellectual Empowerment

Matilda's shift from a suppressed child to a confident young girl⁶⁰ is the result of her resistance to the challenges of authority and the expectations it imposes on her. The social expectations are primarily shown to the child through his/her communication with parents, which rejects the idea of a child's separation from the parent from the moment of birth: the child is dependent on his/her parent during the formative years of his/her social development. into account that a child acquires his/her first experience of socialization primarily through his/her parents, Matilda's self-confidence is initially shaped by her parents' attitude toward her. In her research on "Child's Attachment to Mother as the Basis of Mental Development Typology", attachment gains:

...a qualitatively different character which depends on quite a number of conditions and first of all on mother's behaviour, i.e., her sensitivity, attitude to the child, emotional acceptance, consistent responsiveness and some other characteristics. (Burmenskaya 389)

Matilda's mother, who fails to provide emotional support for her daughter, and her father, who fails to encourage her desire to study, both contribute to Matilda's improper emotional development. Matilda's sense of "I"⁶¹ develops through interaction with her parents. Her father prevents Matilda from developing a firm sense of "I" in fear of losing authority over her. This leads to Matilda's low self-esteem and her lack of confidence in the level of her intelligence. She is denied the ability to express her emotions, and her sense of self-reliance and desire for self-development

⁶⁰ The previous chapter focused on the suppression of the protagonist's voice within the domestic and institutional spheres, while this chapter explores the emergence and development of the female voice and agency. This division ensures balanced structural proportion and allows for a deeper critical engagement with the novel's feminist themes.

⁶¹ Jacques Lacan explains the formation of the "I" of the child at "the *infans* stage, still sunk in his mirror incapacity and nursing dependence...", that: "...would seem to exhibit in an exemplary situation the symbolic matrix in which the *I* is precipitated in a primordial form, before it is objectified in the dialectic identification with the other, and before language restores to it, in the universal, its function as subject". Lacan, Jacques. *The Mirror stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience*. Zurich, 1949. p. 2.

are not encouraged. A dysfunctional family with an authoritarian father and an emotionally distant mother does not help Matilda integrate well into society⁶².

As previously stated, Matilda's mother disregards her and leaves her alone five times a week. The child responds accordingly to such actions depending on the circumstances⁶³: through cooking for herself and going to the library by herself, Matilda gains a certain form of independence. Consequently, through distancing herself later in the novel by using her "power" and outwitting her parents with the help of a parrot as a response to the oppressive behavior of Mr and Mrs Wormwood, Matilda gradually gains emotional independence from them.

Dahl illustrates how the suppression of Matilda's voice from the beginning of the novel is a remnant of the past that persists in modern-day society⁶⁴. Mr. Wormwood specifies exactly what she is and is not permitted to do based on gender expectations and stereotypes⁶⁵. He explicitly tells Matilda that he does not intend to introduce her to his business as he does to her brother Michael: "You're too stupid.....But I don't mind telling young Mike here about it seeing he'll be joining me in the business one day" (18). Even though Matilda is significantly better at counting than Michael is⁶⁶, being female causes her to be silenced by her father⁶⁷ when she suggests the number based on her calculations: "Don't butt in, your brother and I are busy with high

⁶² "As the child takes up the symbolic disposition it does not leave the semiotic behind. The semiotic will remain a constant companion to the symbolic in all its communication". McAfee, Noëlle. *Julia Kristeva. Routledge*. 2003. pp. 23-24.

⁶³ Such response of a child is explained by Galina V. Burmenskaya as following: "...protective mechanisms of emotional hypoactivation are formed. It means not only repression of unpleasant information but reduction of its perception, exhaustion of affective sphere and emotional closure. Tendency to dissociation in interpersonal relations and striving for reliance only on themselves are typical of their behaviour." For a broader explanation see Burmenskaya, Galina V. *Child's Attachment to Mother as the Basis of Mental Development Typology. Psychology in Russia: State of Art*, 5(1). 2009. p 390.

⁶⁴ According to Elizabeth Marshall, "...[f]rom its inception in the eighteenth century, children's literature enforced ideas about biological sex as synonymous with a gender that required specific behaviors". Nel, Philip, et al. *Keywords for Children's Literature, Second Edition*. NYU Press, 2021. p 81.

⁶⁵ "Attention to the production of gender in literature for children suggests that the fictional child is a complex site for examining which bodies have power and which do not and who gets to decide", according to Elizabeth Marshall. Nel, Philip, et al. *Keywords for Children's Literature, Second Edition*. NYU Press, 2021. p 81.

⁶⁶ Adrienne Rich claims that: "Masculine intellectual systems are inadequate because they lack the wholeness that female consciousness, excluded from contributing to them, could provide." For further explanation of the argument see Adrienne Rich, *"Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution"*. Norton & Company. New York. 1976. p. 80.

⁶⁷ "The language of patriarchal power insists on a dichotomy: for one person to have power, others—or another—must be powerless". For further explanation of the argument see Adrienne Rich, *"Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution"*. Norton & Company. New York. 1976. p. 67.

finance” (49). He tells her to “...stop guessing and trying to be clever” (50) in response to her attempt to demonstrate that she is equally capable of performing the same tasks as her brother. He emphasizes that Matilda’s ability in counting cannot be applied to “such complex mathematical issues” simply because she is a girl.

The gradual evolution of the identity of Matilda into a confident girl complements the examination of children’s literature of the 1970-1980s⁶⁸. As a child longing for freedom, Matilda is confronted with the conventions of the society around her and is determined to gain autonomy. Moreover, she represents a new generation of individual who strives to challenge stereotypes and establish her own “I”⁶⁹ that will serve as an inspiration for people around her.

Matilda is triggered off by her father and Miss Trunchbull to shatter the restrictions she faces in the educational sphere: her father disapproves of her eagerness to read when he comes back home one day and becomes infuriated by the fact that Matilda is reading a book. Taking the book away from her, he says he is “...fed up with [her] reading a book anyway” (37) and rips the pages out of the library book while commanding her to find herself “...something useful to do” (37). In response, Matilda does not cry but stays rather calm and sits “...very still and white and thoughtful” (37). As a young girl with a regularly suppressed voice, Matilda aims to reassert her female agency with the help of her creative mind instead of an open reaction. She does understand that as a representative of the patriarchal society, her father will not listen to her and tolerate her crying over a ripped book, that is why Matilda chooses a symbolical weapon to challenge her parents’ position: her neighbor, Fred, lends her a parrot for one evening.

The parrot that Matilda borrows is a metaphor for the limitation imposed on her by authority: the bird, just like her, is entrapped and is subject to the owner who

⁶⁸ Elizabeth Marshall in her explanation of gender refers to feminist critics of 1970’s who see children’s fairy tales as “...material which has undoubtedly played a major contribution in forming the sexual role concept of children, and in suggesting to them the limitations that are imposed by sex upon a person’s chances of success in various endeavors”. The feminist critic, Judith Butler, that Marshall quotes later also considers gender to be a “political category”, where “...performativity is less about an individual’s choice to pick whether to be a girl or a boy in a particular moment; rather, gender lies in the repetition or imitation of dominant norms that make it seem real”. Nel, Philip, et al. *Keywords for Children’s Literature, Second Edition*. NYU Press, 2021. p 81.

⁶⁹ “Throughout the world, the question “Who am I?” has never been met with more radical uncertainty and hopeful possibility, but today’s children’s books tend to favor the latter”. Nel, Philip, et al. *Keywords for Children’s Literature, Second Edition*. NYU Press, 2021. p 101.

teaches it certain phrases. Therefore, for both of them, there is no chance left to self-expression and freedom. Matilda, whose voice is dominated and controlled by the authoritative figures around her, hides the bird in the chimney and waits until it speaks. When it does, she is the first one to “guess” that it is a ghost to terrify her parents, and it works in her favor.

Gradually, Matilda becomes a self-confident individual who stands against authority. This is a turning point for the character in children’s literature, as explained by Karen Koats in *Keywords for Children’s Literature*; Coats explains one of the options of identity representation in children’s literature showing the:

...gradual evolution from perceiving the readers’ identities as.....self-reliant individuals responsible for construction of their own identities sometimes within, and sometimes over and against, the dominant ideologies of their cultures. (Nel, et al. 98)

Although Matilda is not fully independent from her parents financially due to her age, she is independent from them on a psychological level, since she forms her identity depending on her personal experience, since, in accordance with Coats’ reference to cultural constructivists and cultural determinists, children are capable of acquiring their personal identity “...not as something inherent or bequeathed but as something we achieve over time and through experience and experiment” (Nel, et al. 99). Matilda’s surroundings have an impact on how her identity develops.

Mr and Mrs Wormwood fail to recognize the artistic abilities and intellectual curiosity in their child. She attends a school that is the epitome of excessive discipline. For Matilda, reading becomes less of an amusement in the restrictive and gloomy world around her and more of a haven from it, where she finds solace in the realm of fantasy.

Her creativity develops in the process of reading and analyzing new information, which relates to the theory of the creativity being the indispensable component of a child’s development⁷⁰. The elementary school is expected not only to expand the child’s knowledge but to help the child fit in the social norms of the society

⁷⁰ According to Ruth G. Strickland, creativity is part of a chain of elementary school children’s development: “Children, reading, and creativity - three beads to link together to form a chain”. Strickland, Ruth G. “Children, Reading, and Creativity.” *Elementary English*, vol. 34, no. 4, 1957, p 234.

he/she lives in. However, Matilda's school headmistress, Miss Trunchbull, restricts the children in her school from expressing any eagerness to become independent and initiative⁷¹. Instead of encouragement and support, they receive total control over the creativity of their minds, where not even a usual smile shall be noticed on a child's face in her presence. Miss Honey describes Miss Trunchbull to the children in Matilda's class warning them about her ruthlessness, pointing out that Miss Trunchbull:

...insists upon strict discipline throughout the school, and if you take my advice you will do your very best to behave yourselves in her presence. Never argue with her. Never answer back. Always do as she says. If you get on the wrong side of Miss Trunchbull she can liquidize you like a carrot in a kitchen blender. It's nothing to laugh about, Lavender. Take that grin off your face. All of you will be wise to remember that Miss Trunchbull deals very very severely with anyone who gets out of line in this school. (65)

Even though the children at Crunchem Hall are terrified of Miss Trunchbull whenever she looks in their direction, there seems to be no way to not 'get on the wrong side' of the headmistress. Therefore, the children are constantly under pressure and fear, which leaves little space for the emotional and social development of an individual. For a child of Matilda's age, the expression of emotions is crucial in understanding the environment around the individual. However, the emotional response of a child who lives in a neglectful family, as is Matilda's case, helps a different kind of motivation to develop⁷²: a motivation provoked by an emotion that is ignored, rejected, or punished for, that creates a certain pattern, according to which the child's attitude to life might change from observation to rebellion against the rejection and neglect.

⁷¹ The reason for this is Miss Trunchbull's obsession with total control over the minds of the students, because: "Creative thought may result in action or production of some sort, but it need not. Creative thought, when it is of the artistic rather than the scientific variety, may be satisfying in itself and in the emotion it evokes". Strickland, Ruth G. "Children, Reading, and Creativity." *Elementary English*, vol. 34, no. 4, 1957, p 240.

⁷² "In a loving and admiring family circle, a child builds favorable concepts of himself which may be uncomfortably altered by contacts with a group of peers on the school playground or by the teacher in school. Experience in a neglectful, rejecting or over-critical family or one at odds with its neighbors sets up a different pattern of emotional response toward people and a different concept of self. Emotion is a motivating force of great power", explains Ruth G. Strickland in "Children, Reading, and Creativity." *Elementary English*, vol. 34, no. 4, 1957, p 234.

Matilda stands out among her peers due to how much she takes pleasure in reading books and the discipline of mathematics⁷³. Her obsession with books resembles a psychological mechanism formed as a consequence of the behavior of her immediate surrounding. The personal experiences caused by aggression that she faces in both of them leads to her longing for having a safe place to hide as a way to escape from her reality.

Matilda's house lacks intellectual stimulation and its atmosphere is marked by indifference and neglectful behavior, as is obvious when her mother, Mrs Wormwood, tells Miss Honey that Matilda "...spends her life up in the room buried in some silly book" (93). As a result, the library becomes an environment for her to obtain compassion and psychological support while remaining in her fictitious world, as she is always noticed:

...sitting for hour after hour in the big armchair at the far end of the room with the book on her lap. It was necessary to rest it on the lap because it was too heavy for her to hold up, which meant she had to sit leaning forward in order to read. And a strange sight it was, this tiny dark-haired person sitting there with her feet nowhere near touching the floor, totally absorbed in the wonderful adventures of Pip and old Miss Havisham and her cobwebbed house and by the spell of magic that Dickens the great story-teller had woven with his words. The only movement from the reader was the lifting of the hand every now and then to turn over a page... (11-12)

In addition, Matilda's visits to the library are not solely an expression of her enjoyment of reading and desire for personal development. Her intrinsic motivation⁷⁴ is the compensation for the lack of love and security in her life and the development

⁷³ Matilda stands out among her peers due to her interests that are not typical for children of her age group, since: "There are likely many individual differences in such patterns, but regarding interest, elementary and middle school-aged children say that they are most interested in social and sports activities, and less so in mathematics and reading, a finding that is not especially surprising". Wigfield, Allan, et al. "Children's Motivation for Reading: Domain Specificity and Instructional Influences." *The Journal of Educational Research*, vol. 97, no. 6, 2004, p. 300.

⁷⁴ "Intrinsically motivated students also seek to improve their skills and build on what they know, thereby increasing their capabilities. Intrinsic motivation thus can have strong cognitive as well as motivational benefits. When extrinsically motivated, individuals perform activities to receive some benefit...". Wigfield, Allan, et al. "Children's Motivation for Reading: Domain Specificity and Instructional Influences." *The Journal of Educational Research*, vol. 97, no. 6, 2004, p. 301.

of her identity in a neglecting family and oppressive school environment. As a result, Matilda feels safe and peaceful in the library:

Every afternoon, as soon as her mother had left for bingo, Matilda would toddle down to the library. The walk took only ten minutes and this allowed her two glorious hours sitting quietly by herself in a cozy corner devouring one book after another. (9)

It becomes evident that the environment full of books, silence, and the ability to concentrate on reading, as opposed to her home environment, satisfies her need for security and a motherly figure with warmth. Mrs Phelps becomes the person that Matilda finds the necessary support in before she enters Crunchem Hall and meets Miss Honey, since: “Mrs Phelps always felt sad when the time came for her to cross the floor and say, ‘It’s ten to five, Matilda’” (12). The sharp contrast between Mrs Wormwood’s devotion to gambling and Matilda’s longing for intellectual development only extends the distance between the mother and her child. Thus, Mrs Phelps fills this void in Matilda’s life, encouraging her desire for knowledge.

Like any child her age, Matilda needs to hear praise, which acts as an incentive and motivation among children of her age⁷⁵. Matilda is not praised at home; rather, she is reproached for reading. One outstanding instance of this is when Matilda’s father, Mr. Wormwood, rips apart a library book, demanding her to watch TV with the family despite her lack of any interest in it⁷⁶:

The father kept going. There seemed little doubt that the man felt some kind of jealousy. How dare she, he seemed to be saying with each rip of a page, how dare she enjoy reading books when he couldn’t? How dare she? (37)

⁷⁵It is important to praise children for their effort, since: “Whether it is the sports field or in the classroom, nothing seems more natural than applauding their abilities in the same way. It is thus unsurprising that this type of praise has been widely accepted as a popular tool in the development and maintenance of individuals’ academic achievement motivation, behaviors, and strategies”. Mueller, C. M., and C. S. Dweck. “Praise for intelligence can undermine children’s motivation and performance.” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, vol. 75, no. 1, (Jan. 1998), p. 33.

⁷⁶ Matilda’s lack of interest in watching TV may be the indicator of the level of her intelligence compared to her parents, who do not read any books at all. Their dedication to TV programs can be explained as their way of compensation for the absence of adequate parental ties with their children: “Intelligence seemed to be the most important factor; the higher the intelligence, the less the child view.....the emotional needs of the child and parental example were affective”. Feeley, Joan T. “Television and Children’s Reading.” *Elementary English*, vol. 50, no. 1, 1973, p. 141.

He regularly reads specific magazines: "...the *Autocar* and the *Motor* from cover to cover every week" (92), and uses this habit to argue that Matilda's reading skills are unremarkable. Mr Wormwood finds no interest in or excitement in any reading that is not related to his illegal business in one way or another. His interest in reading these magazines can be explained as his way to learn more about the capabilities of a variety of cars, which can help him trick his customers (as happens with Miss Trunchbull).

Mr Wormwood's reaction to Matilda's reading gives him not the feeling of jealousy, but rather such feelings as irritation and non-acceptance. After all, it is noted in the beginning of the novel, that "...all the reading she had done had given her a view of life that they had never seen" (24-25). Mr Wormwood is a person with a very narrow outlook and superficial interests: he is only interested in material wealth and everything related to it, including the magazines he reads.

As a result, Mr Wormwood is perplexed by Matilda's enthusiasm for reading. It is acceptable to assume that the act of reading Matilda demonstrates becomes a threat to his patriarchal authority, which he obliterates by tearing the book apart and forcing Matilda to do what he normally does, which is watching television with Mrs Wormwood and Michael every evening during dinner. If Matilda follows his lead, he will not consider her a threat to his authority or position in the family. Matilda's critical thinking could question his authority. Mr Wormwood chooses to discredit and neglect Matilda rather than admit his inferiority. Mr Wormwood's act of forcing Matilda to gaze at the television and eat without thinking about anything at all so that she does not become a threat to his authority is his defense mechanism against the arousal of the uncanny feeling. The uncanny feeling of facing his inferiority has the potential to lead to his symbolic castration. Matilda's intelligence is superior in comparison to his own, and the exposure of this can effortlessly destroy his masculinity. This is why Mr Wormwood prefers to either neglect his daughter or, when he does pay attention to her, to suppress her voice. His neglect from Freudian perspective of *unheimlich* can thus be interpreted as the return of the repressed. In other words, when neglecting Matilda, Mr Wormwood represses his 'double'. The 'double', as Freud explains, becomes an essential part of the gradual evolution of ego:

By slow degrees a special authority takes shape within the ego; this authority, which is able to confront the rest of the ego, performs the function of self-observation and self-criticism, exercises a kind of physical censorship, and so becomes what we know the ‘conscious’The double has become an object of terror... (Freud 142-143)

It can be inferred that, from Freudian lens, Matilda’s intelligence is Mr Wormwood’s double, or, in other words – his potential that he has failed to realize and widen. Since it highlights his own failings, it is easier for Mr Wormwood to neglect Matilda instead of confronting her. Matilda’s self-esteem suffers as a result of her lack of recognition for her abilities, and she delves deeper into reading to fill the void left by being neglected.

The lack of praise only hinders the building of the strong female identity. Based on this, it is reasonable to assume that Matilda’s primary motivation for reading is to discover herself and change her self-perception. Miss Honey becomes the first person with whom Matilda builds a meaningful relationship and to whom she demonstrates her “telekinetic” powers⁷⁷. Therefore, Matilda’s eagerness to study and read develops her critical thinking and is a way of escape from reality through delving into the world of fantasy in which the protagonist is not rejected.

Children of Matilda’s age generally have several factors that lead them to read books⁷⁸. The books she reads are not necessarily appropriate for her age group:

Nickolas Nickleby by Charles Dickens

Oliver Twist by Charles Dickens

Jane Eyre by Charlotte Brontë

Pride and Prejudice by Jane Austen

Tess of the D’Urbervilles by Thomas Hardy

⁷⁷ Miss Honey’s praise of Matilda is crucial in the protagonist’s development, since: “Every teacher who has encouraged or even permitted children to be themselves knows that children’s thinking often displays delightful freshness and creativeness”. Ruth G.Strickland. “Children, Reading, and Creativity.” *Elementary English*, vol. 34, no. 4, 1957, p 236.

⁷⁸ There are: “three distinct reasons for reading: enjoyment, utility, and escape” that are influenced by intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, according to Greaney, Vincent, and Susan B. Neuman. “Young People’s Views of the Functions of Reading: A Cross-Cultural Perspective.” *The Reading Teacher*, vol. 37, no. 2, 1983, p. 162.

Gone to Earth by Mary Webb

Kim by Rudyard Kipling

The Invisible Man by H. G. Wells

The Old Man and the Sea by Ernest Hemingway

The Sound and the Fury by William Faulkner

The Grapes of Wrath by John Steinbeck

The Good Companions by J. B. Priestley

Brighton Rock by Graham Greene

Animal Farm by George Orwell (14)

However, it should be noted that the rather impressive list of literature mentioned in the opening chapters of the novel reflects not only her intelligence but also her desire to broaden her worldview and scope of interest (this can be inferred from the list of novels written in different historical periods), which extends far beyond the typical school curriculum for children of her age group. The plots consist of psychologically challenging issues that require the reader to analyze rather than simply observe the progression of events. One may reasonably assume, then, that since these novels portray rebellious characters, as a consequence they shape Matilda's identity. As quite an impressionable child, she tells Mrs Phelps, the librarian, that while reading, she "...feels right there on the spot of it all happen" (15). This ability of Matilda to place herself at the epicenter of events is not only an indicator of her highly developed, vivid imagination and ability to create an alternative reality for herself. Most significantly, this ability shapes her analytical thinking and also establishes her moral values and principles, which she nurtures in her young mind while reading. The list of the books of Matilda's interests is chosen in a particular manner to call attention to her desire to broaden her view of the world as well as to highlight significant issues for her such as social inequality, poverty causing crime, child abuse, and a lack of connection with her parents.

Matilda's ability to solve complex mathematical issues without using the help of a calculator or paper demonstrates her capacity for rapid thinking and abstract thought processes. Abstract thought process is a cognitive skill that combines the individual's own experiences, hypothetical reasoning, creativity, symbolic

representation, and concrete thinking. Matilda implements these abilities in her daily life. Abstract thinking, combined with analytical thinking, which Matilda constantly nurtures through independent learning, allows her to quickly analyze a situation, draw the correct conclusions, and find the most appropriate and beneficial solution to the problem she faces, whether at home or in the public sphere of her life. When Mr Wormwood destroys her library book, Matilda does not cry, but instead analyzes the situation and chooses an appropriate strategy for her to respond to her father's hostility in a secure and reliable manner:

...[m]ost children in Matilda's place would have burst into tears. She didn't do this. She sat there very still and white and thoughtful. She seemed to know that neither crying nor sulking ever got anyone anywhere. The only sensible thing to do when you are attacked is, as Napoleon once said, to counter-attack. Matilda's wonderfully subtle mind was already at work devising yet another suitable punishment for the poisonous parent. (37)

Matilda immediately thinks of Napoleon Bonaparte. This may serve as one of the most obvious examples of how her mind reacts to aggression. In accordance with the theorem of Napoleon⁷⁹, it is possible to draw a parallel with Matilda and to understand how exactly her mind works as she grows up⁸⁰. If Napoleon's theorem is based on symmetry, balance and harmony, it can be assumed that the same theorem can be applied for the better understanding to what surrounds Matilda and influences her personal qualities as well as how each triangle (each sphere of her life) is connected to another triangle (another sphere of her life), of which Matilda becomes the centre⁸¹. All of these triangles have impact on Matilda and her development, and, combined

⁷⁹ Napoleon's theorem proves that if equilateral triangles are constructed on the sides of any triangle, either all outward or all inward, the lines connecting the centres of those equilateral triangles themselves form an equilateral triangle.

⁸⁰ The picture of Napoleon's theorem in practice can be find in the section of appendix.

⁸¹ In Matilda's case, if one applies this theorem in a metaphorical point of view, the three main components of her personality (MLN triangle) are in perfect balance with each other: her intellect, her actions and her emotions. It is obvious from Matilda's reactions to the aggression she constantly faces, that she is capable of skillfully controlling her emotions, which is not typical for children of her age group (because of her high IQ level). The main processes of her thinking are similar with the harmony of the equilateral triangle. Matilda acts based on her personal experiences and feelings, as well as her acquired knowledge, which all together create the harmonious triangle. In such case, the other triangles around her represent the domestic and public spheres of her life. The triangle ACB, for example, serves as her family (the domestic sphere, the first triangle that she finds herself in). Triangles YCA, CXB and ABZ, therefore, symbolize the public sphere of Matilda's life that appears at a later time as she grows up: Crunchem Hall, the library she goes to, and Miss Honey's home.

together, they form her analytical and mathematical thinking by being the reason of her personal experiences.

Mr Wormwood becomes the first person Matilda decides to strategically overcome. Her analytical and mathematical abilities allow her to first evaluate the situation she finds herself in, after which she chooses a particular sequence of steps considering her own safety in case of being discovered. Matilda first finds out how exactly her father takes advantage of people and sells damaged cars with manipulated mileage. Then, she takes her time to draw her conclusions based on which she acts later. She determines the appropriate timing for her actions, uses it to her advantage, and implements her creative strategy: Matilda focuses on Mr Wormwood's vulnerability: his attachment to his unusual hat. Keeping in mind that Mr Wormwood "was very proud of it" and "...thought it gave him a rakish daring look, especially when he wore it at an angle with his loud checked jacket and green tie" (p 26), she decides to damage his hat in particular:

Matilda, holding the hat in one hand and a thin tube of Superglue in the other, proceeded to squeeze a line of glue very neatly all round the inside rim of the hat. Then, she carefully hooked the hat back on to the peg with the walking stick. She timed this operation very carefully, applying the glue just as her father was getting up from the breakfast table. (26)

She does in advance, so that no one can catch her in the act or suspect her in the minor crime she conducts because she performs it at home. Matilda calculates the exact time appropriate for her plan, so that nobody realizes anything is wrong until her father gets to his "...beastly second-hand car garage" (26) after the family breakfast and tries to remove it.

Matilda's "game" with her father is the consequence of her deliberate strategy planned out in advance, by following which even her mother may be fooled easily and consider this hat incident nothing more but her husband's obsession with modifying it constantly: "I expect you were trying to stick another feather in your hat" (29). As a result of Matilda's calculated plan, even when Mr Wormwood looks at her "...with great suspicion" (29), there is nothing he can say to blame his daughter. In the end, a child of her age lacks the ability to devise such a plan as to calculate all the possible steps and reactions of the father.

Matilda develops her ability to count and calculate based on autodidacticism and what she sees around her⁸². She does not experience the traditional route⁸³ of learning mathematics; nobody teaches her how the algorithms operate. Her studying process mainly passes in silence before she enters school since she is not guided or supported by any of her parents. Just as nobody praises Matilda for her reading passion (except Miss Honey, who appears in her life much later), she is not praised for her knowledge of mathematics either⁸⁴. For her, knowing something beyond the expectations of stereotypical gender roles⁸⁵ is a notion she accepts without question to the point where Matilda does not even realize the significance of her abilities. It is Miss Honey who points out to her parents that Matilda, "...at this early stage, is also a kind of mathematical genius. She can multiply complicated figures in her head like lightning" (95). Matilda cannot explain how exactly she is able to multiply big numbers in her head without help, since nobody explains it to her when she educates herself through books:

‘...Was it your mother, Matilda, who taught you?’

‘No, Miss Honey, it wasn’t.’

‘You must have a great father then. He must be a brilliant teacher.’

‘No, Miss Honey,’ Matilda said quietly. ‘My father did not teach me.’

‘You mean you taught yourself?’

‘I don’t quite know,’ Matilda said truthfully. ‘It’s just that I don’t find it very difficult to multiply one number by another.’ (69)

⁸² There is a certain “model of how women “come to know,” the authors present five perspectives: silence, received knowing, subjective knowing, procedural knowing (separate and connected), and constructed knowing”. Becker, Joanne R. “Gender and Mathematics: An Issue for the Twenty-First Century.” *Teaching Children Mathematics*, vol. 9, no. 8, 2003, pp. 470.

⁸³ Traditional route of teaching mathematics is performed through “stressing certainty, a single correct answer, deduction, logic, argumentation, algorithms, structure, and formality - may be particularly incompatible with the ways in which many females learn” according to Becker, Joanne R. “Gender and Mathematics: An Issue for the Twenty-First Century.” *Teaching Children Mathematics*, vol. 9, no. 8, 2003, pp. 470.

⁸⁴ “Girls need confirmation that they are knowers and doers of mathematics”. to Becker, Joanne R. “Gender and Mathematics: An Issue for the Twenty-First Century.” *Teaching Children Mathematics*, vol. 9, no. 8, 2003, pp. 471.

⁸⁵ “...if mathematics is framed as masculine, then from a worldview that has a binary perspective on gender, mathematics, by default, is then not feminine”. Laurie H. Rubel. “Speaking Up and Speaking Out about Gender in Mathematics.” *The Mathematics Teacher*, vol. 109, no. 6, 2016, pp. 436.

When Miss Honey (who, as her primary school teacher, teaches mathematics⁸⁶ as well other subjects to Matilda and her classmates), asks her if she can try to explain how exactly she counts, Matilda finds it impossible to do so. Her counting abilities work on the level of intuitive understanding of the algorithms, since she is not taught mathematics by anyone except the books that she reads alone. There is no possible way for one to demonstrate one's intuition verbally. Therefore, Matilda, when asked politely if she can describe the process going on in her mind, replies: "I'm not really sure" (70). Miss Honey becomes curious and challenges Matilda by her request to multiply fourteen by nineteen, and when she receives the correct answer immediately, Matilda once again cannot explain how she manages to multiply so fast in her mind. It can be suggested that Matilda does not find it important for herself either: the result is what interests her more than the process. She explains her thoughts to Miss Honey later on, when they converse: "I'm afraid I don't know how else to explain it. I've always said to myself that if a little pocket calculator can do it, why shouldn't I?" (70).

The comparison between the power of the human brain and a pocket calculator can be interpreted as Matilda's rejection of the expectations of the society and the stereotypical gender roles within the constraints of which mathematics is considered knowledge that is not necessarily proper field for the female⁸⁷. Matilda demonstrates her abilities as compared to her father and brother, Michael. Mr Wormwood, before Matilda is accepted to Crunchem Hall, tells her brother to write down the numbers and count the total amount of the profit he has made within a day. Michael cannot count so fast⁸⁸, so he asks his father to speak more slowly. In the end, he does not name the exact amount of the profit, but only states: "That's a lot of sums" (49).

Mr Wormwood proudly claims that he needed less than ten minutes to count everything. However, when he is asked by his son whether or not he is able to count

⁸⁶ "...having female math teachers is important, more than knowing that adult females can do mathematics is needed to convince girls that they can". Countryman, Joan. "Gender and Mathematics." *The Radical Teacher*, no. 30, 1986, p. 25.

⁸⁷ "Patriarchy is the power of the fathers: a familial-social, ideological, political system in which men—by force, direct pressure, or through ritual, tradition, law, and language, customs, etiquette, education, and the division of labor, determine what part women shall or shall not play, and in which the female is everywhere subsumed under the male". For further explanation of the argument see Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*. Norton & Company. New York. 1976, p. 57.

⁸⁸ Joan Countryman, the author of mathematics and autobiographical essays claims that: "In mathematics, for example, girls perform better than boys do in arithmetic in the early grades, but that fact is regarded as insignificant" and proceeds with "We even compensate for the lower test scores of boys by maintaining separate male and female standard scales". Countryman, Joan. "Gender and Mathematics." *The Radical Teacher*, no. 30, 1986, p. 23.

such amounts in his mind, Mr Wormwood replies: “Well, not exactly...Nobody could do that” (49). Mr Wormwood – the representative of the patriarchal society that instills whether or not mathematics is a field appropriate for females⁸⁹, immediately becomes infuriated when Matilda names the correct total profit amount: “No one in the world could give the right answer just like that, especially a girl!” (51). Matilda’s ability to do so demonstrates her rebellion against the imposition of stereotypes according to which a female is inferior to a male in the mathematical field⁹⁰. Thus, by comparing herself to a pocket calculator, Matilda not only demonstrates her exceptional intellect but also underlines the potential power of a human brain and criticizes the educational system that does not provide students with the appropriate knowledge of how to count better than a machine produced by people themselves. Miss Honey only reassures her with her reply: “Why not indeed?.....The human brain is an amazing thing” (70).

Matilda wisely uses her intellectual superiority to confront the injustice of the authority. The very first step towards this is exposing the fraud and injustice of her own parents. Matilda knows about her father’s fraudulent activities and interprets everything he says to her own advantage in order to avoid the negative consequences for herself. Therefore, she does not accept Mr Wormwood’s assertions about the level of her intellectual development when he tries to prove his dominance with: “A little cheat, madam, that’s what you are!” (51). Matilda skillfully avoids possible punishments for her attempts to “teach her parents a lesson”, silently calculating her plans and acting based not so much on emotions as on logic. After being accused of cheating, Matilda chooses her target once more, and again, it is her father’s head. The importance of her choice (this is the second time Matilda “attacks” his head) lies in the association of the head with power, authority and intelligence⁹¹: Mr Wormwood himself says that strong hair “...means there’s a good strong brain underneath” (p 53).

⁸⁹ “I asked students to visualize a mathematician. A large majority of them visualized a white male. This was undeniable evidence of bias in mathematics”. Kellmermeier, John. “Mathematics, Gender, and Culture.” *Transformations: The Journal of Inclusive Scholarship and Pedagogy*, vol. 11, no. 2, 2000, pp. 44.

⁹⁰ Joan Countryman states that “...women doing science and mathematics freely would do them differently. There would be less concern with mastery and domination of nature and the world in that mathematics, more concern with cooperation, understanding and empowering”. Countryman, Joan. “Gender and Mathematics.” *The Radical Teacher*, no. 30, 1986, p. 25.

⁹¹ The head, as the highest point of the human body, is associated with control and dominance. In patriarchal ideology, the male holds the power and control over the family, and therefore becomes the “head” of the family. The brain, responsible for intellect and reasoning, leads to the connection of authority. Hence, the head symbolizes the capacity for leadership, dominance and the supreme authority of the male in the scope of patriarchal ideology. Matilda consciously attacks Mr Wormwood’s head repeatedly, as to challenge his authority and shatter the patriarchal system.

Matilda shatters Mr Wormwood's patriarchal authority and dominance by depriving him of the opportunity to control the situation. By damaging his hair, Matilda rebels in her own creative way, and asserts her intellectual superiority. The interpretation of her deed is the shattering of Mr Wormwood's masculinity for neglecting her. She deliberately chooses the most vulnerable part of his body to indirectly challenge the authoritative power of her father, who is described as a person:

Incapable of entering any room quietly, especially at breakfast time. He always had to make his appearance felt immediately by creating a lot of noise and clatter. One could almost hear him saying, 'It's me! Here I come, the great man himself, the master of the house, the wage- earner, the one who makes it possible for all the rest of you to live so well! Notice me and pay your respects! (55-56)

Mr Wormwood is immediately seen by his wife as a "freak" (58). And again, Mrs Wormwood blames him, not Matilda, for what happens, just as Michael does. Matilda, in return, celebrates her achievement. She is even able to make sure that she is not suspected by anyone in the house, when asking her mother: "He does do some pretty silly things now and again, doesn't he, Mommy?" (61). Mrs Wormwood's agreement on this only ensures Matilda's safety and innocence.

Constant reading of books gives Matilda the opportunity to understand people's psychological states. Using this, she employs manipulative strategies to influence adults in order to "teach them a lesson". For the same purpose, Matilda brings a neighbor's parrot into her house to use it to her advantage and intimidate her parents. Fred, the boy from her neighborhood, gives Matilda his encaged parrot for a day, and she "...set about wedging the cage up the chimney and out of sight" (41). When her parents come back home and hear the voice of the parrot, they become terrified of the imaginary burglars in the dining-room, as Mrs Wormwood immediately suggests. The talkative parrot is made a tool to undermine the authority of her parents and to change the power roles: her father shows the vulnerable side of his personality when his position in his own house is in danger, and the "burglars are in the dining-room":

'I think they are', the father said, sitting tight.

‘Then go and catch them, Harry!’ hissed the mother. ‘Go out and collar them red-handed!’

The father didn’t move. He seemed in no hurry to dash off and be a hero. His face had turned grey.

‘Get on with it!’ hissed the mother. ‘They’re probably after the silver!’

The husband wiped his lips nervously with his napkin.

‘Why don’t we all go and look together?’ he said. (p 41)

Matilda does not show her aggression openly. She observes from a distance the results of her well-thought plan and proves the power of her intellect over the violent dominance of the authority. It only takes her to use a bird to put Mr Wormwood’s authority under question, which highlights intellectual power as a more formidable force than as a rather more dangerous weapon than the social position and physical force of her immediate surroundings. Matilda is able to clearly formulate her arguments, using which she can easily convince adults that she is right. However, the adults around her are not inclined to think as rationally as she does. In this case, there is no point in Matilda expressing her rationality.

In the case of her mother, Matilda also expresses her disillusionment by opposing Mrs Wormwood’s demands and expectations (which are also imposed by the society on Mrs Wormwood herself⁹²). According to De Beauvoir, the:

...myth of a woman plays considerable part in literature; but what is its importance in daily life? To what extent does it affect the customs and conduct of individuals? In replying to this question it will be necessary to state precisely the relations this myth bears to reality. (De Beauvoir 260)

De Beauvoir discusses the myth of the woman, which portrays her as an unchanging entity, in contrast to the actual range of women’s lives. This myth is founded on imposed ideals rather than reality, and promotes the concept of femininity. In other words, a woman who does not conform to this imposed ideal is considered

⁹² “Patriarchy depends on the mother to act as a conservative influence, imprinting future adults with patriarchal values even in those early years when the mother-child relationship might seem most individual and private...”. Rich, Adrienne. *“Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution”*. Norton & Company. New York. 1976, p. 61.

unfeminine. In reality, according to De Beauvoir, men and women differ in their interaction experiences rather than their intrinsic nature. Thus, she believes it is acceptable to argue that a woman is not born, but rather becomes one as a consequence of life experience, mutual recognition, and affirmation of one's individuality, which opposes the imposed ideals. The idea of maternal power, as Adrienne Rich later analyzes in *If Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* with reference to De Beauvoir:

...has been domesticated. In transfiguring and enslaving woman, the womb – the ultimate source of this power – has historically been turned against us and itself made into a source of powerlessness. (Rich 61)

Matilda shows her condemnation of her mother and her way of living in the following way: instead of showing interest in her own appearance, Matilda stubbornly demonstrates her love for books and desire to study. This contradicts with Mrs Wormwood's values.

Although Matilda condemns her mother's lifestyle, she does not seek revenge on her as she does on her father. When Miss Honey visits Matilda's parents and asks them if they are aware of the level of their daughter's intelligence, Mrs Wormwood responds: "Of course I knew she could read.....She spends her life up on her room buried in some silly book" (93). Even though she tells Miss Honey that "...looks is more important than books" (93), Mrs Wormwood does not express open hatred toward literature and Matilda reading it. She is simply disinterested in greater effort than watching TV and playing bingo. Mrs Wormwood is unbothered about Matilda's devotion to reading since the activity poses no harm to her.

Unlike Mr Wormwood, who tears apart her book, Mrs Wormwood shows no interest in power or dominance. Matilda, who sees her mother's disregard of herself and her interests, does not seek revenge on Mrs Wormwood for prioritizing her personal needs and for denying the need for intellectual development. Matilda's position in the instance of her mother can be understood as: "it is better to continue doing what you are doing silently in order to reduce the dangers and more thoroughly plan revenge on the person who truly poses a threat". Thus, Matilda's subtle acceptance of her mother's emotional distance and limited scope of Mrs Wormwood's education displays her reluctance to engage in a useless conflict with her mother.

In her conversation with the librarian, Mrs Phelps, Matilda shares that her mother isn't even aware that she goes to the library:

‘She doesn’t know I come here.’

‘But that’s surely not right,’ Mrs Phelps said. ‘I think you’d better ask her.’

‘I’d rather not,’ Matilda said. ‘She doesn’t encourage reading books. Nor does my father.’

‘But what do they expect you to do every afternoon in an empty house?’

‘Just mooch around and watch the telly.’

‘I see.’

‘She doesn’t really care what I do,’ Matilda said a little sadly. (12)

Matilda claims that her mother does not care about her a little sadly, but does not make an effort to improve their relationship. Matilda does not feel compassion towards her mother and is disappointed in her. This indirect confrontation of Matilda with Mrs Wormwood’s values by reading books is not only her desire for knowledge but also a technique to cope with the emotional distress that her own mother's neglect brings her.

Mrs Phelps feels empathy for Matilda after hearing of her the attitudes of parents towards her and her desire to learn. She understands that Matilda uses reading to isolate herself, find solace, and overcome the loneliness she feels at home. That’s why, Mrs Phelps: “...always felt sad when the time came for her to cross the floor and say: ‘It’s ten to five, Matilda’” (12). She understands that by reminding her of the time and denying her the opportunity to finish reading, she is robbing Matilda of solace and an escape into another, brighter alternative reality, which Matilda truly seeks. Eventually, Mrs Phelps informs Matilda that “...public libraries like this allow you to borrow books and take them home” (15). Thus, she does everything in her power to help Matilda not only gain knowledge, but, more importantly, receive the necessary support that will fill the void created by the lack of emotional connection with her parents⁹³.

⁹³ Empathy is claimed to: “...[M]ost likely occur in a family environment that (1) satisfies the child’s own emotional needs and discourages excessive self-concern, (2) encourages the child to experience

2.4 The Development of Matilda's Psychological Well-being and Her Influence on Others

Matilda develops a sense of empathy by reading books before she goes to school for the first time. There, she witnesses how Miss Trunchbull throws one of the schoolgirls, Amanda Thripp, over the school fence because her hair does not fit the school dress-code standards. Hortensia, who is standing next to Matilda and her friend, Lavender, tells them: "That idiot Amanda.....[H]as let her long hair grow even longer during the hols and her mother has plaited it into pigtails. Silly thing to do" (108). Amanda is aware that Miss Trunchbull despises her hairstyle, yet she still wears pigtails to school and tells Miss Trunchbull that her mother likes it. What is remarkable is that she finds the strength to contradict Miss Trunchbull, despite her fear of her:

Amanda, paralysed with fright, managed to stutter, 'My m-m-mummy likes them. She p-p-plaits them for me every morning.'

'Your mummy's a twit!' the Trunchbull bellowed. She pointed a finger the size of a salami at the child's head and shouted, 'You look like a rat with a tail coming out of its head!'

'My m-m-mummy thinks I look lovely, Miss T-T-Trunchbull,' Amanda stuttered, shaking like a blancmange. (109)

When Amanda attempts to defend herself, Miss Trunchbull grabs her by her hair and throws her over the school fence. Matilda only attentively watches and analyses the situation. She notices Amanda tries to assert herself when replying to Miss Trunchbull, which demands courage for the children of Crunchem Hall. Amanda knows that she challenges the school authority by going against the rules. Consequently, Miss Trunchbull uses her physical strength to silence Amanda. The

and express a broad range of emotions, and (3) provides opportunities for the child to observe and interact with others who encourage emotional sensitivity and responsiveness". Parental warmth is believed to be fundamental in the development of empathy in a child. However, it is this parental warmth that Matilda is deprived of. The second point, about encouraging the child to express and experience a wide range of emotions, is suppressed by Matilda's father by tearing apart her library book that gives her all those needed emotions. Matilda lacks all three empathy-building aspects, which supports the idea that: "Although parents' socialization practices may partly reflect parents' genetic makeup (which is passed on to offspring), children's observations of, and interactions with, parents likely contribute to individual differences in empathy-related responding above and beyond those due to heredity". Zhou, Qing, et al. "The Relations of Parental Warmth and Positive Expressiveness to Children's Empathy-Related Responding and Social Functioning: A Longitudinal Study." *Child Development*, vol. 73, no. 3, 2002, pp. 893-895.

school fence that she is thrown over symbolizes the boundaries that are set by the Headmistress, and the act of throwing Amanda over it is a foreshadowing the consequences of individuals who dare to oppose the authority. Miss Trunchbull suppresses personal autonomy and any manifestation of dissent. This scene is a grotesque parody of discipline.

Matilda, observing all of this, does not seem like a person who feels compassion for Amanda, unlike Lavender, who is terrified with Miss Trunchbull's attitude and tells Matilda that her father would never tolerate such an attitude toward his daughter. Lavender's statement only emphasizes Matilda's lack of an emotional connection to her parents. Based on the statistics of the social experiment described in "The Relations of Parental Warmth and Positive Expressiveness to Children's Empathy-Related Responding and Social Functioning: A Longitudinal Study", it is asserted that "...children's empathy is one mediator between parental socialization and children's social behavioral outcomes" (Zhou et al. 911). Lavender experiences the same suppression of her individuality and her voice at home. This is why her empathy is developed gradually only after becoming Matilda's best friend and choosing her as her role model. As Lavender chooses Matilda as her role model later (which develops her empathy) and also fights against the authority, one can assume that Lavender's father's reaction would be similar to the reaction of Matilda's father. Lavender's choice of a role model and imitation of Matilda's way of silent rebellion against the authority only supports the suggestion that she experiences similar problems at home. Her eagerness to protest indirectly suggests that she has a similar experience of the suppression of her voice. Matilda does not need to hear about it directly. Her empathy allows her to notice that they share the same experience at home. It is by analyzing her personality carefully that Matilda comes to such conclusion. Matilda chooses to say the truth, while Lavender opts to vocalize her fantasy about her father's impossible reaction. This difference in expressing their ways of coping with the neglect of their parents symbolizes Matilda's prioritization of truth as well as her approach to the challenges of her life. As a person who analyzes everything around her, Matilda has to be realistic in order to calculate her following steps. Lavender's decision to lie about her father's possible reaction displays her lower level of intelligence which results in a more simplistic, immediate solution to cope with her helplessness:

‘How can she get *away* with it?’ Lavender said to Matilda. ‘Surely the children go home and tell their mothers and fathers. I know my father would raise a terrific stink if I told him the Headmistress had grabbed me by the hair and slung me over the playground fence.’

‘No, he wouldn’t.’ Matilda said, ‘and I’ll tell you why. He simply wouldn’t believe you.’

‘Of course he would.’

‘He wouldn’t.....No parent is going to believe this pigtail story, not in a million years. Mine wouldn’t. They’s call me a liar.’ (112)

Matilda, who lacks alternative models of interaction with her parents, draws on her own experiences, as her father never believes her, calling her a liar even when she demonstrates her mathematical abilities. It is unlikely that her story about the pigtails would be deemed credible if she told it to her father. Mr Wormwood even warns Miss Trunchbull that his daughter is:

...a bad lot though. He said to watch her. He said if anything bad ever happened in the school, it was certain to be his daughter who did it.....Her father said she’s a real wart (81).

It is evident that he would not advocate on her behalf, nor would Lavender’s father.

In Amanda’s case, Matilda sees both the traits of a daring character and a weak strategy for resisting authority. When Lavender suggests that Amanda will probably ask her mother to cut off her pigtails when she gets home after school, Matilda responds: “Amanda will do it herself. You’ll see if she doesn’t” (112). Matilda analyzes everything she hears and sees. Amanda’s mother, like other parents, must have been informed of the school’s dress-code rules. Nonetheless, she sends her daughter to school with pigtails, emphasizing the patriarchal expectations of female’s outward conformity. Matilda draws a parallel between Amanda’s mother and Mrs Wormwood, both of whom prioritize a female’s external presentation in accordance with socially constructed norms. Matilda concludes that Amanda’s request in this case will be denied: her mother will almost certainly refuse to cut her hair, since it is an act of rejection of gendered expectations imposed on females. Amanda, according to Matilda, is quite strong in girl to cut her hair on her own; even after Miss Trunchbull

throws her over the school fence, Amanda "...landed on the grass and bounced three times and finally came to rest. Then, amazingly, she sat up. She looked trifle dazed and who could blame her, but after a minute or so she was on her feet again and tottering back towards the playground" (111). It is reasonable to infer that Matilda says that she will cut the hair herself because that is what Matilda would probably have done in her situation.

Matilda has the deepest compassion for Miss Honey among all her surroundings. She recognizes herself in her school teacher, mirroring the same values and traits. Matilda, like Miss Honey when she was at her age, is a suppressed child. Miss Honey, because of her own aunt, Miss Trunchbull, lacks the ability to live a full life with needed conditions for any person and is forced to live in her circumstances. This is what Matilda sees when she visits Miss Honey's home:

The front-door was covered with flaky green paint and there was no keyhole. Miss Honey simply lifted the latch and pushed open the door and went in. Although she was not a tall woman, she had to stoop low to get through the doorway. Matilda went after her and found herself in what seemed to be a dark narrow tunnel. (181)

Miss Honey is kind and responsive to Matilda (as her surname implies, Miss Honey's personality is similar to honey). Through autodidacticism and attentive observation, Matilda has cultivated a strong inclination to support those in need. That is why she sympathizes with Miss Honey, and her sense of justice and desire to help Miss Honey and become a "heroine" like the ones in the books Matilda reads increases with time.

Miss Honey's strategy of fighting the injustice is to challenge Miss Trunchbull's education system. She is aware that Miss Trunchbull is against the artistic approach to teaching spelling, but she continues to do so anyway. In their analysis of the importance of the implementation of art into the educational system in "The Arts and Cognitive Development", William Ives and Jeanne Pond claim that the "...development of values and attitudes, the development of creative interests and talents, and the meeting of emotional needs" (Ives and Pond 335). In other words, art contributes excessively to the cognitive development of a child and Miss Honey is contributing to such development by implementing songs when teaching spelling. Ives

and Pond further explain that the artistic approach in education involves the use of fantasy and the use of imagery alongside with the use of the media. As it is claimed by Ives and Pond, the:

...main concern of education, cognitive development in the form of knowledge and skills for use in living, has gradually come to mean only certain knowledge and skills that are considered to be higher levels of mental activity, for example language and mathematics. (Ives and Pond 335)

Miss Trunchbull's categorical attitude towards Miss Honey's attempts to implement the artistic way of teaching spelling to children displays Miss Trunchbull's desire to fully control the minds of the schoolchildren and her belief in a punitive style of education. Such freedom of artistic expression threatens Miss Trunchbull's control.

School teachers play an integral role in the cognitive development of children. During the pre-operational stage, children spend most of the time with their teacher, who is responsible for providing not only knowledge, but also confidence and individual intelligence. In order to achieve it, teachers involve students in activities that require social interaction (games, singing, etc.). According to Syeda D. Bashrin in her research of *Piaget's Pre-operational Stage in Children: A Comparative Study*, teachers' role is "...to develop students as individual beings" (Bashrin). The artistic approach of Miss Honey encourages the cognitive development of the schoolchildren and nurtures creativity, problem-solving skills, critical thinking, and emotional intelligence, all of which are crucial for every child's development and pose a threat to Miss Trunchbull's authority. This is why Miss Trunchbull insists on the stressful learning environment that hinders cognitive development⁹⁴. Not only does she disagree with Miss Honey's approach, but she actively suppresses it in order to preserve her power and control over the children. Such approach with no encouragement of artistic approach of teaching (and studying) consequences in children obedience.

⁹⁴ "The educational use of various art forms and art materials gives the child an opportunity to investigate and develop experiences in a variety of media, exercise skills in imagery, partake in fantasy, and, in the process, deepen conceptual understanding. We have discussed only three ways in which current research demonstrates that the arts contribute to cognitive growth. We feel these possibilities are suggestive rather than exhaustive and that the arts are an essential cognitive component of educational practice". Ives, William, and Jeanne Pond. "The Arts and Cognitive Development." *The High School Journal*, vol. 63, no. 8, 1980, p. 339.

Miss Honey's experience of the oppression by Miss Trunchbull who makes her feel like a slave has an impact on her self-perception. The abusive treatment Miss Honey receives from her aunt in childhood after losing her father traumatizes her, which she strives to overcome later in life. When Miss Honey invites Matilda to her home, she shares her traumatic memories of how she had to live after her father's death:

.....[O]ver the years I became so completely cowed and dominated by this monster of an aunt that when she gave me an order, no matter what it was, I obeyed instantly. That can happen, you know. And by the time I was ten, I had become her slave. I did all the housework. I made her bed. I washed and ironed for her. I did all the cooking. I learnt how to do everything.....I was far too terrified to complain.....I wasn't allowed to cry in front of her. But I lived in fear. (194)

Her lack of financial stability which Miss Honey tells Matilda about later, and the repression of her emotions are the result of her trauma. Her kindness, empathy her commitment to defending those in need is similar to Matilda's traits. Miss Honey is therefore not a weak person; through her compassion and desire to create a safer environment for children than she had as a child, she challenges Miss Trunchbull's control at Crunchem Hall, which undermines Miss Trunchbull's authority. Miss Honey's appreciation of Matilda's intelligence fosters mutual understanding and empathy between both of them. Matilda, who fails to form her "I" due to her parents' neglect, begins to sense her worth as a result of Miss Honey's encouragement and supportive guidance. This has a positive effect on her self-esteem.

The accident with Miss Trunchbull's cake that was "stolen" and eaten supposedly by the schoolchildren is one of Miss Trunchbull's most blatant displays of cruelty. Miss Trunchbull, upon discovering that a portion of her cake has disappeared, chooses an eleven-year-old Bruce Bogtrotter as the object of her punitive action and forces him to eat the entire cake as punishment. Miss Trunchbull, having gathered two hundred and fifty students in the Assembly Hall, says to him in front of everyone: "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!" (122). Miss Trunchbull transforms the chocolate cake, which is traditionally a source of joy and a symbol of celebration for

children, into a symbol of suppression of individuality. Miss Trunchbull's insistence on Bruce finishing the entire cake underlines how much she dominates the children at school, and how openly she displays her sense of satisfaction derived from Bruce's public humiliation in front of his peers. Such humiliation and bullying of the child at school can be confronted in two ways, according to SuEllen Fried in her article "Bullying: Children Abusing Children":

The ideal response to bullying is a target who can handle the situation with confidence and aplomb. When the bully is not rewarded by power, tears, obvious signs of distress, compliance, or an explosive reaction that brings punishment to the target, the bully will seek another victim. Many students advocate standing up to bullies; other strategies they report include ignoring the bully, walking and.....threatening or fighting the bully. (Fried 26)

Bruce does not "reward" Miss Trunchbull with tears or any signs of distress since he begins to enjoy his punishment as he proceeds with eating the chocolate cake. Instead of "rewarding" the Headmistress, he stands up against her and threatens her authority by completing her seemingly-impossible order to finish eating the whole cake. Miss Trunchbull's abusive treatment of Bruce, both psychological and physical, is reflected in his appearance and mobility: "...an eleven-year-old boy who was decidedly large and round stood up and waddled briskly forward. He climbed up on the platform" (113).

The fact that he finishes the entire cake can be justified by his fear of the Headmistress and the potential repercussions of disobedience. However, the most crucial factor is Bruce's unexpected resistance. Bruce, who is not expected endure the punishment, demonstrates determination and a form of psychological adaptation as he continues eating the cake⁹⁵:

One sensed that he was almost beginning to enjoy himself. He had a mountain to climb and he was jolly going to reach the top or die in the attempt. What is more, he had now become very conscious of his audience and of how they were all silently rooting for him. This was nothing less than a battle between him and the mighty Trunchbull.

⁹⁵ The illustration can be found in the appendix.

Suddenly someone shouted, ‘Come on, Brucie! You can make it!’ (125)

For the first time, Bruce gets the opportunity to reclaim his agency by reframing his perceived weakness, which sets off a chain reaction. The fact that someone in the crowd shouts out that they believe in him demonstrates the children’s desire for a shared celebration against Miss Trunchbull’s abuse of power. Bruce has no way to avoid her punishment in any case, since what she hopes to humiliate him in front of the entire school has turned against the Headmistress. Matilda notes that “...she’s going to kill him if he wins” (125). He will be punished both if he finishes the cake, which is initially a punishment, but ultimately becomes his tool to perform an act of rebellion against the authority, and if he does not comply with Miss Trunchbull’s order, which will also demonstrate disobedience to authority. This infuriated Miss Trunchbull:

Suddenly the Trunchbull lunged forward and 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 top of the wretched Bruce Bogtrotter’s head and pieces flew all over the platform. (128)

Miss Trunchbull takes advantage of the moment in front of the entire school as Bruce challenges her with his victory and the students cheer him on. She immediately heightens the tension to remind the children who holds power despite the fact that Bruce finishes the whole cake. By crashing the china platter she foreshadows the potential violence for the schoolchildren to frighten them and prevent any desire to rebel against the authority.

However, the rebellion continues after this incident, and this time Lavender, Matilda’s best friend, gets inspired by Matilda and the shared experience of challenging authority in the Assembly Hall together. Earlier, when Miss Trunchbull’s actions during the incidents involving Amanda and Bruce are carefully analyzed by Matilda, she tells Lavender a revealing detail concerning Miss Trunchbull: “Never do anything by halves if you want to get away with it. Be outrageous. Go to the whole hog. Make sure everything you do is completely crazy it’s unbelievable” (112).

Matilda inspires Lavender with her courage, creativity, and belief in justice whenever she tells her how she outwits her father repeatedly. This assertiveness functions as motivation for Lavender. Matilda becomes a role model for her: “It was

her turn now to become a heroine if only she could come up with a brilliant plot” (131). Matilda’s trust in herself and her confidence in her ability to transform her life motivates Lavender to develop her sense of empathy. Her own moral values are appreciated and have a positive effect on the Lavender, because when “defined as an affective response, empathy and its related forms of responding (e.g., sympathy) have been linked conceptually to individuals’ moral development.....altruistic and prosocial behaviour...” (Zhou 893).

Inspired by Matilda, Lavender decides to catch a newt and put it in a jug of water on Miss Trunchbull’s table. This little creature is “...about six inches long and very slimy” (132). The newt that she chooses to carry out her plan is associated with transformation, adaptability, and renewal due to its ability to regenerate. This tiny creature has the power to undermine Miss Trunchbull’s authority when she sees it for the first time:

The Trunchbull let out a yell and leapt off her chair as though a fire cracker had gone off underneath her. And now the children also saw the long thin slimy yellow-bellied lizard-like creature twistling and turning in the glass.....The Trunchbull. This mighty female giant, stood there in her green breeches, quivering like a blancmange. She was especially furious that someone had succeeded in making her jump and yell like that because she prided herself on her toughness. (156)

At this point, the vulnerability of her authority is most apparent, as even a lizard is able to challenge it. And this is exactly what Matilda teaches Lavender: a small act of disobedience is far more powerful, and unlike Miss Trunchbull’s aggressive techniques, such a startling impact can be reached without the use of violence. It is a quiet resistance, waiting for its moment, just like the parrot that Matilda hides in the chimney to scare her parents. For Lavender, this is the safest way to oppose the authority. In order to protect herself even more, she does not share her strategy with anyone, having calculated the risks of being accused or betrayed by her friends under the expected tortures of Miss Trunchbull.

Although Lavender is brave enough to put a newt in a jug of water before Miss Trunchbull enters the classroom, she is not, however, brave enough to protect Matilda when her friend is accused and silenced by the headmistress who inculcates her.

Matilda's efforts to prove that it is not her fault only infuriate Miss Trunchbull up to the point when she silences her in a brutal way: "If you don't shut up at once and sit down I shall remove my belt and let you have it with the end that has the buckle!" (159).

It is precisely at this moment of being accused for what she has not done when the first "miracle" happens to Matilda in the classroom. Matilda is triggered by the cruelty of the headmistress and she feels "...angrier and angrier...so unbearably angry that something was bound to explode inside her very soon" (159). She despises Miss Trunchbull due to the way she threatens her with violence and refuses to acknowledge her self-defensive claims. She aspires to revenge, although she understands that Miss Trunchbull is going to punish her for it:

She longed to march up and grab the glass and tip the contents, newt and all, over the Trunchbull's head. She trembled to think what the Trunchbull would do to her if she did that. (159)

While Matilda is contemplating her possible revenge, she begins to experience an extraordinary feeling of electricity in her eyes, a sense of "power" with which, as Matilda believes, the glass is knocked over. With each wobble of the glass, she silently commands it to fall. As a consequence, "...the water in it and the squirming newt splashed out all over Miss Trunchbull's enormous bosom" (161). Matilda is convinced that her gaze is capable of influencing objects, and this idea is interpreted as a reflection of her desire to restore justice, gain control of the situation, and feel empowered⁹⁶. Although her actions are already explained as well-planned and imaginary, it is important for one to notice that Matilda does not move or say anything to Miss Trunchbull when trying to oppose her. Instead, she follows the specific rules⁹⁷

⁹⁶ "We gain a more plausible understanding of the relationship between emotion on the one hand and imagination on the other if we recognize that the causal arrow typically travels in the reverse direction. It is not the emotional needs of children that give rise to the invention of an imaginary character or scene, but rather that such inventions give rise to various emotions: depending on the nature of the imaginary actions and events, children may feel frightened, frustrated or satisfied". For Matilda, satisfaction is what she is seeking for. Since she has no chance to confront Miss Trunchbull openly, she uses her imagination in order to compensate for her powerlessness compared to the authority. Harris, Paul L. *The Work of the Imagination. Understanding Children's Worlds*. Oxford, Blackwell Publishers, 2000, p. 18.

⁹⁷ One of the main functions of the imaginary game in Matilda's instance is the creation of a way in which she fulfills her desires that are not satisfied due to specific reasons in real life. However, according to Vygotsky, even imaginary games contain: "...[R]ules for behavior that children must follow to successfully act out the play scene". Thus, for Matilda, even in her pretend-play, it is vital to follow specific social rules in order to attain this satisfaction, since: "...[E]ven the simplest imaginative

of both the imaginary world and the rules of silence and obedience set up by Miss Trunchbull, which are essential for the “miracle” to happen. Matilda uses this illusion of telekinetic “abilities” to counteract her feelings of powerlessness. She finds it easier to imagine that she has telekinetic “abilities” than to imagine that the newt in the glass is actively attempting to free itself, and accidentally knocks over the glass at the exact moment when she mentally commands it to fall on the table in front of Miss Trunchbull.

In this instance, one should keep in mind how important imagination and pretend play⁹⁸ are for children’s cognitive development. For Matilda, the encounter with the newt in the glass becomes an imaginary game⁹⁹ that she perceives as reality. This is her coping mechanism, with the support of which she achieves the desired balance by establishing a controlled environment where her telekinetic “abilities” become a key component of her power¹⁰⁰: “A strange feeling of serenity and confidence was sweeping over her and all of a sudden she found that she was frightened by nobody in the world. With the power of her eyes alone she had compelled a glass of water to tip and spill its contents over the horrible Headmistress, and anybody who could do that could do anything” (163).

Matilda is about five years old, and her age falls under the pre-operational stage, which lasts from two to seven years. As explained in *Cognitive Behavior Therapy with Children* by Andrew Meyers and W. Edward Craighead, during the pre-operational stage of cognitive development the child begins to build social relationships with other people, such as peers when entering the school – a new social

situations created by very young children proceed in accord with social rules”. Further, Vygotsky concludes that: “Whenever there is an imaginary situation, there are rules”, without which a child: “[C]annot behave in an imaginary situation”. Berk, Laura E. “Vygotsky’s Theory: The Importance of Make-Believe Play.” *Young Children*, vol. 50, no. 1, 1994, pp. 31-32.

⁹⁸ “[P]retend play is instrumental to creating internal systems of representation that help children to free themselves from the control of external stimulation and permit thinking about events and objects not immediately present”. Ives, William, and Jeanne Pond. “The Arts and Cognitive Development.” *The High School Journal*, vol. 63, no. 8, 1980, p. 336.

⁹⁹ “In pre-operational stage, children are able to form stable concepts as well as mental reasoning and magical beliefs”. Bashrin, Syeda Dishari. *Piaget’s pre-operational stage in children: a comparative study*. BRAC University, Department of English and Humanities. Graduation thesis. Dhaka, Bangladesh. 2015.

¹⁰⁰ The coping effect of child’s play is claimed to be an: “[I]nfantile form of the human ability to deal with experience by creating model situations and to master reality by experiment and planning” ... In fantasy, a child can make up for all the defeats, sufferings, and frustrations that befall young children, and can even acquire the skills necessary to prevent their recurrence”. Meyers, Andrew and W. Edward Craighead. *Cognitive Behavior Therapy with Children*. Plenum Press. New York. 1984.

environment. During the pre-operational period of cognitive development, the child mainly uses his/her egocentric thinking: he/she evaluates everything that happens in accordance with his/ her individual life experience. Therefore, it is reasonable to claim that the thinking process of the child during this stage of cognitive development is mostly intuitive. It is precisely at this period of cognitive development, children are more likely to engage in pretend play. At moments of frustration and distress, Matilda's telekinetic "abilities" become only symbolic manifestations of her own desires, unconstrained by logic or reality. Lev Vygotsky's theory of the importance of make-believe play analyzed by Laura E. Berk in "Vygotsky's Theory: The Importance of Make-Believe Play" can be applied to explain the reason why exactly Matilda's "abilities" are active only at the moments of her frustration, anger and fear:

Vygotsky concluded that play has two critical features that, when combined, describe its uniqueness and shed light on its role in development. First, all representational play *creates an imaginary situation* that permits the child to grapple with unrealizable desires. Vygotsky pointed out that fantasy play first appears at a time when children must learn to postpone gratification of impulses and accept the fact that certain desires will remain unsatisfied. (Berk 31)

Berk highlights the make-believe play as one of the essential activities of the child during the preschool years and middle childhood that is present alongside with the: "...social experience and language as vital forces in cognitive development" (Berk 30-31). Fantasy does not only play a role in the cognitive development, but is a "...leading factor in development" (Berk 30-31).

The most reasonable and acceptable explanation for Matilda's telekinetic "abilities" is the newt and the weight of the glass that is full of water, which splashes from side to side due to the newt's actions, causing the glass to fall. Matilda, taking into account her age and other external circumstances, makes use of the glass of water as a prop. Matilda's belief in her telekinetic "abilities" serves as a coping mechanism for her psychologically traumatic reality. It is possible to assume that Matilda uses negative emotions to fuel her imagination. Her primary feelings and emotions, such as anger anxiety, isolation, disapproval, and powerlessness, are transformed into "abilities" - symbolic expressions of her feelings. Thus, unpleasant emotions

eventually give her a sense of supremacy¹⁰¹. Along with this, her telekinetic “abilities” become an opportunity to repress Matilda’s traumatic experiences.

When Matilda explains to Miss Honey that she has “forced” the glass of water to tip off with her gaze, Miss Honey validates her by remaining attentive. She instantly recognizes Matilda’s confidence in the truth of her experience and the lack of her intention to lie about her telekinetic “abilities”: “She did not think Matilda was meaning to tell a lie. It was more likely that she was simply allowing her vivid imagination to run away with her” (167). Since this is Matilda’s first attempt to share such a “secret” with someone, and Miss Honey has already seen her parents and knows that it is certain that they will not understand the nature of Matilda’s “abilities”, Miss Honey refrains from discrediting Matilda’s experience directly, and chooses to cope with the circumstance in a way that is as hidden from Matilda as possible in terms of her suggestion in how “...often small children have flights of fancy like this” (168). Miss Honey asks her to tip the glass off again, and Matilda does not even doubt her “abilities” when she agrees:

Now she concentrated the whole of her mind and her brain and her will up into her eyes and once again but much more quickly than before she felt the electricity gathering and the power was beginning to surge and the hotness was coming into the eyeballs, and then millions of tiny invisible arms with hands on them were shooting out toward the glass, and without making any sound at all she kept on shouting inside her head for the glass to go over. She saw it wobble, then it tilted, then it toppled right over and fell with a tinkle on to the table-top not twelve inches from Miss Honey’s folded arms. (169)

The moment the glass tips over and leaves Miss Honey shocked can be interpreted as Miss Honey’s implicit push of the glass. The noted distance between the glass and her hands implies an attempt by Miss Honey to support Matilda and prevent her from feeling helpless and unable to change her reality without the help of others.

¹⁰¹ Matilda’s sense of power is derived from her emotional response to injustice. Thus, feeling a moral obligation to act against the injustice she faces, she initially uses her intellect and creativity to “teach her father a lesson”, and later, when she feels oppressed and powerless as she enters Crunchem Hall and meets Miss Trunchbull, she uses her “abilities” as an element of power, control, and resistance to oppression. These “abilities” are, in other words, fueled by her negative emotions that Matilda uses for her benefit.

In accordance with Paul L Harris' account of imaginative engagement in *The Work of Imagination. Understanding Children's Worlds*, adults can:

...drive their emotional system by an act of the imagination. If they are presented with a description of an emotionally charged situation, and they imagine experiencing that situation, presumably in the full knowledge that what is being described is not actually taking place, some of the standard physiological accompaniments to emotion, such as an increase in heart rate or changes in skin conductance, can be detected. (Harris 71)

In such context, one can assume that Miss Honey unintentionally pushes the glass in order to increase Matilda's belief in her telekinetic "abilities". Miss Honey's actions are therefore understood as an attempt to safeguard Matilda's fragile psyche¹⁰². Thus, this interpretation of the glass that is tipped off, Miss Honey's shock is part of her strategy to support Matilda, her "therapeutic lie" and the sign of her ability to drive her emotional system by an act of the imagination. She assists Matilda with her realistic imitation of shock since she can relate to her psychological state, and she attempts to help her get through a difficult time in her life.

Whenever Matilda finds herself alone at home after the first "miracle", she "trains" and "improves" her telekinetic "abilities" with the help of her father's cigar. In her opinion, this "practice" is required to help Miss Honey:

In the end it all depended upon her being able to do one very special thing with her eye-power. She knew she wouldn't manage it right away, but she felt confident that with a great deal of practice and effort, she would succeed in the end. The cigar was essential. It was perhaps a bit thicker than she would have like, but the weight was about right. (205)

This time, it is not a glass of water that becomes her prop with which she tries to exercise, but her father's cigar, the symbolic meaning of which is masculinity, power and authority. In Matilda's case, the cigar that she secretly takes from her father's drawer is a symbol of her Mr Wormwood's authority, a symbol of his presence in the

¹⁰² "...[W]hen adults process an imagined event, they work out its emotional implications, and more specifically, they work out its emotional implications from the point of view of the protagonist who is currently in focus". Harris, Paul L. *The Work of the Imagination. Understanding Children's Worlds*. Oxford, Blackwell Publishers, 2000, p. 67.

house, and therefore a symbol of what is forbidden and inaccessible to Matilda. This storage in a separate box in the drawer is metaphorically interpreted as her father's power in the house, to which only he has access.

Matilda's symbolic thinking, a critical component of the pre-operational stage of cognitive development, is demonstrated when she gives a "role" to her father's cigar and transforms it into an instrument for practicing her telekinetic "abilities". The cigar gains an entirely new significance, beyond its regular purpose of use: "It would be fine for practicing with" (205) is the only thought that Matilda has in her mind when she looks at the cigar. Matilda's following step after "making" the cigar drop on the floor is her attempt to lift the cigar. Her attempt to do so demonstrates another aspect of the pre-operational stage of cognitive development: animism¹⁰³. Matilda grants a live feature to an inanimate object which it is not capable of: "But if I have the power to *push*, then I also have the power to *lift*? It is *vital* I learn how to lift it. I *must* learn how to lift it right up into the air and keep it there" (207). Matilda's impulse to lift the cigar is an attempt to take over her father's dominance and authority. It is also her desire to compensate for her sense of powerlessness and regain control of her life, since "...counterfactual thinking can take the form of wishful feeling. Once set in motion, it offers a way to liquidate – at least in the imagination – the unpleasantness of reality" (Harris 139).

Matilda's egocentrism is another characteristic of the pre-operational stage of cognitive development. Her telekinetic desires become the center¹⁰⁴ of all that exists around her as she "practices" her telekinetic "abilities". Her imaginary game helps her handle the reality, yet it fails to do so to full extent:

With a colossal effort, she managed to hold it there for about ten seconds. Then it fell back again.....For the next hour, Matilda kept practicing, and in the end

¹⁰³ During the pre-operational stage of cognitive development which lasts from 2-7 years old, children tend to attribute human feelings, physical abilities or thoughts to inanimate objects. This phenomenon is known in science as animism.

¹⁰⁴ Centration is: "... [T]he propensity to focus on just one or a small portion of an event's or an object's dimensions. This phrase was introduced by Jean Piaget to describe children's ability to pay close attention to just one important aspect of a problem, situation, object, etc., while ignoring other, equally important aspects. The second stage of cognitive development, known as the preoperational stage, is when centration typically emerges (encompassing the kids between ages two and seven)". Kanwal, Wajiha et al. Development of skills at the preoperational stage; A comparative study on Cognitive development of Urban and rural children. *Journal of Early Childhood Care and Education*. vol. 7, no. 1, 2023. p. 18.

she had managed, by the sheer power of her eyes, to lift the whole cigar clear off the table about six inches into the air and hold it there for about a minute. Then suddenly, she was so exhausted she fell back on the bed and went to sleep. (p 208)

This ignorance of gravity indicates the distinction between reality and Matilda's fantasies. The weight of the cigar, which initially disturbs Matilda, is her reaction to understanding she cannot control reality in the manner that she desires.

Given that the pre-operational stage of cognitive development lasts from 2-7 years of age, and Matilda is already slightly over five years old, it is suitable to assume that it is at this point that Matilda begins to understand the fundamental physical laws and her inability to rebel against them. The recognition that her telekinetic "abilities" are bounded in their capacity marks a significant turning point in her cognitive development and demonstrates her reliance on imagination as a coping mechanism with her reality¹⁰⁵. Feeling impotent, she begins to "practice" her "abilities" with an increased frequency:

From then on, every day after school, Matilda shut herself in her room and practiced with the cigar. And soon it all began to come together in the most wonderful way. Six days later, by the following Wednesday evening, she was able not only to lift the cigar up into the air but also to move it around exactly as she wished. It was beautiful. 'I can do it!' she cried. 'I can really do it! I can pick the cigar up just with my eye-power and push it and pull it in the air any way I want!' (209)

Matilda's constant attempts to suppress her reality through her desires become an attempt to cope with her sense of powerlessness. Matilda strives to blur the distinction between fantasy and reality through her imaginative activity¹⁰⁶. However,

¹⁰⁵ "...[C]hildren can sometimes overcome their fear by creative redeployment of their imagination.....[C]hildren's fantasy life is not always tagged in a clear and unequivocal fashion as mere fantasy: the possibilities that have been conjured up begin to be treated as emotionally charged actualities". For further explanation of the argument see Harris, Paul L. *The Work of the Imagination. Understanding Children's Worlds*. Oxford, Blackwell Publishers, 2000, p. 59.

¹⁰⁶ "Children who participated in the fantasy play condition...were much better able to deal with causative relationships as well as being better at interpreting stories. They were also better at distinguishing fantasy from reality, which answers critics who might feel too much fantasy would blur the fantasy/reality distinction". Matilda, as a creative child who reads a lot, is able to distinguish her fantasy world from reality, but still tries to blur the distinction that she sees since only in her alternative

her dissatisfaction with being incapable of controlling reality in the way she desires has a beneficial impact: she begins to seek more plausible ways to assert herself, which strengthens her motivation and encourages her cognitive development. She does not entirely renounce her “abilities” since these “abilities” continue to serve her as her coping mechanism. Her coping mechanism can be explained by the fact that Matilda’s “abilities” fade away at exactly the period of her life when Matilda’s social environment becomes safer for her. Thus, although the tendency to fantasize is one of the characteristics of cognitive development, Matilda’s “abilities”, that later fade away due to the emergence of a favorable environment, indicate that they are, to a greater extent, a form of her psychological compensation.

Nevertheless, Matilda acknowledges her limitations more realistically and turns to Miss Honey for insight into her childhood:

‘The first thing is this,’ Matilda said. ‘What did Miss Trunchbull call your father when they were around the house at home?’

‘I’m sure she called him Magnus,’ Miss Honey said. ‘That was his first name.’

‘And what did your father call Miss Trunchbull?’

‘Her name is Agatha,’ Miss Honey said. ‘That’s what he would have called her.’

‘And lastly,’ Matilda said, ‘What did your father and Miss Trunchbull call *you* around his house?’

‘They called me Jenny,’ Miss Honey said.

Matilda pondered these answers very carefully. (203-204)

With Miss Honey’s assistance, Matilda develops a more practical approach to resisting the oppression of Miss Trunchbull. Matilda relies on her intelligence and creativity to identify Miss Trunchbull’s vulnerabilities just like she would before obtaining her telekinetic “abilities”. Matilda has already done this earlier, having thoroughly investigated her father’s actions and preferences before employing his vulnerabilities as the fundamental elements for her act of resistance. In the case of her

(fantasy) world she has the ability to oppose the authority. Ives, William, and Jeanne Pond. “The Arts and Cognitive Development.” *The High School Journal*, vol. 63, no. 8, 1980, p. 336.

father, it is easier for her to analyze him because they live in the same house, but in order to “teach” Miss Trunchbull a lesson, she requires a reliable, supportive figure: Miss Honey, whom Miss Trunchbull is unlikely to suspect since does not pose a threat to her authority.

Matilda fulfills her plan during the time when Miss Trunchbull’s rage and attention concentrated on her classmate. Matilda’s emotions and reaction to Miss Trunchbull’s rage, who shouts at him while: “...swinging Wilfred from side to side by his ankle” (213) are not described. It is therefore reasonable for one to assume that the inscription on the chalkboard with the first name of Miss Trunchbull is written by Matilda at the moment when her reaction to Miss Trunchbull’s violence against her classmate Wilfred is left undescribed in order to create the atmosphere of the presence of her telekinetic “abilities”¹⁰⁷. This is enough time for Matilda to write a few phrases on the chalkboard before returning to her desk unnoticed by Miss Trunchbull. It is only afterwards when Miss Trunchbull glances at the chalkboard, does she notice the inscription: “Agatha, this is Magnus. This is Magnus, Agatha” (216). Everything that appears on the chalkboard after this inscription is a product of Matilda’s imagination, since:

...children may become absorbed in that imaginary situation and its emotional implications – often, to the neglect of what might be happening in the real world. Admittedly, in going on that imaginary journey, children take with them causal knowledge based on the real world, knowledge that allows them to make sense of their make-believe encounters.....Sometimes, children mentally travel back and forth between the imagined and the real world.....children’s interpretation of what has actually happened is constantly infused by their ability to consider what might have happened or should have happened but did not. In that respect, the landscape of reality may look different after they return from an excursion into the counterfactual world. (Harris 118)

Miss Trunchbull’s reaction is explained by the presence of names on the chalkboard that are never used outside the family: the appearance of Magnus’ name

¹⁰⁷ It is important for one to keep in mind that: “[C]hildren mentally locate themselves within the narrative world and process events from the point of view of the narrative protagonist”. Therefore, for the young generation of readers, it is easy to imagine that Matilda *does* have telekinetic “abilities”. Harris, Paul L. *The Work of the Imagination. Understanding Children’s Worlds*. Oxford, Blackwell Publishers, 2000, p. 53.

awakens Miss Trunchbull's repressed memories as it reappears in a disturbing, ghostly guise. The chalkboard writing confirms her darkest fears: Magnus' spirit has returned to exact retribution and the sudden horror that she experiences at the moment of realization of it becomes the reason of her loss of her consciousness. If Miss Trunchbull is responsible for Magnus' death, then she has suppressed the memory in order to avoid the feeling of guilt. When Magnus' name appears on the chalkboard, it serves as an externalization of her hidden guilt and forces her to confront what she has been trying to forget.

Miss Honey has previously informed Matilda that her father passed away in odd circumstances, following which Miss Trunchbull gained possession of his properties. Based on this information, it is reasonable to conclude that the inscription causes Miss Trunchbull genuine anxiety, guilt, and the fear of exposure of a secret. In the case of the newt, it is already clear that Miss Trunchbull's authoritarian position is fragile, and the recurring circumstance in which she reacts in such a manner escalates her anxiety and rage: "The woman's face had turned white as snow and her mouth was opening and shutting like a halibut out of water and giving out a series of strangled gasps" (217). Thus, the writing on the board challenges her carefully created self-image, depriving her of power and exposing her vulnerability to her students. The exposure of this fear marks a collapse of ego and the mask of invulnerability breaks down, causing the regression - a return to a childhood condition of terror and panic. This childhood condition of fear and panic becomes the reason for her immediate departure. This explains why Miss Trunchbull does not appear in school the next day and subsequently vanishes from town as it is later stated.

Matilda's conditions of living change significantly following Miss Trunchbull's departure. She initially uses library books to escape reality, but as she matures and develops her connection with Miss Honey, she no longer needs her telekinetic "abilities" that she uses as a coping mechanism with her reality. Matilda's "abilities", which she believes "manifest" in emotionally draining circumstances, eventually fade away due to the welcoming environment she gradually finds herself surrounded by and her gradual understanding of the physical laws¹⁰⁸. The reduction of

¹⁰⁸As she grows up and finds herself in a welcoming environment, Matilda starts to realize that physical laws limit her telekinetic "abilities". However, according to Harris: "...[C]hildren's growing appreciation of those constraints does not mean that they restrict their horizon of possible outcomes. On the contrary, their increasing recognition that certain possibilities are excluded enables them to identify

stress and the lack of need for coping mechanisms improves her cognitive development. Her intellectual demands are finally satisfied when the school's new headmaster, Mr Tilby, moves her: "...up into the top form, where Miss Plimsol quickly discovered that this amazing child was as bright as Miss Honey had said" (223-224). Consequently, she no longer needs her "abilities" as she begins to recognize the distinction between reality and imagination¹⁰⁹. This is apparent in Matilda's conversation with Miss Honey, when she says: "I wouldn't want to go through life as a miracle-worker" (224). The "loss" of her telekinetic "abilities" symbolizes Matilda's transition to the next stage of cognitive development, in which she successfully copes with the challenges of the real world, relying on her intelligence and social skills:

This morning.....The power had gone. I think I've lost it completely.....But now things are different. You are in the top form competing against children more than twice your age and all that mental energy is being used up in class. Your brain is for the first time having to struggle and strive and keep really busy... (223-224)

The development of Matilda's "abilities" in terms of neuroplasticity involves confronting obstacles with the assistance of the brain adjusting to its surrounding environment¹¹⁰. The unfavorable home environment along with the lack of intellectual motivation and emotional support forces her to seek an alternative way of development through creating an alternative world with the help of the library books she reads. She is interested in self-development, through which her brain adapts to the conditions of deprivation from her parents and her reading contributes to the formation of her critical thinking. Matilda persistently seeks other forms of self-realization. Reading literature and using telekinetic "abilities" as a metaphor for her inner strength lead her towards the recognition of her ability to resist. Thus, Matilda indicates that not all victims of

a set of impossible outcomes". Harris, Paul L. *The Work of the Imagination. Understanding Children's Worlds*. Oxford, Blackwell Publishers, 2000, p. 161.

¹⁰⁹ "In the course of development, children's occasional references to magic yield to causal explanations, but the reverse does not occur.....[T]he range of potential instances of magic is likely to wax rather than wane as children's causal understanding grows and they grasp the range and complexity of constraints on what can ordinarily happen". Harris, Paul L. *The Work of the Imagination. Understanding Children's Worlds*. Oxford, Blackwell Publishers, 2000, p. 165.

¹¹⁰ "...[T]he skills and knowledge that inform an individual's behavioral repertoire are acquired and updated on the basis of one's experience in changing environments. This learning process, at different time scales and across different stages of development, is accompanied by lasting changes in the developing brain". Fandakova, Yana and Catherine A. Hartley. "Mechanisms of learning and plasticity in childhood and adolescence". *Developmental Cognitive Neuroscience*, vol. 42, 2020. *National Library of Medicine*.

violence fall into learned helplessness. The contribution of *Matilda* to the children's novel's motivation for change and the empowerment of the female voice is portrayed through the demonstration of how intelligence, determination, and creative thinking may help one to overcome the detrimental effects of the unfavorable environment.

Continuous stressful situations are potentially harmful to children's cognitive and emotional development and well-being, especially if they occur on a regular basis and the child lacks a solid relationship with someone able to reduce the impact of the stressor. Miss Trunchbull's uncontrollable aggression causes Matilda to experience fear and stress, which eventually leads Matilda to "develop" her telekinetic "abilities" in an attempt to achieve control over the situation. For Matilda, the person the solid relationship with whom is able to reduce the impact of the stressor is Miss Honey. Miss Honey's support has positive cognitive consequences for Matilda: it demonstrates the power of controllable positive events to moderate the impact of uncontrollable ones, which is capable of increasing motivation. Thus, Miss Honey's assistance has a positive impact¹¹¹ on Matilda's behavioral response, encouraging timely and appropriate cognitive development, in which Matilda's behavioral and psychological response to stress evolves effectively and naturally as she grows up in a more favorable environment that reduces her feeling of fear. Matilda's initial telekinetic "abilities" are her brain's ability to adjust to different situations¹¹². The loss of these "abilities" is then attributed not only to her cognitive development but also to Matilda's brain adapting¹¹³ to a more favorable environment through interactions with individuals who encourage her emotional and intellectual desires. Hence, Matilda's telekinetic

¹¹¹ "...[P]ositive social support can inhibit behavioral and physiological stress responses...[T]hese responses to a variety of stressors are reduced in the presence of a companion, and that this reduced activity is likely mediated through a variety of mechanisms including activation of the parasympathetic nervous system, activation of brain regions (e.g., ventromedial prefrontal cortex) that detect safety and that inhibit fear, and release of the neuropeptide/hormone oxytocin...[T]he neuropeptide oxytocin is released during social situations and promotes prosocial behavior by increasing social recognition and feelings of affiliation and trust". Sippel, Lauren M., et al. "How Does Social Support Enhance Resilience in the Trauma-Exposed Individual?" *Ecology and Society*, vol. 20, no. 4, 2015.

¹¹² "...The social environment may be particularly important in early adolescence when negative effects of exclusion have more widespread effects and negatively influence cognitive performance". Fandakova, Yana and Catherine A. Hartley. "Mechanisms of learning and plasticity in childhood and adolescence". Developmental Cognitive Neuroscience, vol. 42, 2020. *National Library of Medicine*.

¹¹³ "Neural plasticity in turn, plays a critical role in shaping cognitive and behavioral developmental processes across childhood and beyond". Fandakova, Yana and Catherine A. Hartley. "Mechanisms of learning and plasticity in childhood and adolescence". Developmental Cognitive Neuroscience, vol. 42, 2020. *National Library of Medicine*.

“abilities” are less a fantastical element and more a sign of her inner strength, based on brain neuroplasticity principles.

Matilda’s transformation demonstrates how intelligence, adaptability due to the neuroplasticity of the brain, positive self-esteem, and support are capable of helping one overcome oppression and achieve independence. She emphasizes an alternative model of self-sufficiency, in which intelligence, rather than physical power, is crucial. Matilda demonstrates that self-confidence is not built by conformity to norms but rather through self-esteem, intellectual development, and support.

From the perspective of Simone de Beauvoir’s assertion that one is not born, but rather becomes a woman, Matilda exemplifies Beauvoir’s key ideas about the female experience and the struggle for equality and independence. Matilda is confronted with gender stereotypes from the very beginning, whether it is her father’s claim that she’s not sufficiently intelligent for the family business, which he intends to pass down to her brother¹¹⁴, or her mother’s conviction that a woman can only achieve success through marriage instead of achieving it through education like Miss Honey. Matilda’s parents expect her to act in a “traditional” (stereotypical) manner of a female¹¹⁵, which includes obedience, compliance, and submissiveness. This perception displays the gender stereotype, according to which a woman is often defined by her social role (mother, wife) rather than her own identity. Such perception is imposed on females by the society¹¹⁶. Matilda is rejected by her parents for not

¹¹⁴ According to De Beauvoir: “...if the girls want to struggle with the boys and fight for their rights, they are reprimanded. They are doubly envious of the activities to the boys: first, because they have a spontaneous desire to display their power over the world, and, second, because they are in protest against the inferior status to which they are condemned”. Matilda is doubly envious of the “boys” activities. She is envious of their independence and ability to demonstrate their knowledge. Her attempt to demonstrate her counting abilities to her father is also her protest against her inferior status in the household, where her opinion and intellect are devalued. Mr Wormwood, by obstructing Matilda’s attempts to demonstrate her ability to analyze this inequality, only contributes to the inescapable circle described by De Beauvoir in *The Second Sex*: he prevents Matilda from developing her intellectual abilities and reinforces her sense of powerlessness. De Beauvoir, Simone. *The Second Sex*. ed. by H.M. Parshley. *Jonathan Cape*, 1953. p. 284.

¹¹⁵ “...[T]he passivity that is the essential characteristic of the ‘feminine’ woman is a trait that develops in her from the earliest years. But it is wrong to assert that a biological datum is concerned; it is in fact a destiny imposed upon her by her teachers and by society”. De Beauvoir, Simone. *The Second Sex*. ed. by H.M. Parshley. *Jonathan Cape*, 1953. p. 284.

¹¹⁶ According to De Beauvoir, women are assigned the role of an object of desire by society, and they are continuously expected to please and meet the expectations of the patriarch. This eventually results in the loss of personal autonomy and the transformation of women into “living dolls” devoid of independence. As Simone de Beauvoir observes, this creates an inescapable circle: the less a woman utilizes her freedom to explore the world and discover herself, the fewer resources and self-confidence she has, making it more difficult for her to assert herself as an independent individual. For further

complying with their gender expectations. Her mother considers her to be nothing more than a “blue stocking girl” due to her outstanding intelligence and unconventional behavior that challenges gender stereotypes. Miss Trunchbull, in relation to the interpretation of *Matilda* through the lens of gender stereotypes, is an authoritarian figure; She imposes her rules (behavior, dress code, teaching style, etc.) on schoolchildren without any consideration of their individuality, and is an archetype of patriarchal authority. Beauvoir’s claim that females frequently experience discrimination by males who limit their rights and freedom becomes apparent. Miss Honey, on the contrary, reflects the value of female solidarity¹¹⁷: she encourages Matilda to reach her full potential and supports her, echoing Beauvoir’s conviction that women should support one another in the struggle for freedom and equality.

In this approach, Matilda deconstructs gender stereotypes associated with leadership and challenges the societal norms. The image of Matilda, which undermines gender stereotypes, not only inspires the reader to fight for justice and self-affirmation, but also contributes to the further development and expansion of the female voice in children’s literature with the aim of empowerment. Dahl’s depiction of her transformation from a neglected child into a person in control of her own life holds the potential to inspire readers to fight for their rights. Her transformation becomes a symbol of female independence, shattering the stereotype of female vulnerability, silence, and passivity. The example of Matilda in Roald Dahl’s novel *Matilda* emphasizes that female empowerment is possible through education, solidarity, confidence in one’s abilities, and intellectual resistance to oppression.

explanation see De Beauvoir, Simone. *The Second Sex*. ed. by H.M. Parshley. *Jonathan Cape*, 1953. p. 285.

¹¹⁷ Solidarity is essential in creating the special bond between females that is capable of helping overcome the imposed ideals of the patriarchal society, according to De Beauvoir. It is therefore crucial for the promotion of female empowerment: “The feminine friendships that she succeeds in keeping on forming are precious to a woman.....[W]omen are confined within their general feminine lot and are bound together by a kind of immanent complicity. And what they look for first of all among themselves is the affirmation of the universe they have in common. They do not discuss opinions and general ideas, but exchange confidences and recipes; they are in league to create a kind of counter-universe, the values of which will outweigh masculine values. Collectively they find strength to shake off their chains...”.. De Beauvoir, Simone. *The Second Sex*. ed. by H.M. Parshley. *Jonathan Cape*, 1953. p. 518.

CHAPTER III

THE RISE OF THE FEMALE VOICE IN ROALD DAHL'S *ESIO TROT*

3.1 Plot outline of *Esio Trot*

Mr Hoppy is an elderly and shy man who lives alone on the top floor of an apartment complex. His life after retirement is modest and peaceful: Mr Hoppy enjoys tending flowers on his balcony and is secretly in love with his neighbor, the kind and friendly widow Mrs Silver. However, Mrs Silver's attention is focused on her pet tortoise, Alfie. Standing on their balconies, they occasionally discuss the weather, and at such moments Mr Hoppy enjoys his view whenever he looks down at Mrs Silver and she has to look up to see his face. Mr Hoppy remains hesitant to invite Mrs Silver for a cup of tea, much less to confess his feelings to her. Instead, he decides to keep his feelings for her hidden and is envious of Alfie, who receives all of Mrs Silver's affection and devotion.

During one of these small talks, Mrs Silver expresses her desire for Alfie to grow in size, and shares her concern that despite all of her efforts, her pet remains exactly the same size as before. This is an essential turning point for Mr Hoppy, who has spent the last several years yearning to become a hero in Mrs Silver's eyes and fantasizing of how to achieve such a result. Mr Hoppy concludes that the most effective way to win her deep affection is to fulfill Mrs Silver's desire. Hence, he creates a strategy to "help" Alfie "increase" in size, according to which Mrs Silver merely needs to repeat the "magic spell" he provides her with. Mr Hoppy carefully replaces Alfie with larger, store-bought tortoises over the next two weeks as Mrs Silver recites the "magic spell" to create an illusion of positive results. Mrs Silver is so pleased with the "positive outcome" of the "magic spell" of Alfie's "miraculous transformation", that she begins to see Mr Hoppy as a partner she can rely on. Eventually, Mrs Silver gives Mr Hoppy a chance, and the story concludes with their engagement.

3.2 Mr Hoppy as the Operator of the Male Gaze

Although *Esio Trot* appears to be a lighthearted love story between two neighbors, a deeper insight shows a profoundly ingrained masculine dominance dynamic. Mr Hoppy is depicted as a retired man who tends his plants and secretly loves his neighbor, Mrs Silver. Mr Hoppy's feelings are kept hidden not due to his innate modesty, but due to the foundations of gender roles set by society, which he must comply with in order to fit in. In *The Will to Change: Men, Masculinity, and Love*, bell hooks asserts that patriarchy has "...taught men that their manhood is dependent on the suppression of emotion" (hooks 27). Mr Hoppy's features challenge conventional views of masculinity: he is silent, insecure, and emotionally vulnerable (as demonstrated by his uncertainty and anxiety of revealing his feelings for Mrs Silver).

In his research of emotion as a discursively constructed feeling in *The Inward Gaze: Masculinity and Subjectivity in Modern Culture*, Peter Middleton links emotion to subjectivity and social control. Middleton asserts that emotions are fundamental to subjectivity and are culturally regulated, primarily attributed to females, since they (emotions) contradict conventional ideals of masculinity. His claim aligns with hooks' assertion concerning the dependence of masculinity on the suppression of emotions, since "...violence against men, especially boys and young men, has destroyed their ability to use emotion as a language as well as their ability to articulate their feelings" (Middleton 120). This neglect of emotions in later stages in life, as in Mr Hoppy's instance, consequences in miscommunication and emotional isolation. Hence, as a product of patriarchal conditioning in which the emotional expression is restricted, he is a man deeply immersed in solitude; he is already retired, does not go to work, has no friends, does not contact anyone except Mrs Silver, and has no social connections.

The emptiness of his apartment from the inside reflects his solitude: "The only furniture in Mr Hoppy's small living room was a table and two chairs" (27). Mr Hoppy serves as an illustration of how patriarchal social structures condition male subjectivity by discouraging emotional expressiveness and promoting emotional detachment as a masculine ideal, since "...patriarchy demands of all males that they engage in acts of psychic self-mutilation, that they kill off the emotional parts of themselves" (hooks 66). According to hooks' critique of patriarchy, such a system enforces emotional

suppression in males and is considered violent; the noncompliance with the emotional discipline equates to the loss of masculine legitimacy: “If an individual is not successful in emotionally crippling himself, he can count on patriarchal men to enact rituals of power that will assault his self-esteem” (hooks 66). Therefore, Mr Hoppy’s solitude is a consequence of internalized norms of hegemonic masculinity, the concept of which frames emotional openness as incompatible with male identity. Hence, Mr Hoppy’s isolation at an old age is not merely a personal vulnerability, but rather the consequence of a complex system constructed to suppress emotions in male individuals.

The emptiness of his apartment also demonstrates not only his inner solitude but also his social class. It is mentioned that Mr Hoppy used to be a mechanic before his retirement. From his stable but rather modest living conditions, one can assume that he belongs to the lower-middle class.

His flower-filled balcony is not only the reflection of his inner world, but a complete poetic construction in the framework of Gaston Bachelard’s *The Poetics of Space*: it is a symbolic “...corner of the world” that fosters Mr Hoppy’s imagination. The neatness of Mr Hoppy’s balcony reflects not only organization and control, but also his latent aspirations, since one’s house is one’s “corner of the world”, and “...our first universe, a real cosmos in every sense of the word”, which “...shelters day-dreaming...allows one to dream in peace” (Bachelard 4-6). Thus, Mr Hoppy fantasizes about Mrs Silver by creating a protected space for his dreams: “There were two loves in Mr Hoppy’s life. One was the flowers he grew on his balcony. They grew in pots and tubs and baskets, and in summer the little balcony became a riot of colour” (9). This illustrates how, in the model of a safe environment, his feelings can be expressed without dread about rejection. Given that his house is nearly empty inside, one can assume that Mr Hoppy spends all of his time outside, on the balcony.

However, his house remains empty, which mirrors his emotional isolation; as a consequence, he attempts to fabricate the fullness of being on the balcony – a liminal space between the private interiority and public visibility. Therefore, one can conclude that Mr Hoppy’s inner world, informed by prescribed masculine norms, is devoid of emotions, which indicates his social isolation. Bachelard emphasizes the symbolic significance of doors within one’s living space as the existential thresholds that

represent human experiences, asserting that a mere door “...can give images of hesitation, temptation, desire, security, welcome and respect” (Bachelard 222-224). In order to go out onto the balcony, Mr Hoppy needs to first open the door that leads to it (both practically and metaphorically) and step over the threshold. Mr Hoppy’s balcony serves as a transitory place, compensating for his emotional void (in the physical sense - the emptiness of his apartment). In this regard, his impulse to decorate the balcony functions as a substitute for the inner emotional void. Every year, the flowers on his balcony bloom in vivid colors, yet they serve only as a mask for his solitude as a representative of a patriarchal structure that teaches males to suppress their emotions to comply with the concept of hegemonic masculinity.

Despite his outward shyness, Mr Hoppy obtains the position of an observer in the Panopticon tower, not merely as a passive onlooker, but as the operator of the male gaze, which enables him to spy on Mrs Silver without being noticed. Mr Hoppy’s balcony is one floor higher, which permits him to overlook Mrs Silver’s balcony:

The balcony immediately below Mr Hoppy’s jutted out a bit further from the building than his own, so Mr Hoppy always had a fine view of what was going on down there.....Every morning, Mr Hoppy and Mrs Silver exchanged polite conversation, the one looking down from above, the other looking up...¹¹⁸(10)

Jeremy Betham’s model of Panopticon is a special form of power; as Betham explains the architecture of the Panopticon in *Panopticon or the Inspection House*, it “...will be applicable... without exception, to all establishments whatsoever” (Betham 5), despite the purpose of its use. It can be used, as Betham asserts, for the purposes of “...perpetual prisons in the room of death...or mad-houses, or hospitals, or schools” (Betham 5). The main principle of the Panopticon is the “...centrality of the inspector’s situation, combined with the well known and most effectual contrivances for *seeing without being seen*” (Betham 12). In the historical and structural context, the role of the “inspector” is assigned to a male, the gaze of whom is invisible yet omnipresent, which consequences in self-regulation of the subject under surveillance. The subject under surveillance in *Esio Trot* is Mrs Silver, who lives below Mr Hoppy. She is, in the scope of Betham’s Panopticon model, visible and unaware that she is constantly being watched. Mr Hoppy’s balcony, which is in the light of Bachelard’s *The Poetics*

¹¹⁸ The illustration can be found in the appendix.

of Space, a liminal space between the public and private, functions as a tool for Mr Hoppy to ensure Mrs Silver's obedience and conformity through the internalization of the constant male gaze.

It is such architecture of the balconies that places him in the role of an observer of the Panopticon, which is described by Michel Foucault in "Panopticism" from 'Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison' as an:

...enclosed, segmented space, observed at every point, in which the individuals are inserted in a fixed place, in which the slightest movements are supervised, in which all events are recorded, in which an uninterrupted work of writing links the centre and periphery, in which power is exercised without division, according to a continuous hierarchical figure, in which each individual is constantly located, examined and distributed among the living beings, the sick and the dead - all this constitutes a compact model of the disciplinary mechanism. (Foucault 3)

Hence, the Panopticon is a model of total surveillance in which the subject – Mrs Silver, never knows whether she is being watched at a particular moment, and therefore submits herself. The idea of the Panopticon of Foucault comes from Bentham's explanation circular prison, in which the warden observes the prisoners while remaining invisible to them. Given that Mr Hoppy, as previously stated, is already retired and has no acquaintances or other social interactions, he has the ability to observe almost all of Mrs Silver's actions from his balcony at any time he wishes to do so. He knows when she comes out to the balcony to feed her tortoise Alfie; he knows when she leaves for work and at what time exactly she returns. When viewed through the lens of panopticism, such continuous observation of Mrs Silver enables him to manipulate her emotions in the future. Mr Hoppy solely builds an artificial setting in which she becomes complicit in her own subjugation. When Mrs Silver follows his instruction of how to "help" Alfie grow in size and later allows him to enter her apartment, it is a metaphor for her "corporeal" entity, which is equated to the private sphere that remains in the economy of patriarchal ideology.

In her thesis *Panopticon and Surveillance: an ethical approach to social control*, Giulia Girlando argues that privacy is a condition which:

...can assume three main functions: first of all, privacy can safeguard freedom of action without being affected by external provocations nor being subjected to constraints; in this case, privacy is equal to the condition according to which an individual can carry out his or her own autonomy, that is, the ability to decide for one's self. (Girlando 28-29)

When Mrs Silver allows Mr Hoppy to enter her apartment, it marks the intrusion into her private space. Through the lens Girlando's theory of privacy, Mrs Silver's privacy no longer protects her autonomy. On the contrary, by letting Mr Hoppy enter her private sphere, Mrs Silver "invites" the male gaze and its control. Thus, in such context, Mr Hoppy's access to Mrs Silver's apartment, while not described in detail, allows him to calculate the probability of being detected if Mrs Silver returns home early one day without him knowing. It should be highlighted that it is not she who first invites him into her apartment, but Mr Hoppy who asks to be allowed in: "Mrs Silver.....Do you think I could pop down to your balcony and hold Alfie myself?" (50). One may conclude that Mr Hoppy acts with a particular agenda in this context that is very much in line with the prescriptions of masculinity he has been indoctrinated with. With this information, Mr Hoppy can resort to an even more discreet approach to perform his "magic". Thus, Mr Hoppy embodies the central features of the panopticon model: the invisibility of the observer, which, in his case, is the most crucial condition, and the continuity of surveillance.

Mr Hoppy anticipates the opportune moment to assert control over Mrs Silver in accordance with the concept of masculinity established by the patriarchal structure where men are "...socialized to believe that without the capacity to dominate they cannot be real men" and where "...domination is always power, but never about love" (hooks 57). When Mrs Silver expresses her wish for her pet tortoise, Alfie, to grow in size, and shares her concern that despite all of her efforts, her pet remains exactly the same size as before, he offers her assistance, therefore reinforcing the gendered expectation where the male provides the solution whereas the female expresses dependence on the male. In his research about the conventional idea of masculinity and dominance in "Masculine Domination Revisited", Pierre Bourdeau uses the example of the women and men of Kabylia for overt demonstration of these concepts that have remained unchanged for centuries. Bourdeau claims that the only word the women of Kabylia are allowed to say in public is "I do not know", which is the

“...antithesis to virile speech, which is decisive, assertive as well as thoughtful and measured” (Bourdieu 196). As the women of Kabylia in Bourdieu’s “Masculine Domination Revisited”, Mrs Silver complains that she does not know what else to do to make Alfie grow, and it is at this moment that Mr Hoppy immediately reacts and decides to demonstrate his masculinity in an alternative way. He aims to attain Mrs Silver’s affection through inventiveness rather than overt assertiveness. Mr Hoppy is not physically dominant, although he aspires to attain her devotion through the physical force and heroism inherent in conventional ideals of dominant masculinity: “...Oh, if only, he kept telling himself, if only he could do something tremendous like saving her life or rescuing her from a gang of armed thugs, if only he could perform some great feat that would make him a hero in her eyes” (12). His repeated attempts to look “manly” reveal that gender performativity is constructed culturally and sustained through repeated gestures and behaviors. Hence, Mr Hoppy’s aspirations are informed by repeated and learned performances. However, his initial attempts to give the impression of being assertive and confident through demonstration of physical power are eventually never performed due to his lack of confidence and courage.

Instead of physical force, Mr Hoppy employs the so-called symbolic dominance that he is allowed to have as a male, which is an alternative form of domination: his tactics rely on calculated patience, strategic thinking, and subtle manipulation. This symbolic dominance enables him to construct an illusion of benignity. Mr Hoppy’s apparent timidity and seemingly supportive behavior towards Mrs Silver is, in reality, his latent aspiration to control others. Therefore, his behavior is part of larger societal scripts that incorporate certain gender and power dynamics. Ultimately, he assumes the role of the active agent through strategizing and orchestrating the outcomes. Mrs Silver’s affection is the societal “reward” that Mr Hoppy seeks. By creating the illusion of caring as a method of acquiring trust and pursuing his objective, Mr Hoppy uses instrumentalized care as a mechanism of control, which is, in accordance with hooks, the consequence of the patriarchal structure ideology, where patriarchy “...encourages men to approach relationships as arenas where they must exert power and dominate, rather than as spaces of mutual nurturing” (hooks 54). His method constructs a reality in which Mrs Silver’s efforts are perceived as effective. Thus, Mr Hoppy does not merely express his personal identity, but the participation in broader cultural structure that rewards conformity and

marginalizes deviation. In the absence of physical force, his tactics appear natural. Mrs Silver's intellect, emotional complexity, and personal agency are disregarded by Mr Hoppy due to his lack of interest in their acknowledgement. His ignorance is reinforced by patriarchal expectations and male narratives that marginalize the female experience. Hence, Mr Hoppy imposes on Mrs Silver the image of a female that conforms to conventional gender expectations.

Cynthia Wolff in "A Mirror for Men: Stereotypes of Women in Literature" analyzes the role of a sufferer in the literary practice and asserts that the role of the sufferer is primarily given to those who are dependent. Wolff asserts that in most occasions, the dependent sufferer is "...a woman or a child", and that in most occasions the sufferers are eventually "...prized for their vulnerability" (Wolff 210). This act of female submission becomes not only normalized but also celebrated as it is evident through Mr Hoppy's emotional response to Mrs Silver's vow; her subjugation is idealized. Since children's literature is considered a mirror of the social structure, the vow of Mrs Silver and Mr Hoppy's reaction to it embody the idealization of female subjugation. This subjugation is consequently "rewarded".

Mrs Silver is not perceived as an autonomous individual by Mr Hoppy, but an objectified figure that will affirm Mr Hoppy's ego through admiration and exaltation, which will reinforce his sense of masculinity. This is exactly what she does when Mr Hoppy's strategy to replace Alfie with store-bought tortoises creates the illusion of a miracle: "You're a miracle man, you are indeed!.....You really are the most wonderful man I've ever met! You can do anything!" (50-57). Her immediate consent is not motivated by sentimental attachment to Mr Hoppy, but rather by a calculated compensation for his assistance in Alfie's "growth". Mr Hoppy's satisfaction originates not so much from having gained the object of his affection as from the fact that, in accordance with the patriarchal ideology of conquering, he has done it through symbolic dominance and is consequently rewarded for performing his "masculinity".

This performance, however, is connected with his emotional response to Mrs Silver's care towards Alfie. Her devotion to her tortoise and the daily ritual of feeding Alfie and talking to him makes Mr Hoppy frequently jealous:

Every day, when Mr Hoppy looked over his balcony and saw Mrs Silver whispering endearments to Alfie and stroking his shell, he felt absurdly jealous.

He wouldn't even have minded becoming a tortoise himself if it meant Mrs Silver stroking his shell each morning and whispering endearments to him. (12)

Mr Hoppy is not jealous of Mrs Silver's care for Alfie but rather of the way in which Alfie receives this care – effortlessly and without control. His strategy of replacing Alfie with the store-bought tortoises serves as his attempt to usurp the meaning of care and the emotional investment of Mrs Silver that is disregarded by the patriarchal ideology. The name Alfie phonetically echoes the word "Alpha", which traditionally implies dominance and leadership. Hence, the structure of the narrative indicates that Mr Hoppy's strategy to replace Alfie with store-bought tortoises takes the form of symbolic castration; Mr Hoppy attempts to eliminate Alfie and insert himself into the privileged position. Thus, when Mr Hoppy replaces Alfie with other tortoises, the concept of care is transformed into a form of manipulation, and Mr Hoppy serves as part of the structure of the masculine narrative that attempts to marginalize the female's emotional autonomy. He asserts that the "miracle" of Alfie's "growth" is not possible without a special spell in "...tortoise language" (24) which he writes down and gives to Mrs Silver taking her promise that she will "...whisper these words to him three times a day, morning, noon and night" (25). His strategy of creating a "tortoise language", which is, in reality, a human language with words that are spelled backwards is the manifestation of discursive control.

In her research on language discourse and gender constructions – *Language and Gender*, Mary Talbot refers to Dale Spender's assertion in *Man Made Language* that English is "...a 'man's language'" (Talbot 45). In such approach, language is constructed to form the perception of reality following the patriarchal viewpoint on identity and agency. The "man's language", therefore, advances the idea of females using the "...meanings that are not their own" (Talbot 45). A related issue is displayed in *Esio Trot* once Mr Hoppy "creates" the "tortoise language" and instructs Mrs Silver to deliver it with a specific frequency. Mr Hoppy attempts to shape her perception of reality with his assertion that if Mrs Silver tries to "...get a little more expression into it" (25) when she repeats the "magic spell" which requires emotional labor, the effect will be more sufficient. Not only does he posit himself in a role of linguistic authority when he instructs Mrs Silver, but at the same time, he also controls the way the "magic spell" is to be delivered. Mrs Silver is, therefore, expected to "...whisper these words" (25), which corresponds to the assertion that when the female speaks, "...it must be in

‘a form acceptable to men’ ” (Talbot 46). Mr Hoppy, by promising Mrs Silver that if she delivers the “magic spell” properly, Alfie will be “...twice as big as now” in “...a few month’s time” (25), dictates what is “true” and therefore attempts to suppress her version of reality.

3.3 Mrs Silver’s Strategic Silence and Caregiving as Subversive Empowerment

In accordance with Joan Tronto’s prevalent argument in *Caring Democracy*, caregiving is an instinctive form of action that is politicized and imposed on females as “natural duty” since females are, according to the patriarchal ideology: “...those who are “naturally good” at caring” (Tronto 7). Tronto argues that care is not a private and “natural” duty of women, but a politically significant activity. However, within the patriarchal structure, women bear a disproportionate burden of care due to the social construct. Tronto proposes a model of democracy that takes into account the interdependence of people with an emphasis on the fair distribution of care, which deconstructs gender-divisioned labor and class hierarchies. Thus, Tronto’s main aim in *Caring Democracy* is to prove that care should not be a performative act peculiar to female subjects, but a public practice that constructs a democratic ethics of care. In the scope of the feminist approach towards the distribution of care, Mr Hoppy’s jealousy is not for the care that Alfie receives but for the position of subjectivity that Mr Hoppy is alienated from. Hence, within the ethics of care, Alfie becomes the recipient of Mrs Silver’s care, which is not private sentimentality, but a form of political and ethical engagement.

Through the lens of “a man’s language”, females have significantly limited access to authority and power, which consequences in the symbolic devaluation of their voices, as Arlie Hochschild argues in *The Managed Heart: Communication of Human Feeling*. It is precisely due to this structural limitation that Mrs Silver becomes responsible for emotional labor and caregiving since her refusal to conform will make her “...considered less “feminine” ” (Hochschild 166). Instead of performing overt resistance to patriarchal ideologies, Mrs Silver reacts by “...making defensive use” of her “...charm and relational skills” (Hochschild 164), which are defined by socially constructed expectations of femininity. She does not refuse immediately to follow Mr Hoppy’s instructions, but she highlights that she “...can’t believe it’ll work” (25). Her doubt is displayed in a rather tender form, which functions as a socially expected

female politeness. Before expressing her doubt, she tells Mr Hoppy that she will try to follow his instructions, which reassures Mr Hoppy in his dominance. From a feminist theoretical perspective, such answer can be interpreted as strategic compliance to gender constructions, since Mrs Silver's tender approach can be considered "...deep acting" that has "...unusually high "secondary gains" " (Hochschild 167). It is at this particular moment that Mrs Silver employs the socially prescribed vulnerability, uncertainty, and sensitivity as an instrument of gendered performance, which enables her to conform to patriarchal ideals of "femininity" while maintaining a strategic agency within the constrained structure. For her, acting is a "...needed art, and emotion work is the tool" (Hochschild 167).

From the feminist standpoint, Alfie, Mrs Silver's tortoise, embodies a form of subtle resistance to patriarchal ideologies with regard to its shelled exterior and defenseless body. Alfie's slow movement functions as a metaphorical form of resilience, longevity, and non-compliance. A tortoise is a very slow animal, that is sometimes, with respect to the particular sub-species it is designated with, an amphibian. Amphibians are all-spatial dwellers, thereby "survivors" who can adapt to any physical, and hence, sociocultural circumstances to reassert themselves. With regard to its shelled exterior and the defenseless body, the tortoise symbolically functions as the embodiment of home in its internal and inseparable meaning. Therefore, one can infer that Mrs Silver's wish for Alfie to grow in size is her coded expression for her striving for a broader space of warmth and connection grounded on equally distributed care and attentiveness. Thus, Mrs Silver's wish can be interpreted as her yearning to develop an emotional relationship with Mr Hoppy, since the managing of emotions is a socially constructed expectation, within the constraints of which Mrs Silver attempts to assert herself. As Hochschild argues further in *The Managed Heart: Communication of Human Feeling*, the "...general subordination of women leaves every woman with a weaker "status shield" against the displaced feelings of others" (Hochschild 163). Since females are socially subordinated and males, and are taught to suppress their emotions, it is Mrs Silver who performs the emotional labor. Hochschild asserts that women are:

...thought to manage expression and feeling not only better but more often than men do.....[W]omen do *more* emotion managing than men. And because the well-managed feeling has an outside resemblance to spontaneous feeling, it is

possible to confuse the condition of being more “easily affected by emotion” with the action of willfully managing emotion when the occasion calls for it. (Hochschild 165)

In light of Hochschild’s argument concerning emotion management, it is precisely within the social constraints imposed on Mrs Silver that she asserts her agency. Since agency is explained as the capacity of the subject to act intentionally within the specific social limits in order to assert oneself, Mrs Silver’s agency is realized through her strategic negotiation with Mr Hoppy and her subtle restructuring of emotional space while acting and speaking in accordance with gender expectations. She does “...willfully manage emotion” (Hochschild 165) when she asks Mr Hoppy for “help”. One can conclude, that it is precisely within the narrative of marginalization and disregard of emotional labor that Mrs Silver’s subjectivity emerges through ethical vulnerability and the embodied language of care. Given that a human’s identity is formed in relation to recognition, certain conventional norms to be followed, and responsibility, the ethical vulnerability of Mrs Silver in particular refers to both her survival and the limits of her autonomy. Mrs Silver, having no other social roles (wife, mother in this particular context) chooses the role of a caregiver for her tortoise Alfie as a form of transforming the imposed role into a form of subjectivity. Taking care of Alfie is an action that involves taking responsibility and physical performance (Mrs Silver feeds Alfie at a strictly defined time, changes his location in accordance with warm and hot seasons). According to Judith Butler, human identity is bound to normative regulations in accordance to which one does not exist outside these regulations but within these constraints. It is through her ethical vulnerability that Mrs Silver becomes the subject. Mrs Silver speaks through gestures, through her daily care of Alfie, which gives her agency. It is this form of silent speech that she utilizes once Mrs Silver occupies the feminized space of caregiving that is disregarded by the patriarchal structure; this is interpreted as both labor and resistant self-articulation.

By directing her care towards Alfie, she is, in the frame of patriarchal ideology, conforming to the expectations and fulfilling the imposed role of a “natural caregiver”. However, from the feminist view, given that care is attributed to females as “natural duty”, it is precisely this act of Mrs Silver’s care for Alfie that reveals the ambiguous nature of it: while conforming to the patriarchal expectations, Mrs Silver’s care functions as the performance of alternative subjectivity. Her care is of a chosen nature:

Mrs Silver's emotional investment asserts her presence and redefines the imposed gender role into a subtle resistance and subversive agency. Therefore, the symbolic meaning of the tortoise pet that Mrs Silver owns lies in the apparent passivity of Alfie that functions as a political statement; drawing on Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity, Alfie's morphology exemplifies how Mrs Silver's agency is preserved not through overt physical force, but rather through subtle resilience.

Mrs Silver's choice to take care of Alfie is intertwined with the feminist ethics of care, according to which caregiving is an affirmation of self-assertion within the social constructs that limit female expression. Hence, Mrs Silver makes the prescribed gendered expectations – caregiving through daily rituals of feeding and talking to her pet, and emotional labor – a tool of self-assertion. Alfie, therefore, becomes the mediator through which she exercises a form of power that is non-dominative, yet resilient form of agency. Mrs Silver's striving to be heard and integrated into a structure of meaningful connection grounded on emotional interdependence and mutual recognition are evident when Mr Hoppy proposes to her:

That smile of hers, so warm and friendly, suddenly gave him the courage he needed, and he said, "Mrs Silver, please will you marry me?"

"Why, Mr Hoppy!" she cried. "I didn't think you'd ever get round to asking me! Of course I'll marry you!" (58)

Although it is Mr Hoppy who takes the initiative in formulating the strategy to "help" Alfie "grow", changing the tortoises and instructing Mrs Silver on how to deliver the "magic spell", it is, from the feminist standpoint, Mrs Silver who sets the emotional dynamics of their relationship. Alfie's ultimate "growth" is the manifestation of the transformation of the social space around Mr Silver. Within the socially constructed gender expectations, Mrs Silver adopts a strategy of self-affirmation. Her response to Mr Hoppy does not express her impulsive joy as expected by the male narrative, where she is positioned in the role of the "sufferer" and her consent is the expected "reward" for assistance. On the contrary, through the lens of ethics of care, Mrs Silver's consent is an articulation of her longing to build a relationship that is grounded on emotional interdependence. Therefore, her answer "...I didn't think you'd ever get round to asking me!" (58) is interpreted as her yearning for emotional recognition that is met in the end. Such interpretation of Mrs

Silver's tortoise functions as the metaphor of the double bind of female existence within the patriarchal structure. The feminine, therefore, is multiple and fluid in its resistance to the patriarchal structure.



CONCLUSION

The sociohistorical and sociocultural transformations that Britain faced in the 1970s and 1980s under the Thatcherite system were displayed in children's literature of the era. The Thatcherite ideology introduced the new neoliberal policies, the expansion of free markets, the reduction of the income tax, and privatization, which further led to rising unemployment and growing social inequality. These political reforms also resulted in the reduction of the government's financial involvement in social welfare and education. Since one of the key elements of Thatcherism was the interest of the individual over the society, children were perceived as a "burden" due to their inability to contribute financially to the family's economic well-being. The social tension caused by economic instability, as a consequence, incited public discontent and the emergence of the Punk Movement, as well as inner-city riots. At the same time, patriarchal expectations of femininity persisted, reinforcing motherhood as the primary role for females. Such patriarchal expectations were displayed in children's literature, which is claimed to function as a mirror of the social structure, as it is analyzed in the Introduction.

Given that the socially and culturally constructed gender norms are inherent in children's literature, the function of children's literature not solely for entertainment purposes, but rather as a tool for education through the implementation of socio-cultural values and norms has been analyzed in the Introduction. These particular cultural values and social norms conveyed through children's literature depend on the country the children's literature is produced in. As a consequence, young readers are subject to specific social norms that help them develop their identities and integrate into society with the knowledge of prescribed behavioral norms and social conformity. As it is explored in the Introduction with the examples of well-known tales (*Snow White*, *The Sleeping Beauty*, *Cinderella*), femininity has been defined by passivity, suppression of the female voice, and conformity to patriarchal ideologies, whereas masculinity has been defined by dominance, legitimacy, control, and authority. Such gender performative norms sustain patriarchy by disciplining the limited construction of femininity into socially accepted norms, which "naturalizes" it. Such gender performativity roles of passive femininity in need of male intervention and masculine male characters depicted as saviors and defenders, in turn, highlight the persistence of

gender stereotypes that are present in children's literature and limit the image of the identity of both male and female individuals.

Due to the mirroring of persistent traditional gender role norms, children's literature has been critically examined through a feminist standpoint concerning patriarchal "ideals" of masculinity and femininity. Roald Dahl's *Matilda* (1988) and *Esio Trot* (1990), chosen for this thesis as two examples in which these constructions are embedded, demonstrate two diverse images of the presence of female agency when analyzed through the lens of feminism. Although the chosen novel and novella highlight conventional gender roles and the suppression of the female voice both in public and social spheres, Dahl's *Matilda* and *Esio Trot* have been analyzed in this thesis through a feminist lens that makes it plausible for one to see the female protagonists who resist the patriarchal structure with a subversive narrative and empowered female agency. Drawing mostly on feminist theoretical works of Adrienne Rich, Bell Hooks, and Joan Tronto, the socially constructed gender norms present in both *Matilda* and *Esio Trot* have been challenged and re-evaluated, revealing a multifaceted layer of meanings displayed in children's literature.

Based on the theoretical framework of Judith Butler, as analyzed in the Introduction, gender is not biological, but performative; there can be no gender identity before the gendered acts, given that the acts constitute the identity itself as a consequence of continuous performance. In such approach, nobody can be a gender before performing the prescribed gendered acts, which are institutionally reinforced. Deriving from this theoretical standpoint, patriarchal structure shapes the norms of female subjectivity that are considered "legible", "acceptable", and "valuable" within the patriarchal discourse. Femininity, therefore, is shaped into a performative script within limited constraints: the female is defined as "acceptable" once the female enacts within specific limits of performative acts, such as being silent, conforming, emotionally laboring, and "naturally caregiving". In addition to this, the concept of to-be-looked-at-ness – a term first introduced by Laura Mulvey – is positioned within the concept of femininity. According to the concept of "to-be-looked-at-ness", women are perceived as visual objects for the pleasure of the male gaze. Stereotypical images of gender roles are still present in contemporary children's literature, although they are used following the transformations of cultural values and views, as a tool that demonstrates the break from the old stereotypes. In such cases, gender roles are

challenged in contemporary children's literature through critical reflection and revision for a more diverse literary space.

As it has been analyzed in Chapter II through the allegorical characters in Dahl's novel *Matilda*, the concept of "to-be-looked-at-ness" is challenged by Matilda, a child protagonist who is situated within a cultural narrative that expects passivity and conformity from females. Matilda, a five-year-old female child who is at the pre-operational stage of cognitive development, resists the socially constructed gender norms through solidarity and empathy that are essential for the empowerment of the female voice, as well as intellectual autonomy over the socially expected passivity and conformity. This chapter has explored the gradual development of Matilda's identity from the perspective of a feminist view concerning domesticity, intellectual self-determination, and female solidarity drawing mostly on *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* by Adrienne Rich, as well as gender performativity as it is examined in Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* and "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory". The analysis of female solidarity as the essential role in the development of Matilda's identity has been examined with the use of *The Second Sex* by Simone De Beauvoir.

Using the allegorical characters of Mrs Wormwood, Miss Honey, and Miss Trunchbull, Roald Dahl presents a portrait of contrasting female identities shaped by social norms and strategies for survival. These characters are Matilda's immediate surroundings and therefore play a crucial role in displaying the domestic and public environments in which patriarchal norms define gendered subjectivity. From the very beginning of the novel, Matilda is positioned as a subject whose intellectual skills are, in accordance with gender norms, viewed as "unacceptable". Mrs Wormwood's remark about her daughter being the "blue-stocking girl" reinforces the image of femininity, which, according to the constructed gender roles, should be transmitted through passivity and bodily aesthetics rather than intellectual skills. Given that all characters in *Matilda* are allegorical, Mrs Wormwood's choice to prioritize personal interests over conforming to the role of a "natural caregiver" positions her as a mother who fails to perform her socially expected duties. Consequently, Matilda remarks that her mother "does not really care" about her, which portrays Mrs Wormwood as a

dysfunctional mother since she does not deliver the expected attentiveness and emotional labor prescribed to females as “natural”.

In line with Judith Butler’s theory of gender performativity, Matilda’s insistence on intellectual autonomy functions as a non-compliance with socially prescribed norms and incites disciplinary reactions. In further analysis of Chapter II, drawing on the theories of cognitive development of Lev Vygotsky and Jean Piaget, Matilda’s “telekinetic” powers have been analyzed through the perspective of neurological theories of cognitive adaptation and plasticity, which is a psychological response to a hostile and repressive environment. Matilda’s resistance with the use of “telekinetic” power is marked by animism, one of the aspects of the pre-operational stage of cognitive development, which is explained as the tendency of children to attribute human feelings, physical abilities or thoughts to inanimate objects.

Her gradually developing solidarity with Miss Honey is grounded on mutual recognition and emotional investment that helps Matilda’s identity develop in a favorable environment as she grows up. The ultimate loss of Matilda’s “telekinetic” powers upon her transition to a nurturing and supportive environment after her parents’ departure functions as attributed not only to her cognitive development but also to Matilda’s brain adapting to a more favorable environment through interactions with individuals who encourage her emotional and intellectual needs.

Chapter III of this thesis has examined the subtle yet powerful form of resistance to patriarchal structures and prescribed female subjectivity with the use of Roald Dahl’s novella *Esio Trot*. Through the feminist lens, the dynamics of surveillance, emotional labor, symbolic dominance, and gender performativity are embedded in Dahl *Esio Trot*. Mr Hoppy, a retired old man who lives one floor above Mrs Silver, is, as a product of patriarchal conditioning in which the emotional expression is restricted, a man deeply immersed in solitude. However, his outward timidity is examined in Chapter III as an alternative form of dominance – the symbolic dominance, a concept defined by Pierre Bourdieu that refers to a subtle, often invisible form of power. This form of power operates through language, tactics that rely on calculated patience, strategic thinking, and subtle manipulation rather than through direct physical force that is prescribed to the hegemonic masculinity.

His balcony, analyzed from the perspective of Gaston Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space*, is a liminal space between the private and the public. From the inside, his apartment is nearly fully empty, which reflects a displacement of domestic warmth and therefore, his emotional isolation. Since the balcony is considered a threshold for imagination, Mr Hoppy's balcony, filled with blooming flowers, has been interpreted as the place for "daydreaming". However, Mr Hoppy, who tends his flowers every morning on his balcony, constantly operates the male gaze from it. He is, through the concept of Jeremy Bentham's and Michel Foucault's panopticism not merely as a passive onlooker, but the operator of the male gaze, which enables him to spy on Mrs Silver without being noticed. Mr Hoppy anticipates the opportune moment to assert control over Mrs Silver in accordance with the concept of masculinity established by the patriarchal structure. That is why when Mrs Silver shares her wish for her pet tortoise Alfie to grow in size, Mr Hoppy immediately offers assistance.

When analyzed through the feminist perspective, Mrs Silver's wish for Alfie to grow is her coded expression for her longing to establish a relationship that includes warmth, mutual recognition and the equal delivery of care. With the use of Arlie Hochschild's assertion in *The Managed Heart: Communication of Human Feeling* that women are expected to manage emotions more than men, and the emotional labor is disregarded by males and attributed to females as "natural duty" it is explored that Mrs Silver's emotional expressions such as gratitude and politeness in response to Mr Hoppy's assistance is performative yet subversive. Mrs Silver is performing a "deep acting" in order to gain emotional recognition, maintain social viability and assert a form of agency within the limits of gender norms. As it has been analyzed in Chapter III, Mrs Silver's emotional engagement and caregiving become her strategic compliance within the gendered expectations that she uses as an instrument to gain recognition. Her daily care of Alfie is not the manifestation of "natural caregiving", which is, in the frame of patriarchal ideology conforming to the expectations, but the performance of alternative subjectivity since it is Mrs Silver's choice to take care of her pet tortoise. This choice has been analyzed with the use of Joan Tronto's *Caring Democracy*, in which care is considered not a performative act peculiar to female subjects, but a public practice that constructs a democratic ethics of care. Viewed through the lens of feminist critique and the ethics of care, Mrs Silver's caregiving reveals the ambiguous nature of it: while conforming to the patriarchal expectations,

she is at the same time subverting them by transforming care into an act of agency and self-assertion. It has been analyzed in Chapter III therefore, that Mrs Silver's position within the narrative is not one of submission, and her consent to Mr Hoppy's proposal is not a socially expected "reward" for his assistance, but a manifestation of the empowerment of female voice within a limiting structure.

Two different images of resistance to prescribed gender norms and empowerment have been analyzed in this thesis: Matilda's vocal resistance and Mrs Silver's subtle, strategic persistence, both of which are valid and encouraging to young readers. The findings of this thesis reaffirm that children's literature serves as a mirror of social structure and is never neutral, but rather reflects the norms and values of the particular era it is written in. For future generations, the portrayals of Matilda and Mrs Silver function as a broader cultural shift that values ethical vulnerability, female solidarity, and the delivery of care.

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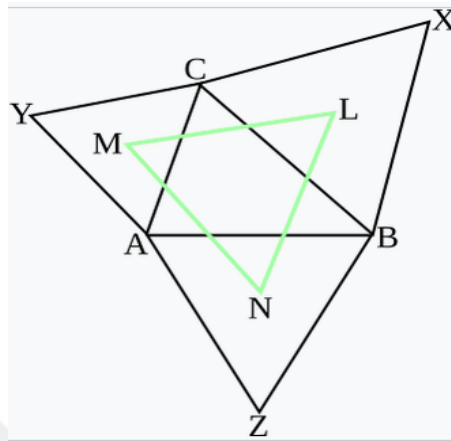
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APPENDIX



Napoleon's theorem: If the triangles  centered on L , M , N are equilateral, then so is the green triangle.



Bruce Bogtrotter eating the chocolate cake in the Assembly Hall (illustrated by Quentin Blake). *Matilda*.



The position of the balconies in *Esio Trot* (illustrated by Quentin Blake). *Esio Trot*.