

The Presentation of Female Gender in Roald Dahl's *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, *The Witches* and *Matilda*

“Children are foul and filthy!” thundered the Grand High Witch... “Children are dirty and stinky” screamed the Grand High Witch... “Children are smelling of dogs’ drrroppings” screeched the Grand High Witch.



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Table of Contents

Introduction.....	2
Chapter 1: A Theoretical Approach to Children’s Literature and Gender Issues.....	6
Chapter 2: <i>Charlie and the Chocolate Factory</i>	18
Chapter 3: <i>The Witches</i>	35
Chapter 4: <i>Matilda</i>	50
Conclusion.....	67
Works Cited.....	72

Introduction

In Donald Sturrock's *Storyteller: The Life of Roald Dahl* (2010) – a biography on Roald Dahl – somewhat surprisingly only a small part is devoted to Dahl's children's texts. It is in this brief section of the book that Sturrock raises the issue of female gender. Sturrock specifically wonders about stereotypical gender portrayal in relation to an interview Dahl gave on *The Witches*, in which Dahl remarks that he “must keep reminding you that this is a book for children and I don't give a bugger what grown-ups think about it” (535). Dahl appears to distance himself – at least in some of his children's books – from active participation in a grown-up feminist debate. However, even though Dahl claims not to consider the opinion of adults in his children's writings, the perceived didactic function of children's literature does place the author in a powerful position, one that he arguably ought not completely to ignore.

As a writer of children's fiction, Dahl is often considered rather controversial with his penchant for cruelty and his grotesque descriptions (Plomley). In his analysis of Dahl's children's books, Jonathon Culley questions the appropriateness of Dahl's works for children. He argues that Dahl often presents characters in strong binary positions, hereby “purifying the characters into archetypes” (62). By presenting his characters as, for example, either exclusively tender-hearted (Miss Honey) or exclusively monstrous (the Trunchbull) (both from *Matilda* (1988)), Dahl enables the child to “focus more clearly on the dilemmas involved” (Culley, 63). Considering this narrative technique, Culley links Dahl's writings to folklore. By placing Dahl's writings within this generic context, Culley intends to absolve Dahl of “his supposed crimes of violence and sexism” (62). In presenting Dahl's writings as works of folklore, Culley seems to interpret Dahl's provoking and sexist stereotypes as a means to criticise rather than support social and ideological hypocrisy: “By giving the villain bold sexist statements that the reader will be able to recognise from experience, Dahl successfully ridicules this kind of everyday sexism” (64). However, despite debate whether

Dahl's intentions were to ridicule or to encourage ideological hypocrisy, it is the child's perception or interpretation of Dahl's work that seems to be cause for concern. Culley remarks that Dahl's grotesque and even sadistic presentation of society provokes concerns that "the children will unconsciously pick up this underlying fascist message" (64). In his biography on Dahl, Philip Howard too remarks that "beneath Dahl's robust caricature, simple morality, and rich comic invention, critics detected an undercurrent of vengeful sadism and black misanthropy" (Howard), again expressing a concern that Dahl's satire may be inappropriate for a child audience. This concern seems to link in with both the innocence of children and therefore of children's literature and the perceived gap between adult and child; concepts that are to be discussed in the following chapter.

Despite his straightforward denial that he has to deal with grown-up opinions, Dahl does appear to show an awareness of gender issues, something he expresses through the narrator of *The Witches*. The book starts with "A Note about Witches" (7) in which Dahl attempts to side-step criticism of his portrayal of witches as always being women, simply by claiming that he does not need to justify this:

A witch is always a woman. I do not wish to speak badly about women. Most women are lovely. But the fact remains that all witches are women. There is no such thing as a male witch. On the other hand, a ghoul is always a male. So indeed is a barghest. Both are dangerous. But neither of them is half as dangerous as a real witch. (9)

A more in-depth analysis of this passage will be provided in chapter 3, but for now it seems that this passage offers a rather straightforward example of gender issues in Dahl's children's literature. The aim of this thesis is to uncover the representation of gender roles in *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (1964), *The Witches* (1983) and *Matilda* (1988) and to analyse to what extent Dahl follows or breaks gendered stereotypes. A framework of ideas about gender

as developed by Simone de Beauvoir, Judith Butler, and Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar will be drawn upon in order to gain an understanding of the existing scope of literary research on female gender issues; more specifically, I shall make use of gender studies on the social, cultural and behavioural construction of female gender (de Beauvoir and Butler) and the (repressive) stereotypes to which the female is often reduced (Gilbert and Gubar).

A historical contextualisation of Dahl's children's books places his works in an era (partly) marked by feminism. Roald Dahl was born in 1916 and passed away in 1990, meaning that he was alive during the period of second wave feminism in the 1960s and 1970s; this upswing of second-wave feminism appears a significant historical event for the analysis of female gender in Dahl's children's books. As the name indicates, second-wave feminism was not the first period during which women's rights were subject of debate in England (as well as in other countries). First-wave feminism concerned mostly the legal issues that created inequality between men and women, such as the right to vote or to attend universities. Second-wave feminism was, next to more legal reforms, also focussed on gender inequalities that were no longer represented in the law but that were lived and experienced in everyday life, such as an unequal balance in men and women staying at home or working. The second-wave feminists did manage to change some existing laws (for example, educational equality or making it illegal to fire someone who's pregnant). However, while the law remained vital (pay-scales etc.), second-wave feminism seemed more engaged with revolutionising social and cultural practices. Dahl's apparent refusal to mingle in debates about "grown-up" opinions concerning his presentation of female characters, in a period during which feminism is a prominent issue, raises the question whether he does not implicitly dismiss feminism, thereby taking a traditional stance in the male-female binary.

In her analysis of second-wave feminism in *Free to be... You and Me* (2011), Leslie Paris links the effects of second-wave feminism to children's literature. According to Paris,

from the “mid-1960s onward, children’s books were subject of new political scrutiny... feminist activists raised similar concerns about the underlying sexism of many children’s books, which, they claimed, socialized girls and boys in traditional and even repressive ways” (5) and that “as these studies generally concluded, standard sex roles in mainstream children’s literature reinforced traditional gendered stereotypes and limited young people’s aspirations” (7). In my historical contextualisation of Dahl as a writer of children’s literature, I have already explained that all three children’s texts that will be analysed in this thesis were written by Dahl either during or after the second wave feminism. In the following chapters, I shall compose a theoretical framework of both children’s literature and female gender studies and use this for an analysis of the presentation of female gender in Roald Dahl’s *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (chapter 2), *The Witches* (chapter 3) and *Matilda* (chapter 4). Following Culley’s analysis, Dahl’s at times grotesque and even sadistic narratives appear to uncover ideological hypocrisies like sexism or stereotyped gender roles, hereby drawing attention towards gender issues. However, the satirical presentation of these ideological stereotypes may present Dahl’s work as mainly humorous or entertaining, in this way overshadowing the actuality of repressing gender stereotyping as projected in the text.

Chapter 1: A Theoretical Approach to Children's Literature and Gender Studies

In order to situate my analysis of female gender in Roald Dahl's *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, *The Witches* and *Matilda*, I shall first take a closer look at the fields of children's literature, female gender studies and feminist theory. I shall start with a selection of Perry Nodelman's findings in *The Hidden Adult* (2008), through which he attempts to define the genre of children's literature. Furthermore, I shall consider a variety of scholars that have taken a closer look at the definition of children's literature, the role of the adult in children's literature and the didactic purpose of the genre. After my analysis of the genre of children's literature, I shall shift focus to gender studies, considering studies by Simone de Beauvoir, Judith Butler and Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar.

If there is something many scholars analysing the field of children's literature appear to agree upon, it is that the genre of children's literature is difficult to define. The most straight-forward definition Nodelman appears to provide us with is that children's literature can be used to define any text that is written for children (3). However, as Nodelman's extensive analysis of aspects of children's literature implies, a well-rounded definition of children's literature includes more than merely its intended audience. I too write this chapter searching for the right terms to describe what I understand to be children's literature, and why it is that Dahl's *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, *The Witches* and *Matilda* can be classified as such other than that Dahl intended them to be children's books. In his analysis of children's literature, Peter Hunt investigates whether one can "deduce what we mean by a children's book or a book for children as opposed to any other book" (2), much like Nodelman asks whether "texts so diverse" have anything in common (3). In the following analysis, I shall consider both Nodelman's and other critics' such as Hunt's and Tison Pugh's investigation of children's literature, after which I shall link this analysis to female gender studies.

Considering the definition of children's literature as a genre, Nodelman remarks that children's literature is unique in the sense that texts are classified within this genre by their intended audience, rather than their content. He argues that "it might seem surprising that texts so diverse could so easily share the same label or fit into the same category. Do they have anything in common?... texts identified as children's literature are included in this category by virtue of what the category implies, not so much about the text itself as about its intended audience" (3). Nodelman thus appears to question whether, although the intended audience may seem to be the conclusive aspect that places a text within the genre of children's literature, there is actually more to be found within these texts that connects them as a genre. Following Nodelman, I shall initially approach my analysis of Dahl's *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, *The Witches* and *Matilda* as an analysis of children's literature determined by the fact that they were written specifically for children.

Nodelman formulates five key aspects found in children's literature, of which I shall focus on the following three: 1. shadow texts 2. focalization 3. variation. Firstly, Nodelman argues that the language in children's literature is marked by a "straightforward nature of its style" and is focussed "much more on action than on detailed description" (8). Despite this action-focussed style, Nodelman argues, children's texts do contain an "unspoken complexity" which he refers to as a "shadow text" (8). The shadow text is that which the adult (possibly wrongly) assumes the child does not pick up on through the simple diction of a children's text, but which the adult reader can uncover. An example in relation to *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* would be that in the *oompa loompas*, many adult readers and literary critics may recognise a portrayal of slavery, whereas a child reader arguably merely recognises a somewhat exotic and funny worker who values cocoa-beans over money and freedom. Applied to the focus of my analysis, I shall thus look for gender presentation as can be found in the shadow texts of Dahl's children's books.

With his second characteristic, focalization, Nodelman argues that the vast majority of children's literature has a child protagonist, but a separate – most often adult – narrator. Furthermore, Nodelman argues that “the focalized child character is not seeing everything there is to see or possibly not understanding events in the various ways they might be understood. The narrator seems to see more and know more” which, according to Nodelman, creates “a second point of view” (20). This characteristic appears to comply with the first characteristic of a shadow text, creating a tension between what is arguably recognised by the child reader and what is recognised by the adult reader. This again links into my research question, and my attempt to uncover those gender issues in Dahl's children's literature that may not be apparent to a child reader, but that are certainly present. Nodelman links focalization to a didactic function of children's literature, arguing that “readers tend to identify with the characters through whose perspective they view the action” and that this is “the way they (children) are encouraged by adults to read” (18). Nodelman presents focalization as a key-aspect to recognise children's literature, arguing that “focalization through a central child character is another quality that marks a text for me as one intended for child readers” (18). However, Nodelman does make a clear distinction between focalization and narration in children's literature:

There is one particularly significant result of this, and it suggests another quality that causes me to identify a text as possibly being intended for child readers: a sense that there is a second point of view, that of the narrator. These texts all seem to offer hints that the focalized child character is not seeing everything there is to see or possibly not understanding events in the various ways they might be understood. The narrator seems to see more and know more. (20)

In summary, Nodelman argues that in children's texts, an adult often narrates the story

through a focalized (main) child character, in which the adult narrator has a more omniscient view than the focalized child does.

A third characteristic Nodelman formulates is what he calls variation. Nodelman explains that “like the structures of music, the structures of texts take shape over time, by means of sequential developments; they, too, can demonstrate variation.” (69). The idea that certain genres follow a certain structure around which they vary has been elaborately analysed in relation to the fairy tale, starting with Vladimir Propp’s *Morphology of the Folktale* (1958). The fairy tale is often considered to be the genre from which children’s literature originates, and therefore a structural analysis of Dahl’s children’s texts may appear useful. One elaborate example of variation that Nodelman provides in his work is the home-and-away pattern, with which he means that “the plots usually follow a basic pattern of movement from home to away and then back home again” (80). The plot of the story does not necessarily have this pattern of home-and-away as a central point, but this pattern – according to Nodelman – is consistently there in children’s literature. Variation, then, refers to the different plots that are built around these basic structures. For my analysis, I shall not be looking at the home-and-away pattern, but rather attempt to uncover a consistent pattern of gender portrayal in Dahl’s *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, *The Witches* and *Matilda*. I shall analyse whether the three different stories tend to follow a certain pattern in their (female) gender portrayal and I shall investigate to what extent these three stories follow stereotypical gender patterns as formulated by Judith Butler, Simone de Beauvoir and Gilbert and Gubar.

The definition of children’s literature, the concept of a hidden adult in children’s texts and the didactic function of children’s literature are discussed by many other scholars besides Nodelman. In his analysis of theoretical development in studies of children’s literature, David Rudd argues that “children’s fiction is innocent and innocuous only in a very particular way, presenting us with a microcosm of social relations, beliefs, and values” (226). These

“microcosms” arguably link into the didactic function I shall discuss in a following section. However, the question whether the genre can or cannot be presented as innocent and innocuous adds a new dynamic to my following analysis of Dahl’s children’s book, if one links gender portrayal to the socialisation of the child reader through repressive or stereotypical gender roles. In his analysis of children’s literature, Tison Pugh argues that “baseline definition of children’s literature, which are necessarily over-simplistic given the confused contours of the field, typically run along the lines of literature written primarily for children’s consumption and featuring children (or perhaps talking animals or otherwise marvellous beings) as the narratives’ protagonists” (2). Finally, in their introduction to *The Oxford Handbook of Children’s Literature*, Julia Mickenberg and Lynne Vallone link into both the innocence of children’s literature and the gap between the adult and the child, arguing that “the very category of children’s literature comes not simply from the recognition that children are cognitively less developed than adults, not fully literate, and less experienced – and therefore in need of simpler materials that will be comprehensible and relevant to them – but also from the belief that certain material is inappropriate for the young” (8). Nodelman too recognises this state of innocence, arguing that “childhood cannot be defined because definition is an act of logic and reason, and childhood is presumably the antithesis of logic and reason – a time of innocence, the glory of which is exactly its irrationality, the lack of knowledge and understanding that presumably offers insight into a greater wisdom” (147). Therefore, in addition to Nodelman’s analysis of shadow texts, focalization and the hidden adult, I shall focus my analysis of Dahl’s children’s books on the apparent innocence of the genre with a realisation that the only conclusive element Nodelman, Pugh and various other critics attribute to the genre is its intended child-audience.

As mentioned before, Mickenberg and Vallone present the inappropriateness of certain material for a child reader as a key-characteristic of children’s literature. It is, however,

mostly the adult author (who in turn is presumably shaped by the dominant ideology of his or her society) who decides what is appropriate and what is not. The gap between the child and the adult – and the problem this gap poses – is recognised by various scholars. Peter Hunt again – like Nodelman – recognises this problem in the adult-child relationship in children's literature, posing how “adult and child readers make meanings from – understand – a text written for children” (2) and “how power is exercised over those meanings” (2) as a central conflict in children's literature. Hunt thus appears to argue that the difficulty in the child-adult relationship is that the adult has developed his or herself to such an extent since childhood that it is highly unlikely that he or she will remember an actual child's perspective. This notion of power that comes with children's literature applies to the didactic function of the genre, as I shall discuss in the next section. Similar to Nodelman and Hunt, Jill May – in her analysis of children's literature – argues that many critics have “suggested that childlike perceptions cannot be articulated because the child is too naive, too unschooled in personal response theory” (84), distinguishing between the child and the adult. May seems to imply that the (hidden) adult is always present in children's literature for the mere reason that the adult cannot become a child again and hereby write from a child-like perspective. Considering the gap between child and adult, Tison Pugh even claims that children's literature is not concerned with the actual child, but rather with a constructed child, arguing that “there is no child behind the category of children's fiction than the one which the category itself sets in place” (2). Children's literature, then, does not provide its readers an insight in the concept of childhood as children themselves experience childhood, but rather in what adults perceive childhood to be. The adult, according to Pugh, constructs a child, creating a gap between how adults perceive childhood to be and how the child (reader) actually experiences this.

Finally, I shall consider the didactic purpose of children's literature. In her analysis of the position of girls in children's literature, Kimberley Reynolds argues that the recognition of

children's literature as an autonomous genre can "largely be viewed as originating in Britain in the 1880s" (xv) but that the didactic purpose, or "the relationship between the recognition of the child as a potential consumer and the education policies" (2), came to be known in the second half of the last century. With education policies, Reynolds refers to her interpretation that through reading, children "feed their image of themselves and colour their relationship with the world" (153) and that while reading, this child is "acquiring discourses which enable thought about the self" (39). Considering the focus of my analysis, the presentation of gender in Dahl's children's books, the didactic message I am interested in is that of gender roles. In their analysis of gender role stereotyping in children's literature, Carole Kortenhaus and Jack Demarest argue that "the gender identity of most children is shaped by the universally shared beliefs about gender roles that are held by their society. These shared beliefs often take the form of oversimplified gender role stereotypes" (220). However, it is exactly these stereotypes that the feminist movement – like Paris argues – intends to overthrow, since they are believed to socialise the child-reader in a repressive way. Therefore, in order to analyse the gender roles Dahls imposes on his child readers, I shall link this perceived didactic purpose of children's literature to gender studies as investigated in the remainder of this chapter.

A foundational scholar of feminist theory is Simone de Beauvoir. In *The Second Sex* (1949), de Beauvoir presents the position of the female as supposing to differ from, but not to be equal to, the man; to be by definition subordinate and secondary; to be another order connected to the normative and central one of masculinity. In de Beauvoir's analysis, certain arguments comply with Butler as well as with Gilbert and Gubar, who wrote some time after de Beauvoir. Firstly, de Beauvoir argues that "the human-being is not anything...he is to be measured by his acts" (1269). This links in with Butler's interpretation (to be discussed in the following passage) of gender as a performative construction, rather than a physical feature.

Simone de Beauvoir presents “the myth of the woman” (1265). With this myth, de Beauvoir argues that in literature, the male is considered to be the standard human being and “the woman is other than the man” (1265). The female, according to de Beauvoir, becomes female by following culturally defined patterns of behaviour. Consequently, “it is very difficult for women to accept at the same time their status as autonomous individuals and their womanly destiny” (1273). This dilemma arguably leads to the struggle with stereotypes central to Gilbert and Gubar’s approach. De Beauvoir recognises this obstacle in literature, arguing that “literature always fails in attempting to portray mysterious women; they can appear not only at the beginning of a novel as strange, enigmatic figures; but unless the story remains unfinished, they give up their secret in the end and they are then simply consistent and transparent persons” (1270). Considering Dahl’s children’s books, this interpretation could arguably be applied to many female characters in the works analysed in this thesis. The witches, for example, start off as awful and mysterious women whom no one ever catches, and the book ends with all English witches being discovered and destroyed, these witches no longer forming the mysterious threat they used to form. Another example can be found in *Matilda’s* Trunchbull, who starts off as a feared and brutal woman and ends up being defeated by a child who exposes her past and her sinful secrets.

In *Gender Trouble* (1990) and *Undoing Gender* (2004), Judith Butler presents gender as a cultural construction rather than a biological characteristic:

If one “is” a woman, that is surely not all one is; the term fails to be exhaustive, not because a pre-gendered “person” transcends the specific paraphernalia of its gender, but because gender is not always constituted coherently or consistently in different historical contexts, and because gender intersects with racial, class, ethnic, sexual, and regional modalities of discursively constituted identities. (3)

An analysis of female gender in Roald Dahl's children's literature would thus consider the cultural construction of femaleness within the framework of the book itself, but also within the field of children's literature and within the historical framework of the period. Following Butler's claim that gender is "not always constituted coherently or consistently" depending on the social environment and the position the female holds within this environment, my analysis of the female in Dahl's children's book will have to consider the individuals behind the female character. Because all three works are written by the same author, the cultural setting in which these characters are created are presumably consistent, which may offer a consistent perspective upon these characters. However, all female characters do live in different circumstances (family, age, occupation, etc.) and following Butler's argument, these factors should be taken into consideration too. The analysis of gender presentation in child characters may appear to be somewhat more challenging than an analysis of adult characters. Often, adult authors seem to portray children as rather flat characters, complying with the adult's stereotyped perception of what childhood ought to look like. Linking into this apparent problem, Jill May argues that "children tend to be treated as a monolithic category, untouched by race, class, gender, sexuality, disability and other identity categories" (64), touching upon the majority of characteristics Butler ascribes to construct gender.

Other than the fabrication of the constructed quality of gender, Butler also presents gender as a variable that can and will change with time, arguing that "gender is not to culture as sex is to nature; gender is also the discursive/cultural means by which sexed nature or a natural sex is produced and established, prior to culture, a politically neutral surface on which culture acts" (7). Butler thus presents a clear division between sex and gender – with sex being a physical and gender a cultural phenomenon – and links the presentation of gender to both cultural and political circumstances. Following this argument, the presentation of female gender in Roald Dahl's children's book would then be (partially) defined, or at least

influenced, by the cultural and political circumstances under which Dahl wrote. This presentation hereby appears to be influenced by the impact of second-wave feminism, be it consciously or subconsciously.

From the interpretation of gender as a cultural and political construction, Butler derives certain consequences that I consider important to address. Firstly, Butler argues that “the cultural matrix through which gender identity has become intelligible requires that certain kinds of ‘identities’ cannot ‘exist’ – that is, those in which gender does not follow from sex and those in which the practices of desire do not ‘follow’ from either sex or gender” (17). In other words, Butler argues that the distinction between two genders (male and female) simultaneously denies a hybrid of male and female gender characteristics in one person and it presents expressions of gender by someone of the opposite sex as abnormal. Therefore, if a person of a certain sex does not comply with this sex in his or her gendered behaviour, one cannot place that person in either of the gender categories. With this impossibility to label this person, his or her gender does not ‘exist’. This could be applied to the presentation of Charlie, the boy narrator in *The Witches* and Matilda, who all appear to be presented in a gender role opposite to their sex. Secondly, Butler stresses the hierarchy caused by the binary interpretation of gender:

Gender is the linguistic index of the political opposition between the sexes.

Gender is used here in the singular because indeed there are not two genders.

There is only one; the feminine, the masculine not being a gender. For the masculine is not the masculine, but the general. (28)

An analysis of female gender would with this interpretation mean that one needs to acknowledge the representation of male gender as the norm and search how female representation differs from this norm. Finally, Butler links gender issues to feminism, arguing that “feminism is about the social transformation of gender relations” (204). In order to

analyse the relation between gender and feminism, I shall now introduce two other scholars' analysis of gender and feminism.

In *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979), Gilbert and Gubar argue that the male author will attempt to “enclose her (the female writer) to extreme stereotypes (angel, monster) that drastically conflict with her own sense of her self – that is, of her subjectivity, her autonomy, her creativity” (1929). Although my analysis will focus on the works of a male author, I consider the interpretation of the female writer to be applicable – to an extent – to female characters too. Gilbert and Gubar's argument appears to link in with Shira Wolosky's argument in her feminist reading of the *Harry Potter* series, in which Wolosky argues that “masculine personality tends to be defined more in terms of denial of relation and connection whereas feminine personality comes to include a fundamental definition of self in relationship” (206). Therefore, I argue that this presentation of the female writer being reduced to stereotypes can arguably be applied to female characters too. An example of this can be found in Dahl's characters, in the presentation of witches as being exclusively female as well as in the binary portrayal of good and evil in Miss Honey and the Trunchbull in *Matilda*.

Gilbert and Gubar ask their reader how the stereotypical portrayal of the female writer influences future female writers:

If the vexed and vexing polarities of angel and monster, sweet dumb Snow
White and fierce mad Queen, are major images literary tradition offers women,
how does such imagery influence the ways in which women attempt to pen?
(1927)

In my analysis, I consider how these stereotypical portrayals of women influence not female writers, but female (and possibly male) readers; or, more specifically, female (and male) child readers. Considering children's literature's didactic function and authority to impose

ideologies upon its readers, the stereotyping of female characters will partly shape the woman that a female child reader will become. Gilbert and Gubar recognise this influence on child readers, arguing that “whether she is a passive angel or an active monster, in other words, the woman writer feels herself to be literally or figuratively crippled by the debilitating alternatives her culture offers her, and the crippling effects of her conditioning sometimes seem to ‘breed’ like sentences of death in the bloody shoes she inherits from her literary foremothers” (1936). In the following analyses of *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, *The Witches* and *Matilda*, I shall attempt to uncover stereotypical portrayals of female characters and research to what extent this stereotyping limits these characters, making them not so much an individual as a conventionalised female figure.

Chapter 2: *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*

In his biography on Roald Dahl, Howard quotes an “eminent American critic” describing *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* as “cheap, tasteless, ugly, sadistic, and for all these reasons, harmful”; all of these characteristics do not seem desirable in a work of children’s literature. *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* tells the story of a little boy named Charlie Bucket who goes from being really poor to inheriting a successful factory in less than 200 pages. Considering the presentation of gender, the book may not initially strike the reader as presenting extreme gender inequality. The two little girls in the story – Veruca Salt and Violet Beauregard – are presented as either spoiled or un-ladylike, but the two little boys besides Charlie – Augustus Gloop and Mike Teavee – are likewise presented in a way that emphasises their flaws. Following Culley’s argument (62), Dahl appears to present his naughty child characters as extreme archetypes, or perhaps caricatures, in which they appear to be defined through nothing but their bad behaviour. This representation as naughty seems to contrast with Charlie’s portrayal, who appears passively to undergo and observe the portrayed in the book until, finally, the naughty children are all dismissed and Charlie is the only child left. The rather cruel punishments Dahl subjects the naughty children to seem to be so extravagant that they become absurd or humorous, and it seems precisely through this sort of exaggerated portrayal that Dahl apparently justifies his presentation of such cruelty to a child audience. If Dahl does expose everyday hypocrisy through his satirical narratives, a close-reading of these events may provide insights into Dahl’s presentation of gender in his children’s books. The balanced division of two non-heroic girls and two non-heroic boys may imply that Dahl seemingly avoids portrayals of gender inequality. He grants each gender the right to be repellent. If Dahl does encapsulate gender inequality in *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, this would possibly only become apparent in the shadow text. Through a comparative analysis focussed on the role of gender in the five child characters, I argue that – although only slightly

and perhaps unconsciously – Dahl projects stereotypical gender norms onto his child characters. Following Gilbert and Gubar's argument that the female is always in conflict with her own self or her agency as she is often reduced to a stereotype, I argue that out of the naughty four, Veruca and Violet are presented as less autonomous and more impressionable than Augustus and Mike. Moreover, the passive presentation of Charlie seemingly positions him in more of a feminine than a masculine role.

Charlie and the Chocolate Factory is a story about a poor boy Charlie Bucket who lives with both his parents and two sets of grandparents in a house with no heating and only one bed for the four grandparents to sleep in. When Charlie's father loses the only job that brings an income into the household, times get even rougher since they now almost starve and freeze to death. However, in his home-town, a large chocolate factory is situated and the owner of this factory – Mr Willy Wonka – organises a contest with special prizes for five children who find a golden ticket in one of his chocolate bars. These five children, and of course their parents to guide them, are the only people in the entire world who will be allowed into the factory and receive a lifetime supply of sweets. Moreover, one of these five children will receive an extra special prize. The first four golden tickets are found by, in turn: a fat boy, Augustus Gloop; a spoiled girl Veruca Salt; a girl who chews gum all day Violet Beauregard; and a boy with many toy pistols who only watches TV, Mike Teavee. Charlie does not think he has any chance in finding a ticket because his parents can only afford to buy him one chocolate bar a year for his birthday. However, Charlie does find the last golden ticket in a chocolate bar he buys from money he finds on the street and he and his grandpa Joe are allowed to visit the factory. During the tour led by Willie Wonka, the other four children find themselves in trouble because of their naughty behaviour. In the end, Charlie is the only child left and then, Willie Wonka chooses Charlie to be his successor as owner of the chocolate factory.

In the following analysis, I shall mainly focus on all five child characters in *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, following Nodelman's three points in his analysis of children's literature as introduced in the previous chapter, namely shadow texts, focalization and variation. Furthermore, considering various other critics besides Perry Nodelman, the following analysis shall consider the now established understanding that children's literature is a genre classified by its intended audience, that texts within the genre are often (but sometimes wrongly) associated with innocence, that there is a gap between the adult and the child and finally that the genre serves a didactic purpose

Considering shadow texts, Nodelman argues that simple texts tend to imply "more subtle complexities than they actually say" and that "they do so by implying a more complex shadow text...one readers can access by reading the actual simple text in the context of the repertoire of previously existing knowledge about life and literature it seems to demand and invite readers to engage with" (77). Following this argument, an analysis of Dahl's children's books as presented in their specific cultural and historical context (see introduction) and within the genre may provide us with perceived gender norms children were brought up with during this period. In *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, the songs sung by the *oompa loompas* anytime a naughty child is dismissed provide an excellent cue for the story's didactic message. I shall further elaborate on this didactic message somewhat later in this chapter, since this didactic message seems to be an intrinsic and significant part of the shadow text. Although first and foremost, Dahl seems to present *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* as a novel that attempts to teach its child readers how to be a good rather than a naughty child. I shall link this consideration of the shadow text to an attempt to uncover gender presentation as found in the shadow text.

Considering focalization, Nodelman argues that "the texts are focalized through their child or childlike protagonists and thus offer a childlike view of the events described" but that

“while the focalization is childlike, the texts are not first-person narratives...they report the protagonists’ perceptions by means of third-person narrators who often report or imply perceptions at odds with those of the protagonist” (77). *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* is narrated from a third person perspective with an apparent omniscient view. According to Nodelman, then, this narration would be focalized through the child protagonist, who in this case is Charlie. Furthermore, Dahl strikingly never vocalises Charlie’s personal opinion of the other children, and the descriptions of the four other child character as for example greedy and spoiled come either from the narrator through a paratext or through the adult characters in the book. With paratext, I refer to the following announcement of the five child characters in the book, to be found right after its list of contents:

There are five children in this book:

AUGUSTUS GLOOP

A greedy boy

VERUCA SALT

A girl who is spoiled by her parents

VIOLET BEAUREGARD

A girl who chews gum all day long

MIKE TEAVEE

A boy who does nothing but watch television

And

CHARLIE BUCKET

The hero

Not only does Dahl already present the child characters as set archetypes, apparently leaving no room for individual interpretation, Dahl also hints at why these other child characters are not the heroes in the story (greed, being spoiled, bad manners and addiction), showing a didactic awareness in his work of children’s literature. Thus, Dahl already rather clearly

distinguishes between his main child character Charlie and the ‘other’ children in the story. This presentation of Charlie as the hero and the remaining four child characters as the others appears to set out the seemingly most important binary structure in the novel, that of good and naughty children. Consequently, Dahl apparently expects Charlie’s actions to be valued as heroic simply because he presents Charlie as the hero, even though the rather passive presentation of Charlie in the following story may not strike the reader as heroic (at least, not in the masculine warrior kind of way) at all.

Other than the presentation of these characters in the paratext, Dahl’s presentation of his child characters is largely defined through the way in which the adult characters (mainly Charlie’s grandparents) react to them. According to Nodelman, children’s literature is typically narrated through an adult, but focalized through a child character. Charlie appears to be presented as a rather flat character and Dahl does not seem to provide the reader with his thoughts and he does not seem to focalize Charlie through the narrator. Rather, both the adult narrator and the adult characters impose their view on childhood upon Charlie, and the reader and Charlie undergo their lessons rather passively. Trapped in his poor living circumstances with no apparent characteristics such as Mike’s love for television or Violet’s competitiveness, the presentation of Charlie seems feminine in de Beauvoir’s sense that the female “conflicts with her own sense of her self – that is, of her subjectivity, her autonomy, her creativity” (1929).

After the above mentioned paratext and an illustration including all five child characters, the *oompa loompas* and Willy Wonka, the novel starts with an introduction of Charlie and his family through the use of illustrations, and the other four child characters are introduced after they have found a golden ticket. The first descriptions of the narrator and the reactions to these children by the other characters arguably provide useful insights in the position of these children within the framework of the story and ultimately in the portrayal of

gender. Dahl presents Charlie through an illustration, rather than a description, introducing: “This is Charlie. How d’you do? And how d’you do? And how d’you do again? He is pleased to meet you” (13). This first chapter, called “Here Comes Charlie” (11), mainly describes Charlie’s living situation rather than – as set out earlier – Charlie himself as an autonomous person. It is described that “life was very uncomfortable for all of them...poor Mr Bucket, however hard he worked, was never able to make enough to buy one half of the things that so large a family needed...there wasn’t even enough money to buy proper food for them all” (15). More in theme of the book, it is then described how “only once a year, on his birthday, did Charlie Bucket ever get to taste a bit of chocolate” (16). Although the personal characteristics of Charlie appear to lack, it is described that to his grandparents, he was “the only bright thing in their lives” (19).

In his analysis of *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, Bernard Beck argues that “the five (child characters) are cunningly contrived to be four assorted upscale obnoxious brats and one poor lad, Charlie, who exemplifies all the virtues one could hope for in an angel-child” (21). Beck here seems to emphasise the presentation of the four children besides Charlie as naughty, which in turn emphasises Charlie’s presentation as the hero; or the “angel-child”. After his previous introduction, Charlie’s actions indeed present him as a polite, humble (for example, he insists on sharing his birthday chocolate and he never complains about his living circumstances) and caring (he refuses to let his parents or grandparents give him some of their food even though he is starving). In contrast, the other four children appear to be portrayed exclusively through characteristics that adults do not appreciate in children.

The first child to find a golden ticket and hereby to be introduced in the story is Augustus. Dahl’s seemingly characteristic grotesque descriptions present Augustus as “great flabby folds of fat bulged out from every part of his body, and his face was like a monstrous ball of dough with two small greedy curranty eyes peering out upon the world” (36), leaving

the child reader with the kind of rancorous impression that may concern an adult audience. Augustus' mother declares that Augustus "eats so many bars of chocolate a day that it was almost impossible for him not to find one" (36). Charlie's grandparents, who read about Augustus in the newspaper, react with both "what a revolting woman" and "what a repulsive boy" (38).

The next child to find a golden ticket and to be introduced in the story is "a small girl called Veruca Salt who lived with her rich parents in a great city far away" (39). In order to find the golden ticket, her father took all his employees off their regular duties and ordered them to unwrap chocolate bars:

"But three days went by, and we had no luck. Oh, it was terrible! My little Veruca got more and more upset each day, and every time I went home she would scream at me: 'Where is my golden ticket! I want my golden ticket!' And she would lie for hours on the floor, kicking and yelling in the most disturbing way. Well, I just hated to see my little girl feeling unhappy like that, so I vowed I would keep up the search until I'd got her what she wanted." (40-41)

When comparing Veruca's behaviour to Charlie's, the contrast appears to be rather clear. Next to Charlie's poor living circumstances, Veruca's behaviour emphasises her portrayal as the spoiled child and simultaneously confirms Charlie's presentation as modest. And again, the grandparents comment on the child's presentation:

"That's even worse than the fat boy", said Grandma Josephine. "She needs a really good spanking", said Grandma Georgina. "He spoils her", Grandpa Joe said. "And no good can ever come from spoiling a child like that, Charlie, you mark my words". (41)

Thus, similar to Augustus, the grandparents provide comments on the narrator's description of the newly introduced child, explaining or confirming the non-heroic presentation of this child character in comparison to Charlie.

The next child to be introduced in the story is Violet, of which grandma Josephine mutters "another bad lot, I'll be bound" (49), before the child is properly introduced:

And the famous girl was standing on a chair in the living room waving the Golden Ticket madly at arm's length as though she were flagging a taxi. She was talking very fast and very loudly to everyone, but it was not easy to hear all that she said because she was chewing so ferociously upon a piece of gum at the same time. (47)

When considering Gilbert and Gubar's stereotypes, the first descriptions of Violet appear to present her more as the stereotypical "active monster" than the "passive angel" (1936); rather than modesty and self-control, characteristics that are stereotypically valued or expected in women, Violet is being portrayed as wild and loud and even rude concerning the gum-chewing. Violet herself then remarks that her mother thinks that "it's not lady-like and it looks ugly to see a girl's jaws going up and down like mine do all the time , but I don't agree" (48), confirming the portrayal of her character as not complying with stereotypical female gender norms. Again, the grandparents comment on this newly introduced child in a rather judgemental way: "'Beastly girl', said Grandma Josephine 'Despicable!' Said Grandma Georgina. 'She'll come to a sticky end one day, chewing all that gum, you see if she doesn't'" (49).

The last child to find the golden ticket before Charlie does is Mike. However, "young Mike Teavee, the lucky winner, seemed extremely annoyed by the whole business. 'Can't you fools see I'm watching television?' he said angrily. 'I wish you wouldn't interrupt!' Mike himself had no less than eighteen toy pistols of various sizes hanging from belts around his

body” (49). Mike, who is previously introduced as “a boy who does nothing except watching television”, is now, while watching television, also portrayed as having rather violent interests judging from all the toy-pistols he is wearing. The comments provided by the adults after this newly introduced child are limited, with the grandparents merely asking “do all children behave like this nowadays – like these brats we’ve been hearing about?” (51).

Considering variation, Nodelman argues that children’s texts are “constructed as a series of variations, succeeding scenes that replicate old elements in new, increasingly different relationships” and they “share many qualities with traditional European fairy tales” (81). I consider the previously discussed introductions of the child characters to be an example of variation. All four introductions follow a pattern of the announcement of a child finding a golden ticket in the newspaper, which Charlie’s grandparents read. The children are then described through the newspaper article and the grandparents give their verdict. Another example of variation in *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* can be found in the dismissal of all four children inside the chocolate factory. There appears to be a repetitive pattern in which the child misbehaves (in a manner related to their flaws as introduced in the paratext), has an accident, disappears from the group and then the *oompa loompas* provide the remaining group (and the child reader) with a song that explains why it is that the child got into an accident. Especially these songs appear to carry an overtly – in a rather disruptive, aggressive, playful but weird way – didactic purpose, and I shall further elaborate on this matter further on in this chapter.

The notion of innocence in children’s literature is surely central to the ways such texts present gender or reinforce gender stereotypes. On the one hand, there appears to be a desire to shield the child reader from possibly harmful messages while, on the other hand, children’s books are thought to socialise the child. As Paris argues in her analysis of feminism in children’s literature, stereotypical sex roles in children’s books “reinforced traditional

gendered stereotypes and limited young people's aspirations" (7). In chapter 1, I mentioned Rudd's argument that children's literature is "only innocent in a very particular way" (226). In her analysis of children's literature, Gabrielle Owen argues that: "if childhood is understood as something entirely separate from adulthood, if the idea of the child describes someone who is naïve, unknowing, innocent, and without agency or desire, then it is this construction that renders the relation between adult and child impossible — impossible because the child is emptied so significantly of anything we might recognize as being ontologically meaningful" (260). If children are as innocent and unknowing as adults often perceive them to be (Owen), this stereotyping would arguably not be apparent to a child reader (although it might be), making it part of the shadow text. However, the existing anxiety over what children read (a persistent and very prominent debate in relation to Dahl's works) implies that children do pick up on these shadow texts and therefore the innocence of the genre is in apparent need of protection.

The gap between adult and child is a phenomenon that makes the analysis of children's literature both problematic and highly interesting. I mentioned earlier Gabrielle Owen's argument that childhood is often seen as completely separate from adulthood, hereby problematizing any research performed by adults. An analysis of the gap between adult and child in all its diversity arguably makes for a completely separate thesis. I shall therefore focus my analysis of the gap between the adult and the child merely on gender portrayal. More specifically, I shall apply it to portrayal of gender stereotyping and how this is apparent to both the child and the adult (in the shadow text).

Judith Butler and Simone de Beauvoir present gender as a culturally constructed phenomenon. Leslie Paris argues that children's texts tend to socialise girls and boys in traditional and repressive ways. Roald Dahl claims that the presentation of gender is in no way relevant in his children's books and that he "does not give a bugger what grown-ups

think about it” (535). Despite this rejection of grown-up issues, Dahl does appear to present *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* as an overtly didactic work of children’s literature, behind which I intend to expose underlying gender roles through a reading of the so-called shadow text. As discussed in relation to variation, there are two apparently recurring patterns that I link to the didactic purpose of the novel: the comments provided by the grandparents and the songs performed by the *oompa loompas*. A consistent pattern can be found in the presentation of the book’s child characters, in which the narrator presents the children and then the grandparents provide (somewhat parental) comments about the bad habits of these children which have already been implicitly introduced through the list of child characters at the beginning of the novel. Furthermore, a didactic message appears to be provided through a song by the *oompa loompas*, every time one of the children is eliminated from winning the ultimate prize. Through these songs, Dahl seems to explain the reason for the child’s unfortunate ending in the chocolate factory. To link this to the portrayal of gender inequality in the story, a comparison of the various songs that explain the children’s dismissal may prove useful.

The first child to be dismissed is Augustus. He drinks from the chocolate river although Willie Wonka tells him not to. He then falls into the river, finds himself sucked into a pipe and is taken away to the fudge room. After Augustus has disappeared from the pipe, the *oompa loompas* appear and sing an explanatory song:

“Augustus Gloop! Augustus Gloop!

The great big greedy nincompoop!

How long could we allow this beast

To gorge and guzzle, feed and feast

On everything he wanted to?

....

We boil him for a minute more,
 Until we're absolutely sure
 That all the greed and all the gall
 Is boiled away for once and all." (105)

Dahl's descriptions of Augustus as a "nincompoop" and a "beast" should arguably strike as somewhat excessive and insulting, describing a little boy whose worst known flaw is eating too much chocolate. However, by enclosing these insults in a didactic song, Dahl seemingly strengthens his archetype of the naughty child without being so gruesome (although adult supervisors may disagree) that a child reader is put off by it. The song complies with the initial presentation of Augustus as a greedy boy. The song appears to present greed as a physical characteristic, something to be "boiled away". When the dismissed children leave the factory at the end of the novel, Augustus is indeed described as being "thin as a straw" (182), implying he has been cured of his greed (in a humoristic way) through punishment.

The second child to be dismissed is Violet. She grabs a newly invented piece of gum from Willie Wonka's hand, one that gives the sensation of a complete three course dinner. Willie Wonka repeatedly warns her and tells her to stop chewing, but Violet will not listen to him. When the gum arrives at dessert, Violet turns blue and swells up like a blueberry, much like the desert she is tasting. She is rolled away to be juiced, and the *oompa loompas* appear:

"Dear friends, we surely all agree
 There's almost nothing worse to see
 Than some repulsive little bum
 Who's always chewing chewing-gum
 ...

And that is why we'll try so hard
 To save Miss Violet Beauregard
 From suffering an equal fate
 She's still quite young. It's not too late." (128-129)

Dahl again seems to rely on provoking descriptions such as “repulsive little bum” to stress the archetype of Violet as being the naughty child. Whereas Augustus is punished for being greedy, Violet is punished because her gum-chewing looks “repulsive”; nonetheless, a physical revulsion (perhaps a cruel one) seems at the back of both responses. Considering that Violet’s gum-chewing is earlier described as “un-ladylike”, the *oompa loompas*’ song appears to refer to a certain standard (chewing gum is repulsive) but also to the impressionability of children, suggesting her behaviour can still be corrected because “she’s still young”. Thus both Augustus and Violet are being punished for bad manners (eating too much and chewing too much), but it is Augustus who is cured “for once and all” through physical punishment. Violet, on the other hand, is presented as being in need to be saved, placing her in a submissive position both de Beauvoir and Gilbert and Gubar ascribe to traditionally feminine gender norms. The *oompa loompas* hereby present Augustus – after his greed is “boiled away” – as an autonomous person once again, no longer in need of a saviour, whereas Violet – who remains blue after the blueberry juice is squished out – is still presented as in need of help.

The third child to be dismissed is Veruca. Being initially presented as a spoiled little girl, Veruca indeed suffers the consequences of wanting something she cannot have. She demands her father to get her a trained squirrel and ends up being pushed into the rubbish:

“Veruca Salt, the little brute,
 Has just gone down the rubbish chute

...

But now, my dears, we think you might
 Be wondering – is it really right
 That every single bit of blame
 And all the scolding and the shame
 Should fall upon Veruca Salt?
 Is she the only one at fault?
 For though she’s spoiled, and dreadfully so
 A girl can’t spoil herself you know.
 ...
 To find out who these sinners are,
 They are (and this is very sad)
 Her loving parents, MUM and DAD.” (147-148)

Despite the again rather offensive description of Veruca as “little brute”, Dahl here appears to defend the child’s naughty behaviour, implying that although it is Veruca’s behaviour that needs to be corrected, it is not Veruca herself that should be blamed. Despite the similarity between Augustus and Veruca (both parents allow them either to eat too much or possess too much), Augustus is considered to be responsible for his own flaws whereas Veruca is portrayed as dependent upon her parents. Dahl here appears to present the female child as more impressionable, more in need of guidance and thus more dependent upon others than the male child, arguably implying stereotypical gender norms that the feminist movement intends to overthrow. I introduced earlier de Beauvoir’s argument that “it is very difficult for women to accept at the same time their status as autonomous individuals and their womanly destiny” (1273); Dahl seems to project this feminine dilemma upon Veruca. With her demand to be served anything she wants, Dahl seemingly presents Veruca as so autonomous that it becomes a bad characteristic, after which he literally throws her back to the bottom, or the subordinate

position the female is supposed to hold toward the male.

The last child to be dismissed is Mike Teavee. His flaw is initially presented as watching too much TV, and again it is this perceived flaw that causes the child's mischief. Mike transports himself through television, even though Willie Wonka tells him not to, and ends up as a tiny person that needs to be stretched back to regular height. The *oompa loompas* sing the following song:

The most important thing we've learned,

So far as children are concerned,

Is never, never, NEVER let

Them near your television set

....

THEY...USED...TO...READ! They'd

READ and READ

....

P.S. Regarding Mike Teavee,

We very much regret that we

Shall simply have to wait and see

If we can get him back his height.

But if we can't – it serves him right.” (173-174)

Similar to Augustus but different from Veruca, Mike seems to be given full responsibility for his behaviour (although I highly doubt this was actually Dahl's intention), singing that “it serves him right”, even though it is the parents that probably bought the TV and allowed him so much time in front of it. Thus, through the four different songs the *oompa loompas* sing to explain the children's dismissal, Dahl seems to make a subtle distinction between self-

responsible boys and dependent girl, arguably resonating gender stereotyping of the submissive female versus the autonomous male.

The idea that children can be formed into what adults want them to be, most obviously found in Veruca but also apparent in the skinny version of Augustus after his punishment, appears to be recognised by Willy Wonka himself. When Charlie is the only child left, he explains that the real reason he came up with the golden tickets is as follows:

“I decided to invite five children to the factory, and the one I liked best at the end of the day would be the winner!... A grown-up won't listen to me; he won't learn. He will try to do things his own way and not mine. So I have to have a child. I want a good sensible loving child, one to whom I can tell all my most precious sweet-making secrets – while I'm still alive.” (185)

Considering traditional gender roles, the choice for a male rather than a female heir for Wonka's legacy appears to project traditional gender roles. Considering the didactic purpose of children's literature, Nodelman argues that “the texts tend to work to encourage child readers to replace whatever sense they have of themselves and the meaning of their own behaviour with adult conceptions of those matters” (78). In case of Veruca and Violet, Dahl places the girl in a subordinate position, presenting Veruca as completely dependent upon her parents' didactic abilities and Violet as an impressionable yet disobedient child. Where Veruca is not given responsibility for her actions, Mike is. This is a gender difference in which girls are considered to be dependent upon others, whereas boys should be able to be their own person and take care of themselves. However, a boy can be spoilt too, just as a girl can be greedy. The question arises whether one cannot learn lessons, separating them from the gender of the actor in the tale. Perhaps one can, and analysing only five child characters will probably not provide us with an all-including conclusion. Therefore, I shall analyse two other children's books by Roald Dahl and see whether I can derive gender-related patterns in these

books, supporting, opposing or honing the findings in this chapter.

Chapter 3: *The Witches*

In response to his editor's request to "tone down *The Witches*", Dahl accordingly refused on grounds that he was "not as frightened of offending women as you are" (Howard). As already briefly mentioned in the introduction, Dahl makes a rather bold claim in the very first chapter of *The Witches*, saying that "a witch is always a woman" (9). Making such a claim without supporting it with any arguments seems to invite debate, which is exactly what I shall provide in this chapter. In her analysis of the female in Dahl's *The Witches*, Anne Bird argues that Dahl's text uncovers an "unequal balance in power between the child and the adults in the story", something signalled by the transformation of the boy into a mouse – which appears to present him as weak– and the fact that the adults are witches – which appears to present them as powerful and dangerous (121). In this chapter, I shall analyse Dahl's *The Witches*, focussing on two aspects: the narration through the child protagonist and the presentation of gender. The name of the child narrator is never mentioned in the story, which seemingly creates a mystery around his identity and simultaneously shifts the focus of the story to action rather than the development of the child protagonist. Because the function of the child as narrator seems to present the child as a rather anonymous character, an analysis of gender in this protagonist may prove to be problematic; portrayals of gender stereotyping appear to be more obvious in the presentation of the witches.

Considering the analysis of gender, I shall investigate the position of the boy protagonist in the story, the presentation of the monstrous and the human and the underlying gender stereotyping as apparent in the shadow text. Despite Dahl's apparent insistence that witches are always women, Bird claims that one cannot make a connection between stereotypical gender presentation and the witches always being female. Rather it is more vital that the witches here are always adults. Bird argues that "the issue of female subjectivity is not raised in Dahl's text; evil is not gender specific but is located within the 'all-powerful'

threatening adult figure” (121). In the following analysis, I shall consider this sense of power in relation to Nodelman’s interpretation of children’s literature. I shall then link this consideration to an analysis of gender in *The Witches*, arguing that through the assumption that witches are always women, Dahl does project ideological gender perceptions upon his characters.

The Witches tells the story of a little boy’s encounter with witches before he was “eight years old” (12). The reader never learns his name. The boy describes how his parents were killed in a car accident and how he now lives with his Norwegian grandmother in England. His grandmother used to be a witch hunter, but she is now retired and teaches her grandson all he needs to know about witches. When his grandmother falls ill, the doctor advises them to go to a hotel at the seaside of England. At that hotel, the yearly meeting of all the witches in England appears to be taking place and the child protagonist finds himself hidden but trapped in a room with many witches. The Grand High Witch presents a potion that turns a child into a mouse to all the other witches, demonstrating its effects on a (rather greedy) boy staying at the hotel. The witches then discover the child protagonist and turn him into a mouse too, hoping that grown-ups will kill him with a mouse trap. He escapes to his grandmother and together they come up with a plan to destroy all the witches in England before the witches turn all the children into mice. Eventually, they put the mouse making formula in the witches’ dinner and every single one of them turns into a mouse. The little boy remains a mouse for the rest of his life, but he leaves with his grandmother on a mission to defeat all the other witches in the world.

Considering Nodelman’s definition of a shadow text – “unspoken complexities” hidden behind the simple language of children’s texts (8) – I intend to uncover (repressing) gender presentation as found in (the shadow text of) *The Witches*. In her analysis of the monstrous-feminine, Wing Bo Tso investigates the relation between the presentation of both

male versus female and human versus non-human. Bo Tso analyses how this presentation can be linked to stereotypical gender portrayal of the female and how (children's) stories that blur the lines between these categories seem to display a didactic message concerning a purification of the female monster. Bo Tso links her interpretation of the monstrous and the feminine to the didactic message of the book, arguing that the witches are "portrayed as the monstrous alien other in disguise, and readers are warned that they should be careful of the deceptive creatures, because physical deformities that distinguish them from human beings are hidden 'in fashionable and rather pretty clothes' (64)" (227). Considering the shadow text, Bo Tso thus seems to argue that behind the main plot of a boy's encounter with witches, one could read the shadow text as a message claiming that a threat will not always present itself initially as dangerous – like the witches hiding their monstrous physique – and therefore that appearance can be a deceptive concept. While revealing this underlying theme in the novel, Bo Tso links this notion of what in Nodelman's terms would be the shadow text to the didactic purpose of the book, assuming that by revealing this threat, a lesson can be drawn from it. More about the didactic message of the novel will follow in a later section of this chapter.

Considering focalization, we are now familiar with Nodelman's claim that children's texts are usually focalized through a children's perspective, but that there is no first-person narration; the narrator is often a third-person adult offering "a childlike view of the events described" (77). This distinction between focalization and narration links into the gap between adult and child in children's literature; Tison Pugh argues that this child-like view is constructed, displaying a perception the adult conceives the child to have. Other than the narration in *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, the seven-year-old boy protagonist narrates *The Witches* through a first person perspective. With this choice of narration, Dahl seems to intend the creation of an experience as lived by the child. In this way, Nodelman's argument

that children's literature is often narrated by an adult but focalized through a child is not fully applicable to an analysis of *The Witches*. However, this adult author creating a child narrator does link into the gap between adult and child in the book. In case of *The Witches*, one could reverse Nodelman's argument: as the creator of his child narrator, the voice of Dahl is to an extent focalized. Dahl seems to present the story almost as a conversation between the narrator and the reader, sometimes addressing the reader directly and not providing third person descriptions of the boy protagonist. Strikingly, Dahl never even gives his child protagonist a name. This anonymity seemingly allows Dahl to present the reader with a very general concept of childhood. Dahl does not much consider the personal characteristics of the boy and in this way seems to focus his narrative mainly on adventure and thrills rather than childhood struggles such as growing up or dealing with adult supervision.

Through his choice of narration, Dahl seemingly creates a conversation between child protagonist and child reader. The first chapter of the book is called "A Note about Witches" (7), in which the protagonist (at this point, the reader does not yet know this protagonist is a seven-year-old) warns the reader: "This is not a fairy-tale. This is about REAL WITCHES" (7). In this first chapter, the child protagonist appears to have a direct conversation with the child reader: "a real witch gets the same pleasure from squelching a child as you get from eating a plateful of strawberries and thick cream" (8) and "a witch, you must understand, does not knock children on the head or stick knives into hem or shoot at them with a pistol; people who do those things get caught by the police" (9). Through direct speech – repeatedly addressing the reader directly with "you" – Dahl creates the illusion that what the boy protagonist has to say is especially relevant to reader at the time of reading. This in turn attributes to the scare-effect as well as the vividness Dahl seemingly has in mind with his book. By implying an actual relevance for the child reader – presenting the witches as a real-life threat and directly addressing the reader – Dahl adds to the realism of the horrifically

fantastic events. Thus, through a first-person perspective, Dahl apparently shifts the main focus of the novel to the horrifically exciting behaviour of the witches and the brave response by the child protagonist, rather than focussing on the protagonist as a child. Furthermore, through the use of direct speech, Dahl adds to the realism of the novel, which in turn seems to add to the horrifying effects.

Moving on from Nodelman's concept of a shadow text and focalization, I shall now consider the apparent innocence of children's literature. Although the aim of this thesis is to uncover aspects of Dahl's children's texts that are anything but innocent, children's books often seem to leave out age-inappropriate themes; such a claim invites for debate on what is and what is not child-appropriate and it appears precisely this debate that the text enters into. In *The Witches*, it seems as though Dahl intends to create a narrative that is horrific enough to be a gripping and interesting read, yet not so horrific that children are too frightened by it. The following passage illustrates its horrificity:

REAL WITCHES dress in ordinary clothes and look very much like ordinary women. They live in ordinary houses and they work in ORDINARY JOBS...she might even – and this will make you jump – she might even be your lovely school-teacher who is reading these words to you at this very moment. (7-10)

Much like my argument that through the first person perspective and direct speech, Dahl appears to intend to create a real-life threat to present his child reader with, he also does this by positioning his witches in a real-life setting. This seems interesting for an analysis of gender in *The Witches*, raising the question to what extent Dahl's witches can be interpreted as either women or as monsters. An example of not making the text too frightening can be found in the following passage:

“No”, my grandmother said. “A witch will never do silly things like climbing

up drainpipes or breaking into people's houses. You'll be quite safe in your bed. Come along. I'll tuck you in". (23)

Through this passage, Dahl seems to create a feeling of safety amongst his attempts to create a frightful sensation. This appears to reflect an adult's concern for the protection of innocent children and salving the child's distress, making sure the narrative does not have a devastating effect.

Another example of perceived innocence in *The Witches* concerns the position of the caretaker. The position of caretaker is normally ascribed to the adult in a child-adult relationship. However, in *The Witches*, this distinction appears to blur at times. The book starts with the grandmother taking over the care for the boy protagonist when his parents die in a car-crash. However, the grandmother then falls ill, and all of a sudden, the boy protagonist is presented as the caretaker: "Then don't let her go on a long journey this summer. She's not yet strong enough. And stop her smoking those vile black cigars" (51). Here, the child protagonist is given the responsibility to discipline his grandmother, rather than the other way around. With this increased responsibility, one could argue that Dahl takes away the innocence of the child. This appears to be a developing process throughout the book, as the boy protagonist later is expected to exterminate all witches in England while risking his own life. Eventually, the grandmother even tells the boy that "we shall pack our bags and go travelling all over the world...you shall creep inside (all witches' houses) and leave your little drops of deadly Mouse-Maker" (206). At the age of seven, the child protagonist is thus told by his grandmother that the rest of his life – including his supposedly carefree childhood years – will not be devoted to his personal growth, but rather to the extinction of the witches. Much like Charlie, his future is secured before the boy enters puberty, leaving him robbed of his innocent years as a child.

Finally, an analysis of the concept of innocence in Dahl's *The Witches* seems

incomplete without a consideration of the horrors Dahl presents to his child reader. Culley considers Dahl's use of "violence and sexism" to be a narrative technique – positioning Dahl's works as folkloric – as a means to clearly present the story's dynamics and present the characters as clear archetypes. Dahl then accordingly intends to use his sexist stereotypes as a means to ridicule social hypocrisy. However, a child reader may not pick up on such a political statement and Dahl's horrific descriptions may then come across as merely excessive. Much like the Trunchbull in *Matilda* – to be discussed in the following chapter – the Grand High Witch is presented as an authoritarian female figure who seems to display extremely violent behaviour in her powerful position. An example can be found in the punishment of a witch who dares to speak to the Grand High Witch before her turn:

A moment later, a stream of sparks that looked like tiny white-hot metal-filings came shooting out of the Grand High Witch's eyes and flew straight towards the one who dared to speak... "Frrizzled like a frritter," said the Grand High Witch. "Cooked like a carrot. You vill never see her again. Now vee can get down to business." (76)

The excessive response by the Grand High Witch seemingly presents her as both dangerous and ludicrous. This dual portrayal links in with Culley's analysis of the appropriateness of Dahl's children's books for children: on the one hand, Dahl's use of excessive punishment creates a comedy of excess while on the other hand, these portrayals may come across (according to adult supervision) as too extreme. The overkill of the witches' cruelty also seems to project in the pleasure they get from murdering children:

"The springs go crack and snap and ping! Is lovely noise for us to hear! Is music to a vitch's ear! Dead mice is every place arrround, piled two feet deep upon the grrround." (87)

Because the children are turned into mice before they are killed in a mouse-trap, the gruesomeness of this passage is arguably somewhat censored. However, if one was to replace “mice” with “children”, a concern for the suitability of Dahl’s use of excessively violent description for children seems valid. The ludicrous presentation of this powerful female figure adds to the horror of the book, although this can also be interpreted as Dahl’s satirical presentation of the way in which the female can express authority or power.

In my analysis of the shadow text in *The Witches*, I considered the didactic message in relation to the shadow text. However, a didactic message in which the child learns right from wrong through naughty behaviour and punishment seems somewhat harder to find in *The Witches* than in *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* and – as we will see – *Matilda*. Although Charlie does go on an adventure too, the didactic message in *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* appears to be illustrated mainly through the naughty children and not so much through Charlie himself. In *The Witches*, the narrator is the main child and the only other child occurs in only a few passages in the book. I argued before that the child protagonist seems most important in his function as the narrator (offering a child-like view on the events) but that he remains rather flat as a character. The child receives lessons from his grandmother not as a consequence of his behaviour, but rather as a timely warning. Furthermore, the lessons his grandmother teaches him concern the fictional phenomenon of witches and therefore, her lessons appear not to be directly applicable by a child reader. However, an analysis of the shadow text does reveal “unspoken complexities” (Nodelman 8), from which a didactic message can be derived. This I shall further discuss in the following section focussed on gender representations in *The Witches*.

Concerning his claim that he does not wish to “speak badly about women” (9), Dahl seems to be aware that he does speak badly about women and he needs to rectify this. Linking this back to my analysis of the innocence of children’s literature and the gap between adult

and child, it seems understandable that Dahl choses to disguise his monsters in human form to frighten the child-reader a bit more. However, it does not seem absolutely necessary that these monsters should be disguised specifically in a female body. In her analysis of the gendering of witchcraft, Lara Apps investigates a historical explanation for the link between witchcraft and associated gender. Apps argues that in historical sources such as Latin and Greek texts or the Bible, there are mentions of both male and female witchcraft (119). The phenomenon of witchcraft was often explained as people who “sold their soul to the devil in exchange for magical powers and therefore witches represent the weaker mind” (Apps, 122). From this interpretation, it seems a small step to anti-feminist thoughts that women are the weaker sex and men have to guide them. Apps then goes into the question whether male witches were depicted as feminine (127) (yes, to a certain extent) and whether the male witch was a known phenomenon in Early Modern Europe (127) (also yes). An assumption that Apps remarks on, and that I consider significant for an analysis of gender in *The Witches*, is that “women are more credulous than men, which is why the Devil, whose chief aim is to corrupt faith, prefers to approach them instead of men...because this sort of weakness had been regarded since antiquity as a particularly feminine failing, witchcraft was inevitably feminised” (132). The idea that witches are considered female because of “weakness” is arguably a typical cultural stereotype that the feminist movement intends to debunk. The fact that Dahl follows this historical pattern of witches as feminine can be interpreted as the power of a dominant ideology in a certain culture to enclose gender in a set stereotype, which Dahl seems willing to preserve.

Apps’ remark suggests that the association of witches with female gender could partly be explained by the cultural perception that the female is more “credulous” than the male. This perception could be rather easily linked to the Biblical story of Adam and Eve, in which Eve herself is presented as more credulous than Adam, letting the serpent convince her to eat

an apple from the forbidden tree. In *The Witches*, Dahl seems to hint at the story of Eve in at least two passages. The first passage occurs when the boy protagonist first sees the Grand High Witch:

There are times when something is so frightful you become mesmerised by it and can't look away. I was like that now. I was transfixed. I was numbed. I was magnetised by the sheer horror of this woman's features. But there was more to it than that. There was a look of serpents in those eyes of hers as they flashed around the audience. (66-67)

The first descriptions, where the child describes how he feels “transfixed”, “numbed” and “magnetised”, seem almost to evoke the sensation of a prey trapped in a spider's nest or a lion's hole, arguably attributing to the monstrous presentation of the witches. The latter part can be linked to the story of Eve through the notion of “a look of serpents in those eyes”, but this passage may also be interpreted as the possession of the witches' soul by the devil, in which the devilish presence is apparent in the eyes. A second example, presented earlier in the book, describes how a woman tries to lure the boy out of a tree:

“Come down out of that tree, little boy,” she said, “and I shall give you the most exciting present you've ever had”... Without taking her eyes from my face, she very slowly put one of those gloved hands into her purse and drew out a small green snake... “If you come down here, I shall give him to you,” she said. (45)

The witch tries to persuade the boy with a snake, much like Eve was persuaded by a serpent. Analysing these two passages, Dahl rather explicitly seems to be influenced by cultural perceptions of the female, linking back to the beginning of the male female binary. In this sense, Dahl presents himself as a product of the cultural ideology in which he operates, not as

a pioneer who breaks this ideology (although I do not mean to say that he did claim to be so).

Secondly, I shall analyse to what extent the witches appear to be presented as women, thus raising gender questions, or as monsters, which arguably creates more difficulty to apply an analysis of female (human) gender. Dahl does not seem to be very consistent in his presentation of the witches as either women or as non-humans disguised in human form. He sometimes refers to them as creatures (64), and sometimes as women (30). However, Dahl's intention appears to be to present witches as non-human:

You don't seem to understand that witches are not actually women at all. They look like women. They talk like women. But in actual fact, they are totally different animals. They are demons in human shape. That is why they have claws and bald heads and queer noses and peculiar eyes, all of which they have to conceal as best they can from the rest of the world. (30)

Dahl here does not seem consistent in his presentation of the witches as either animals or demons, confusing the link to "real women". Firstly, his main point appears to be that we should not think of women as human-beings. However, Dahl then claims that they are "totally different animals", insinuating that both witches and women are a kind of animal, emphasising the similarities between witches and women. Furthermore, he then again changes this presentation, claiming that witches are "demons in human shape", presenting witches as demons rather than animals. Finally, Dahl seems to support his vision of witches as "other animals" or "demons in human shape" through a set of physical attributes (claws, bald heads, queer noses and peculiar eyes). Following both de Beauvoir's and Butler's interpretations of gender as a cultural and behavioural construction, gender norms apply to behavioural norms rather than physical attributes. Dahl's apparent claim that witches are unlike women because they have monstrous physical features may then appear not to be a strong enough argument to not consider the witches (a somewhat controversial kind of) female.

Although Dahl seemingly intends to dehumanise the presentation of the witches, in “A Note about Witches” (7), the very first chapter of the book, the narrator immediately emphasises the femaleness of Dahl’s monsters: “A witch is always a woman. I do not wish to speak badly about women. Most women are lovely. But the fact remains that all witches are women” (9). Not only does Dahl emphasise the femaleness of witches, he also seems to feel the need to defend this claim, saying that he “does not wish to speak badly about women”. This apparent urge to defend his claim insinuates an awareness of the controversy around gender stereotyping. This does not seem surprising considering the historical setting – during the prime time of second wave feminism – be it not that it was Dahl himself who claimed not to think about grown-up meanings when writing for children. In the same chapter, Dahl again seems to confuse the presentation of witches as either female or monstrous: “Oh, if only there were a way of telling for sure whether a woman was a witch or not, then we could round them all up and put them in the meat-grinder” (11). Dahl here seems to claim that some women are witches and some women are not, but that one must always look for witches in “ordinary women”. If witches were really monsters rather than human beings, it seems more fitting that Dahl would have said something along the lines of “oh, if only there were a way of telling for sure when a witch disguises herself as an actual woman”. When the Grand High Witch has explained to the witches how they can make a potion that turns children into mice, she calls for the “ancient vuns” (106), which is also the title of the chapter (The Ancient Ones) (106). The description of older witches as “ancient ones” appears to differ from descriptions of the protagonist’s grandmother, who is either referred to as “grandmother” or “old bird” (50). This contrast can be interpreted as Dahl’s intend to present the witches in a way that is different from the presentation of humans. However, the entire passage of the “ancient vuns” is as follows: “All those over seventy put up your hands!” she barked suddenly...”It comes to me”, said the Grand High Witch, “that you ancient vuns vill not be able to climb high trrees in

search of grrruntled' eggs." (106). That witches are considered "ancient" when they are over seventy arguably does not differ from when human beings are considered old. That witches can no longer climb trees at this age does not seem to differ from old human-beings and one could argue that Dahl here again blurs the lines between monsters and humans and that he hereby weakens his own claim that witches are not to be thought of as actual women in a human sense.

Finally, I shall consider the presentation of danger as hidden behind beauty. The above mentioned Bo Tso argues that *The Witches* warns us about the "alien other in disguise" (227) and that the monstrous deformities are hidden yet still eminent. Bo Tso also considers the mask the Grand High Witch uses to cover up her monstrous face (225), in which she seemingly refers to the following passages:

"Very slowly, the young lady on the platform raised her hands to her face. I saw her gloved fingers unhooking something behind her ears, and then...then she caught hold of her cheeks and lifted her face clean away! The whole of that pretty face came away in her hands! It was a mask!" (66)

Bo Tso describes the appearance of the witch as an almost vampire-like presentation (224), since she hides her bodily deformities. Indeed, the child character is at first seduced by the witches' beauty and then disgusted to find what lies beneath:

"I simply cannot tell you how awful they were, and somehow the whole sight was made more grotesque because underneath those frightful scabby bald heads, the bodies were dressed in fashionable and rather pretty clothes. It was monstrous. It was unnatural." (70)

The little boy here stresses the presentation of the witches as demonic creatures rather than humans, describing them as "monstrous" and emphasising their existence as non-human or "unnatural" (70). However, at this point, the boy draws conclusions only from the look of the

witches and it seems unlikely that Dahl intended to claim that all bald women are in fact witches. The only witch that seems to take a demonic shape is the Grand High Witch, who is known to need a mask to hide her actual appearance. Again, this seems to be an example of the blurred boundaries of the presentation of the witches as either human or demonic. The idea of both original sin (referring to Eve) and the female hiding danger behind her beauty seemingly invites for (feminist) debate concerning the link between beauty and danger that is often ascribed to women rather than to men.

Linking my close-reading to feminist theories introduced in chapter two, the question arises how the presentation of witches relates to a cultural constructions of femininity (Butler and de Beauvoir) and to what extent Dahl captures his presentation of the female in stereotypes (Gilbert and Gubar). The latter may seem rather easily answered since Dahl presents the majority of women in *The Witches* as evil creatures. However, the confusion whether Dahl presents the witches as either human or non-human problematizes the idea that Dahl reduces his female characters to witch-like stereotypes, hiding their evil behind deceptive beauty. However, the fact that Dahl does present his – according to himself non-human – evil creatures in a specifically gendered human shape seemingly does uncover gender portrayal shaped by historical and ideological definitions of femaleness. Nonetheless, considering gender as a social and cultural construct, one could argue that both the witches and the grandmother break traditional gender roles. Both the witches and the grandmother actively seek for a way to rule over each other, a warrior-like position which is traditionally often ascribed to the male. However, the witches' failure to succeed can be interpreted as a confirmation that the female should indeed not seek power since this does not fit her cultural position. The boy protagonist, although remaining a rather flat character, seems to be gendered in a non-traditional sense either. I argued above that the boy's innocence seems to be taken away through two events: placing him in the role of caretaker and becoming an

assistant on a life-long quest to hunt witches. However, these two events also seem to place the boy in a feminine position. Considering de Beauvoir's argument that "it is very difficult for women to accept at the same time their status as autonomous individuals and their womanly destiny" (1273) and Gilbert and Gubar's argument that the female often finds herself "in conflict with her own sense of her self – that is, of her subjectivity, her autonomy, her creativity" (1929). The boy protagonist – already rather anonymous throughout the story – eventually becomes the person his grandmother needs him to be before the boy can come of age. The boy being presented both as caretaker and assistant of his grandmother thus not only seems to reverse the adult-child relation, but this also seems to gender the boy feminine. The grandmother in turn appears to be gendered male in her presentation as a well-informed and successful hunter who goes off to fight a danger that threatens the world.

Chapter 4: *Matilda*

The third and final children's text written by Roald Dahl I shall discuss is *Matilda*. As with the previous two chapters, I shall follow the same pattern of focus used in the theoretical framework and in the analyses of *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* and *The Witches*. Out of all three works discussed in this thesis, *Matilda* is the only book with a girl protagonist and hereby a female hero. In *Children's Responses to Heroism in Roald Dahl's Matilda* (2014), James Pop and Julia Round argue that with *Matilda*, "Dahl has created a flawed heroine who blurs the lines between fantasy and reality" (271); however, the children participating in their reader-response experiment were able to weigh up "a complex mix of narrative elements, such as *Matilda's* family, the treatment she endures, her personality, her powers, and her response to provocation" (271). In my analysis, I shall consider these elements of family, treatment and response in relation to the presentation of gender roles. Much like *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* and *The Witches*, Dahl appears to focus *Matilda* on a didactic message. In case of *Matilda*, this didactic message seems to teach children the value of being intelligent:

Being very small and very young, the only power *Matilda* had over anyone in her family was brain-power. For sheer cleverness she could run things around them all. But the fact remained that any five-year-old girl in any family was always obliged to do as she was told. (43)

By acknowledging the subordinate position children have to grown-ups, but also by emphasising the control *Matilda* nonetheless has over her family, Dahl seems to stress the power someone – a child – can have through intelligence. In *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, it is humility rather than intelligence that appears to make the child protagonist a hero. In *The Witches*, the virtue the child is praised for appears to be courage and cunning. Because *Matilda* has a girl protagonist, one could possibly expect the book to reflect more

portrayals of female gender inequality than the works in which the female is more of a background character. I argue that many displays of gender stereotyping can be found in *Matilda* and that these displays do not mainly project in the child protagonist, but very much in other (adult) characters. *Matilda* proves to be an excellent work to analyse female gender, since its female characters are very diverse. Not only does the work provide the child reader with a female child hero, it also presents women in varying social positions. Through the use of rather stereotypical portrayals of women and a girl, *Matilda* provides the reader – maybe in the shadow text – with a projection of gender roles in the mid-late twentieth century.

Therefore, considering Dahl's words in *Storyteller*, I argue that perhaps Dahl indeed does not make a bold statement about gender roles, but through *Matilda*, gender roles of his time (an ideology) become (implicitly) apparent. To support my personal analysis of the women in *Matilda*, I shall also consider Kristen Guest's argument in *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly: Resistance and Complicity in Matilda* (2008).

Matilda tells the story of five-year-old Matilda who lives with both her parents and her older brother, all three of whom do not pay much attention to her. Matilda's father is not only a fraud himself, he is teaching Matilda's brother to be a fraud too; Dahl portrays her mother as a stereotypically shallow housewife with no job. Matilda appears to be a clever girl, but is not challenged by her family in anything. So she teaches herself how to read and eventually goes to the library every day to read every single book they have there. When she is old enough (or actually too old already), her parents send her to primary school. The school she attends appears to have a very sweet teacher (Miss Honey) and a very terrible headmistress (the Trunchbull). Matilda discovers that the Trunchbull is actually Miss Honey's aunt and that she has unjustly taken away everything Miss Honey inherited when her father died. Matilda also discovers that she can move objects with her eyes, and through a series of rather funny events, she scares away the Trunchbull and forces her to give back all Miss Honey's belongings.

After all this, Matilda finds that her father has to run from the police for fraud and the entire family is planning to move away. She asks Miss Honey to adopt her, and both Miss Honey and her parents agree. Matilda and Miss Honey live happily ever after.

One didactic message in *Matilda* appears to be that people who behave badly – or naughty – and treat other people unfairly, will come to a bitter end. In this it shows similarities to both *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* and *The Witches*. Considering the focus of my thesis, I shall research how this idea of punishment relates to the representation of gender. I shall look at four main female characters: Matilda, Mrs Wormwood, Miss Honey and the Trunchbull. Pop and Round argue that “Roald Dahl is a fascinating author in that his books for children feature child heroes who are very often neither hero nor villain, but a wild, subversive combination of both” (258). Out of the three child heroes I analyse in this thesis, this argument appears to apply most to *Matilda*, although all three texts as a whole do support this reading. Where Charlie and the little boy in *The Witches* appear to be mostly either modest or noble, Matilda shows two very different sides of herself. When with her parents and the Trunchbull, Matilda appears rebellious and cunning, whereas with Miss Honey, she appears to be very polite and modest. These two different sides of her arguably also present her both in a masculine and a feminine way.

Firstly, I shall consider Nodelman’s concepts of the shadow text and focalization. An implicit message Dahl seems to portray in the shadow text is that of behaviour and achievement. Mrs Wormwood initially tells Miss Honey that because she chose “looks over books”, she has a nice life and Miss Honey is struggling to teach a bunch of children the ABC (92). Mr Wormwood thanks his success to betrayal and so does the Trunchbull. However, by the end of the story, all of these roles are reversed and both Matilda’s parents and the Trunchbull are punished while Miss Honey and Matilda get what they deserve after all. I shall argue that Mrs Wormwood appears to be presented as a stereotypical housewife, Miss Honey

as an independent (non-stereotypical housewife) but vulnerable woman, the Trunchbull as a somewhat independent but monstrous woman and Matilda arguably represents a girl's power through intellect rather than appearance. She refutes her mother's claim that girls should choose looks over books, and helps herself by helping Miss Honey. Matilda's and Miss Honey's portrayals, however, also emphasise modesty as a necessary trait for a successful woman. Matilda never appears to realise how special she is and Miss Honey does not have the courage to take what is hers.

Dahl narrates the story through a third person apparently omniscient perspective. According to Nodelman, this narrator is an adult voice, but with a focalized child. This focalized child, however, is created by the adult author and therefore arguably does not represent an actual child. This is also an example of the gap between adult and child. The focalized child is thus that which the adult believes to be a truthful representation of the child's thoughts. One example of this process can be found in the following passage:

“Do you think that all children's books ought to have funny bits in them?”
Miss Honey asked. “I do”, Matilda said. “Children are not so serious as grown-ups and they love to laugh”. Miss Honey was astonished by the wisdom of this tiny girl. She said, “And what are you going to do now that you've read all the children's books?” (75)

In this passage, the adult narrator focalizes what it is that children look for in books through the child Matilda. In the first chapter, I introduced May's argument that “childlike perceptions cannot be articulated because the child is too naive, too unschooled in personal response theory” (84). Considering this argument, the passage provides the reader with an example of an adult's construction of a childlike perception. Earlier on in the novel, another example of an adult's construction of a childlike experience can be found when the narrator describes how books transported Matilda “into new worlds and introduced her to amazing people who

lived exciting lives” (15). Again, the (presumably adult) narrator constructs an experience as lived by a child, raising the question to what extent this experience may apply to actual children and to what extent this is only an adult presumption of how children experience literature.

Another example with regards to both focalization and the gap between child and adult is presented when Matilda plots to punish her parents for treating her unjustly, at which the narrator addresses the reader that “you must remember that she was still hardly five years old and it is not easy for somebody as small as that to score points against an all-powerful grown-up” (23). It appears not to be very clear whether the narrator here focalizes a child’s thought or the view of an adult. However, this uncertainty whether it is the child or the adult that is focalized in a way arguably applies to the majority of children’s literature and therefore this passage exemplifies this dilemma very well. Other than the issue of focalization, the gap between child and adult projects in various passages in the novel, as will be further discussed in a later part of this chapter.

Considering the apparent innocence of children’s literature, it again proves to be difficult to find somewhere to start, for innocence can arguably be found not in something that is present in the text, but rather in something that is left out. In the following two passages in the novel, such (deceptive) innocence of children appears to be acknowledged. Firstly, a subtle remark of the innocence of children is given after Matilda starts reading adult novels. The librarian asks Matilda how she liked her book and she answers that “Mr. Hemingway says a lot of things I don’t understand... especially about men and women” (13). This remark implies that a child can make sense of an adult world, but that the innocence of the child will leave certain aspects unexplained. One could argue that Matilda’s experience projects to some extent the child reader’s experience of *Matilda* in relation to gender issues, in which the child may not grasp the full complexity of gender presentation in the shadow text. Another example

of the deceptiveness of innocence in *Matilda* can be found when the narrator focalizes Matilda's thoughts about Miss Honey's personal life:

“That's all right” Matilda said. In her wisdom she seemed to be aware of the delicacy of the situation and she was taking great care not to say anything to embarrass her companion. (183)

Dahl here arguably emphasises Matilda's emotional maturity and further on, Miss Honey seems to confirm this:

“You are so much wiser than your years, my dear”, Miss Honey went on, “that it quite staggers me. Although you look like a child, you are not really a child at all because your mind and your powers of reasoning seem to be fully grown-up. So I suppose we might call you a grown-up child, if you see what I mean.” (189)

Miss Honey here appears to distinguish between a physical state of maturity and an emotional one. This concept may be useful to consider for an analysis of children's literature, as the intended audience is often defined by an age-group as if every child of a certain age is in the same state of emotional development. Considering the focus on female gender, I am specifically interested in an apparent innocence in the presentation of gender roles, or rather the representations of gender censored by this apparent innocence (Nodelman's concept of the shadow text).

In her analysis of resistance and complicity in *Matilda*, Kristen Guest argues that “Miss Honey's appeal to Matilda as a grown-up child is suggestive of the ways that adults have appropriated, idealized, and used the space of childhood in order to formulate nostalgic escapes from complex experiences” (255). In this way, she appears to touch on the various interpretations of the gap between adult and child that have already been set out above. The

author of children's literature creates a gap between adult and child because the author is often an adult while his work revolves around child characters and is intended for a child-audience. Set out earlier, Pugh argues that "there is no child behind the category children's fiction other than the one which the category itself sets in place" (2) and that any child occurring in the genre portrays a constructed childhood, one the adult author creates. In my analysis of focalization, I argued that the adult narrator appears to attempt to construct an experience as lived by a child. Other than constructed childhood experiences, there are various examples in the text in which an adult's – more specifically, the Trunchbull's – perspective on children is given:

"I don't like small people", she was saying, "small people should never be seen by anybody. They should be kept out of sight in boxes like hairpins and buttons. I cannot for the life of me see why children have to take so long to grow up. I think they do it on purpose". (145)

The Trunchbull here presents the child as someone other or completely separate from an adult. Furthermore, she appears to present childhood as a purposeless phase. She also appears to present growing up both as a conscious decision and a specific turning point rather than an ongoing process. Not only does the Trunchbull present children as other, she also presents childhood as something negative, claiming that "I have never been able to understand why small children are so disgusting...I have often thought of inventing a spray for getting rid of small children" (153). Dahl appears to portray the Trunchbull as the enemy of children and he emphasises this portrayal in various passages through which a binary portrayal of the adults versus the children is created. However, the monstrous portrayal of the Trunchbull ultimately enforces Matilda's portrayal as the hero in the story, when she defeats the Trunchbull.

Other than the gap between the child and the adult created by the Trunchbull's hostile attitude towards children, Dahl also appears to attempt to narrow the gap between child and

adult in his portrayal of the relation between Matilda and Miss Honey. Firstly, the narrator focalizes Matilda's understanding of the gap between herself and her adult teacher:

Matilda had never once stopped to think about where Miss Honey might be living. She had always regarded her purely as a teacher, a person who turned up out of nowhere and taught at school and then went away again. Do any of us children, she wondered, ever stop to ask ourselves where our teachers go when school is over for the day? Do we wonder if they live alone, or if there is a mother at home or a sister or a husband? "Do you live all by yourself, Miss Honey?" she asked. (176-177)

Rather than an adult constructing a perception of a children's world, the narrator here reverses the matter with a child trying to imagine an adult perspective. One could argue that this presents the reader with a gap between a child and adult in a much more literal sense than the gap of which critics often speak. However, there appears to be an attempt to narrow this gap in the adult-child relationship between Matilda and Miss Honey when it is described that "a very close friendship began to develop between the teacher and the small child" (222). The narrator here emphasises the adult-child difference between Matilda and Miss Honey by addressing them as "teacher" and "small child" rather than their names, but simultaneously appears to refute the idea that this difference creates a gap between them, also saying that she felt "completely comfortable in her presence, and the two of them talked to each other more or less as equals" (224). These two passages link into Miss Honey's remark, already presented above, in which describes Matilda as "a grown-up child" (189). However, even though Matilda's mind may be that of a grown-up, she is put back into her subordinate child position when with her actual parents. When Matilda tells Miss Honey that she does not want to flee town with her family, Miss Honey responds with "you cannot leave your parents just because you want to. They have a right to take you with them" (229), emphasising the power adults –

especially those who are family – have over children. The gap between adult and child thus appears to be narrowed through the relationship between Matilda and Miss Honey, but it simultaneously shows an awareness that this gap will always remain to some extent, presenting the child still as the other in relation to adults.

Dahl appears explicitly to focalize a didactic message of children being subordinate to adults and having to listen, but also a contradictory implicit didactic message of wisdom over unfairness, even if this means that the child is superior to the adult. This may also be the attraction of the story to children; children attempting to overrule adults is normally seen as naughty behaviour, but Matilda appears to justify and encourage it. *Matilda* thus appears to contain a classic didactic message in which naughty behaviour needs to be punished, and applies this didactic message in a way that empowers the child rather than the adult, since the adult is being punished by the child rather than the other way around.

Although they seemingly should be punished themselves, the adult characters also remark on suitable behaviour for children. When Matilda learns to talk at a miraculously early age, her parents, “instead of applauding her, called her a noisy chatterbox and told her sharply that small girls should be seen and not heard” (5). This idea that children should be seen and not heard recurs in the Trunchbull’s attitude towards children (as discussed previously) where the Trunchbull goes so far as to say that children should also not even be seen until they are grown-ups (145). The presentation of the adults (except for Miss Honey) as the bad or naughty characters also appears to be emphasised through various words of bad advice. For example, Matilda’s father tells his son that “no one ever got rich being honest” and “customers are there to be diddled” (17). Furthermore, Matilda’s mother tells Miss Honey that “looks is more important than books, Miss Hunky” (91). I shall come back to this passage when considering the role of gender in *Matilda*. However, Dahl’s presentation of his adult characters as attempting didactic authority arguably adds to the portrayal of Matilda as a child

hero, when she overthrows the didactic lessons the adults surrounding her attempt to force upon her.

Resonating through *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, the punishments in *Matilda* appear rather excessive. Although there is not such extreme hate against children as found in the witches – who literally want to destroy all living children – the Trunchbull too expresses a disgust regarding them. As set out above, the Trunchbull presents the value of children as no more than “hairpins and buttons” (145) and although she does not explicitly wish to kill them, she does desire them not to show themselves until they grow up, which – the Trunchbull complains – children seem purposely to do at a very slow pace (145). The presentation of Mr Wormwood underestimating his daughter’s abilities because she is a girl (17) and Matilda proving him wrong on more than one occasion seemingly link in with Culley’s argument that Dahl uses instances of sexism as a means to reveal social hypocrisy. The Trunchbull’s horrific behaviour positions her as a strong archetype of the evil character and through excessive punishments appear to ridicule or satirise the totalising adult control she intends to hold over all children. An example of such excessive punishment can be found when the Trunchbull tells Amanda Thripp “I’ll give you pigtails, you little rat” (108):

The Trunchbull was leaning back against the weight of the whirling girl and pivoting expertly on her toes, spinning round and round, and soon Amanda Thripp was travelling so fast she became a blur, and suddenly, with a mighty grunt, the Trunchbull let go of the pigtails and Amanda went sailing like a rocket right over the wire fence of the playground and high up into the sky.
(108)

The Trunchbull thus uses physical punishment only because she does not like the way Amanda’s mother has braided her hair. Another example of physical punishment in *Matilda* can be found in The Trunchbull’s punishment closet:

“The Chockey”, Hortensia went on, “is a very tall but very narrow cupboard... And three of the wall are made out of cement with bits of broken glass sticking out all over, so you can’t lean against them... The door’s got thousands of sharp spiky nails sticking out of it. They’ve been hammered through from the outside.” (98)

Much like swinging Amanda by her hair, the Chockey seems to be an outrageous method of punishment; if any adult would truly put a child in a small space in which it can do nothing but harm itself on “bits of broken glass” and “spiky nails”, this would be considered child-abuse. Much like the outrageous punishments in *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* and the cruel intentions of the witches, the Trunchbull’s behaviour seems to create conflicting effects: on the one hand, it creates an adult concern for the appropriateness of Dahl’s works for children (see also Culley) and on the other hand a sense of thrill which may be needed to keep the child reader interested. That these excessive and inappropriate punishments are initiated by a female in an authoritarian position arguably derive from stereotypical gender presentation, as I shall discuss hereafter.

Before I move on to my analysis of gender portrayal in *Matilda*, Mrs Wormwood, the Trunchbull and Miss Honey, I shall briefly introduce Guest’s interpretation of these four characters. Guest argues that “both the monstrous Trunchbull, who has assumed a life of action as a star athlete and working woman, and the narcissistic Mrs Wormwood, who is figuratively entombed by the mass media images she embraces, indicate the disfiguring effects of the gendered scripts available to women in the late twentieth century” (247). Guest thus links Dahl’s character portrayal to the cultural situation in which he wrote, implying that Dahl did not separate himself entirely from social issues despite his intention to write for children and not be concerned with an adult’s interpretation of his children’s books.

Furthermore, Guest argues that “Miss Honey is a problematic role model insofar as her mild

nature compromises her relationship to other adults, who use her passivity and vulnerability against her” and she is “rescued and ultimately defined by the child who provides a place for her within the constraints of traditional domesticity” (247). Finally, Guest argues that “Matilda may be left with the same choice as Gilbert and Gubar’s princess: imprisonment in an ideal, or an active life as a monster” (253).

As I mentioned before, *Matilda* seems to be an excellent work to analyse the role of female gender in its specific cultural and historical framework because it presents the child reader with various female characters. I shall first consider the role of gender as reflected in Matilda’s family: “they (Matilda’s parents) had a son called Michael and a daughter called Matilda, and the parents looked upon Matilda in particular as nothing more than a scab” (4). Already in the very first pages of the book, Dahl presents Matilda as the unwanted daughter and her brother as the preferred child. The narrator’s presentation of Matilda appears to be counter to her parents’, claiming that “the child in question is extra-ordinary, and by that I mean sensitive and brilliant. Matilda was both of these things, but above all she was brilliant” (4) (seemingly praising bookish virtues). Matilda’s father completely opposes this view when he wants to explain his company strategy, saying to Matilda “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” (16). This passage portrays a stereotypical gender perception that the son of the family takes over the father’s legacy and the daughter is dismissed as a potential heir by her sex. When Matilda proves to be able to solve her father’s calculation, he persists that “no one in the world could give the right answer just like that, especially a girl!” (49), linking gender to a level of intelligence.

Guest argues that both Mrs Wormwood and the Trunchbull are “figuratively entombed by the mass media images she embraces” and hereby represent “gendered scripts of the twentieth century” (247). One of Guest’s arguments thus appears to be that Mrs Wormwood’s

portrayal is stereotypical for women at that time. Dahl seems to refer to this stereotype in the following passage:

“A girl should think about making herself look attractive so she can get a good husband later on. Looks is more important than books, Miss Hunky... You chose books. I chose looks... 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”. (92)

In this passage, Matilda’s mother links the success of a woman in life to her appearance rather than her abilities. Considering the historical situation of the book around the second wave feminism, opinions like Mrs Wormwood’s appear to be exactly the point for discussion during this period. This also seems to be a very explicit example of the issue Leslie Paris tackles in her analysis, arguing that “feminist activists raised similar concerns about the underlying sexism of many children’s books, which, they claimed, socialized girls and boys in traditional and even repressive ways”. Dahl arguably intends the unfortunate ending of Mrs Wormwood to be read as satire, but one could also read her misfortune as a feminist statement, in which the stereotypical perception of women relying on their appearance and on men is overthrown. *Matilda* thus appears to side with the feminist movement, as it is eventually Miss Honey (and Matilda) – who chose books – who ends happily ever after and Matilda’s mother – who chose looks – loses everything.

Although both working women without a husband, two apparent opposite portrayals of the female can be found in the Trunchbull and Miss Honey. When Matilda finally starts primary school, these two female characters are introduced and presented in apparently very opposite ways. Miss Honey is described as “her body was so slim and fragile one got the feeling that if she fell over she would smash into a thousand pieces, like a porcelain figure” (60), whereas Dahl introduces the Trunchbull as “she was gigantic holy terror, a fierce

tyrannical monster who frightened the life out of the pupils and teachers alike. There was an aura of menace about her even at a distance, and when she came up close you could almost feel the dangerous heat radiating from her as a red-hot rod of metal” (61). Guest appears to present both Mrs Wormwood and the Trunchbull as suffering from “gendered scripts”

(247) or society’s restricting gender perceptions. However, even Miss Honey is presented by Guest as a “problematic role model” who is rescued (which arguably presents her as weak) and given a place in society by Matilda herself. Matilda can then arguably be interpreted not only as a child hero because she punishes naughty grown-ups, but also as a feminist hero who battles the destructive stereotypical gender roles of society.

Guest describes Matilda as facing the struggles of Gilbert and Gubar’s princess: “imprisonment in an ideal, or an active life as a monster” (253). When listening to adults around her, Matilda would suffer in silence and not openly explore her extraordinary talents, although Miss Honey reaches a hesitant hand towards her (76). If Matilda intends to explore her talents through trickery, she first has to eliminate repressing adults. Matilda thus indeed appears to be divided between two extremes. Miss Honey’s consistent portrayal as imprisoned in an ideal, combined with her inability to take control over her own life, appears to confirm the necessity for a woman to become more of a monster should she want to make something of her life. However, the fall of the monstrous Trunchbull and the differently monstrous Mrs Wormwood also confirm that mere monstrosity is not the way for a woman. Matilda, then, represents the ideal balance between the two.

Linking the analysis of female gender in *Matilda* to my theoretical analysis as provided in the first chapter, a consideration of gender as a cultural construction – following de Beauvoir and Butler – appears useful. Guest already links her analysis to the interpretation of female gender as formulated by Gilbert and Gubar; in addition, I consider de Beauvoir’s and Butler’s argument of gender to be useful and relevant. Both de Beauvoir and Butler

consider gender to be a cultural construction rather than a physical attribute. Guest's notion of gendered script (247) seems to comply with Paris's argument that mainstream children's literature tended to reinforce gendered stereotypes. One could argue that Dahl appears to overthrow Paris's perception of children's literature, by offering alternative presentations of female gender – in both *Matilda* and *Miss Honey* – while simultaneously preserving gender stereotyping in other characters.

Through the Trunchbull, Dahl appears to challenge the boundaries of gender roles, linking into Butler's argument that "the cultural matrix through which gender identity has become intelligible requires that certain kinds of identities cannot exist" (17); that is if someone does not follow either male or female gender expectations. The Trunchbull is presented as a "gigantic holy terror" and "a fierce tyrannical monster" (61), a description in which no trace of typical femininity seems to be present. Holding a position of authority and despising the role of a caretaker arguably places the Trunchbull in a socially constructed male position, something Butler presents as problematic. The Trunchbull's apparent resistance against stereotypical female gender expectations arguably confirm Butler's argument that "feminism is about the social transformation of gender relations" (204). However, the Trunchbull's defeat at the end of the books can possibly be interpreted as a defeat against feminism, as the female character who does not comply with stereotypical gender norms does not prosper in the end. However, Mrs Wormwood appears to be the (mock) advocate for the standardised female in twentieth century England, and her defeat in the end may be interpreted as supporting a feminist desire to transform gender relations.

Guest thus links the presentation of *Matilda* as both intelligent and cunning to Gilbert and Gubar's princesses. Although I agree that this dilemma is apparent within her character, I also recognise the female struggle of being reduced to extreme stereotypes, being either really nice or really monstrous, in the other female characters. The most obvious binary portrayal

appears to be found in the Trunchbull and Miss Honey, in which the Trunchbull is reduced to a monster and Miss Honey to a princess (if you will). An analysis of Mrs Wormwood appears problematic in terms of Gilbert and Gubar's theory. One could argue that Mrs Wormwood represents the stereotypical housewife that the feminist movement is so eager to transform. However, her treatment of Matilda and sneers at Miss Honey present her as a rather monstrous housewife. Therefore, I argue that all four female characters face the difficulties of being imprisoned in an ideal or image of the self, such as Gilbert and Gubar have formulated. However, the four female characters in *Matilda* provide us with different expressions of this imprisonment. Where Matilda appears to be forced to find a balance between the cultural ideal of girlhood and her own prosperity, Miss Honey and the Trunchbull represent the two extremes between which Matilda finds herself. Mrs Wormwood arguably represents the female who experiences imprisonment, but is herself unaware of the restraints under which culturally constructed gender norms hold her.

Finally, the question arises to what extent the portrayals of gender can be linked to the didactic purpose of the book. Firstly, the main didactic message Dahl arguably seems to portray – a punishment of bad behaviour – is not intentionally linked to gender inequality. Because most main characters (with the exception of Mr Wormwood) are female, Dahl's presentation of female gender appears very diverse and therefore, I cannot claim that he positions female gender in one specific way. However, looking closer at the text and his shadow text does reveal underlying gender patterns that may not be on the surface of the book, but that do shape the child reader's gender perceptions to some extent. Matilda being both female and a child arguably provides the child reader with a strong female protagonist. Miss Honey, however, provides the child reader with a stereotypically subordinate female in need of rescue and her happy ending may thus confirm a stereotypical gender perception of female gender as the weak one. The unfortunate ending of the Trunchbull on the one end

supports the didactic message of punishment, but it arguably strikes against the feminist movement who supports independency in women. Mrs Wormwood's unfortunate ending appears to be most in line with what the feminist movement intends to advocate, showing that looks and dependency on a man make you helpless and vulnerable and not in control of your own life.

Conclusion

In this thesis, I have explored the presentation of gender as found in Roald Dahl's *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, *The Witches* and *Matilda*. I argued that Dahl's at times grotesque and even sadistic narratives appear to uncover ideological hypocrisies like sexism or stereotyped gender roles, hereby drawing attention towards gender issues. However, the satirical presentation of these ideological stereotypes may present Dahl's work as mainly humorous or entertaining, in this way overshadowing the actuality of repressive gender stereotyping as projected in the text. As a conclusion, I shall provide a comparative analysis of the now established interpretation of the three works. As main points of focus, I introduced Nodelman's concepts of the shadow text, focalization and variation. Furthermore, I formulated an understanding of children's literature as a genre classified by its intended audience, that texts within the genre are often (but sometimes wrongly) associated with innocence, that there is often a gap between the adult and the child and finally that the genre serves a didactic purpose. I then linked these characteristics of children's literature to the presentation of gender, considering Simone de Beauvoir's and Judith Butler's understandings of gender as a culturally constructed phenomenon as well as Susan Gilbert and Sandra Gubar's analysis of the repressive stereotyping of the female. From the now established analyses of Dahl's books within the framework of children's literature, I can formulate the following conclusion considering how Dahl presents female gender in *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, *The Witches* and *Matilda*.

Out of the three children's books, *The Witches* is the only one with a child narrator rather than an adult narrator. I argued that through first person narration in combination with the absence of his name, the child protagonist remains rather anonymous and the focus in *The Witches* appears to be more on the horrific events in the story than on the development of the child character. Simultaneously, where the narrator in especially *Charlie and the Chocolate*

Factory, but also in *Matilda*, seems to provide didactic comments specifically aimed at children's (mis)behaviour, this does not appear to be a prominent practice in *The Witches*. This implies that the choice of narrator to an extent determines the level of didacticism in a book. With this didacticism, however, I refer to the adult's attempt to socialise the child in a proper manner (do not eat too much chocolate, do not watch too much TV, do not speak against your parents, etc.). The message I am ultimately interested in, however, concerns the ideological presentation of gender norms. Much like using rather unconventional grotesque and at times horrific descriptions, Dahl does seemingly challenge culturally constructed gender norms, presenting male characters in feminine gender positions and vice versa.

Comparing the three different books, some similarities between various characters can be found, arguably revealing a form of what Nodelman's defines as variation. It appears that Dahl overthrows stereotypical gender norms, especially in his child protagonists. I have analysed the presentation of gender in these child protagonists as well as the other child and adult characters through a perceived stereotypical understanding of the masculine gender as autonomous and the feminine gender as 'relational'. This understanding of stereotypical gender positions stems from a consideration of established gender studies. However, Dahl himself seems consistently to confuse these gender norms, presenting both his male and female characters in masculine as well as in feminine manners. In that sense, Dahl indeed "does not give a bugger" about these grown-up opinions. The presentation of Charlie seems to contrast significantly with the presentation of his fellow naughty children and some of the hysterical female characters. As a modest and caring character, one could argue that Charlie complies with standards of femininity rather than masculinity. This seems to follow Butler's and de Beauvoir's argument of gender as a social construction with the female being another order connected to the normative and central one of masculinity and Wolosky's argument that "masculine personality tends to be defined more in terms of denial of relation and connection

whereas feminine personality comes to include a fundamental definition of self in relationship” (206). Charlie never allows anyone of his family to care for him through self-sacrifice and in the chocolate factory, he does not present himself much to Willy Wonka in order to win the extra prize. Such an interpretation could be applied to the boy in *The Witches* too. The anonymity of this child protagonist and child narrator, together with his devoted obedience towards his grandmother, means the child protagonist in *The Witches* (much like Charlie) is seemingly presented and defined in relation to what his grandmother needs him to be. Furthermore, the third child protagonist Matilda also seems to overthrow gender stereotyping. Where both Charlie and the boy in *The Witches* are seemingly presented as passive and obedient child heroes, Matilda is presented much more in a self-empowered, autonomous and arguably ‘masculine way’; it is Matilda who actively sets out to enact vengeance for Miss Honey and ultimately changes her own life for the better.

Following his analysis of the appropriateness of Dahl’s children’s books for children, Culley describes Dahl’s narrative technique as following some of the constructions found in folklore, using strong archetypes for his characters in order to present the dynamics of the story clearly. Many characters analysed in this thesis may indeed be considered archetypes rather than well-rounded characters. In *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, the presentation of the four naughty children only focusses on their naughty behaviour; the way in which they find their golden ticket as well as the way in which they are dismissed from the chocolate factory all stem from either Augustus’ greed, Veruca’s spoiled upbringing, Violet’s abhorrent (un-ladylike) gum-chewing and Mike’s obsession with watching television. Furthermore, the hysterical and horrific presentation of the Trunchbull seems to draw parallels to the presentation of the Grand High Witch; both female characters are known to have an intense disgust for children and a predilection of extreme (physical) punishment or violence. Both the Trunchbull and the Grand High Witch start as authoritarian autonomous and powerful

characters – arguably placing both females in a rather masculine position – and end up being defeated by the child protagonist. The bigger the villain, the more heroic the child protagonist can become.

Culley's argument concerning the use of archetypes appears rather prominent in *Matilda*. The Trunchbull is seemingly presented as the archetype of the villain, whereas Miss Honey is presented as the victim. With her disgust towards children and her excessive methods of punishment, the Trunchbull's portrayal veers firmly towards the monstrous. Furthermore, the Trunchbull's authoritarian position and attitude seemingly present her as a masculine figure. However, her totalitarian regime becomes her downfall, with Matilda avenging Miss Honey's maltreatment, ultimately presenting the masculinized female as the failed character in the story. Interestingly, the presentation of Mrs Wormwood prohibits a strong anti-feminist interpretation of the book; through Matilda's mother, Dahl seemingly ridicules the stereotypical housewife. Dahl apparently satires the housewife by first letting her make fun of the working Miss Honey who chose "books over looks" (92), but ultimately granting the bookish Miss Honey and Matilda a happy ending as opposed to the vain Mrs Wormwood.

In summary and conclusion, the analysis of gender in all three works reveals various portrayals of gender roles, and it would be simplistic to imagine that Dahl pursues a consistent version of gender identities from text to text. Out of the three works, *The Witches* seemed to present gender stereotyping in the most controversial manner. However, a close-reading of all three works uncovers a resistance against ideological gender perceptions. Other than the rather obvious portrayals of sexism in *The Witches*, Miss Honey, The Trunchbull, Mrs Wormwood and the child protagonists seem to be presented in gender roles that arguably break ideological perceptions. I argued that both Charlie and the boy in *The Witches* can seemingly be interpreted in a feminine manner, where *Matilda* in turn could be gendered

masculine. The arguably repressive stereotyping found in the female adult characters thus seemingly contrasts with the non-conventional gender presentations in the child protagonists. This may imply that through his contrasting gender presentation in child and adult characters, Dahl seemingly makes a statement against gender stereotyping, revealing that it is the hypocrisy of adult society that pushes children in certain gender roles. This complies with Paris' argument that children's literature socialises the child reader. However, the question arises to what extent such a political statement should be drawn from an author who himself claims not to be bothered with such "grown-up" opinions. The question remains whether the presentation of for example the witches is truly satirical and whether Dahl did intend to uncover social hypocrisy through them, consciously or subconsciously.

I suspect Roald Dahl's claim that he does not consider grown-up opinions (such as gender inequality) in his children's books to be disingenuous, although I do acknowledge that he seemingly "does not give a bugger" what the adults think. With his seeming intent to shock his reader through grotesque descriptions and hysterical character portrayals, Dahl actually confronts social hypocrisy. Despite the sexist presentation of the female adult, Dahl seemingly uses both his child and adult characters to challenge socially constructed expectations of gender roles.

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