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**DIDAKTICKÉ ASPEKTY V DÍLECH ROALDA  
DAHLA**

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**DIDACTIC ASPECTS IN THE WORKS OF ROALD  
DAHL**

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## ABSTRACT

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This diploma thesis deals with the influence of children's books and their heroes on children readers. Its aim is to explore to what extent children's literature can provide the readers with valuable lessons, thus affecting the reader's conscience as well as understanding of the world. The focus of this work is on selected works by the British author Roald Dahl, mainly *James and the Giant Peach*, *Danny the Champion of the World*, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, *Matilda* and *The Witches*. The first part of the thesis concentrates on theoretical aspects of children's literature, its functions and impacts on juvenile readers. It also describes Roald Dahl's personal life in terms of its influence on his career and critical acclaim of his writing. The second part of this work is concerned with the analysis of the novels in terms of possible implications on both young as well as adult readers. The final part of this thesis explores the applicability and relevance of the didactic aspects found in the selected works by Roald Dahl in education.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

From the very beginning of human society there were stories. First the stories were transmitted orally, later, thanks to the invention of printing, by means of books. This is how literature came to existence. It is a cultural heritage, a result of artistic creativity of many generations which accompanies humans on their way to understand the world. Children's stories, nursery rhymes and fairy-tales represent the first work of art children are introduced to. It prepares them, first as listeners, then as readers, for perception of more complicated literary works. Children's literature influences its recipients in many ways: not only does it enhance children's imagination, but it also reflects their most vital need to learn.

When I should recall my first encounters with literature in my childhood, the first memory that immediately springs to my mind is me sitting on my father's or grandmother's lap listening to their stories, sometimes read aloud from a book, other times simply created by imagination, stories about princes and princesses, fairies, talking animals, enchanted objects and magic. I used to love those moments when my imagination, later stimulated by my own reading, would take me to a faraway land inhabited by strange creatures where everything is possible. Usually the main character was a truly good person whose starting position in life was rather difficult but in the end he or she managed to overcome all the hardships and sufferings. Or there could be a spoiled antihero at the beginning whose mean nature would change in the course of the story due to some moral lessons with the result of his or her self-correction. Either way, the outcome of those stories was clear and simple: good deeds get rewarded and a villain gets what he or she deserves.

Nowadays it would be rather naive to believe that the above mentioned rules are generally applicable to human society. We live in a complicated world of injustice, confusion and even malice, a world where, unlike in fairy-tales, good does not always beat evil and, what is more, the division between what is good or evil often gets blurred. Behaviour which was considered inappropriate earlier has now become a standard. When it comes to children, all this inevitably leads to their feeling of confusion as they perceive these contrasts between the behavioural norms and the actual deeds more sensibly than adults. This disorder produces a dilemma: how can one orientate in this world? It is true that the development of



technologies, mainly the internet, contributed to the facilitation of communication and data retrieval, but then it is also true that it paradoxically enclosed its users in some kind of isolation, both personal as well as cultural. It is widely known that the amount of time parents spend with their children, all of them involved in meaningful activities, is getting shorter and that sitting in front of a computer becomes the dominating activity of children's, even the youngest ones', free time. The lack of contact is why children gradually lose the opportunity to find proper role-models. The process of socialization is the main domain of family, and, to some extent, school, yet as the influence of these institutions is weakened, children, in their desperate desire to fit in among their peers, often tend to identify themselves with pseudo celebrities from TV shows or questionable characters from action computer games. This inevitably leads to one's doubt about the role of literature.

Therefore, we should ask ourselves what message it is that our children should take from children's books. Is their aim to present the world as it is or as it should be? Should they prepare their readers for living in such world or should they preserve the purity of beliefs that acting good is worth trying? How should an ideal children's hero look like? Are the ideas of proper behaviour actually even valid in current society where the motto of interpersonal relationships seems to be: "if at first you don't succeed, pack your bags"? And, last but not least, is it possible to bring children up by means of literature, considering the fact that reading books seems to be rather old-fashioned when compared to the immense and rapid growth of technologies and science? Obviously great many people from various fields of study, such as parents, educators and librarians, have been involved with these issues, yet the answers prove not very easy to provide as there is a huge amount of contributing factors.

The aim of my thesis is not only, to some extent, to reflect on the previously stated questions, but, more importantly, also to describe the role of children's literature in upbringing, particularly the identification of children's readers with the heroes of their books, with regards to several books for children by my favourite author Roald Dahl. The reason I chose his production for children and young adults is quite simple: I consider Roald Dahl to be one of the most interesting and influential authors of children's literature. I have to admit that I started to read his works in my twenties which is the age not very

typical for his target audience. Despite the fact that I am not six neither twelve years old, which is the usual age span of the readers Dahl's books are intended for, I can still, even more so, fully enjoy his original plotlines, fantastic motifs, believable characters and mainly the omnipresent sense of humour which is the integral part of his literary pieces both for young as well as adult readers. Moreover, what has always fascinated me was Dahl's "magic" transition from an adult writer, whose works, usually short-stories, can be characterized by for some readers and critics hardly digestible macabre elements, such as shocking violence or perverse sex, to an acclaimed and successful author of unforgettable children's books, in which the above mentioned unpleasant hints, such as death and cruelty, can be traced as well, yet of course in a form more suitable for little readers. It is precisely this contrast between Dahl's stories and what a society expects to be appropriate for children – enjoyment on the one hand, rebellion on the other hand, which attracts me on Roald Dahl's approach to his readers. The focus of my thesis will be on five of his novels, *Matilda*, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, *James and the Giant Peach*, *Danny the Champion of the World* and *The Witches*, in which I would like to explore what potential moral messages the author wants to transmit to his audience.

As for the structure of my thesis, the first part of my thesis will concentrate on the theoretical aspects of children's literature – its development, functions, genres with the emphasis on characteristics of children's novels, and readers. Roald Dahl's unique style of writing as well as his own life experiences which formed him as a writer and shaped his huge success will be discussed more thoroughly within this part. In the next part of my thesis I would like to provide an analysis of the novels and mainly its heroes in terms of the positive examples their characteristics might provide young readers with. In this part I would also like to focus not only on the complex relationships between children and adult protagonists, but also on their possible impact on adult readers. The final part of my thesis will explore to what extent children's proper behaviour and notion of the world can be developed using Roald Dahl's literary texts and whether this could have any implications on teachers; in other words, I would like to examine the possible applicability of the texts within the curriculum.

## II. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

This chapter presents not only theoretical aspects of children's literature with the emphasis on its didactic function, but also information about the life and critical acclaim of Roald Dahl and his books for children.

### **Children and Literature**

Since the very dawn of mankind adults have made up stories to entertain and educate children. Fables were passed down orally from generation to generation, later taking the form of folktales. These laid the foundation for what is now commonly referred to as "children's literature". According to the general definition which can be found in many textbooks children's literature is an area of literature intended for children that encompasses the production specifically designated for readers at the age of 3 to 16 (Čeňková, 2006, p. 11). As simple as defining children's literature initially seems, identifying the parameters of this term proves to be rather questionable; as Hunt (1994) observed, children's literature is "a rich and paradoxical area" (p. 4). To give an example, the very appellation presents itself to be ambiguous in that it refers to books written for children whereas it neglects the aspect of books written by children. Similarly, there has been a long-standing dispute among literary critics over the existence of such kind of literature and its connection – if any – to literary canon, the dominant idea adopted by many being that "there is no such thing as books for children but only books which children happen to read" (Chambers, 1990, p. 91), or even that "there is no such thing as children's literature, there is just literature" (Townsend, 1990, p. 61). This also leads to doubts in terms of authors' intended readership – if books aimed primarily at children are read and enjoyed by adults (and vice versa), it seems rather hard to define which category of literature these pieces of writing belong to. Moreover, similar dispute over the position of children's literature does not necessarily involve scholars but also many librarians, teachers or even parents as children's books are deemed appropriate or inappropriate by them rather than by the books' recipients. Considering the above mentioned, in order to define children's literature within this diploma thesis, several aspects must be taken into consideration.

Let us start with the crucial aspect of children's literature – its audience. Assuming that the primary targets of children's books are young and juvenile readers, the form of these books is defined by them in a way other literatures tend not to be (Hunt, 1994, p. 8). What Hunt has in mind is that when children decide what to read they are not likely to be influenced by the books' prestige or critical appraisal, as adult readers would have been, but by other criteria they consider to be intriguing, such as mystery, adventure and humour. This means that books for children are written in a specific mode, so that they are understandable, enjoyable and at best even memorable for their readers. The mode does not only affect the language, which tends to be milder and more playful when compared to its "adult" counterpart, but also the content which is somehow modified so as to reflect and even shape the children's understanding of the world. Additionally, the narration in a great majority of children's books is accompanied by certain elements, such as lovely pictures, funny rhymes, enigmatic puzzles etc. that children find attractive and that, more importantly, enhance readers' imagination. Thus authors of children's literature have to fulfil the readers' anticipations about the books based on the above mentioned qualities which are created by children and which can be therefore applicable to children's writing.

This brings us to another aspect of children's literature worth considering, namely the connection between children and literary authorities, such as writers or teachers. There is no doubt that adults play an important role in determining what, when and how children will read. In this sense, they have power on children readers because, as Hunt (1994) stressed, "the books are written by, and made available to children by, adults (and contain) what adults think children can understand, and what they should be allowed to understand" (p. 5). This group of adults concerns publishers, who produce huge amount of children's books they think will sell best as their usual aim is to make a big profit, teachers, who set up reading lists for students at schools or in libraries thus making certain books available to children while dismissing others as unsuitable, and finally parents who, at the top of the imaginary book chain, go to bookshops in order to buy books that are then given as birthday presents or read at bedtime. Authors are part of this establishment too, but they influence their readers in yet another way, as they inadvertently tend to transmit not only the views of the society as a whole, but also their notion of childhood based on their own memories and experiences as well as their ideas about proper literature in their books. Thus the motifs of children's books are closely related to the social and historical background of

the time period in which books come into existence. In other words, society affects children by means of literature. However, as seen from the previous paragraph, this influence works both ways since children provide the society they live in with their views of the world as well: according to Hunt (1994), “paradoxically, some of the best evidence that we have about childhood derives from its literature” (p. 9). This is well reflected in the fact that children found their way to literary texts which, despite belonging with the traditional literary canon and being not originally intended for young readers, gradually became the classics of children’s literature. The same is true for children’s desire to explore themes dealing with current sensitive matters or taboo subjects which are not openly discussed in a society. This desire stems from children’s natural need to know as well as their tendency to rebel against the over-protective environment which literature targeted at children begins to acknowledge rather than suppress, increasingly drawing attention to issues such as dysfunctional relationships, illnesses, violence, sexuality and death. So, in this sense, children seem to have the final say when it comes to literature.

Finally, let us focus on equally important aspect of children’s literature – its functions from the point of view of readers. As Hunt (1990) pointed out, “there can be no question that texts in this area are culturally formative, and of massive importance educationally, intellectually, and socially” (p. 2). In addition, various specialist texts define cognitive, relaxing, aesthetic, and didactic function of children’s literature (Čeňková, 2006, p. 12). Whereas the latter was long considered to be perhaps the most distinctive feature of children’s books which distinguishes this literary area from mature literature, and will be described more closely in the next part of this thesis, the former remained, undeservedly so, in its shadow, although their importance, mainly that of aesthetic function, has been recently acknowledged. It is true that children, unlike adults, possess the ability neither to appreciate artistic language or other qualities which contribute to an outstanding piece of art, nor to identify the underlying symbols within the story. Similarly, they accept the knowledge presented in the books only if it is relevant to them. But then it is true that children, when compared to adults, are more sensible to emotions and impressions a book has left in them. What is more, children’s books have a great impact on young readers’ imagination. Because of children’s general lack of experience in life, their minds are open to absorb anything new, no matter how curious that may be. Not only do they live through the stories subconsciously, but they also simultaneously learn to create utterly original

imaginative worlds on their own. All in all, the children's writing may exert the influence on its reader in terms of emotional, volitional and rational development yet this has to correspond to his or her age, personality, abilities and interests. Furthermore, how a book, be it for children or for adults, is perceived by its readers depends on one's subjective interpretations as well as cultural settings the readers find themselves in.

To sum up, when it comes to children's literature, the associations related to this term are as diverse as human beings are. For some, the synonym is a fairy-tale, for others, a nursery rhyme. While Townsend (1990) called children's literature "enjoyment" (p. 60), to Chambers (1990) it meant "a way of saying something" (p. 91). Additionally, whereas one person labels particular book as splendid and worth reading, another person disgustedly throws it away. In fact, there is no incorrect opinion on or explanation of children's literature as it encompasses multiple genres, from simple board books for babies to sophisticated novels for teenagers, assimilates anything it likes, mingling with adult literature, and appeals to readers of every age, because, as Hunt (1994) stressed, "its character – Cinderella, Pooh bear, the Wizard of Oz (...) – are part of most people's psyche, and they link us not simply to childhood and storying, but to basic myths and archetypes" (p. 1). Thus, what children receive from reading is not only pure pleasure, but also basic guidance in life.

### **Didacticism in Children's Literature: from Puritanism to Liberalism**

It has already been mentioned in the previous part that a children's book is a powerful object which enables its author to affect his or her readers in many aspects. Not only does children's literature cultivate young readers' imagination and appreciation of aesthetic values, but it also familiarizes its recipients with the norms and rules of the complex world of interpersonal relationships, thus helping them to orientate themselves in human society. As Hunt (1994) pointed out, "it is arguably impossible for a children's book (...) not to be educational or influential in some way" (p. 3); while reading, children perceive how both positive as well as negative literary characters act in various situations, how they treat others and, more importantly, what outcome of their actions is there at the end of the story. In other words, by means of analysis of characters children basically learn

to differentiate between good and evil. Thus, from the point of view of young readers, children's books unobtrusively contribute to setting up moral standards and, consequently, to adopting such behavioural patterns that are in accordance with those standards. These are the main characteristics of what literary theoreticians call the didactic function of literature – its significance lies in the fact that literature for children participates in the process of development and consolidation of their values, emotions as well as social skills (Čeňková, 2006, p. 12). With that in mind, let us have a closer look at the historical development of this function with the emphasis on its negative as well as positive features.

In order to describe the process of evolving of the didactic function, its relation to society's perspective on childhood must be taken into consideration as it is society and its segments, such as family or school, that create the norms and thus affect their member's conscience. The social notion of childhood, along with general demands on children in terms of proper behaviour, took various forms at various stages of society's advancement which is well reflected in different perceptions of the didactic function of children's literature and its intended as well as actual impact on readers.

To begin with, the tradition of didactic function in children's literature goes as far as the origins of writing for children in the seventeenth century. At that time the society was strongly influenced by conservative religious beliefs of Puritanism and did not give much attention to children who were considered to be miniature adults rather than human beings in specific developmental stage; as Hunt (1994) observed, "childhood was scarcely recognized or recognizable before the eighteen century" (p. 27). Puritan children's literature consisted of morality and religious obligations, stressed constant fear of death and damnation which could only be prevented by reverence for God, and depicted children as innately wicked, amoral savages in need of salvation; according to Carpenter and Prichard (1984), "the Christian doctrine of original sin suggested that each child was doomed to hell unless some action prevented it" (p. 432). Unsurprisingly, such prevention could only be found in Bible that Puritans emphasised as a tool of salvation. Since the Church had the monopoly on education, the predominant literary material children came across in monastic schools ranged from religious tracts to instructive books that taught alphabet and hygiene. The fact that educational texts dominated writing for children is best illustrated by Comenius and his textbooks, such as *Orbis sensualium pictus* (1658), which

are among the earliest books specifically designed for young people (Fielding, 1990, p. 15). In this sense, the purpose of works for children from this period was strictly didactic, to initiate the young into society through stories full of instructions and religious messages that well corresponded to the Puritan views, yet lacked amusement for the idea of reading for pleasure was viewed as an abhorrence of God-given ability to read (Hunt, 1994, p. 39). However, children did seek pleasure in reading and thus relied on adult literature offering adventure stories that were made suitable for the young by the authors. Perhaps the first attempts to combine entertainment with moral lesson can be found in fairy tales by Charles Perrault whose collection *Tales of Mother Goose* (1697) was originally aimed to amuse the French court. Perrault adopted traditional European folk tales and reworked them for a younger audience, stressing the magical elements while omitting sometimes rather rough details. Thus he managed to create fairy tales both suitable as well as, more importantly, enjoyable for children, although he did not leave out the disciplinary lessons. For example, the story of Little Red Riding Hood, a girl who fatally disobeyed her mother in that she did not stay on the path and naively revealed the Big Bad Wolf her destination, eventually ending up in his belly, which, according to Tatar (1992) “started out as a bawdy folktale with a heroine who performs a striptease for the wolf” (p. 142), contained a stern warning about the dangers of listening to strangers.

It was only later in the 18<sup>th</sup> century that enlightened ideas about education and upbringing laid the foundation of renewed cultural conception of childhood. The society began to acknowledge childhood as a particular phase of existence rather than as a mere transition to adulthood which passed unnoticed and was soon forgotten. This change contributed to the development of categories of books for children that was supported by thriving business of publishing houses in the middle of the eighteenth century. As Hunt (1994) mentioned, “commercial publishing for children seems to have got under way in the 1740s” (p. 42); among the first English publishers was John Newbery who sold works distinctively intended for young readership. The improvement of printing helped to spread various literary forms, such as chapbooks, action adventure stories that delighted children on the one hand, but worried adults on the other hand, as they, together with legends and folk-tales, did not correspond to Christian doctrine. Despite the progressing variety of children’s literature at that time and growing respect to childhood, the evangelistic attitudes still dominated children’s books (Hunt, 1994, p. 39). Therefore, until the end of



the eighteenth century, the official children's reading was restricted to didactic fictions for elementary moral and religious education. Moral tales became the main genre of children's literature, though when compared to their Puritan precursors, they were somehow milder in tone, and instead of threatening the children with eternal damnation, their sole purpose was to keep the young docile, quiet and, what is more, rational. Rationality as a higher ideal of novels stood in great contrast to magic contained in fairy tales; as much as being well-informed was desired, supernatural was all the more denounced as superstitious beliefs that frightened children (Carpenter & Prichard, 1984, p. 358). Another great theme of moral tales was self-improvement as a consequence of improper behaviour. Authors of moral tales, such as Isaac Watts in his collection of children's poetry called *Divine songs* (1715) or John Newberry in *Goody Two-Shoes* (1764), frequently dealt with naughty boys and girls who could not stay out of mischief that later led to physical or mental discomfort and made the children repentant for their sins. In this sense, didacticism became more overt, as the implied objective of children's reading passed from religious education to social education in the later decades (Hunt, 1994, p. 45); not only did the works include rules of conduct in various situations, but they also openly taught children manners. In the late eighteenth century moral tales were followed by cautionary tales, stories or poems that also conveyed warning about the dangers of disobedience and misdeeds, yet unlike in moral tales, where, as Carpenter and Prichard (1984) observed "for the most part the only consequences are a bruised limb or an awakened conscience" (p. 359), the fallouts in cautionary tales frequently equal death penalty. The characters of such stories, as described in *Original Poems for Infant Minds* (1805) by Ann and Jane Taylor, behave foolishly and disobey their parents but instead of being gently warned about the possible outcomes of their actions, they seem to be deprived even of the possibility to remorse for the sins they committed as their punishment is rather fatal, a girl being burnt alive or a boy almost bleeding to death due to a fish hook stuck in his neck, thus serving as deterrents to other would-be wrongdoers. This can be seen as an efficient precautionary method (hence cautionary tales), but the amount of cruelty is questionable; although these texts clearly saw themselves as firm and godly, they may now appear to be unnecessarily repressive and brutal (Hunt, 1990, p. 2).

While in the eighteenth century the main concern of books for children was to impart religious instructions and a code of social behaviour, in the course of the nineteenth

century children's literature reflected changing perspectives on childhood, partly influenced by Romanticist idea of children's purity and innocence, shifting focus to youngsters in need of adult attention and nurturing. Religious instructions ceased to be the primary aim of children's books as their authors tended to free themselves from outdated notions of children as embodiments of evil that had to be educated into goodness; alternatively, children's writing tried to get nearer to children's individual needs and perception of the world, promoting understanding of children as they are rather than as they should be (Hunt, 1994, p. 47). As for the didactic function of literature, there was an obvious shift from strict didacticism to a more liberal tone in books for children. As seen in immensely popular *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) by Lewis Carroll, fairy tales and folklore by Hans Christian Andersen and the brothers Grimm, or even parodies on cautionary tales, for the first time in its history, children's literature served as entertainment and moralizing was replaced by humour and fantasy. Books for children diverted from study and responsibility and simulated the child's sense of imagination. This period is commonly referred to as the golden age of the children's book that saw the writers responding to a redefined childhood (Hunt, 1994, p. 58).

The innovative tendencies in children's literature preserved in the twentieth century; due to wide distribution of inexpensive books, the popularity of reading has flourished and the success of children's books has created an industry in itself, producing new categories of children's books available to meet the needs and pleasures of all children. In response to actual social and political conditions, since the last decades of the twentieth century children's literature has been exploring the possibilities of effect on individual readers, mirroring problems of modern society. Rather than conveying moral messages in an authoritative manner, authors of children's books suggest how to deal with complex issues that were once cautiously avoided, such as discrimination, gender or sexuality.

This brings us to negative aspects of the didactic function. To start with, the very definition of the word didactic is rather ambiguous as it implies the tendency to teach moral lessons in a rather determined way. Didacticism inevitably evokes pressure, boredom and pedantry – such terms should not be associated with children's writing because they discourage youngsters from reading. Similarly, the negative connotation is

based on centuries of promoting hypocritical and ossified morals of prejudiced society (Hazard, 1970, 12). Until recently, the aim of this function was not the child's development, but his or her unconditional submissiveness to, and almost sacred esteem for, authorities; in other words, children's literature, from contemporary point of view full of conventional phrases, was meant to control. The excessive emphasis on moralizing character of the didactic function resulted in underestimating of other, equally important functions, mainly the aesthetic one. Although there has been a significant shift in terms of defining the functions of literature, still the didactic tendency somehow undermines the complexity of both a literary work as well as its readership in that it tends to portray the child characters as moral stereotypes or allegories rather than as real children whose needs and interests develop constantly and differ from those of adults. There is no wonder that even today this function, sometimes called formative, is subject of critical discussion and, simultaneously, raises suspicion for it seems to neglect the obvious fact that children do not want to be constantly reprimanded for making mistakes but rather to be offered support when making mistakes, which is only natural when growing up. In this sense, formative function of literature should not only gently accompany the readers on their path without moralising and pressure, but also encourage the sense of partnership between the author and the reader.

Furthermore, having established the connection between society and didactic function of literature, the danger of its ideological abuse must be taken into consideration. As indicated in historical theological and ideological perspectives on childhood, in the previous centuries society demanded the production of obedient and industrious children. The interests of pedagogues, clergymen, and publishers dominated children's literature. Thus, in case of Anglo-Saxon literature, these interests were mostly connected with religion and education; however, societies ruled by totalitarian regimes could possibly use the didactic function of literature for children as the ideological means of oppression, since this function, when compared to other ones, affects both the recipient's behaviour as well as his or her way of thinking directly. As Carpenter and Prichard (1984) observed, "modern children's writing in the Soviet Union contains many examples of didacticism which resemble the old-fashioned English moral tale" (p. 360). This leads to another threat that didactic function of literature, whose very substance is based on distinguishing between moral and amoral, could pose – in the interest of edification, some books for

children could be (indeed often still are) subjected to censorship since they are considered, due to low or even absent degree of moral message, not mentioning their subject matter, to be in dispute with society's standard of acceptable virtues, and therefore viewed as harmful. As Hunt (1994) stated, "in the USA there are many examples of books banned by local or state legislatures, of books being burned (...)" (p. 164). Children's literature should not create the overprotective vacuum. Likewise, the didactic function should not be employed to manipulate the veracity of the displayed reality. To put it simply, even the unpleasant sides of life in children's books cannot be concealed from children as they should be given the chance to see things as they are. In order to form proper attitudes to the world they live in, children's literature has to provide its readers with actual themes, problems, and real-life situations.

Nevertheless, it is undeniable that didactic function of children's literature, if freed from bigoted narrow-mindedness and false morality, may influence the readers positively. Generally, the ideal impact of didactic function on readers of children's books involves suppression of one's negative characteristics, namely egotism, meanness, insincerity etc., enhancement of his or her social as well as communicative skills, and rectification of one's treatment of others with the emphasis on assertive approach towards problem solving.

What is more, given the fact that, as Hunt (1994) stated, "the book is held to be more involving and interactive than, say, a video, then its impact is supposedly stronger" (p. 164), ethical value of a literary work can be graphically illustrated on concrete examples, as in the case of warnings contained in the above mentioned fairy tales; children visualise the consequences of Red Riding Hood's actions and deduce that disobedience (her talking to strangers despite her mother's explicit admonition) led to punishment (her grandmother being attacked and possibly injured). Therefore, children's books offer intuitive and immediate way of learning since it is easier for the readers to memorise the lesson. In this sense, didactic function manages to successfully teach children and the youth certain behaviour models.

Another great benefit of this function lies in its universality; in other words, books for children contain some basic truths which can be generally applicable to interpersonal relationships and which are met with universal approval within society since they correspond to its moral compass. These cultural dictums are worth clarifying as they show

that selflessness and loyalty get rewarded, be it only in terms of a clear conscience, while envy, greed and jealousy do not contribute to one's happiness, that people who only speak badly about others and wish everyone harm remain abandoned, and that respect to human rights and disapproval of violence represent the basic premises of human existence (Hazard, 1970, p. 40).

In conclusion, the didactic function of children's literature has been long considered of major importance, perhaps to its detriment, as scholars, teachers and parents were often concerned solely with its pedagogic value. Nonetheless, children's books should primarily neither educate nor make moral judgments. Reading does not automatically guarantee that one leads a decent life fully in accordance with ethical principles. When it comes to giving children a moral sense, children's literature finds its use only secondarily because it is family that plays a crucial, irreplaceable role. Equally important is school where children are supposed to develop and use the acquired habits. Therefore, a children's book cannot be regarded as an educator, providing instructions on how to bring children up, but rather as an assistant that contributes to the child's development and welfare.

### **Children and Their Heroes: Reader Identification with the Characters**

There is no doubt that the domain of functions of children's literature is so diverse that a great deal of research could be conducted in this area, looking at them from various perspectives. Having established the fact that books for children can affect both behaviour (didactic function) as well as emotions (aesthetic function) of their recipients, let us contemplate other, more subtle forms of influence children's books exert on their readers, namely in terms of their social as well as psychological development.

It has been already suggested in the previous chapter that in order to have a beneficial effect on its readers, a children's book should not only reflect their needs and wishes, but also, more importantly, engage their interest. Traditionally, certain features are believed to be captivating for children, including gripping story content, surprise and humorous element, or appealing refrains and illustrations. However, there is another, equally relevant factor that contributes to the fact that many people tend to remember the

stories which accompanied them in their childhood even long after they have become adults – characters of children’s books. The fictional heroes in children’s literature, and especially the bond which is created between them and the recipients of children’s books throughout reading, play a significant role both in the reader’s attitudes to literature as well as in his or her perception of themselves. As Hunt (1999) observed, books can be “good for inculcating general (or specific) social attitudes, or good for dealing with issues or coping with problems” (p. 11). What he had in mind is that books for children offer a great potential to identify with a desirable positive social behaviour model through reading. Therefore, the possible forms and meanings of reader identification with literary characters will be discussed more closely in this chapter.

Generally, the term identification occurs mostly in connection with social adaptation, that is, a child’s integration into society. Socialization is based on the premise that humans come into being as biological units equipped with innate reflexes and instincts, which develop into social beings in the course of their lives by means of interaction with their social environment and under the influence of education and upbringing. In other words, children learn to become members of society, acquiring its norms, while, at the same time, searching for their own identity (Vášová, 1995, p. 66). The process of social learning necessarily requires the assistance of other people, who affect the children either intentionally, setting up rules and demanding adherence to them, or unintentionally, giving personal example, thus serving as role models. These “idols” possess certain qualities children find attractive, and therefore worth adopting. In this sense, identification can be seen as merging with a certain person one admires and whose behaviour one tries to copy. Obviously, emotional attachment represents a prerequisite for identification which includes not only children’s closest social environment, such as, at the basic level, parents, perhaps even teachers, and later increasingly peers, but also fictional characters children come across in books. As for the functions of the reader identification with protagonists of children’s books, Homolová (2008) explained that these are closely related to self-projecting, anticipatory and compensatory factors (p. 27).

To start with, a literary character can be viewed as a device by means of which the author addresses his or her readers, transferring pieces of information or knowledge he or she considers to be valuable. According to Vášová (1995), this enables the author to

communicate with the readers, reflecting both children's natural curiosity, connected to fundamental need to ask questions and get answers, as well as their craving for attention (p. 65). The importance of such dialogue becomes topical as it is contrasted with current trends in communication, namely the media and its tendency to distort and misrepresent the increasing amount of information spread by modern technologies, not mentioning the alarming reduction of quality time parents spend with their children. Similarly, not only do the characters of children's books help the readers to orientate in everyday life, but they can also express inner feelings, conveying almost intimate messages that target children with corresponding emotional setting. Thus children gain valuable experience interpreting both the complicated world as well as the complex emotions, such as anger, sorrow, happiness or enthusiasm. In this case, the identification with literary characters tends to be far more intense and effective as reading evokes the impression of a close and sympathetic fellow in the form of a likeable hero or heroine (Homolová, 2008, p. 27).

This leads us to another interesting aspect of the identification with literary characters, namely its relation to children's needs and their gratification. As already suggested, children's books can satisfy the basic human need to communicate in that they facilitate the exchange of information when the interaction between a child and, say, a parent, malfunctions. In this regard, as Vášová (1995) noted, reading allows children's readers to meet their needs that remain unsatisfied in reality as identification with characters perceived as ideal in terms of remarkable and exceptionable talents, personalities or actions gives them the opportunity to symbolically reach their goals, and, consequently, the feeling of pleasure (p. 67). To illustrate this, children with lower social status tend to identify with successful literary characters that can be viewed as their complete opposites for they managed to gain the social prestige children strive for. Similarly, many young readers have the tendency to identify with characters that have some extra powers, enabling the readers to mentally break the physical laws and experience something extraordinary, thus indirectly getting a sense of self-recognition, which explains the immense popularity of fantasy books. In addition, Homolová (2008) maintained that by means of identifying with literary characters children often find an escape route from complicated or even unpleasant living conditions as escaping into imaginary worlds can be viewed as a metaphor for looking for solutions how to deal with dark sides of life (p. 10).

The above mentioned is closely related to maybe the most significant function of reader identification – its therapeutic effect. From this perspective, children’s writing can be perceived as a source of psychological relief from various pressures children are concerned with (Homolová, 2008, p. 10). These concerns may stem from problems children have to tackle, such as dysfunctional relationships in the family, poor educational results, loneliness or even bullying at school. More often than not, protagonists in children’s literature are faced with similar worries, being outsiders, experiencing their parent’s divorce, fighting with siblings, or simply feeling lost. In this sense, literary characters can give their readers a plain, yet powerful message that they are not alone, that these things happen to everybody because troubles are part of life whether one wants to or not. Moreover, books for children can offer not only an insight into grim aspects of life, but also some basic grounding in coping with difficulties. Based on the analogy with literary characters, children can recognize their own mistakes that lead to troubles as they see the stories through the eyes of a detached observer. Thus, they are able to define what causes unpleasant situations or problems, which may then result in a modified way of thinking. Also, based on identification with literary characters, children might get explanation as to why certain events are happening in their own lives. After all, one tends to accept the observable fact that bad moments alternate with moments of happiness during the course of one’s life more easily through the identification with a literary character rather than during one’s momentary state of despair.

To conclude, the identification with literary characters undoubtedly provides children with many benefits. While animal and child characters offer a certain kind of assurance and comfort, the readers perceive seemingly insoluble problems and situations in a new light, discovering alternative solutions to problematic situations. As Lederbuchová (2004) pointed out, although their position seems to be threatened by potential mighty rivals in the form of heroes and heroines from movies and computer games, not only do genial literary characters sometimes effectively replace professional therapists when feeling insecure or depressed, but they also, together with their readers, seek and verify their very place in the world, thus enabling children to get to know themselves better (p. 8).



## **Roald Dahl: a Son, Father, Writer**

There is no doubt that Roald Dahl is one of the most widely read and influential writers of the past decades. In fact, his renown does not restrict itself to his home Britain, but spreads across the world as his birthday on 13 September is officially celebrated as Roald Dahl Day by his fans. On the one hand, this author is adored and celebrated by many generations of both children for his fantastical tales full of adventure and fun, as well as their parents for his racy short-stories marked by unexpected twists and black humour. Yet on the other hand, it is precisely this unorthodox, open, even controversial style of writing Dahl has been often heavily criticised for – the style which well reflected his complex personality. Judging from the fact that family, school and society play major part in the process of shaping one's character, the focus of this chapter will be on the above mentioned institutions and the way they formed Dahl not only as a writer, but also at a personal level as a son, pupil and later as a father. Also, in connection with the theme of my thesis, I am interested in what moral lessons (if any) those institutions provided Dahl with.

If one should judge Roald Dahl only by a superficial look at his life, he or she would have to consider a man who went through and survived more than any other ordinary person would be capable of: injuries, downfalls, sequence of personal catastrophes involving death and illness. Moreover, as will be mentioned later, judging from young Dahl's poor school reports, perhaps no one would dare predict that Dahl would become a successful novelist once. Nevertheless, or perhaps for these very reasons, tough experiences hardened Roald Dahl to such an extent that he was ready to face any unpleasant situation life had in store for him.

The first tragedy which struck Dahl's family can be considered of a major importance on Dahl's life: as a four years old child, born 1916 in Wales to Norwegian parents, Roald Dahl lost both his father and one sibling. His mother Sofie, who never re-married, had to pluck up the courage and take care of her children (including those from her husband's first marriage) by herself. It must have been demanding for her, staying in a foreign country, with no help from her family in Norway. Sofie Dahl lacked neither the courage nor the strong will and her son Roald admired and loved her for this: "I was her only son and we were very close" (Dahl, 2001, p. 179). Dahl's biographer Jeremy

Treglown (1994) even mentioned that Dahl was “the apple of his mother’s eyes” (p. 13) which must have placed demands on young Roald because he felt as if he became an only child with all the pros and cons this state entails. In this sense, not only did Sofie Dahl give her son Roald the much needed support and encouragement, thus compensating for his late father, but she also taught him to be resilient, diligent and, what is more, rather demanding – both to himself as well as to those around him. This tendency to excel in any circumstances must have complicated his personal relationships, yet it contributed to Dahl’s reputation as a well-established and productive author. As for Dahl’s family and its primary influence on his writing, the absence of parents, no matter if stemming from the loss or incompetence, or, on the contrary, the strong and harmonious bond between family members is one of the crucial themes he explored in his books for children.

When it comes to formal education, Dahl was generally considered to be “academically weak” (Treglown, 1994, p. 18). However, it would be rather premature to draw conclusions about his study potential as there is a number of factors which contributed to Dahl’s average school results and which deeply affected the boy: homesickness as a result of the separation from his family (mainly from his mother), feelings of loneliness and isolation, strange environment, imposed order and discipline based on disproportionate corporal punishments. Perhaps this was a common practice in English schools at that time, nevertheless, the degree of violence and aggression at schools Dahl attended, such as St. Peter’s and Repton, a prestigious public school, on the side of both teachers as well as students, made his schooldays not very happy: fagging, beatings, the torture of new boys and other miseries were typical occurrences during Dahl’s gory school years (Treglown, 1994, p. 20). Similarly, when recalling his school attendance, Dahl (2001) found himself “appalled by the fact that masters and senior boys were allowed to wound other boys, and sometimes quite severely” which left “a lasting impression of horror” upon him (p. 145). Consequently, there is little wonder that the predominant lesson Dahl took from his school attendance was not to trust authorities represented by arrogant and corrupt grown-ups. Dahl’s stories for children frequently deal with the theme of bullies and bullying and the school environment is often depicted as a great source of oppression and injustice. Many of Dahl’s remarkable literary villains, such as petrifying headmasters or vicious carers, were surely inspired by his memories of various school institutions. Similarly, in his books there is an obvious attempt to mock the vast majority of adult

characters as well as to give the worst possible account of them so that one would get the impression it is better to keep his or her distance from adults. To sum up, Dahl's encounter with social institutions contributed to his lifelong contempt of them blended with rebellion against any form of unfairness, as will be seen later.

It is therefore not very surprising that in order not only to cope with the school environment, but also to express his feelings, Roald Dahl in his teens found a great escape route in the world of imagination which was reflected both in active correspondence with his mother where he vividly depicted his experiences, as well as in his becoming an avid reader; as Treglown (1994) points out, Dahl "absorbed himself in stories [and seemed] sometimes to have believed in [them] more than he believed in people" (p. 19). Given Dahl's Norwegian origin as well as the fact that his family took annual vacations in the country of his ancestors, he grew up listening wide-eyed to Scandinavian folk-tales full of trolls and witches inhabiting beautiful yet rough fjords. Obviously, the source of his imaginative vision, not mentioning rather gruesome elements in his writing for children, can be traced, in part, in folklore and myths of northern Europe (Treglown, 1994, p. 16).

Aside of happiness, another great source of inspiration for Dahl were his own four children he had with a famous actress, Patricia Neal, and to whom he dedicated most of his writing. However, not even this family was spared a good deal of misfortune; at first, Dahl's four-month-old only son was severely injured in an accident with the result of permanent brain damage, then, as a cruel memento of Dahl's oldest sister's fate, his oldest daughter died of measles at age seven and, third time unlucky, his own wife suffered a heavy stroke from which she never fully recovered. There is no wonder that all these disasters left Dahl's remaining daughters insecure and even shattered and that their father felt he had to, as Treglown (1994) pointed out, "make up to the children for the losses and disasters they had been through" (p. 171). Therefore, he invented delightful bedtime stories for them about good giants who blew dreams into children's ears, stories which were accompanied by corresponding rituals (such as serving "sleepy potions" before going to bed or arranging a ladder for the giant to get to their bedrooms easily) as well as games to make them believable. Thus, Dahl's children can be perceived as his first audience on which he tried the extremes of his imagination: he both understood and shared their taste

for bad taste, and couldn't have cared less about the consequences (Treglown, 1994, p. 141).

As seen from the above mentioned, Roald Dahl had lived a life full of ups and downs, yet he managed to creatively incorporate both its positive as well as negative elements into his writing, thus continuing to provide his readers with hours of pleasure.

### **The Question of Suitability of Roald Dahl's Works for Children**

It has already been established that Roald Dahl can, without exaggeration, be considered one of the most successful and original authors of children's literature. His books for children, most of them best-sellers regularly appearing high in various popularity stakes, have won him, deservedly so, devotion from his readership. However, aside from popularity, his writing has aroused a great deal of controversy. As Carpenter and Prichard (1984) noted, while Dahl's stories "have an enormous and enthusiastic following among children, [they] seem objectionable to many adults" (p. 125). Indeed, not only are Dahl's books for children accepted by many with unease, often even with considerable antipathy, but they also provoke some parents and teachers due to his satirical portrayal of the vast majority of adult characters as silly and arrogant, not mentioning his rebellious tendency to question traditional educational as well as social principles. Hence Dahl's writing for children has been condemned on occasion as vulgar, brutish, meretricious and misogynistic (Butler, 2012, p. 1). Since the objective of this thesis is to attest that the works of Roald Dahl can affect their recipients positively, this chapter will critically examine the major concerns about his children's books.

To begin with, some challengers find Dahl's work rather brutal and therefore unsuitable for children; as Rees (1988) put it, "there is a great deal of gratuitous violence in his books" (p. 144). This argument appears to be relevant at first sight, considering the fact that Dahl's fictional world is marked by the macabre, inhabited with cruel and nasty characters that either terribly mistreat poor little orphans, as in *James and the Giant Peach* (1961), or even wickedly plan out their complete extinction, as personified by *The Witches* (1983). Nevertheless, what the critics seem not to realize is that in Dahl's concept the

presence of physical violence is connected with the punishment of wrongdoers, following the same pattern of fairy tales for that matter. As Worthington (2012) pointed out, “in Dahl’s narratives, a constant theme is the revenge taken by the disempowered upon the empowered” (p. 124); violence thus serves as a means of retribution of abused and neglected young heroes and heroines against the oppressive tyranny of authorities. The notion of good triumphing over evil is precisely what makes Dahl’s philosophy so appealing to children and early adolescent, moreover, it is related to the escapist function of literature since it allows the juvenile readers to cope with anger and resentment stemming from not always pleasant and sometimes unfair methods of control adults possess over their lives (Worthington, 2012, p. 125). In addition, when assessing the violent features in Dahl’s fiction, one has to ponder their playful depiction. As already mentioned, the motif of the powerless defeating the powerful can be traced in *James and the Giant Peach* which tells the story of an orphaned boy completely in thrall of his atrocious aunts who, to both the boy’s as well as the reader’s satisfaction, get run over by a giant peach. This scene, in fact the very idea of being killed by jumbo fruit, is hilarious in itself, which brings us to important aspect of Dahl’s treatment of violence, namely that it is depicted in a bizarre, yet comic way. Violent acts do not end up with blood and broken bones; rather, they remind one of cartoons, such as “Tom and Jerry”. In other words, children know there are no imminent dangers of injury as the protagonists usually manage to pull themselves together. This is especially true for *Matilda* (1988) where the frightening and abusive school headmistress, a former athlete, picks one of her students by her hair and throws her like an Olympic hammer, but the girl survives the horrific attack unharmed. As Dahl rightly observed, “when violence is tied to fantasy and humour, children find it amusing” (as cited in Worthington, 2012, p. 133). In this sense, violence in his books cannot be viewed as harmful for juvenile readers because of its obviously fantastical and exaggerated nature.

The question of violence is directly relevant to the representation of crime in Roald Dahl’s books for children. What his critics implied is that Dahl had a tendency to promote criminal behaviour, as apparent in his books *Fantastic Mr. Fox* (1970) and *Danny the Champion of the World* (1975). Whereas the former deals with a group of cunning foxes stealing food from greedy farmers, which only evokes natural eating habits of predators and as such cannot be considered illegal, the latter concerns with deliberate criminal act.

Once again, the aspect of the oppressed taking revenge on the oppressor is present, as the main character of Dahl's book, together with his father, poaches pheasants in the woods owned by a rich, arrogant snob who then gets what he richly deserves for his patronizing attitude towards the characters. In Rees' (1988) point of view, "the moral universe [Dahl] inhabits seems confused and full of contradictions" (p. 143). He is right in thinking that stealing, no matter how exciting and, to some extent, justifiable it may appear, cannot be dismissed as a mere joke. But then it is true that, as Worthington (2012) believed, "the largely positive, if anarchically delivered values of Dahl's fiction [...] generally outweigh the potential effects of any negative elements" (p. 133). Accordingly, child readers are more likely to enjoy carrying off the characters' extraordinary plan rather than to be alarmed by its criminal potential.

Another feature of Dahl's work adult readers perceive as disturbing is his black humour employed in satirical commentaries on appearance or behaviour of negative, most likely adult characters. In relation to that, critics particularly alert potential readers to the vulgarity of Dahl's most successful book, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (1964), which, according to Eleanor Cameron, is "one of the most tasteless books ever written for children" (as cited in Rees, 1988, p. 143). Her disgust with the book certainly aims at the character of Willy Wonka, a creepy inventor of chocolate titbits who takes a great pleasure in mocking the flaws and foibles of children he invites for the tour to his factory. Indeed, Willy Wonka can be seen as an embodiment of Dahl himself, as he indulges in delivering gleeful views on the grotesque consequences of the children's misdeeds. Nonetheless, what Cameron falsely misinterprets as tastelessness is Dahl's unique ability to adapt not only to children's view of the world, but also to their sense of humour; needless to say that many of the situations and jokes children find humorous are often deplored by adults as lowbrow. Roald Dahl is well aware of the fact that children like to grin mischievously at slapstick as well as to delight in slightly crude phrases. In short, children love to laugh and Roald Dahl is happy to oblige, cost what it may; as Royer (1998) observed, Dahl "does not concern himself with the possibility that certain groups of adults might be offended, but concentrates on entertaining his readers" (Critics' Objections to Dahl's Books section, para. 4).

As far as the dispute over *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* is concerned, Rees (1988) also criticised Dahl's "habit of elevating personal prejudices, ordinary likes and dislikes, into matters of morality" (p. 144). He illustrates his statement on the example of the character named Augustus Gloop whom Roald Dahl portrayed as extremely fat. Rees goes on to claim that Dahl intended his readers to dislike this boy because of his obesity, and therefore to sanction a prejudice that exists in every school playground (Rees, 1998, p. 145). However, by means of his seemingly spiteful remarks Dahl actually manages to make the reader aware of the repulsiveness of Augustus Gloop's enormous gluttony, rather than of his body. Therefore Dahl cannot be accused of stirring up jeers at the expense of obese people since the boy's corporal constitution is a product of a weakness in his character that deserves to be ridiculed. As subversive as his use of humour and disgust may appear, it is efficient in that, according to Stallcup (2012), Roald Dahl manages to "delineate specific – and often conservative – social boundaries for his young readers" (p. 46).

Having proved the majority of accusations aimed at *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* to be baseless, the last objection to this book worth considering is restricted to Dahl's alleged racism, especially when it comes to Willy Wonka's exotic employees, the Oompa-Loompas. Many critics believe that Dahl's depiction of the Oompa-Loompas is tinged with racial stereotypes for their working and living conditions are similar to African slaves taken from their homes and forced to labour on the white usurpers' plantations. Although after a series of complaints from various organisations defending human rights Dahl decided to alter some features of the Oompa-Loompas so that their resemblance to pygmy tribes would not cause controversy any longer, it did not prevent some critics from angry comments, specifically that the readers are asked neither to feel sorry for poor Oompa-Loompas, nor to see that their enforced incarceration is monstrous as Mr. Wonka's use of them in his experiments with new chocolates is treating humans like laboratory mice (Rees, 1988, p. 145). It is undeniable that Dahl's portrayal of those little people as extremely loyal workers who do not even know the world outside the factory since they are ready to give up their personal lives, not mentioning the salary and healthy working environment, in exchange for mere cacao beans seems, to say the least, a bit at odds with fashionable political correctness. Interestingly enough, it was only after those complaints provoked an outcry that the book's reviewers started to notice its offensiveness, until then

neither the author nor the book's publishers seemed to notice anything harmful, which, according to Butler (2012) can be seen as an "indication not that racism was absent but that it was so ubiquitous as to be effectively invisible" (p. 3). What is more, given the amount of autobiographical elements in his writing, Roald Dahl's vivid description of the Oompa-Loompas is based on his own experiences in East Africa where he worked for the Shell Oil Company; as Culley (1991) remarked, Dahl's treatment of the Oompa-Loompas can be "read as a personal insight into imperialism and traditional relations between the industrialized and Third World countries" (p. 65). It is therefore hard to believe that Dahl would consciously reveal demean for black people in a book for young readers; rather than fostering racist ideals in children, it appears to be more likely that Dahl simply incorporated these exotic features in his work so as to make the story more exciting for his readership. Indeed, children are amused by the Oompa-Loompas' whimsical nature as well as their quirky ditties while oblivious to complex socio-political matters adults, as is their habit, like to emphasize.

With direct reference to *George's Marvellous Medicine* (1981), Dahl has garnered further criticism for ageist portrayal of old people in his writing. The story of the book revolves around a boy's successful attempt to get rid of his irksome and repulsive hag of a grandmother as he creates a potion that makes her shrink to nothing. It should come as no surprise that while children laughed out loud at the preparation process of this magic drink, containing unlikely, hardly edible ingredients, adults gasped in shock and horror due to its grotesque outcome; Rees (1988) even called the book "the most repellent of all Roald Dahl's books for the young" (p. 147). Consequently, some critics expressed their concerns about the book's message that the needs and opinions of aged people are irrelevant and inconsequential, which could thus not only diminish their human value in young readers' eyes, but also adversely affect the relationships between the young and the old (Royer, 1998, Critics' Objections to Dahl's Books section, para. 3). However, such critique can be denounced as parochial since it neglects Dahl's undoubtedly positive depiction of old people in his other books, such as *The Witches* or *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. These present children with definitely likeable characters of grandparents who are supportive, loving, caring, sometimes even astonishingly energetic and funny, but, more importantly, important for the course of the novels as they navigate their grandchildren through the dangers and pitfalls the author puts in their way. This is especially true for the



Norwegian grandmother in *The Witches* portrayed on the model of Dahl's Scandinavian relatives. Hence the idea of Dahl conveying ageist attitudes in his writing is highly inconceivable, given his own happy childhood memories of grandparents.

The final major concern of critics of Dahl's work is his treatment of women, as illustrated in *The Witches*, which in Rees' (1988) point of view was "sexist and gratuitously frightening" (p. 146). His opinion was shared by many feminists who criticized Dahl for equipping his female characters with clearly unfeminine characteristics, such as the witches' devilish desire to exterminate each and every child in turning it to a mouse and letting it be eaten by cats, which stands in stark contrast to natural maternal instinct. Accordingly, based on the believable descriptions of the witches' behaviour as well as way of thinking, Dahl was accused of conveying misogynist jokes and thus promoting gendered comic stereotypes (Pennell, 2012, p. 104). What is more, ironically enough, Dahl's negative portrayal of witches has attracted unexpected criticism by witches' societies in the United States (Royer, 1998, Critics' Objections to Dahl's Books section, para. 4). Aside from the common and widely accepted fact that witches in folklore and fairy tales are usually female, wicked, and eager to devour or otherwise harm children, which evidently does not seem to bother anyone, it would be rather unjust and premature not only to generalise about Dahl's depiction of women in his works, but also to stress his belief that women are less able than men. To illustrate this thought, the bravery, exuberance and cleverness that other main female protagonists of Dahl's books display, such as Sophie in *The BFG* (1982) or Matilda in the book of the same name (published 1988) can be seen as promoting truly powerful and independent female spirit which symbolises enunciation of and recuperation from some negative female stereotypes (Pennell, 2012, p.118). This is especially significant for young girls who thus find the qualities the above mentioned heroines possess worth identifying with.

For the aforementioned reasons, there is no doubt that the works of Roald Dahl keep polarise their readers since adults tend to look at his stories from another angle than children; whereas to adults Dahl's books seem irreverent and subversive in that they ridicule or at least undermine authoritarian figures, children find them witty, original and, more importantly, essentially identical to their viewpoints. Despite Rees' (1988) belief that "there must be quite a number of teachers, librarians, parents and critics who wish that

some of the books had never been written“ (p. 154), the popularity of Roald Dahl among his children’s readers remains largely undiminished. Far from tiresome moralising, Dahl can be seen as a sort of ally to juvenile readers who, as Royer (1998) stated, “found in [his writing] something that they could not find anywhere else – distrust of authority and firm belief that good will triumph” (Critics’ Objections to Dahl’s Books section, para. 6). In this regard, not only do Dahl’s books provide their readers with all the aspects children take delight in, such as emotions, humour, fantasy and extraordinary adventures, but they are also unusually honest and sympathetic, which makes them suitable for young readership.

### III. METHODS

This chapter presents the procedure and methods employed during the analysis of the selected novels and the rationale of their selection. As we have seen in the previous chapter, the impact of a children's book on juvenile readers does not necessarily restrict itself to teaching dull, pointless moral lessons, but rather encompasses a broad enrichment of children in many aspects, cultivating both the ability to appreciate artistic works as well as the development of ethics since children's literature can be seen as a source of many valuable pieces of information about the structure and organization of human society. Similarly, children's books can complement authorities involved in education and upbringing, providing the readers with possible solutions to their problems, enabling them to express complicated emotions, or simply suggesting the strategies to cope with day-to-day situations. These messages remain of a great, long-lasting importance to the young readers if transmitted through literary characters they can easily identify with.

Despite the general belief that Roald Dahl's books for children lack the respect for authorities, undermine pedagogical principles and therefore have to be considered anti-educational and inappropriate for young readers, I am strongly convinced that in his usual idiosyncratic style the author intended to influence both the young as well as adult readers in a positive way, passing humorous, yet essentially conservative comments not only on proper behaviour, but also on broadly appreciated qualities every human being should possess in order to become a welcome addition to his or her community.

Therefore, given the aforementioned contrast, my research questions are as follows: what is the moral of Dahl's books for children's readers? To what extent are Dahl's books for children capable of transmitting the message to the juvenile audience? And finally, does Roald Dahl's writing contain any useful tips even for parents and teachers about how children should be treated within a family and at school?

In order to answer these questions, the main focus of the chapter Results and Commentaries is on selected works by Roald Dahl, namely *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, *James and the Giant Peach*, *Danny the Champion of the World*, *Matilda* and *The Witches*. In my opinion, these books contain concise examples of the author's effort to shape the reader's attitudes towards other people as well as his or her perception of the

world. Also, another distinctive feature these children's novels share are their main characters whose common denominator are certain characteristics that make them role models for the juvenile readers.

As for the research, the above mentioned books are thoroughly compared and contrasted in terms of their possible impact on young readers. Based on the analysis, I concentrate on four predominant didactic aspects that permeate through Dahl's writing for children, namely the emphasis on obedience and kindness, the role of reading when compared to TV-addiction, the importance of tolerance and cooperation, and the warning about the hypocrisies of the adult sphere. Each aspect is examined from the viewpoint of its potential effect, demonstrated on concrete extracts from the books and accompanied by an explanatory commentary. Furthermore, given the specific portrayal of adults in Dahl's fiction, I identify the desirable qualities of parents and teachers in relation to successful process of education and upbringing of children.

The Methods chapter describes the procedure used in the research. The research questions are presented with respect to the criteria of selection. The following chapter examines the fundamental aspects that may serve didactic purposes. These aspects are obtained by the analysis of the main characters and their behaviour. The findings are illustrated and proved by extracts from Roald Dahl's books. The commentaries follow each extract.

## IV. RESULTS AND COMMENTARIES

According to the analysis of the selected works, there are four distinctive didactic aspects that can be traced in Roald Dahl's books for children. Whereas the dominant theme of *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* is the emphasis on obedience and kindness as well as the role of reading books in comparison to watching television, the latter simultaneously appears in *Matilda*. The importance of tolerance and cooperation is stressed in *James and the Giant Peach*, while both *Danny the Champion of the World* as well as *The Witches* deal with the warnings about the hypocrisy of the adult world. Similarly, *Matilda* and *Danny the Champion of the World* contain strategies for satisfactory parenting and successful teaching. One could certainly identify more elements that serve didactic purposes in Roald Dahl's rich production for children. Nevertheless, the above mentioned aspects are worth considering as they well reflect the author's moral convictions and traditional opinions on the discipline and good manners.

### Results

#### **The emphasis on obedience and kindness**

As far as the moral apparatus of *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* is concerned, the book can be seen as a great source of examples of children's disobedience because it bears a strong resemblance to cautionary tales with their harsh punishments and parental admonitions. The cautionary force of the tale becomes apparent in relation to the weaknesses of the four young winners of the golden ticket that enables them to peek inside the mysterious chocolate factory. During the visit to the chocolate factory the faults of Augustus Gloop, Veruca Salt, Violet Beauregarde, and Mike Teavee lead to fatal consequences accompanied by admonitory remarks delivered by the Oompa-Loompas who sing along to comment on the children's misbehaviour and its harmful effects. The misdeeds of the above mentioned characters stem from their tendency to disobey which takes various forms.

To begin with, the most noticeable negative characteristic of Augustus Gloop is pathological greed as his mother confirms: "Eating is his hobby, you know. That's *all* he's

interested in” (Dahl, 2007, p. 36). Not only is gluttony surely the main cause for Augustus’ obesity, but it can also be seen as a contributory factor to his disobedience which manifests itself in the chocolate room full of sweet enticements. These are available to the visitors, yet with the exception of the river full of hot melted chocolate that has to remain “untouched by the human hands” (Dahl, 2007, p. 97). However, Augustus’ rapacious appetite makes him unable to resist the temptation and as he is gulping down the delicious liquid, he accidentally falls into the river. Given the not very surprising fact that his enormous fatness does not correspond to motion activity, Augustus nearly gets drowned but is later sucked in a pipe. As unpleasant as this must be, there is a possible threat that he, ironically enough, becomes a piece of sweet. After Augustus’ hysterical parents are escorted to pull their poor son out of the chocolate barrel, the Oompa-Loompas begin to chant a summary of Augustus’ fate: “So greedy, foul, and infantile / He left a most disgusting taste/Inside our mouths [...] Augustus Gloop will not be harmed / Although we must admit / He will be altered quite a bit” (Dahl, 2007, p. 105). Indeed, after getting squeezed in the pipe, his body undergoes a terrific transformation that can serve as an eternal reminder of his gluttony for he emerges “thin as a straw” (Dahl, 2007, p. 182) at the end of the book.

Another candidate for a good spanking is Violet Beauregarde: “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” (Dahl, 2007, p. 47). Aside from her silly insisting on gum-chewing, she is obstinate, boastful and, moreover, impudent, especially towards her parents, as her comments on her mother illustrate: ““And who’s she to criticize, anyway, because if you ask me, I’d say that *her* jaws are going up and down almost as much as mine [...], all right, Mother, keep your hair on!”” (Dahl, 2007, p. 48). Driven by her desire to set a new record in gum-chewing, Violet is disobedient in that she ignores the caution and tries out the so far untested, and possibly dangerous product of Mr. Wonka’s factory, which too leads to unforeseen consequences, namely to her metamorphosis into a swollen purple berry that cannot go unnoticed by to the Oompa-Loompas: “This sticky habit’s bound to send / The chewer to a sticky end” (Dahl, 2007, p. 128). Similarly to Augustus Gloop, Violet’s body does not fully regain its previous shape since her skin remains purple.

Perhaps the naughtiest of all the children present on the tour of the chocolate factory is Veruca Salt. Judging solely by her fancy dress, one would call her an adorable little girl. Nonetheless, having a deeper look, Veruca's repugnant behaviour involves typical manifestations of a spoilt "brat"; Veruca wants to possess everything she sets her mind to and whenever she does not get what she wants, she turns into a kicking, screaming, and later sulky "mother-killer". In other words, she is vain, selfish, ungrateful, even greedy. As her father rather euphemistically observes: "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!" [...] and she would lie for hours on the floor, kicking and yelling in the most disturbing way" (Dahl, 2007, p. 40). After she unsuccessfully raises demand for one of the Oompa-Loompas, Veruca directs her attention to other curious employees in Wonka's chocolate factory, the nuts sorting squirrels that immediately appeal to her: "But I don't want *any* old squirrel!' Veruca shouted. 'I want a *trained* squirrel!'" (Dahl, 2007, p. 141). Unable to put up with the fact that she will have to make do without such a cuddly and cute animal this time, Veruca disobeys Willy Wonka's instruction not to disturb the squirrels during their delicate work which results in a horror-like scene – the giant mass of squirrels swarm her, pin her down, decide she is a "bad" nut and subsequently send her, along with her permissive mother and father, down the rubbish chute, a journey which, according to the Oompa-Loompas, the Salt family will hardly perceive as enjoyable: "And here, perhaps, we should explain / That she will meet, as she descends/A rather different set of friends / [...] A fish head, for example, cut / This morning from a halibut" (Dahl, 2007, p. 148). Eventually, Veruca survives the journey unharmed, but not unmarked as she comes out of the chute smelly, covered with disgusting rubbish, and, true to her nature, rotten.

As for Mike Teavee, he too has many faults; aside from his addiction to television – a fact that will be observed more closely in the next section – his behaviour is marked by narcissism and arrogance with which he constantly and most annoyingly quarrels with adults about the slightest details: "I said, that isn't exactly how it works!' shouted Mike Teavee. 'You're a nice boy,' Mr Wonka said, 'but you talk too much'" (Dahl, 2007, p. 159). Mike too shows little respect for the rules and regulations valid in Wily Wonka's factory; it is therefore not very surprising that Mike's disobedience results in his body being seriously disordered after he is shrunk and then stretched: "He's about ten feet tall

and thin as a wire!’ ‘They’ve overstretched him on the gum-stretching machine,’ said Mr Wonka. ‘How very careless!’” (Dahl, 2007, p. 183).

Finally, the aforementioned manifestations of children’s indiscipline as well as the characters’ negative characteristics are in stark contrast with the personality and behaviour of the last lucky finder of the Golden Ticket, Charlie Bucket. Sweet-natured, humble, and unspoilt, he can be seen as an ideal child: “He smiled at them, a small sad smile, and then he shrugged his shoulders and picked up the chocolate bar and held it out to his mother, and said, ‘Here, Mother, have a bit. We’ll share it. I want everybody to taste it’ (Dahl, 2007, p. 45). What makes Charlie exceptional in comparison to the rest of the group visiting the chocolate factory is that he neither questions nor disobeys the authorities, instead, he shows respect for his family members as well as for Willy Wonka and great enthusiasm for the chocolate factory: “‘Isn’t it *wonderful!*’ whispered Charlie. ‘Hasn’t it got a wonderful taste, Grandpa?’” (Dahl, 2007, p. 90). Above all, Charlie Bucket is good-hearted, and it is precisely his kindness he gets rewarded for as he, unlike his naughty companions, emerges a hero, a worthy heir to the chocolate factory: “Mr Wonka suddenly exploded with excitement. ‘But my *dear boy,*’ he cried out, ‘*that means you’ve won!*’” (Dahl, 2007, p. 175).

### **The role of reading in comparison to TV-addiction**

As mentioned above, in *Charlie and the Chocolate factory* Roald Dahl expressed his rejecting notions on television, namely its adverse effects on young viewers. These are personified by Mike Teavee, “the television fiend” (Dahl, 2007, p.78), who seems to be so completely obsessed with this form of entertainment that he finds the whole business about his being the lucky winner rather aggravating: “‘Can’t you fools see I’m watching television?’ he said angrily. ‘I wish you wouldn’t interrupt!’ (Dahl, 2007, p. 49). Moreover, Mike indulges in watching obviously dull action programmes full of brutal violence that only contribute to his aggressive behaviour: “‘They’re terrific, those gangsters! Especially when they start pumping each other full of lead, or flashing the old stilettos, or giving each other the one-two-three with their knuckledusters! Gosh, what wouldn’t I give to be doing that myself!’” (Dahl, 2007, p. 50). There is no wonder that the



only thing about the chocolate factory that can impress him is the television-chocolate room where Mike learns about the possibility of teleporting and is eager to try it out, regardless of the risks. Consequently, his sole hobby is simultaneously his scourge for he is sent by television which radically influences his proportions. However, as Oompa-Loompas point out, excessive addiction to television can cause another, invisible yet equally serious damage: “It rots the senses in the head! / It kills imagination dead! / It clogs and clutters up the mind!” (Dahl, 2007, p. 172). Rather than mindless sitting in front of television all day long, they – along with the author – zealously support reading that brings joy and, more importantly, broadens one’s horizons: “So please, oh *please*, we beg, we pray / Go throw your TV set away / And in its place you can install / A lovely bookshelf on the wall” (Dahl, 2007, 174).

The same is true for *Matilda* that goes even further in the criticism of incessant televisual supply as it shows what happens when young TV-addicts become adults. Not only do the little heroine’s parents, Mr and Mrs Wormwood, seem not to comprehend what books are actually for, but they also encourage their daughter not to waste time on other pieces of writing than newspapers or magazines. Whereas Mrs Wormwood does not give much thought to reading as she observes that “looks is more important than books” (Dahl, 2007, p. 91), her husband appears rather vexed by the whole concept: ““What do you want a flaming book for? [...] What’s wrong with the telly, for heaven’s sake? We’ve got a lovely telly with a twelve-inch screen and now you come asking for a book!”” (Dahl, 2007, p. 6), not mentioning the fact that he intentionally destroys one of Matilda’s precious books. Clearly, to Matilda’s parents, their television set is central; it represents both an uncomplicated source of fun as well as an agreeable companion during family meals. For Matilda, on the other hand, reading becomes passion since a local librarian helps her discover the amazing world of stories that further enhance Matilda’s brilliance, so atypical of her age: “She travelled all over the world while sitting in her little room in an English village” (Dahl, 2007, p. 15). While watching soap operas serves as tasteless entertainment for Mr and Mrs Wormwood that well corresponds to their shallowness, narrow-mindedness, and haughty manners, reading affects their daughter positively. She is much more intelligent than her parents since she is capable both of discussing literature, as well as of outwitting her horrid mother and father: “All the reading she had done had given her a view of life that they had never seen [...] If only they would read a little Dickens or

Kipling they would soon discover there was more to life than [...] watching television” (Dahl, 2007, p. 23).

### **The importance of tolerance and cooperation**

When it comes to tolerance and cooperation, these two qualities are promoted within Dahl’s book *James and the Giant Peach* whose hero, a young orphaned boy, goes on an adventurous journey across the Atlantic Ocean in an extremely large enchanted fruit. Curiously enough, the peach is inhabited by human-sized arthropods, such as Old-Green-Grasshopper, Centipede, Miss Spider, Silkworm, Glow-worm, Earthworm and Ladybird; upon discovering a mysterious tunnel, which leads to the peach stone, James comes across various vermin that grew to a huge size after he accidentally spilled an unspecified magic potion onto the grass. Normally, these little creatures do not pose a serious threat, unless they appear in large numbers, in this case, however, the enormous insects give poor James a real scare and it takes some time to assure him of their good intentions: “‘You mustn’t be frightened’, the Ladybug said kindly. ‘We wouldn’t dream of hurting you. You are one of us now, didn’t you know that? You are one of the crew. We’re all in the same boat’” (Dahl, 2001, p. 42). It is precisely the ability to accept otherness, the strange, even frightening appearance or behaviour of the creatures, that is required of James to put up with this sort of seemingly off-putting companions, not mentioning the fact that a bug or a worm may find a human being equally curious and intimidating: “Already, he was beginning to like his new friends very much. They were not nearly as terrible as they looked” (Dahl, 2001, p. 51). Accordingly, as their quest proceeds, James gets more enlightened in his views on the insects since they acquaint him with their helpfulness and merit, with the humorous exception of the Centipede, who declares himself to be “such a shocking dreadful pest” (Dahl, 2001, p. 101). To give an example of their accomplishments, the legs of the Old-Green-Grasshopper serve as a musical instrument to him, “as though he were playing upon a violin” (Dahl, 2001, p. 96); and while both the Earthworm as well as the Ladybird contribute to agriculture, so that “it is only natural that the farmer should love us” (Dahl, 2001, p. 99), Miss Spider feels, deservedly so, underrated since her commitment is not acknowledged: “‘I am not loved at all. And yet I do nothing but good. All day long I catch flies and mosquitoes in my webs. [...] It’s very

unfair the way we Spiders are treated” (Dahl, 2001, p. 101). Thus, not only does James learn that what seems peculiar at first sight, might as well prove to be beneficial, but he also realises that a deviation from normality does not automatically mean badness, which can be illustrated on his dispute with the Old-Green-Grasshopper over the rightful position of one’s ears:

‘You are joking,’ James said. ‘Nobody could possibly have his ears in his legs.’ ‘Why not?’ ‘Because... because it’s ridiculous, that’s why.’ ‘You know what I think is ridiculous?’ the Centipede said, grinning away as usual. ‘I don’t mean to be rude, but *I* think it is ridiculous to have ears on the sides of one’s head. It certainly *looks* ridiculous. You ought to take a peek in the mirror some day and see for yourself.’ (Dahl, 2001, p. 98)

As for cooperation, the importance of keeping an open mind as well as of setting personal differences aside becomes apparent when the group has to pull together facing various perils and dangers. This is well documented in the scene when the lives of the travellers are in jeopardy for the peach is under an attack by hordes of hungry sharks; in order to escape unscathed, James comes up with a brilliant plan that involves everyone’s participation:

[...] The Glow-worm was lighting up the room so that the two spinners, the Silkworm and Miss Spider, could see what they were doing. The Centipede was down there too, exhorting them both frantically to greater efforts. [...] The Old-Green-Grasshopper and the Ladybird gave the Earthworm’s tail an enormous tug, and like magic the Earthworm disappeared into the tunnel. At the same time, up went James’s hand and the seagull flew right into the loop of silk that he was holding out. (Dahl, 2001, p. 85)

In this sense, James and his friends gradually start to understand that cooperation is vital for a successful completion of their mission; they will only survive if they work together as a team, respect each other’s needs and quirks and, what is more, believe in each other. With reference to his previous ignorance, it is now up to James not only to put the minds of the alarmed inhabitants of New York City, where the giant peach lands, at ease, but also to inform them, along with the readers, about the lessons he has learned, as he proudly enumerates his fellows’ great assets: “‘Of course they’re not dangerous!’ James answered. ‘They’re the nicest creatures in the world! Allow me to introduce them to you one by one and then I’m sure you will believe me!’ (Dahl, 2001, p. 145).

## **The warnings about hypocrisy of the adult world**

Much has been written about Roald Dahl's arguable treatment of adults prevalent in his writing for children. While some find his openly expressed distrust of authorities rather unsettling and his tendency to portray the majority of adult characters either as stupid or as plain evil objectionable, it does not seem unreasonable to suggest that Roald Dahl employed the elements of exaggerated derision and cruel mockery in order to expose certain seamy principles of the world of adults, namely its corruption, false morals and double standards. In other words, he wanted to make his young readers aware of the fact that adults often do not abide by the rules they themselves lay stress on, or that they pretend to believe in something they do not really believe at all. Such degree of the author's frankness may appear detrimental at first sight since it undermines the basic prerequisite for order, that is, respect to authorities; however, it can be viewed as an attempt to prepare the juvenile readers for the inequitable and unjust world they grow to be part of. The arguments that support this thought can be found in *Danny the Champion of the World*. The main protagonist, perhaps like any young boy, has a high opinion of his beloved father who is also his son's unrivalled idol: "My father, without the slightest doubt, was the most marvellous and exciting father any boy ever had" (Dahl, 1994, p. 16). Nevertheless, Danny's idyllic image of his father gets some serious rifts when he learns a shocking truth about this man – that he sneaks in the woods at night where he poaches pheasants belonging to a rich landlord: "I was shocked! My father a thief! This gentle lovely man! I couldn't believe he would go creeping into the woods at night to pinch valuable birds belonging to somebody else" (Dahl, 1994, p. 38). Moreover, as Danny gets further involved in his father's mystery and they devise a masterful stratagem for ruining the shooting party of generally disliked Mr Hazell, to his utter bewilderment and dismay the boy reveals that nearly all of the authority figures in his small village, such as the doctor, the vicar with his wife (!) or even the local policeman (!!), are complicit in poaching and that they zestfully take part in the illegal activity: "I could hardly believe what they were saying. It was beginning to look as though just about everybody in the entire district was in on this poaching lark" (Dahl, 1994, p. 174). It is true that due to the involvement of the village community the poaching goes according to plan; Danny and his father have their revenge on Mr Hazell for his rudeness and conceit as they steal all his pheasants so that there is not one bird left in Hazell's woods to be shot, thus making Mr

Hazell look like a fool in front of the local dignitaries invited to the party. But then it is true that, in a manner of speaking, Danny finds himself surrounded by morally compromised characters, which is likely to cause a feeling of uncertainty and confusion to a child at his age. The following comment can therefore be seen as the author's revelation about the complex nature of adult men and women: "You will learn as you get older [...] that no father is perfect. Grown-ups are complicated creatures, full of quirks and secrets" (Dahl, 1994, p. 33).

Similar, yet more severe message can be traced in *The Witches*. Whereas *Danny the Champion of the World* deals with the moral ambiguity of adults, this book contains some explicit warnings about serious threats adults may pose to children, involving child abuse and murder. In this case the threats are personified by apparently-ordinary women revealed to be witches intending to annihilate children by magical means. Although presented as a pure fantasy, the story of the book is in a sense analogous to reality in that a witch can be viewed as a metaphor for a twisted individual who, for some reasons, inclines towards harming young boys and girls. These sociopaths, whose existence is well documented, act in many ways like witches. First, they operate covertly, which is the greatest threat since it makes one feel insecure about the true identity of these evildoers: "Real witches dress in ordinary clothes and look very much like ordinary women. They live in ordinary houses and they work in ordinary jobs" (Dahl, 2010, p. 1). Second, in order to lure the innocent victims, they misuse children's curiosity and credulity, as the main character's first encounter with a witch illustrates: "'Come down 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" (Dahl, 2010, p. 38). And third, they actually pretend to be full of good intentions while the sole purpose of their actions is sick malice. Evidence to support this thought can be found in the passage where the boy accidentally comes across the Annual Meeting of witches in a hotel he and his grandmother, who happens to be a witch-hunter, spend their summer holidays in; paradoxically, the witches gather disguised as members of an organisation aiming to help the young while they secretly plot against children: "'And all of them including the Grand High Witch herself are downstairs now! They're pretending they are the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children!'" (Dahl, 2010, p. 121). In this respect, the scene when the experienced grandmother gives her

grandson some insight into strategies how to recognize a witch, emphasising suspicious aspects of their appearance or behaviour, certainly involves typical features of the parental advice not to talk to strangers: “‘My darling,’ she said, ‘you won’t last long in this world if you don’t know how to spot a witch when you see one’ (Dahl, 2010, p. 8).

To some extent, the hypocrisy of adult characters is also exposed in *Matilda* as it depicts the obvious inconsistencies in what adults claim to be inappropriate and what they themselves tend to do. This is well reflected in the discussion about bad habits and their consequences Matilda and her parents are holding. After Matilda tells her parents about a boy whose finger glued on in his nose, making him look as if he was picking his nose all the time, her parents react most surprisingly:

‘Serve him right,’ Mrs Wormwood said. ‘He shouldn’t have put his finger up there in the first place. It’s a nasty habit. If all children had Superglue put on their fingers they’d soon stop doing it.’ Matilda said, ‘Grown-ups do it too, Mumm. I saw you doing it yesterday in the kitchen.’ ‘That’s quite enough from you,’ Mrs Wormwood said, turning pink. (Dahl, 2007, p. 28)

The same is true for another passage where Matilda disapproves of her father’s tendencies to deceive his customers by selling them impaired second-hand cars passed off as high-quality products:

Matilda, who had been listening closely, said, ‘But Daddy, that’s even more dishonest than the sawdust. It’s disgusting. You’re cheating people who trust you.’ ‘If you don’t like it then don’t eat the food in this house,’ the father said. ‘It’s bought with the profits.’ ‘It’s dirty money,’ Matilda said. ‘I hate it.’ Two red spots appear on the father’s cheeks. ‘Who the heck do you think you are,’ he shouted, ‘the Archbishop of Canterbury or something, preaching to me about honesty? You’re just an ignorant little squirt who hasn’t the foggiest idea what you’re talking about!’ (Dahl, 2007, p. 19)

### **Tips for parents**

The examples taken from *Matilda* bring us to another important aspect of Roald Dahl’s fiction for children, that is, its potential effect on parents or generally carers. Given the simple premise that typically parents read the children’s books aloud to their sons and daughters, Roald Dahl incorporated in his writing his own notions on what an ideal parent should or should not be like, thus making sure that mothers and fathers would at least once

contemplate their parenting skills when reading his books. Consequently, Dahl's writing contains vivid depictions of good parenting as well as of what can surely be called a grotesque caricature of a parent.

When it comes to parenting skills, there is a marked contrast between Matilda's parents in *Matilda* and Danny's father in *Danny the Champion of the world*. Much has been already suggested in the previous part; despite the fact that Matilda's parents can neither be compared to the abusive and sadistic duo of aunts in *James and the Giant peach*, nor do they spoil their children like the incompetent mothers and fathers of the antiheroes in *Charlie and the Chocolate factory*, still they can hardly be awarded with a price for best parents since their methods of upbringing involve certain controversial aspects: "Occasionally, one comes across parents who [...] show no interest at all in their children, and these of course are far worse than the doting ones. Mr and Mrs Wormwood were two such parents. [...] They looked upon Matilda in particular as nothing more than a scab" (Dahl, 2007, p. 4). Perhaps because of their clear preference for their first-born son Michael, Matilda's parents seem completely oblivious to her very existence, let alone her excellence:

Matilda was [...] brilliant. Her mind so nimble and she was so quick to learn that her ability should have been obvious even to the most half-witted of parents. But Mr and Mrs Wormwood were both so gormless and so wrapped up in their own silly little lives that they failed to notice anything unusual about their daughter. (Dahl, 2007, p. 4)

It is clear that her parents neglect Matilda's basic needs and wishes; sadly for the little girl, her marvellous accomplishments, if noticed by her parents at all, are dismissed as unimportant, even annoying. Undoubtedly, such level of disinterest must in itself be very hard for a small child to deal with; moreover, it causes a great damage to the child's self-confidence which, if left unsupported, only gets worse in later stages of life. The following comment well describes the divide between the desirable qualities of an ideal parent and reality: "Matilda longed for her parents to be good and loving and understanding and honourable and intelligent. The fact that they were none of these things was something she had to put up with. It was not easy to do so" (Dahl, 2007, p. 43). The aforementioned demonstrations of unfair mistreatment would assuredly be enough to result in one's feeling of anger and frustration with his or her parents. Nonetheless, what Matilda detest most

about them is that they often snap at her for no apparent reason, especially her father tends to call her “little twit” although she is obviously more intelligent than any of the rest of the family: “She resented being told constantly that she was ignorant and stupid when she knew she wasn’t” (Dahl, 2007, p. 23). The parents’ neglect of Matilda escalates in the final scene when she is abandoned by them for good as they are about to flee the country in a desperate attempt to avoid the persecution for her father’s criminal behaviour; they leave Matilda behind on her own behalf since she wants to stay with her beloved teacher, Miss Honey, who promises to take care of her. Ironically enough, it is the first time Mr and Mrs Wormwood actually comply with their daughter’s request: “‘Why don’t we let her go if that’s what she wants. It’ll be one less to look after’ (Dahl, 2007, p. 232).

As for *Danny the Champion of the World*, the characteristics of a parental figure are quite opposite from those mentioned above, suggesting that Danny is better off with a single parent when compared to nuclear family in *Matilda*. In spite of his late mother’s absence, Danny has an idyllic childhood living in a gypsy caravan with his father, a mechanic and filling-station owner, who tries to make up for the loss of his son’s mother every day: “I think that all the love he had for my mother when she was alive he now lavished upon me” (Dahl, 1994, p. 11). In stark contrast to Wormwoods, Danny’s father is described as sympathetic, nurturing and deeply loving; the positive child-adult relationship very much resembles the close bond between the grandmother and the boy depicted in *The Witches*. Although it is implied that the living conditions Danny and his father find themselves in are mediocre to say the least, his father’s attentive care as well as creativity more than compensate for the general lack of material comfort since he provides his son with intellectual, emotional as well as bodily sustenance. This involves good story-telling, sincerity and open-mindedness, fatherly advice and encouragement instead of stern criticism, empathy and guidance in place of orders and bans, and, perhaps more significantly, the adult’s willingness to spend time with his child: “It was impossible to be bored in my father’s company. He was too sparky a man for that. Plots and plans and new ideas came flying off him like sparks from a grindstone” (Dahl, 1994, p. 25). In all fairness, the father’s defense of poaching may appear a bit controversial since it is justified in higher moral code; however, it can be viewed as an attempt to teach his son that human beings have to treat one another with mutual respect or else there will be consequences, as in case of Mr Hazell for his insulting treatment of Danny: “‘It’ll always be Hazell’s



Wood,' he said. 'First because that's where all the pheasants are. And second because I don't like Mr Hazell one little bit and it's a pleasure to poach his birds' (Dahl, 1994, p. 52). Similarly, as it is obvious in the scene where Danny's father learns about Danny's teacher's unfair, even cruel methods of punishment, he makes it clear to Danny that no matter what happens, he will be at his son's side, ready to protect him: "I told him everything. He stood there holding my wrist, his face going whiter and whiter, and I could see the fury beginning to boil up dangerously inside him. 'I kill him!' he softly whispered when I had finished" (Dahl, 1994, p. 130). In conclusion, it appears that on the basis of the comparison between the financially secured, yet dysfunctional Wormwood family in *Matilda* and the harmonic relationship between Danny and his father a question can be raised what essential in upbringing. While it is perhaps up to an individual parent to come up with the answer, the author seems to support the following notion: "When you grow up and have children of your own, do please remember something important: a stodgy parent is *no fun at all*. What a child wants *and deserves* is a parent who is SPARKY" (Dahl, 1994, p. 224).

### **Tips for teachers**

Based on his negative experience with the British schooling system, it should come as no surprise that Roald Dahl commented on good and bad teaching in his fiction. The children's book in which Dahl's views on how to educate children are explicitly presented is definitely *Matilda* since it depicts the main protagonist's encounter with both the ideal and the deterrent type of a teacher. Whereas the former is personified by young and gentle Miss Honey apparently devoted to her profession, the latter is represented by severe, even dastardly Miss Trunchbull who, despite being a headmistress, shows not even the slightest interest in children for she only perceives teaching as an opportunity to exert power on the young. Hence, the contrast between their approaches to teaching enables Dahl to illustrate possible strengths and weaknesses in education.

To begin with, as far as the teacher's personality is concerned, Miss Honey certainly fulfils the criteria for being a good teacher. Evidence for the thought that she is

enthusiastic, patient, and sensitive to children's needs can be found in the following excerpt:

Miss Jennifer Honey was a mild and quiet person who never raised her voice and was seldom seen to smile, but there is no doubt she possessed that rare gift for being adored by every small child under her care. She seemed to understand totally the bewilderment and fear that so often overwhelm young children who for the first time in their lives are herded into a classroom and told to obey. Some curious warmth that was almost tangible shone out of Miss Honey's face when she spoke to a confused and homesick newcomer to the class. (Dahl, 2007, p. 60)

Moreover, Miss Honey is quick in recognising and understanding her pupils' potential, especially Matilda's unique talents and impressive intelligence which is greatly undermined by Matilda's boorish parents: "She had just met a small girl who possessed, or so it seemed to her; quite extraordinary qualities of brilliance. [...] Something had to be done about it as soon as possible" (Dahl, 2007, p. 76). On the other hand, judging by Miss Trunchbull's personality, she seems to be the least likely candidate for a good teacher, let alone headmistress:

Now most head teachers are chosen because they possess a number of fine qualities. They understand children and they have the children's best interests at heart. They are sympathetic. They are fair and they are deeply interested in education. Miss Trunchbull possessed none of these qualities and how she ever got her present job was a mystery. (Dahl, 2007, p. 76).

Not only is dreaded Miss Trunchbull extremely strict with the little pupils, unnecessarily pedantic, and ill-tempered, but she also lacks the basic sense of decency: "She was a 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 [...]" (Dahl, 2007, p. 61).

When it comes to the teacher's attitude to children, it is clear from the above mentioned that Miss Honey's treatment of the little pupils is again far better than that of Miss Trunchbull. She is empathetic, kind and able to appreciate as well as sustain the pupils' abilities, not mentioning the fact that she encourages in her students a love of learning: "I myself want to help you to learn as much as possible while you are in this class" (Dahl, 2007, p. 63). Moreover, the fact that she likes children can be illustrated with the bond which begins to develop between Miss Honey and Matilda. By contrast, not only

does Miss Trunchbull undervalue the children's abilities, but she is also adamant about their limitations, as apparent from her unduly adverse reactions to the pupils' mistakes: "‘You bursting blister!’ yelled the Trunchbull. ‘You moth-eaten maggot! This is *not* adding up!’" (Dahl, 2007, p. 212). Accordingly, Miss Trunchbull has fixed, and indeed truly disturbing ideas about children; what is more, she openly admits that she detests them: "‘They are the bane of my life. They are like insects. They should be got rid of as early as possible’" (Dahl, 2007, p. 153). Curiously enough, it seems as if Miss Trunchbull forgot that once she too was a small child: "‘*Me!* A baby!’ shouted Miss Trunchbull. ‘How dare you suggest such a thing! [...] What infernal insolence!’" (Dahl, 2007, p. 145). Undoubtedly, the hostile stance on children and the lack of empathy make the worst possible combination in terms of the teacher's relations to students.

Finally, considering the teaching methods, there too is a marked contrast between Miss Honey and Miss Trunchbull. While the former employs exacting but optimal, even innovative approaches to teaching – she teaches spelling through songs, arranges an individual study plan for Matilda, wantd to involve Matilda's parents in their daughter's process of education etc. – the latter insists on maintaining strict discipline and her teaching style can thus be characterised as retrograde: "‘I have a rule in this school that all children remain in their own age groups regardless of ability’" (Dahl, 2007, p. 82). In addition to that, the headmistress's preferred methods of teaching are based not only on the dull, purposeless repetition of the gained knowledge, but also on unusual, shockingly violent and certainly forbidden means of corporal punishments whose effectiveness is rather questionable, to say the least, as it only contributes to the atmosphere of fear in the classroom: "‘Only yesterday the Trunchbull caught a boy called Julius Rottwinkle eating Liquorice Allsorts during the scripture lesson and she simply picked him up by one arm and flung him clear out of the open classroom window’" (Dahl, 2007, p. 104).

To some extent, Dahl's consistent opinions on education are made known in *Danny the Champion of the World* as well. This time however, Dahl puts emphasis on positive features of home-schooling, as opposed to uniformity of official institutions. Before Danny's school attendance begins, his father familiarises him with his profession, that is, repairing machines, since he is aware of the importance of practical skills: "‘In another two years you will have learned enough here with me to be able to take a small engine

completely to pieces and put it together again all by yourself. After that, you can go to school” (Dahl, 1994, p. 24). Besides, he transmits to his son the love of beauty of nature, teaching him the names and characteristics of trees, flowers and animals that surround them: “Mostly it was he who talked and I who listened, and just about everything he said was fascinating. [...] I believe he could have become a great naturalist if only he had had a good schooling” (Dahl, 1994, p. 115). As for his teaching style, despite the fact that he is no professional, the methods, including demonstrations, creating friendly atmosphere, the focus on interesting details, praising and, perhaps most significantly, individual endeavour, could easily fulfil the high standards of the educational system:

This was one of the really nice things about my father. He didn't take over and want to do everything himself. Whether it was a difficult job like adjusting a carburettor in a big engine, or whether it was simply tipping some raisins into a basin, he always let me go ahead and do it myself while he watched and stood ready to help. (Dahl, 1994, p. 129)

However, when it comes to the portrayal of Danny's school, although most of the teachers Danny encounters are nice and decent, it would not be typical Dahl if his book did not contain at least one example of a bad educator; in *Danny the Champion of the World* this example is personified by stern and unjust Captain Lancaster, who, similarly to Miss Trunchbull, indulges in beating small children to punish them for the slightest manifestations of indiscipline: “Captain Lancaster was a violent man, and we were all terrified of him” (Dahl, 1994, p. 121).

### **Commentaries**

The aforementioned analysis of Roald Dahl's books for children demonstrates, that, as far as didactic aspects are concerned, the author assuredly has much to recommend.

Dahl's didactic intent can be found in *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, where the inadequacies and faults of the disobedient children, Augustus, Violet, Veruca, and Mike, result in their disfigured bodies that serve as symbols of their excesses. These involve gluttony, overindulgence in revolting habits, bad manners, and arrogance. The examples of their misbehaviour are contrasted with kindness and generosity of Charlie

Bucket who eventually gets rewarded for his obedience. The punishments that the naughty children bring upon themselves can therefore serve as a warning to the readers not to behave in a socially unacceptable way. What is more, with undisguised irony Dahl supports the notion that children's pathological addiction to television has harmful effects on them since it, as in case of Mike Teavee, alters their perception of reality, not mentioning their uncontrollable exposure to inappropriate violence. The criticism of television appears simultaneously in *Matilda*, which depicts the struggle between the well read young girl and her narrow-minded parents. It is suggested that while Mr and Mrs Wormwood's stupidity and superficiality is based on watching shallow soap operas, Matilda's fondness for reading contributes not only to her immense intelligence, but also to her school results. In his zealous support for books Dahl promotes the beneficial effects of reading and innumerable pleasures connected with this activity, as opposed to not very stimulating and often monotonous forms of entertainment. This can be viewed as his attempt to foster interest in reading by his juvenile readers. Interestingly enough, given the fact that these books were written decades ago, Dahl can be seen as a prophet in that he anticipated children's growing addiction to audiovisual media (television, computer games etc.) and warned against its harmful effects.

The predominant message of *James and the Giant Peach* is that one should not judge others according to his or her first impression of them; in other words, there is always more to someone than meets the eye. This is certainly true for the human-sized insects James comes across in an enchanted fruit; although they look frightening, they actually are harmless. As the group faces extreme, character-revealing situations, James even grows to like the creatures for their unique abilities as well as to tolerate their little foibles. In this sense, whereas for James and his insect friends the journey in a giant peach is a quest for adventure, for the readers it can symbolise a quest for understanding, since they learn that often due to our sheer ignorance we fail to notice the positive aspects of what seems ridiculous at first sight. Also, based on the vivid characterizations of various bugs and worms, the book can give the readers some insight into the beauty and diversity of the world of nature.

The hypocrisy of adults is exposed in *Danny the Champion of the World*, in *The Witches*, and, to some extent, in *Matilda*. While Danny reveals that adults are imperfect

human beings in that they too have secrets and hidden, often hardly understandable desires, the boy in *The Witches* prevents horrible bloodshed as he uncovers the mysterious clan of witches and, together with his grandmother, foils their plans of mass destruction of children. This can be read as an allegory to parental advice to be vigilant, especially when dealing with strangers, for many adults disguise themselves as pleasant and attentive, but they in fact pose a threat to children. The book well documents that the gravity of danger springing from adults cannot be dismissed as inconsequential since it involves child abuse and murder. In *Matilda*, the hypocrisy is personified by Matilda's parents who usually say one thing and do another, as in case of Mrs Wormwood, or maliciously boast about cheating people, as in case of Mr Wormwood. It is only natural that Matilda, unable to put up with this level of ignorance, invents some truly original punishments for her parents, thus giving way to her feelings of resentment and anger towards them.

Despite the fact that the novels analysed in this part clearly aim at juvenile readers and thus their didactic purpose is adjusted to suit the children's understanding, they can also transmit a forceful message, or at least provide parents and teachers with food for thought about optimal upbringing and education since they contain both implicit as well as explicit hints. According to Dahl, education should ideally be practical since he was well aware of the fact that children seem to take a great delight in discovering things for themselves rather than sitting down in school, reproducing knowledge with no apparent relevance to real life. A sterling teacher, as personified by Miss Honey in *Matilda*, should be devoted to teaching, empathetic, kind, patient and able to recognize the potential of individual students; under no circumstances should he or she tend to solve problems using violence. As for good parenting, this is best exemplified by Danny's father in *Danny the Champion of the World* who is not only deeply loving, but also attentive, caring, kindly supportive and, perhaps most significantly, willing to spend time with his child in a creative way.

This chapter presents the results of the analysis of the selected works by Roald Dahl. Each aspect is supported by illustrations from the books and later commented on in terms of Dahl's possible didactic intent. The following chapter explores the implications for teaching in terms of the applicability of the aforementioned findings to the process of education.

## V. IMPLICATIONS

This chapter explores the possible application and relevance of the didactic aspects found in the selected works by Roald Dahl. It also concerns to what extent these aspects can affect the personal development of students and professional development of teachers.

As Roald Dahl himself suggested, reading is a wholesome activity which brings many benefits to a reader. Not only is it a source of pleasure, but it also broadens one's horizons in terms of understanding the world as well as of language learning. It is precisely due to these aspects that reading has earned its rightful place within the curriculum. When it comes to books at school, their usage is varied; from textbooks to supplementary materials in the language classroom. What is more, the necessity to put emphasis on reading is a current issue since, as the research shows, there is a growing tendency even among small children to perceive books as old-fashioned in comparison to modern technologies and mass media. Therefore, it is up to school institutions, whose aim is to refine and sustain the emotional as well as rational growth of students, to promote the value and meaning of this activity.

### **Implications for teaching**

Regarding the usage of didactic aspects of Roald Dahl's books for children in education, the above mentioned books are worth purchasing as they have a great potential in terms of students' personal growth and teachers' professional development.

As concerns teachers, the relevance of children's books which depict school environment to teaching is obvious in that this environment is described from the point of view of a pupil. Thus the teacher can get feedback about how children feel about school, what they experience there etc. The findings obtained from the analysis of Roald Dahl's books, namely the portrayal of teachers' personalities and teaching styles in *Matilda*, serve as tips for teachers since they enable them to evaluate the treatment of children within classroom objectively and critically. Accordingly, every teacher can contemplate whether his or her teaching style is similar to that of Miss Honey or perhaps that of Miss Trunchbull, and to what extent he or she follows the example of Danny's father in terms of

illustrative, innovative and interesting teaching methods; needless to say that such contemplation may result in improving his or her qualities as an educator.

As far as the applicability of the didactic aspects is concerned, Roald Dahl's books can contribute to moral, character and social education. Given the fact that the typical age span of Dahl's child characters is between 7 and 12 years, it is advisable to use Dahl's books with lower-secondary students or pupils of primary schools. However, teachers should consider the sufficiency of students' language level; perhaps a Czech translation or a simplified version, of course with the preservation of the predominant messages and motifs, could replace the actual books if the students find them too difficult, which would be rather contra productive. When it comes to concrete activities involving Roald Dahl's books, there are many ways to include these in the lessons, depending on various factors, such as aims of the lessons, their total number and time options.

The books can best be used in a long-term process. As for the reading strategies and methods of work, teachers can suggest how the books will be dealt with in the classroom but they should bear in mind that children will probably take more delight in working with the books if they are given the opportunity to take part in the decision-making process, what and how they want to read, whether as a whole-class or individual reading, focusing on certain passages and characters etc. Similarly, children will supposedly react better if engaged in group discussions. These are essential since they allow the teacher to causally and non-violently make the students aware of ideal qualities or amiable deeds of the characters of Roald Dahl's books. To give an example, children can be given the task to compare and contrast the child characters of *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* and *Matilda*. Also, their assignment can be to analyse *James and the Giant Peach* in terms of the characteristics of the insects and their contribution to the success of the journey. Or they can be asked to describe how one can recognize a witch, as suggested in *The Witches*, and even come up with their own ideas. Equally attractive for children is Dahl's sense of humour; children can invent songs similar to those of the Oompa-Loompas. Hence the teacher can effectively promote reader identification with sympathetic literary figures which is, as we have seen earlier, the basic premise for adopting the desirable characteristics, such as respect, tolerance and obedience. Another form of work with the books consists in keeping a reader's diary, where children would write their notions about



and responses to Dahl's fiction for children. This strategy could be best employed during language lessons, especially if the diaries were to be kept in English, since it gives the students the opportunity to practice reading and writing. Children could make small entries which would be periodically checked by the teacher. The evaluation could take the form of the teacher's short comments that would point out the strengths as well as weaknesses of the author's writing style and thoughts. Nevertheless, it is important to ensure that the students do not copy specific parts of the works available online; the dairies should not simply provide a concise summary of the stories, but more likely to depict what the students personally think about the characters or plots of Dahl's books.

### **Limitations of the research**

The limitation of this work is undoubtedly the absence of the actual classroom research. However, it would be rather naive to believe that the didactic aspects have an immediate effect on the students, quite on the contrary, to cultivate their personal as well as civic competence by means of reading is a long-term process that requires not only the systematic approach, but also to some extent, the participation of family, or at least other teachers. The teacher has to take into consideration the students' language level as well. The choice of what aspects to focus on in Dahl's stories requires the teacher's sufficient familiarity with the individual students in the classroom. Perhaps the whole idea of giving children moral sense through reading would appear rather idealistic nowadays, given the fact that children are more interested in high-tech gadgets and gizmos and they could find the whole concept utterly uninteresting. It is therefore essential to carefully plan a whole-year project concerning Roald Dahl's books in advance in order to make it as appealing for students as possible.

### **Suggestions for further research**

While the major concern of this work focuses solely on five books by Roald Dahl, it is suggested to explore his stories further in order to find other, perhaps less obvious aspects that could serve the didactic purposes. Further research could also examine the relationships between adult and child characters in Dahl's fiction more closely as these are perceived differently by adult and children's readers. Equally inspiring would be to compare and contrast Dahl's writing for adults and for children in terms of the author's suitability for juvenile readers. Another suggestion for further research is that it could

generally explore Dahl's ambiguous portrayal of the educational system, its negative as well as positive characteristics. Last but not least, further research could be aimed at Dahl's playful and innovative way of writing and its possible impacts on teaching English language.

This chapter explores the applicability of the findings presented in the previous part to education. The didactic aspects are considered with respect to their practical usage, relevance to teachers as well as students, and the limitations of the research. Suggestions for further research are presented. The next chapter briefly summarizes the research question as well as the content of this thesis.

## VI. CONCLUSION

It has been mentioned several times in the Theoretical Background that children's literature is a world of its own that opens up to a child through reading. What the readers find in this world is as diverse as the area of books for children. Some might find solace while others pleasure. Some find wisdom, while others beauty. However, what this kind of literature offers to all is the basic assurance that sooner or later good will triumph over evil. Adults may laugh at the naivety of this, but whether they want to admit it to themselves or not, somewhere deep inside they still believe in it.

Roald Dahl is a unique author who did not forget about this belief even after he grew up since he tried to transmit this message to his children's readers in almost every book he wrote for them. The young characters in his writing struggle with indifferent parents, cruel foster parents, brutal teachers and dangerous creatures. More often than not, they face the direst circumstances. Nevertheless, they emerge winners from the fight because they are the good ones while losers are the bad ones. Although the degree of mockery, violence and disrespect for authority in Dahl's fiction for children can be viewed by some as inappropriate and objectionable to say the least, this is where the didactic aspects of Roald Dahl's works for children typically become apparent, in conflicts and extreme situations. As for moral intents, Dahl is careful never to preach, never to be moralistic. Instead, he employs his vivid imagination as well as hilarious humour to emphasise the qualities he perceives as vital for moral fibre, while condemning characteristics he deprecates as detrimental.

Given the aforementioned features of Dahl's writing, the analysis of the selected works by this author has proved that Dahl's books can contribute to moral and character education as they provide the readers with numerous illustrations of socially accepted behaviour and characteristics. Similarly, they can positively affect parents and teachers since they enable them to objectively evaluate their approaches to upbringing and education. In addition, Dahl's innovative and playful way of writing can serve as a source of inspiration for activities within English language classroom. As diverse as the usage of Roald Dahl's books for children can be, its underlying aspects, namely to foster interest in reading by children and thus educating them in right values, remain of major importance, especially in the mass media competition.

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## SHRNUTÍ

Tato diplomová práce se zabývá rozbohem vybraných děl pro děti od Roalda Dahla z hlediska jejich možného vhodného působení na čtenáře. Teoreticky popisuje aspekty dětské literatury, zvláštní důraz je přitom kladen na funkci výchovnou, její proměny v průběhu vývoje literatury význam pro výchovné působení na čtenáře. Zmíněny jsou také životní peripetie Roalda Dahla a jejich vliv na autorovu tvorbu. V práci je dostatečný prostor věnován kritice Dahlových děl z hlediska jejich nevhodnosti pro malé čtenáře, což je ale na základě protiargumentů vyvráceno, to vše s odkazem na odbornou literaturu. Práce dále zkoumá jednotlivé didaktické aspekty nalezené v Dahlových knihách a podpořené úryvky z nich. Cílem je zjistit, do jaké míry se tyto aspekty dají prakticky využít ve vzdělávacím a výchovném procesu. Rozbor jednotlivých aspektů je následován komentáři. V neposlední řadě se práce věnuje otázce praktického využití Dahlových děl ve škole, ať už při výuce anglického jazyka nebo v rámci osobnostní výchovy.