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1. Introduction

Roald Dahl is without a doubt one of the most popular children's authors in the Western world. His fame is reflected in numerous surveys designed to determine the best-loved children's books, which feature works by Dahl on top of the list. For example, a survey by *The Young Telegraph* in 1993, three years after Dahl's death, revealed that those polled voted eight of his children's books on the top ten, five of which got the first places (Maynard & McKnight 2). This success prevailed until the early years of the twenty-first century when it was eventually overshadowed by J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter series (Butler 1). By the dawn of the first decade of this century, Dahl's books have been translated into 54 languages including Afrikaans, Welsh (Butler 11) and even Latin. In addition, no less than nine films based on his works (including adult fiction) have been published so far. All this gives evidence of the author's persistent reach and popularity.

Of course, being part of the literary discourse entails facing up to criticism, and Dahl was not immune to disapproval either. Especially as a writer of juvenile fiction it is hard to meet parents', teachers' and scholars' requirements as to what is suitable for the young readers. The debate about Dahl's books for children evolves to a large extent around recurring elements in his books, such as alleged vulgarism, racism, sexism and, most relevant for this diploma thesis, violence. What appears to be most condemnable for many critics of the violence in Dahl's children's literature is its gratuitous character marked by "an unnecessary tone of glee and spite" (Reese 144, 145). This appealing to children's sadistic side is grist to the mills of those who view violent content of this type as promoting the decay of innocence, an ideal that has been ascribed to children since the Romantic period.

This thesis attempts to revisit violence in Roald Dahl's fiction for children, with a special focus on two of his most celebrated books, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*¹ and *Matilda*. In the theoretical part the concept of violence will be investigated by drawing upon various definitions. Although violence is a phenomenon present in everyday life and thus familiar to people of all age

¹ For reasons of reader-friendliness, this rather long title will be shortened to *Charlie* in the following.

groups, social backgrounds and ethnic communities, a look at the literature reveals that there are many ways and, even more importantly, contexts in which to define violence. Therefore, violence oscillates between a myriad of spheres changing its shape depending on the area under investigation. It is thus necessary to come up with a definition as clear and general as possible in order to obtain a term to work with in this thesis.

One important term to tackle in a discussion of violence is aggression, since both expressions are similar. Yet, aggression is mainly used in the field of psychology as a collective term encompassing violence, which is merely used for severe cases. This diploma thesis, however, uses the term violence as in common parlance it is used to denote an action causing harm, while aggression is rather associated with an emotion. In addition, violence will be investigated in the context of child abuse, which makes sense due to the fact that children in Dahl's books are often subject to violent treatment by adults. Moreover, that subsection also serves the purpose of expanding the category of violence by including terms such as dignity and psychological abuse. In the final section of these introductory pages violence shall be examined in connection with power, as both concepts are related and exist on the grounds of mutual impact.

Since this thesis looks at violence in children's books, one chapter is also dedicated to the field of children's literature. The second part of the introduction therefore tries to summarize more than 250 years of the genre's history by concentrating on the image of the child that has dramatically changed with the passage of time. This has influenced the literature written for the young readers to a great deal, from books written to educate and moralize the next generation to texts whose primary goal was to evoke delight. Before turning to the analysis of the two books, the final section is dedicated to the author himself and the way he viewed children, which of course had an impact on his writing style.

The analytical chapters of this thesis are structured as follows: First, *Charlie* and *Matilda* will be scrutinized for their violent content by investigating and furthermore comparing forms, functions and effects of violence in both texts. Next, a particularly important point, that is, the question if Dahl's books can be considered appropriate for young children, considering the violent scenes they feature, will be addressed. This section will pinpoint certain qualities of violence

in Dahl's juvenile fiction which serve the purpose of reducing potential fearful reactions of children who are confronted with violence in the books. In other words, the relevant section will develop the argument that Dahl purposefully uses certain strategies when writing about violence, which lead children to enjoy rather than fear such scenes.

The final chapter will not focus on the famous author's texts but on his equally renowned illustrator, Quentin Blake. In a brief discussion, Blake's artwork will be examined as to what extent it reflects the violence occurring in the textual material. In doing so, the balancing act of presenting violence in a way suitable for a young target group shall be sufficiently reconstructed.

At the present day, the violence described by Dahl in his juvenile fiction no longer seems to be as revolting as it apparently was 30 years ago. Movies, video games, lyrics and, naturally, literature featuring and often glorifying violence make the criticism against books like *Charlie* appear almost ridiculous. Nevertheless, a close look at some of the scenes conjured up by Dahl, especially in his later works, reveals a not so harmless picture: Stripped off humor and fantasy, what remains is violence in its purest and cruelest form. This being said, the investigations hopefully offer a new perspective as far as violence in Dahl's children's literature is concerned. On the one hand, this may counteract past reproaches, on the other, it may show what readers of Dahl's juvenile fiction find so fascinating and appealing about his books.

2. Violence

Violence is intriguing. It is universally condemned yet to be found everywhere. Most of us are both fascinated and horrified by it. It is a fundamental ingredient of how we entertain ourselves (children's stories, world literature, the movie industry) and an essential feature of many of our social institutions. In most parts of the world it is notoriously common in family life, religious affairs, and political history. (Litke 173)

This quote by the Canadian philosopher Bob Litke reflects both the versatility and ubiquity of violence, a phenomenon as old as the human race. Violence has been known throughout history in different cultures and societies and occurs in various contexts of social, political as well as interpersonal life. Despite, or rather because of its omnipresence it is "one of the most elusive and

most difficult concepts in the social sciences” (Imbusch 13). Consequently, there has been certain disagreement amongst scholars with regard to the characterization of violence. In general, definitions vary greatly depending on the historical context as well as the respective scientific domains (Anderson 163). In the following, an attempt to define violence shall be made by drawing upon various approaches towards this subject matter.

2.1 Defining Violence

In the attempt to define violence, one inevitably has to take into account aggression. Both terms are used interchangeably in everyday speech with aggression being primarily used to express a sort of emotion. Violence, on the other hand, often denotes the visible form of aggression or, in simpler terms, a kind of behavior. One can therefore argue that violence is aggression put into action. This usage of the terminology can be found for example in the Oxford English Dictionary, which defines aggression as “feelings of anger or antipathy resulting in hostile or violent behaviour” (“Aggression”). ‘Violence’, on the other hand, refers to “behaviour involving physical force intended to hurt, damage, or kill someone or something” (“Violence”).

While both definitions may seem quite obvious at first sight, the concepts become slightly more ambiguous by the following characterization: Sociologists regard aggression as twofold, that is to say, as “a manifest action aimed at causing physical or psychological injury or harm to another“, or as “a latent potential or disposition to such an action or such behavior” (Imbusch 18-19). The latter definition suggests that aggression is distinct from violence, namely a “preliminary stage of violence” (Imbusch 19), whereas in the first case the boundaries between aggression and violence are somewhat blurred.

In studies of psychology, on the other hand, aggression is used only in the first sense of the meaning mentioned above. Baron & Richardson (7), for example, maintain that the term “aggression” should purely be seen as a certain behavior and not as “an emotion, a motive, or an attitude”. Although they concede that feelings like anger or biases such as racism clearly may contribute to the development of aggression, they do not see a necessary connection between such or similar dispositions and aggressive behavior. Furthermore, they note

that most social scientists nowadays would agree most likely on aggression as “any form of behavior directed toward the goal of harming or injuring another living being who is motivated to avoid such treatment” (Baron & Richardson 7).

This definition differs from the one given by the OED in many aspects and it raises the question if violence and aggression can be used synonymously after all. In other words, if aggression is defined as what is commonly understood by the term ‘violence’, then what is violence? Viewed from a strictly psychological perspective, violence is regarded as a subcategory of aggression which describes “extreme forms of aggression, such as murder, rape, and assault” (Anderson 163). In other words, “[a]ll violence is aggression, but many forms of aggression are not violent” (Anderson 163). Agreeing on violence as a subtype of aggression, one can draw upon the definition stated in the previous paragraph in order to propose a potential framework for violence. In simpler terms, “[h]uman aggression is behavior performed by one person (the aggressor) with the intent of harming another person (the victim) who is believed by the aggressor to be motivated to avoid that harm” (Anderson 163).

This involves yet another problem: How is harm to be defined, qualitatively *and* quantitatively? Clearly, the answer to this question will differ according to the person asked. However, it has been agreed that harm means direct physical harm such as a punch in the face, direct psychological harm, which could be verbal insults, and indirect harm, for example, destroying someone’s property (Anderson 163). Harm inflicted upon someone unintentionally is, however, not considered aggressive (Anderson 163). This leads to a further characteristic of aggression and violence, respectively, that is, intentionality.

Intentionality is the basis for any aggressive behavior to deserve the term violence or aggression. However, the cause of intentionality is irrelevant. Consider, for example, the following cases in each of which the intention to cause harm or pain is clearly present: An aggressive act can be thoughtful, that is, an instrument to achieve a certain goal, or thoughtless, in other words, a sheer impulse caused by anger (Anderson 163). Due to its impulsive nature, this latter incident of aggression is not “cognitively mediated” (Tedeschi &

Felson 165)² but nevertheless intended to harm. In the attempt to differentiate violence more distinctively from mere aggressive behavior, a rule of thumb proposed by Tolan (6) appears useful: “What is violent and how serious or offensive is that violence depend on how fully formed the intent to harm is”.

The final component of the working definition involves a recipient who is “motivated to avoid [the] harm”. Although this may seem rather straightforward, there are ambiguous cases in which the sufferer does in fact seek to be harmed. Examples are certain sexual practices such as sadomasochism, but also suicide constitutes a pertinent case in which “the aggressor serves as his or her own victim” (Baron & Richardson 11). According to Baron & Richardson (11) suicidal behavior therefore does not fall within the category of aggression. However, perspectives differ with regard to this point. For example, Krug et al. (5) clearly count suicidal behavior and self-abusive acts as forms of violent behavior, which proves once more the various ways of approaching violence.

To recap, different scientific disciplines view aggression differently. However, the common denominator is aggression perceived as an action or a behavior and this is therefore equivalent with what in everyday speech is referred to as violence. The more planned a possibly harming act is, the more it can be classified as violent and not merely aggressive. Consequently, “violence” is used to refer to severe cases of aggression. In order to determine if aggression (or violence) is present, an action has to involve a person performing the aggressive behavior as well as an individual being harmed or injured by the aggressive act. In addition, there has to be the intent to harm this victim³.

A further point that shall be mentioned here is that the social sciences by definition only investigate violence as a force present in human interaction. For instance, Buss (1) stresses that aggression is always marked by “an

² Tedeschi & Felson reject the differentiation into angry aggression and instrumental aggression entirely. In their theory, they propose that all aggression happening in a social construct is cognitively mediated in order to attain a desired outcome. A more detailed discussion of Tedeschi and Felson’s social interactionist theory of aggression is included in the final subsection of this chapter.

³ There may be, however, ambiguous cases in which an aggressive act is targeted towards a certain victim but in fact fails to deliver any harm (such as when a sniper misses their target). Although the act is intended to harm, it does not. According to the common definition, this incident is nevertheless marked by aggression (it involves a perpetrator, a victim and the intent to harm). However, with the target not being affected, the notion that aggression is present has been challenged (see Tedeschi & Felson 161).

interpersonal context". However, given the linguistic definition, violence is not only exercised by human beings against their kind but can also affect inhuman life or objects. Moreover, violence can also be the "strength of emotion or of a destructive natural force" ("Violence"). The conclusion which can be drawn from these definitions is that although violence is scientifically often regarded as a subcategory of aggression, it ironically serves as a collective term in general, since "aggression" is primarily used in the investigation of interpersonal relationships. The following paragraphs will focus on violence between humans exclusively. To avoid confusion, the term "violence" will be used to refer to all aggressive behavior, the exception being direct or indirect quotations where the word "aggression" is used in the source text.

Although the definition at hand provides a clearer picture of what is to be considered violent, it still fails to include less obvious instances. For example, the question if cases of threat or neglect are related to violence remains uncertain since the degree of harm or injury inflicted on the victim is hard to measure. However, the World Health Organisation offers a more detailed characterization of violence. In their *World Report on Violence and Health* violence is defined as "[t]he intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation" (Krug et al. 5). As in the other definition above, unintentional cases of aggressive behavior are excluded from this characterization, too. Furthermore, the addition of the words 'power' in connection with 'physical force' extends the spectrum of violence since it also encompasses violence present in relationships marked by power and dependency such as "threats and intimidation" (Krug et al. 5). Not only are "neglect and all types of physical, sexual and psychological abuse" (Krug et al. 5) implicit in this definition as well but it also mentions smaller or larger groups violence can be directed against. In addition, this characterization avoids the ambiguity resulting from other definitions by implying some uncertainty with regard to the actual harming of a person. Since it therefore takes into account all possible forms violence can take, it serves best in order to characterize this phenomenon and may thus be used as a framework for the analytical part of this thesis.

One last aspect that should be considered are the culturally and historically dependent notions of violence. While certain behavior may be or may have been considered acceptable in different cultures and societies, they are in fact harmful to the victims and therefore violent (Krug et al. 5). It remains, however, controversial if the cultural context in which such behavior is performed can serve as a criterion in the differentiation of violence from culturally accepted exertion of physical force or otherwise harming actions (Tolan 8).

2.2 Types of Violence

In their *World Report on Violence and Health*, Krug et al. (6) note that not many typologies of violence have been established so far, of which all fail to classify the types of violence properly. In the attempt to provide a more useful taxonomy, they divide violence into three categories, depending on the “characteristics of those committing the violent act” (Krug et al. 6). The resulting groups of violent actions are self-directed violence, such as suicidal behavior or self-mutilation, and interpersonal violence, divided into family and intimate partner violence as well as community violence. Roughly, the former includes violent acts of family members, for example, child abuse or domestic violence in general while community violence refers to violence between unrelated people which usually does not take place in a domestic setting. Youth violence, rape or sexual assault as well as violence in schools and other institutional surroundings fall into this category. Terrorist acts, war or attacks for economic reasons are subsumed under the term collective violence (see Krug et al. 6). In general, this last category is divided into social, political and economic violence which “suggest possible motives for violence committed by larger groups of individuals or by states” (Krug et al. 6).

Apart from the division into the three categories of self-directed violence, interpersonal violence and collective violence, violent acts can also be classified in terms of their nature. In an attempt to conceptualize aggressive behavior, Buss suggests three parameters, along which aggression can be classified, that is, physical-verbal, active-passive and direct-indirect (Buss 4, see table below). Taking into account this division, violence can range from very obvious violent acts, such as shooting another person, to less straightforward cases, for

example, hunger strikes or sit-ins which are aggressive “only via a complex chain of events” (Buss 9).

Type of aggression	Examples
Physical-active-direct	Stabbing, punching, or shooting another person.
Physical-active-indirect	Setting a booby trap for another person; hiring an assassin to kill an enemy.
Physical-passive-direct	Physically preventing another person from obtaining a desired goal or performing a desired act (as in a sit-in demonstration).
Physical-passive-indirect	Refusing to perform necessary tasks (e.g. refusal to move during a sit-in).
Verbal-active-direct	Insulting or derogating another person.
Verbal-active-indirect	Spreading malicious rumors or gossip about another individual.
Verbal-passive-direct	Refusing to speak to another person, to answer questions, etc.
Verbal-passive-indirect	Failing to make specific verbal comments (e.g., failing to speak up in another person’s defense when he or she is unfairly criticized).

Table 1

Categories of Aggression according to Buss (1961), table taken from Baron & Richardson (10)

As becomes evident by Buss’ conceptualization, violence can be roughly categorized into physical violence and verbal or, in more general terms, psychological violence. Buss (4) defines physical aggression as “an assault against an organism by means of body parts [...] or weapons [...]”. He goes on saying that physical aggression may have two consequences: first, “overcoming or removing a barrier”, in other words, since aggression is always understood in an interpersonal context, another human being (Buss 5). The second consequence is, more often than not, “pain or injury to another organism” (Buss 5). While this form “always causes open, visible harm or injuries” (Imbusch 23), psychological violence is often not recognized and its effects are much less predictable (Imbusch 23). Verbal aggression, according to Buss (6), is “a vocal response that delivers noxious stimuli to another organism” such as “rejection and threat”. Rejection is not necessarily realized by words but also involves “shunning of an individual by avoiding his presence or escaping from it, making gestures of disgust, [or] ejecting him forcibly from the group” (Buss 6). This definition indicates the partial overlap of Buss’ verbal aggression with

psychological violence which goes one step further. Psychological violence involves “words, gestures, pictures, symbols, or deprivation of the necessities of life, so as to force others into subjugation through intimidation and fear, or specific ‘rewards’” (Imbusch 23).

While Buss’ framework lays the focus on the perpetrator by classifying violent acts according to the way they are performed, Krug et al. (6), propose a different categorization by determining four ways in which victims of violence can be affected, that is, physically, sexually, psychologically as well as by deprivation or neglect. However, although the terminologies differ from each other, those four ways in which violence may manifest itself can also be inferred from the table above, at least partially.

Summing up, violence can be divided into three main groups according to its target(s): self-directed violence, interpersonal violence and collective violence. Moreover, it can be classified with regard to the nature of violent acts as performed by the perpetrator but also according to the way it affects the victims. Although physical violence is the most obvious form of violence, it is by far not the only way to harm a potential victim. Psychological violence, which may be said to encompass Buss’ verbal violence, is less direct but may have far more serious long-term effects on the victims. Sexual violence, deprivation or neglect, on the other hand, can have direct negative impact on both, the body and the mind of those being affected by it. Moreover, emotional harm certainly has to be mentioned as collateral damage of physical violence as well.

For the analysis of Dahl’s children’s books, interpersonal violence appears to be the most relevant category and therefore deserves a closer examination. One problem in defining the forms interpersonal violence can take is that violence is present in all areas of human relationships. Therefore, it is hard to establish a universal definition of violent acts that may overshadow interpersonal relationships. In the light of the topic of this thesis, however, those forms of violence that may be present in adult-child relationships shall be scrutinized. Thus, in the following section physical and psychological violence together with deprivation and neglect are outlined in greater detail by using child maltreatment as only one possible model. Sexual abuse shall be omitted as

there appears to be no reason to include this form in the light of the topic of this thesis.

2.3. Violence against Children

Although children are in many cases not only victims but show aggressive or even violent behavior themselves, they form one of the weakest groups in society and are therefore at high risk of becoming maltreated or even abused by those who are supposed to take care of them. Violence against children constitutes a worldwide problem that is often ignored or unrecognized (World Health Organisation 5). However, similar to violence in general, the cultural and historical context must be taken into account in the definition of child abuse and maltreatment as well. In other words, ideas and methods of child care are culturally embedded, which results in different notions of what is unacceptable treatment of children (Krug et al. 59). For example, although nowadays widely condemned, beating children was still commonly used as a means of disciplining in family and school settings only a century ago⁴. The brutal practices of childrearing have their roots in the ancient belief that children were “evil beings in need of taming” (Smith Chalou 11). This is not to say that using physical force against children in order to achieve the subordinate goal of disciplining them has not always been considered a cruel method by individuals. However, the level of social acceptance was higher in former times and still is in some areas⁵.

In 1998, Tedeschi and Quigley (100-101) pointed out the lack of scientific investigation concerning violence against children, that is, as far as corporal punishment is concerned. This shows that until recently, researchers rather

⁴ Dahl himself writes about the cruel treatment he and his schoolmates had to endure during their school time in *Boy: Tales of Childhood*.

⁵ Krug et al. (64) state that only in 1979, Sweden took a leading role in banning corporal punishment of children entirely with at least 10 countries to follow suit including Namibia, South Africa, Zimbabwe and Israel. Yet, about a decade ago corporal punishment still was a legal method of disciplining in at least 65 states and equally acceptable in a domestic setting in all but 11 countries, as the *World Report on Violence and Health*, written in 2002, reveals (Krug et al. 64). Unfortunately, the authors do not go into detail as to which countries were involved at that time. Austria was one of the first five states to establish non-violent parenting by law in 1989 (Ziele des Österreichischen Kinderschutzbundes). Since 1986, corporal punishment, along with insults and collective punishment, is explicitly prohibited in Austrian schools (Schulunterrichtsgesetz §47 (3)).

seemed to be interested in such violent behavior on the side of parents and caregivers when the aggressive acts exceed their intended purpose of disciplining the child and turn into child abuse. A brief discussion on the use of violence against children as a means of disciplining and demonstration of power will be included in the following subsection. At this point, however, three forms of child abuse possibly relevant for the following analysis shall be presented.

First of all, it has to be clarified what kind of behavior towards children can be termed abusive. According to the World Health Organisation (15) child abuse means “all forms of physical and/or emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect or negligent treatment or commercial or other exploitation, resulting in actual or potential harm to the child’s health, survival, development or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust or power”. This is obviously a very broad definition which encompasses even less extreme forms of violence such as mild corporal punishment but also cases of failed custody. Furthermore, the term ‘dignity’ is also problematic here since it is not sufficiently specified which aspects it covers. For instance, the above definition raises the question if parents playfully making fun of their son or daughter’s childish utterances already harm their child’s dignity.

Leeb et al. (11) in turn divide violence against children in two categories using the term ‘maltreatment’ in order to refer to acts that include abuse as well as neglect. They divide child maltreatment in acts of commission and acts of omission performed “by a parent or caregiver that result[s] in harm, potential harm, or threat of harm to a child” (Leeb et al. 11). Acts of commission, according to Leeb et al. (11) involve “[w]ords or overt actions”. One characteristic of acts of commission is that they are, like all violent acts, intentional. However, the intended aim is not necessarily to harm the child, since “[i]ntentionality only applies to the caregivers’ acts—not the consequences of those acts” (Leeb et al. 11). The authors give an example of a person in charge who uses physical force as a means of punishment against a child. In so doing, punishment is sought but the consequence of seriously injuring the child is not automatically intended (Leeb et al. 11). In this case, however, a definition of harm is important. If “harm” includes “physically unpleasant experiences” (Tedeschi & Felson 171) then the aim, to punish the child by using bodily force

and thus inflicting pain upon it, certainly means to harm the child. Physical abuse, sexual abuse as well as psychological abuse is also counted among acts of commission.

Physical abuse is probably the most widespread form of violence against children. The World Health Organisation (15) describes it as “resulting in actual or potential physical harm from an interaction or lack of an interaction, which is reasonably within the control of a parent or person in a position of responsibility, power or trust”. The effects of physical abuse can take many different forms and have been found to negatively influence “children’s development of social competencies, autonomy, self-esteem, peer relationships, cognitive and intellectual abilities and academic performance” (Rowe and Eckenrode, qtd. in Garbarino & Bradshaw 726). Psychological or emotional abuse, then, “includes restriction of movement, patterns of belittling, denigrating, scapegoating, threatening, scaring, discriminating, ridiculing or other non-physical forms of hostile or rejecting treatment” (World Health Organisation 15).

Acts of omission, on the other hand, denote “[t]he failure to provide for a child’s basic physical, emotional, or educational needs or to protect a child from harm or potential harm” (Leeb et al. 11). Acts of omission are typically marked by neglect, which can manifest itself in two forms: failure to provide and failure to supervise. These involve for instance physical and emotional neglect as well as educational neglect, inadequate supervision or exposure to violent environments (Leeb et al. 11).

Roald Dahl frequently used the image of the maltreated child as a departing point for his narratives where adult authority is often subverted, a theme that is especially dominant in his last long children’s book *Matilda*. In this and other of his fictional works for children, the negotiation of power plays a significant role. The next section therefore looks at the concept of power which is established and defended by violence and hence directly related to it.

2.4. Violence and Power

In the previous section, violence was discussed in the context of adult-child relationships in which the parent or guardian deliberately uses either

instrumental violence against the child (as a means of punishment so as to trigger a learning process in the child), or as a result of aggression (affective violence) or carelessness. Implicit in human interaction, and particularly in adult-child relationships, is the presence of power that is often demonstrated and perpetuated through the exertion of violence, physical or psychological. The WHO's definition also implies that violence can be enacted by using "[...] power, threatened or actual" (Krug et al. 5). In fact, the concept of violence is very closely related to the concept of power. This relationship goes so far that more often than not both notions are hard to perceive independently (Imbusch: 18). Hanna Arendt (36), for instance, observes that there seems to be a consensus in the literature about power that violence and power are the same or that violence is the most radical form of power. Even though she draws a clear line between violence and power by claiming that power ends where violence begins (Arendt 57), one has to admit that even if violence is by far not the only way to exercise power, it can be used quite effectively to achieve one's goals by controlling a physically or socially weaker person (Imbusch 18).

The close link between violence and power may become most evident by an etymological approach of both terms. Imbusch (15ff) has pointed out the polysemic usage of the German word *Gewalt* for both an assault as well as for the public authority. Even though the concepts of violence and power, originating in the Roman legal system, have been semantically related ever since, the terms describing both notions have always been different in ancient Rome and the languages deriving from and influenced by Latin, including English. German, however, is an exception and the concept of *Gewalt* fuses (and sometimes blurs) the two Latin roots *vis/violentia* (direct personal violence) and *potentia/potestas* (legitimate institutional violence) (Imbusch 15). In fact, German long did not differentiate between *Macht* and *Gewalt*, in other words, both concepts were used interchangeably (Imbusch 16). Therefore, one can say that the proximity of both notions is made visible (or invisible) by the German use of the word *Gewalt*.

An examination of the literature concerning the topic of violence and aggression shows that violence has always been the subject of numerous research projects designed to reveal the possible reasons for aggressive behavior in humans and

other species. The results are just as diverse as these experiments and range from biological dispositions that make certain people prone to violent behavior to Albert Bandura's famous social learning theory of aggression. However, although the reasons for violence have been thoroughly examined, the intentions behind acts of violence remain uncertain as the nature of intentions still is obscured due to the lack of conceptualization (Tedeschi & Quigley 100). Violence, however, can and must always be viewed with the social context in mind in which such acts are performed. Only a comprehensive examination of the given circumstances in which violence happens allows for an assessment of the social mechanisms at stake and reveals power relations between human beings. Thus, in an attempt to re-conceptualize violence, Tedeschi & Felson (1995)⁶ examine violence that is influenced by social motivation. Instead of aggression or violence, they use the term "coercive actions" which encompasses threats, bodily force and punishment (168). They also note that such termed coercive actions describe strategies, such as threats and punishment, that are typically not subject to theories of aggression but are treated in academic works about the enactment of power through "deterrence, social control, grievance, coercive power, social conflicts, bargaining, and retributive justice" (172-173). In other words, the above mentioned interpersonal actions are marked by implicit power relations in which roles and ranks in a social construct are negotiated, and Tedeschi and Felson's theory addresses the impact coercive actions may have on social roles (159). Such a theory allows a new perspective on interpersonal violence and aggression since it focuses on the actors' motives behind violent behavior.

The use of contingent threats against a potential victim enables the perpetrator to draw their target into an asymmetrical relationship. However, the ultimate purpose of contingent threats is not to harm but rather to achieve the target's compliance (172). Thus, they are marked by the following pattern: The victim is signaled that they will be punished if they do not abide by the perpetrator's wish (169). Contingent threats imply the possibility of avoiding punishment, whereas noncontingent threats are used to scare or degrade the victim. Typically, noncontingent threats serve to communicate the impending use of violence (169). Punishment for Tedeschi & Felson (171) means "an action performed

⁶ The following references in this subsection, unless otherwise stated, relate to this work.

with the intention of imposing harm on another person”, and is therefore equivalent to the commonly accepted definitions of aggression and violence. Punishment can take three different forms depending on the qualitatively different kinds of harm they may cause: Physical harm, deprivation of resources, which is “the restriction of opportunities, removal or destruction of material possessions, or interference with social relationships that the target values” (171), and, finally, social harm referring to “damage to the social identity of target persons and a lowering of their power status” (171). Examples of social punishment are “insults, reproaches” and even “sarcasm, and various types of impolite behavior” (171).

One interesting remark made by Tedeschi & Felson (173) is concerned with two types of aggression normally distinguished throughout the specialized literature, namely legitimate and illegitimate aggression. While for the majority of aggression theorists, punishing a child would fall among the same category of legitimate aggression as police officers using violence against a criminal, unprovoked aggressive events such as rape and robbery belong to illegitimate aggression. According to Tedeschi & Felson, the intentions for such coercive actions, however, do not differ in parents, judges or criminals. Parents, as well as criminals make use of their power by drawing upon coercion in order to control the behavior of their ‘victims’ and obtain an advantage (173). Unfortunately, the majority of scientists focus on the causes of illegitimate aggressive behavior as in criminal acts, while motivations for ‘legitimate aggression’ have rarely been the subject of scientific research (173).

Tedeschi and Felson (174) argue that people make use of their power to obtain certain goals such as materialistic values like money or goods but also to gain information, services or safety. Two further motives behind the enactment of power through coercion are especially interesting for the discussion in the analytical part of this thesis and shall therefore be mentioned briefly in the following. The forcing of a person into compliance can also be directed towards the goal of retaining or restoring retributive justice. This is especially achieved by punishment since retributive justice derives from the principle of guilt and atonement (213). As already mentioned above, coercion exercised by parents as a response to “blameworthy behavior” (213) on the side of their children is perceived as a legitimate form of aggression. In fact, parents are expected to

punish since “[i]n all societies people are socialized to believe that under specified conditions particular individuals have the right to inflict pain or deprivation on others” (216). The question what form of punishment is appropriate for which form of ‘bad’ behavior is indeed quite sensitive and shall not be included here. Finally, coercion can be used to establish “desired social identities” (174). Since social interactions take place in the public and thus established public identities depend on a person’s behavior but are equally defined socially via third parties’ judgment, self presentation concerns are often the reason for the use of coercive strategies (250). For example, an individual may either want to “establish an identity as morally righteous” (251) and therefore publically punish another person for a certain offense, or they may wish to “acquire and exercise social power” (251) by using coercion. The authors differentiate between assertive self-presentation and protective self-presentation. The first is the case when people use certain intimidation tactics such as the display of weapons, shouting or the use of profanity in order to force their antagonist into coercion (252). While such methods are useful in order to evoke fear, self-promotion aims at instilling respect through the demonstration of “prowess, skill, and competence” (253).

When people feel that the image they tried to establish is threatened, they use protective strategies in order to maintain their identity. This is mainly achieved through the avoidance of showing weakness. Therefore, when individuals feel humiliated, scared or embarrassed, they are likely to use protective tactics such as insults in order to “spoil the identity of the target person and to lower his or her status” (259-260). Besides insulting an opponent, threats may also serve the purpose of presenting the perpetrator as strong and powerful, however, they carry the risk of appearing weak if the victim refuses to give in (262). One last point to mention with regard to protective self-presentation is the challenge to authority. If people show disrespect for an authority this may threaten this person’s legitimacy creating the need to regain or consolidate their authority. This can be achieved by publicly punishing any dissident to demonstrate the consequences of disobedience (265).

The purpose of this section has been to point out the connection between violence and power that is especially prominent in human relationships.

Conventional psychological theories of aggression often do not cater for this aspect of human interaction sufficiently and may therefore not be of great help for the discussion in the subsequent part of this thesis. Tedeschi and Felson's social interactionist model views aggression as a means of forcing a victim into compliance through coercion and highlights power structures between antagonists. It is thus suitable for the analysis of violence occurring in Dahl's *Matilda* since in this book the ultimate purpose of violence is to achieve and maintain power, as shall be proven later on. Before discussing Dahl's works, however, a brief outline of the history of children's literature, the ever-changing concept of childhood, as well as Roald Dahl's personal view of children and his approach in the representation of child heroes and heroines shall be included here.

3. Roald Dahl and the Portrayal of Children

The concept of childhood shifts constantly from period to period, place to place, culture to culture – perhaps even from child to child. The literature designed for childhood is going, therefore, to reflect this variety too. (Hunt, *Children's* IX)

Roald Dahl's career as a writer did not start out in the fields of children's literature. On the contrary, his first publications were aimed at an adult audience, which only changed in the early 1960s with *James and the Giant Peach* as his first narrative for children. His children's books testify to Dahl's gift of empathizing with his young readers which he displays, for example, by creating terrifying and monstrous villains for the child protagonist to face. More often than not, those villains are adult characters, usually surrogate parents, relatives, or teachers. In so doing, he establishes a hostile and repressing environment for his often orphaned heroes and heroines to grow up and depicts the protagonist as a lonely, mistreated and, above all, isolated child character that struggles in a hostile environment against adversities of a cruel world (such as in *Charlie*) or against evil and violent adults (e.g. in *Matilda*, *James and the Giant Peach* or *George's Marvelous Medicine*). Thereby, he responds to children's feelings of helplessness in a world that is primarily governed by adults' rules. Dieter Petzold (1995) has pointed out that such an illustration of child characters is reminiscent of Charles Dickens and his construction of working-class children, which highly influenced the portrayal of children in the

Victorian novel. Dickens' satirical works often illustrate orphans in Victorian England who had to endure all possible cruelties originating in the zeitgeist of the industrial revolution. In many of his children's books, for example in *The BFG*⁷ or *Matilda*⁸, Dahl's fondness for the classical author becomes obvious, thus supporting Petzold's claim.

In a discussion about Dahl's approach to the writing for and about children, it makes sense to look at historical constructions of children and childhood in Western Europe, specifically in Great Britain, as the basis for any further analysis of Dahl's works for a child audience. The establishment of the genre of children's literature shall serve as the point of departure, since it has at all times been influenced by prevailing ideas about children and childhood itself.

3.1. The Genre of Children's Literature

In their theoretical work *The Pleasures of Children's Literature*, Nodelman and Reimer (1987) point out the controversial issue of considering children's literature as a literary genre on its own. However, they go on saying that books for children, whether belonging to the adventure, fantasy, or any other genre share certain features that define them as texts for children, such as minimal but concrete information, childlike characters, binary oppositions and optimism (Nodelman & Reimer 191-212). For the authors the genre of children's literature is defined via "qualities that relate to common ideas about children, about what they can understand and what they might enjoy" (Nodelman & Reimer 188). In the light of this assumption, it is no wonder that the beginnings of what nowadays would be considered children's literature lie in an age when children were for the first time recognized as different from adults. Moreover, it is little surprising that children's literature, when examined as a self-contained branch in the literary canon, has undergone dramatic changes in the course of the centuries.

⁷ Not only has the BFG read "all of Dickens" (Dahl, *The BFG* 207) but Dahl even, in one of his signature spoonerisms, changes Charles Dickens into Dahl's Chickens (Dahl, *The BFG* 113).

⁸ On Matilda's reading list (Dahl, *Matilda* 18), Dickens is the only author to occur twice.

3.1.1. The Beginnings of Children's Literature and the Romantic Child

Generally speaking, the birth of the children's book industry first took place in Britain and can be dated back as late as the 1740s⁹ (Grenby 4, Avery 1). This is, however, not to say that this was the time children's literature came first into being. Narratives specifically directed at a child audience had of course long been part of the cultural tradition. Along with the invention of the printing press in the Middle Ages, oral stories then found their way into books, paving the way for the establishment of a separate genre for children. Before the eighteenth century, books given to children neither in language nor in content were child-oriented, their sole purpose being religious training and the practice of reading (Avery 1-25). It took the arrival of the Age of Reason and a new conception of childhood for this branch of literature, aimed at the newly acknowledged group of society, to blossom.

Amongst those who theorize about childhood and the development of literature aimed at a young audience, a quote by Philippe Ariès is repeatedly mentioned. In his outstanding work *Centuries of Childhood* he argues that the idea of childhood did not exist until the early modern period (Ariès 128). This argument has been challenged ever since, resulting in numerous theories about the exact recognition of childhood as a separate sphere in Western Europe. According to Horne (7), those differing assumptions propose rather diverging definitions of childhood than anything else. In other words, childhood is no static concept and can never be viewed outside historically and culturally determined contexts that shape predominant notions about the nature of children and childhood. What can be observed, for example, is that in the Western world, adults' attitude towards childhood underwent radical changes in the course of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century¹⁰ from childhood seen as not different from adulthood to gaining gradual importance as a specific phase of life. Closely linked to this changing concept was a transformation of British society, including religious changes, demographic shifts, as well as economic transformations (Horne 9-10). Due to the improvement of hygiene as well as medical conditions, the British population experienced a growth from 1720 onwards until 1770

⁹ John Newbery's *Little Pretty Pocket Book*, which was published in 1744, is widely considered the first children's books, at least according to today's standards.

¹⁰ Notably, this only holds true for the upper class since the belief in childhood as a distinct phase of life only found its way into the lower classes about two centuries later (Ariès 26).

(Grenby 7), leading to children becoming an increasingly larger group in society. As a result of this process, the interest in children rose steadily, with Jean-Jacques Rousseau as one of the first to acknowledge in his influential pedagogical work *Émile* that “the child is important in itself, and not as a diminutive adult” (Coveney 42)¹¹.

Grenby (7) even goes so far as to suggest that the growing focus on education in the age of Enlightenment has to be regarded as “an effect, not cause, of the new concern of childhood”. It was in this climate, prepared by Locke’s famous treatise *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693) that to instruct children in moral principles became the paramount purpose of children’s literature. For Locke, a rationalist of the Age of Enlightenment, the child was a *tabula rasa* on which ideas could be imprinted. This resulted in children’s literature of the Enlightenment era being marked by a strong focus on the didactic purpose of the literary works. Characteristic of the morality implicit in children’s stories of that time are child figures that were “created to exemplify virtues to be adopted and vices to be shunned” (Horne 5). Although such literary characters have long been supplanted by more realistic ones, they can still be found nowadays, especially in books aimed at young readers.

The Lockean view of childhood was taken up and advanced half a century later by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, whose ideas significantly influenced and to a certain extent also caused the predominating sentimentalism of the nineteenth century. He elaborated his conception of childhood at a time marked by the conflict between reason and feeling, the first dominating the Age of Enlightenment, the latter prevailing in the nineteenth century (Coveney 37). For Rousseau, education should serve to develop the “true nature of the child”, which for him manifested itself in innocence (Coveney 44). The Enlightenment’s emphasis on reason was eventually replaced by a counterculture celebrating feeling as the utmost principle. This area of conflict significantly shaped the Romantic child (Coveney 37). It emerged in the poetic works of Wordsworth and Blake as a literary theme and an idealized symbol of “imagination and innocence” (McGillis 102). By defining childhood as a phase different from

¹¹ It is also due to Rousseau that the perception of children as evil beings slowly changed since he declared the child’s nature as essentially good (Smith Chalou 18).

adulthood, the otherness of the child was emphasized. It was precisely this otherness that evoked a certain mysticism portraying the child as both a “natural and supernatural” creature (McGillis 102). The Romanticism’s intense concern with feeling shaped a sentimental construct of childhood equating this phase of life with a time of “innocence, liberty, and naturalness” (Berry 16). This romantic image of the child continued to prevail in the Victorian period, often described as a linkage between Romanticism and Modernity. In fact, it could be argued that such an idea of childhood has been conserved to a great extent even until nowadays.

3.1.2. The Industrial Revolution and the Victorian Child

Although the overall tenor of Victorian children’s books was still a moralizing one, the new emotionalism provoked “a lightness of tone” (Avery & Kinnell 53). The instructional character of children’s books remained. However, this period also experienced the rise of Victorian fantasy obviously sparked by the Romantic averseness to rationalism (Butts 90). The new interest in the fantasy genre reflects the nineteenth century’s gradual shift of the purpose of children’s books from instruction to an emphasis on children’s imagination and the entertainment¹² gained from reading.

To a certain extent, fantasy literature may owe its popularity amongst Victorian readers to the Gothic novel, which was at its peak during Romanticism. Even Charles Dickens¹³ seems to have been influenced by Gothic literature’s portrayal of the supernatural since he used it together with grotesque and comic elements in works such as *Oliver Twist* and *A Christmas Carol* (Butts 91). Furthermore, he was particularly important for the construction of the Victorian literary child. In the following paragraph, the role Dickens played in the portrayal of Victorian working-class children whose lives were heavily affected by the industrial revolution, shall be highlighted, for as Coveney (119) notes “without Dickens [...] England would have felt differently [...] about children”.

¹² Lewis Carroll’s fantasy novel *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* is to be considered an important milestone since it is the first children’s book free from any didacticism.

¹³ As Petzold (186-187) points out, Dickens appears to have influenced Dahl greatly as a writer since he was the first to merge “realism and satyr with a fairy tale deep structure”, a technique that was taken up by Dahl in such major works of children’s literature as *Matilda*. Similarly, “slightly ridiculous and curiously apt names” (Petzold 187) that appear frequently in Dahl’s works clearly reflect Dickens.

In the course of the Industrial Revolution, more and more families moved from the countryside into the city where plebian children's work, formerly needed mainly in the household, shifted to the factories (Horne 8), where they were exploited as cheap laborers. Although Dickens did not write for children in the first place, he can still not be ignored in a historical approach to children's literature, since he frequently addresses in his novels the lives of working-class children during the Industrial Revolution, thereby shaping the image of the child in literary works to follow. Many of his books feature young protagonists growing up in a proletarian environment. By portraying child laborers living under the adverse conditions of the Victorian working class, Dickens first and foremost drew a very realistic picture critical of nineteenth-century British society. Presented as "society's victims, struggling, often against hopeless odds, for physical and spiritual survival" (Briggs & Butts 133), children no longer appear "otherworldly, lively, healthy, and fortunate" (McGillis 102) as was the case in the depiction of childhood by the Romantic poets. In contrast to the Romantic portrayal of childhood, Victorian writers picture the child "not merely as a symbol but as a subject, [...] as a victim rather than as a triumphant representation of the transcendent self" (Berry 16). In short, while Romantic literature dehumanized the child as a symbol associated with Romantic values, Victorian writers, and above all Dickens, concentrated on the vulnerability of children as "tragic and invisible victims of a thoughtless society" (Briggs & Butts 132).

Painting a more realistic picture of the child, Victorian writers are also focusing on its flaws creating a child figure which is "not limited by a binary construct of good/evil" (Malkovich 2). Such a depiction of the child as imperfect being may have been overlooked by many scholars but is nevertheless present in works of Dickens, Kingsley, MacDonald and various other Victorian writers (Malkovich 1-2). As Malkovich (2) further states, the imperfect child, rather than accepting its destiny, takes part in the fashioning of its fate. She goes on saying that "the imperfect child [...] develops a plan and path for their life in the face of adversity and rejects or accepts mores as they deem fit, thus becoming a self-advocate". Moreover, "[t]hey often care for others and take charge of difficult situations even when adults fail to enact change" (Malkovich 2). Such a characterization evokes the picture of child heroes as constructed by Dahl, for instance, Matilda Wormwood fighting and finally succeeding over her evil headmistress, not only

helping herself and her fellow students but also her beloved teacher Miss Honey, or little James, who has to withstand all possible dangers and save his friends' lives multiple times on his journey in the giant peach. The claim that Dahl modeled his protagonists after the heroes of one of his favorite Victorian writers seems thus reasonable.

As has been shown in this chapter, definitions of childhood always underlie cultural and historical conceptions which influence our understanding of what childhood can be thought of. Consequently, children's literature, at all times constituted by contemporary views of childhood, has been in a state of constant change since the establishment of the genre in the mid-eighteenth century.

While the idea of childhood as a stage of life on its own emerged only in the eighteenth century, it was quickly taken up by the upper and middle class resulting in a sentimental concept of childhood in the Romantic Period. As a consequence, literary child figures were portrayed as innocent, almost mystic creatures. However, in the Victorian era, this idea of childhood began to change, with Victorian authors granting their child characters an innocent as well as a sinful side. The new realistic character illustration also replaced the flat characters used to teach children moral lessons through the reading of books. In this regard, the overt and almost aggressive didactic principle of children's books faded into stories written for the sake of entertainment.

Over a hundred years after this shift, Roald Dahl emerged as an author whose books were and still are highly cherished by children as well as adults. Although the teaching of moral lessons is no longer the utmost purpose of children's books, many adults wish for their children to read narratives upholding certain moral principles in some way or another. The next chapter therefore focuses on Roald Dahl as an author of children's books and the question if he meets these demands in his juvenile literature.

3.2. Roald Dahl as a Writer for Children

Roald Dahl clearly is an author of children's books who is often controversially discussed amongst parents, teachers, scholars and those who consider

themselves responsible for children¹⁴. While many certainly seem to echo the voices of their children, who eagerly devour every single one of Dahl's stories, there is at least just as much criticism against the alleged "tastelessness" (Cameron 1976) of his children's books, which is perceived to be a major threat against the development of a sound judgment in the young readers. In one of her articles, Cameron (60) accuses particularly *Charlie* of "its phoniness, its hypocrisy, its getting laughs through violent punishment". For her, young children do not possess yet what would be commonly referred to as 'good taste', and it is the responsibility of adults to choose books which are appropriate for children since the reading of such "potentially dangerous" (Cameron 63) books may have serious consequences. In fact, many critics seem to agree with Cameron, which can be observed in lists featuring the most condemned children's books in which a substantial number of Dahl's works can be found. In the list of the most frequently banned books of the 1990s, for instance, as much as three of Dahl's books have made it into the top thirty with *The Witches* at number 9, *Revolting Rhymes* at number 15 and *James and the Giant Peach* at number 30 ("Most Frequently Banned Books in the 1990s"). Doubtlessly, the almost 20 books Dahl has written for children during his lifetime polarize and divide their readership into two camps. However, while there is a considerable amount of adult readers who seem to have certain concerns about the effects the stories may have on the young ones, Dahl's books are widely celebrated by children who appreciate his narrative style, his depiction of often exaggerated characters, the fantastic and magical elements present in the majority of his stories as well as the repetition of themes, his talent for the creation of vivid images, happy endings, and, last but not least, the recurrent violence (Culley 62). Dahl himself attributes his books' success amongst children to him being "on their side" (Appleyard 15) and to ally with children against parents and teachers: "Putting down adults is a very strong thing with children. They love it. They have certain things they react to very strongly: laughter and putting down adults are two of the strongest" (Appleyard 15).

Dahl's children's books have been heavily criticized for their nasty content along with their often confusing or "dubious" morality (Reese 145). However, as Dahl

¹⁴ But then again, opinions on what kind of books are appropriate for children differ widely amongst the (self-titled) experts.

himself explains, his intent has never been to establish morality in his books but rather to lure children into reading (Appleyard 15). Although books like *Charlie* may seem to contain some sort of moral lesson, Dahl rejects this idea entirely: “My only moral dimension is to teach children to read. There is no other message whatsoever except the slight sense that people are quite nasty” (Appleyard 15). With the statement about the absence of any didacticism in his stories, Dahl seems to be in accordance with his critics, who rage about his books featuring all too flat characters instead of more realistic ones with the effect that children are tricked into believing that the world as well as human beings are merely either black or white: “[A]s is normal with Dahl, evil is evil and good is good, and evil is not to be tamed – it is to be punished or destroyed (Reese 152). What is more, in the case of *Charlie*, but also in *The Twits*, *George’s Marvelous Medicine* and various other stories, the ‘evil’ traits of certain protagonists are not evil in the true sense of the word but Dahl rather “parades his own irritations – television addiction [...], overindulgence in sweets, gum-chewing, shooting foxes, beards, ugly faces, fat bodies, cranky old people, spoiled children – and presents them as moral objections” (Reese 149). Such moral objections are always violently punished in Dahl’s books and this gives the impression that “Dahl [...] enjoys writing about violence, while at the same time condemning it” (Reese 144), as becomes evident by his implied criticism of violent behavior in most of his books – especially with regard to corporal punishment of children (as for example in *Matilda* or *James and the Giant Peach*). When it comes to the treatment of the most of the time grown-up villains of his works, Dahl, however, is not exactly gingerly: James’ evil aunts are squashed by the enormous peach right at the beginning of the story, George administers his disgusting concoction to his cumbersome grandmother – with terrible effects, and little Matilda uses her super power to play all sorts of nasty tricks on her abusive headmistress. As Dahl admits, one of his central themes is “to denigrate adults. It’s the path to [children’s] affections. It may be simplistic but it is the way. Parents and schoolteachers are the enemy. The adult is the enemy of the child because of the awful process of civilising this thing that when it is born is an animal with no manners, no moral sense at all” (Appleyard 15).

This alleged lack of moral sense within the child for Dahl is the anchorage of the often revolting and cruel scenarios in his books. As Fadiman (qtd. in Cameron 60) puts it, “Dahl appeals to an element of sadism in children”. He does so by presenting violent scenes in “an unnecessary tone of glee and spite” (Reese 145). It is this drawing on the sadistic side of children which Cameron finds most disturbing: “Dahl caters to the streak of sadism in children which they don’t even realize is there because they are not fully self-aware and are not experienced enough to understand what sadism is” (Cameron 61). Clearly, Cameron has a different image of childhood in mind than Dahl does when he creates violent but all the more funny scenes to make children interested in his stories¹⁵. While Cameron, according to the still prominent romantic and sentimental idea of childhood, perceives children to be in need of protection from any negative influence, Dahl, on the other hand, deliberately feeds children’s ‘dark sides’ by “captur[ing] some of the anguish and anger of childhood – at unfairness or loneliness, that sense of being utterly isolated and dislocated. This is then turned on its head and an imaginary revenge [...] made reality” (Cullingford 158). The recipe is simple: Dahl’s child characters are most of the time underdogs children can relate to simply because they are like themselves, that is, children (or at least child-like creatures). Although Dahl’s stories are versatile and each is original with regard to its content, most of the child heroes share certain characteristics: they are isolated, oppressed and modeled to a great extent after the Victorian construction of child victims, as is described in the previous chapter. While some Victorian writers such as Dickens constructed children as victims of a merciless and corruptive society, Dahl views them as the sufferers of the arbitrariness of adult power, as becomes evident by an examination of the protagonists in his children’s books. On the other hand, Dahl’s characters are not only innocent victims but have their dark sides as well. Matilda is a good example of a character that may want to help her school mates and favorite teacher when using her powers against Miss Trunchbull but nevertheless *enjoys* inflicting harm upon her enemy. By creating such heroes, Dahl indicates that children’s nature is not merely

¹⁵ In *Matilda* Dahl’s de-romanticized perception of children is made clear when he starts the first chapter in the following way: “It’s a funny thing with mothers and fathers. Even when their own child is the most disgusting little blister you could ever imagine, they still think that he or she is wonderful” (Dahl, *Matilda* 7).

innocent and pure but also cruel. Furthermore, since those stories are supposed to be read by children, he also presupposes that children like to read about cruelty, therefore rejecting the romantic ideal of the child and the imperatives of children's literature as a genre protecting this ideal. Culley (67) states that "[t]he overthrow of such arbitrary authority" is a theme Dahl makes use of in most of his stories. He goes on saying that this "most often takes the form of the underdogs standing up for themselves and correcting a dictatorial situation which would otherwise be perpetuated". Children, Dahl knows, are fascinated by themes that reverse the adult-child power relationship: "They are surrounded by these giants. You've really got to put your head that high from the floor and keep it there for a fortnight to see what it's like - all these giants around you telling you what to do. Poor little buggers"(Appleyard 15).

Indeed, Dahl had a remarkable talent for putting himself in the position of his child readers, which may have been the key to his success. A self-proclaimed "geriatric child" (Sturrock 402), he knew exactly what stories appealed to his young audience and children felt understood by him. "My lucky thing is I laugh at exactly the same jokes that children laugh at" ("An Interview with Roald Dahl"), he says in an interview and by that he most probably also means the often violent scenes he describes and that Cameron and other critics find so disturbingly vulgar and inappropriate to be read by young children. On the other hand, Dahl was very much aware of the responsibility he had as a writer for young readers, perceiving children as "vulnerable because they don't know they are propagandized" (Hill 42). In response to one of Cameron's annihilating articles, he reacted furiously, entirely rejecting the accusation that he "would ever want to write a book that would harm children" (Sturrock 497). Overall, Dahl's attitude towards children can be summarized quoting Hollindale (280) as "compounded of sympathetic alliance and dislike (which is how most children view children)".

Regardless of the critical voices coming from the adult section, Dahl's success as a writer of children's books proves him right. At this point, one can of course argue that his often criticized strategy of conspiring with the child readers is what makes a good writer of children's books. In fact, it is this point which is on the one hand used against Dahl by his critics but on the other held high by his

advocates amongst whom are of course the young readers: “It’s about children and it’s for children” (Culley 69) is probably the most valid argument for Dahl’s stories.

4. Analysis: Violence in Dahl’s Fiction for Children

Without a doubt, Roald Dahl, often referred to as the master of the macabre, is a highly controversial author in general but of all the morbid books and stories written by him, his children’s books have been attacked the severest for featuring vulgarity, fascism and sexism as well as “a great deal of gratuitous violence” (Reese 144). It is the theme of violence I would like to focus on in the analytical part of this thesis. Thus, in what follows, two of Dahl’s most renowned children’s books, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* and *Matilda* shall be investigated with regard to the role violence and its representations play in these narratives and how violence is conveyed to the child reader. My research question can be stated as follows: What forms does violence take on in Dahl’s fiction for children, how does this theme function within the story and what effects does it possibly have on the child reader? In addition, how is violence presented in the stories, in other words, is the way in which violence is portrayed suitable for the young readers and if so, what techniques are used in order to make the violent scenes appear less gruesome? In the following sections, an approach towards these questions shall be made by examining both of the before mentioned narratives.

4.1. Violence in *Charlie and Matilda*

Charlie and the Chocolate Factory, published in the United States in 1964, was Dahl’s second strike after the release of *James and the Giant Peach* three years previously. With poor little Charlie Bucket who wins a ticket for a tour through Willy Wonka’s magical chocolate realm and on top of it is offered to take over the factory and earns a lifetime supply of sweets, Dahl has created a story probably every child falls for. Characters such as the impoverished and kind-hearted Charlie and his endearing Grandpa Joe, along with the capricious Willy Wonka, testify to Dahl’s talent for the construction of captivating and exciting literary figures that not only appeal to children but equally fascinate

adult readers. However, not only does Dahl present little Charlie Bucket as a protagonist children can relate to but the reader also encounters four more children to enter the competition for Willy Wonka's main prize.

Augustus Gloop, Veruca Salt, Violet Beauregarde and Mike Teavee are the most obnoxious, ill-mannered children one can possibly imagine and they all are fitted out with a vice making them all the more loathsome. Augustus Gloop is an incredibly greedy boy who does nothing but eating candy all day and is therefore "so enormously fat he look[s] as though he had been blown up with a powerful pump" (Dahl, *Charlie* 21). Veruca Salt is spoilt by her parents and used to getting anything she wants, while Violet Beauregard has the nasty habit of gum chewing and showing off. Mike Teavee, on the other hand, is practically a television addict and particularly fascinated by TV shows that promote violence: "I like the gangsters best. 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 knuckle-dusters!" (Dahl, *Charlie* 33-34).

Having traced a pattern in the majority of Dahl's children's books, that is, the subversion of adult authority and the resulting violence against grown-ups, it shall be noted that *Charlie* digresses from this path. In this story, it is not adults who are subject to violence, for all four of the above introduced children meet with more or less brutal accidents one after another, once they have entered Willy Wonka's chocolate factory.

Matilda, on the other hand, follows exactly the model described above. It is Dahl's last book published only two years prior to his death in 1990. In comparison to his other works of juvenile literature, it has been attacked relatively seldom, which can be attributed to the fact that there is no negative portrayal of foreigners or women, as can be claimed for many of his other books including *Charlie* (Petzold 185). On the other hand, Dahl's "radical siding with children" is even more extreme in *Matilda* than in his other narratives, due to the "devastatingly negative picture of parents" (Petzold 185). In addition, a further authority figure, Matilda's headmistress Agatha Trunchbull, is illustrated as a grotesque and violent, but at the same time also ridiculous person, abusing her power in order to mistreat the children in her care. In both cases – her parent's and Miss Trunchbull's - Matilda is determined to teach the abusive adults a

lesson, thereby subverting adult normativity. In this process violence plays an important role, which shall be elaborated later on. To start with, the forms of violence present in *Charlie* and *Matilda* will be described.

4.1.1. Forms of Violence in *Charlie*

The overall tenor of the story of *Charlie* is already indicated in chapter three of the book, in the anecdote about Prince Pondicherry, narrated by Grandpa Joe: Prince Pondicherry, an Indian sovereign, has sent for Willy Wonka, whom he engages to build a life-sized palace made entirely of chocolate. After having done so, Wonka warns the prince to eat the edifice as soon as possible, since it is not going to last very long under the hot Indian sun. Pondicherry refuses to listen to the advice and instead moves into the large chocolate building. A few days later, on a particularly hot day, the palace melts, burying the arrogant prince:

“But Mr. Wonka was right, of course, because soon after this, there came a very hot day with a boiling sun, and the whole palace began to melt, and then it sank slowly to the ground, and the crazy prince, who was dozing in the living room at the time, woke up to find himself swimming around in a huge brown sticky lake of chocolate.” (Dahl, *Charlie* 13)

Although this incident can, on a closer look, not be referred to as violent – after all, it does not correspond to the previously established definition of a person intentionally imposing harm on another individual – the episode nevertheless evokes, when approached on a different level than Dahl’s superficial description, quite a gruesome image of the prince drowning in the vast amount of molten chocolate. Therefore, although violence is not directly involved, the reader is confronted with a scene in which harm is inflicted - albeit on a very subtle level – and can infer from the consequences Prince Pondicherry has to face for his refusal of listening to Wonka’s advice that he is being punished for his behavior.

While Willy Wonka is in this example merely a passive observer, his role in the comeuppance of the naughty children is less clear. Shortly after the arrival of the five lucky winners of the Golden Tickets and their parents, strange things start to happen in the chocolate factory. First of all, Augustus Gloop, overwhelmed by the amounts of candy surrounding him, greedily sneaks to the

factory's massive chocolate river in order to indulge in the delicious molten chocolate. Not listening to the warnings of Willy Wonka and his parents, he eventually falls into the river only to be sucked up by one of the pipes used to deliver the chocolate into the numerous rooms of the factory. However, since Augustus is too big for the glass pipe, he ends up stuck in it: "The pressure was terrific. Something had to give. Something did give, and that something was Augustus. *WHOOOF!* Up he shot again like a bullet in the barrel of a gun" (Dahl, *Charlie* 74). Again, although the incident is described merely by the use of very few words, therefore only roughly sketching the scene, a closer examination of the event reveals indeed a very nasty fate Augustus has to endure.

Similarly cruel treatment awaits Augustus' fellow factory visitors: Only about twenty pages later, Violet Beauregarde turns into a human blueberry after having eaten a miraculous piece of chewing gum that simulates a whole three-course-menu. Unfortunately, the side-effect of the desert, a blueberry pie, is the transformation into one of the ingredients. Having turned blue all over, her body even starts to take on the shape of a berry:

Her body was swelling up and changing shape at such a rate that within a minute it had turned into nothing less than an enormous round blue ball – a gigantic blueberry, in fact – and all that remained of Violet Beauregarde herself was a tiny pair of legs and a tiny pair of arms sticking out of the great round fruit and a little head on top. (Dahl, *Charlie*, 98)

Veruca Salt, then, is punished for her greed in the nut room. Insisting on getting one of Mr. Wonka's squirrels, used for sorting out bad nuts by first tapping them, she does not tolerate any objections and is determined to take matters into her own hands, that is, until the animals eventually throw her and also her parents down the garbage chute:

Twenty-five of them caught hold of her right arm, and pinned it down. Twenty-five more caught hold of her left arm, and pinned that down. Twenty-five caught hold of her right leg and anchored it to the ground. Twenty-four caught hold of her left leg. And the one remaining squirrel [...] climbed up on to her shoulder and started tap-tap-tapping the wretched girl's head with its knuckles. [...] Veruca kicked and screamed, but it was no use. The tiny strong paws held her tightly and she couldn't escape [...] 'She's going where all the other bad nuts go,' said Mr. Willy Wonka. 'Down the garbage chute.' (Dahl, *Charlie* 112-113)

Finally, Mike Teavee, once arrived in the television room, beams himself into a television by means of a special movie camera the factory uses for the purpose of allowing viewers to try Wonka's candy immediately when seeing a Wonka-chocolate commercial, by simply putting ones hand into the TV screen and grabbing the candy. The television room is in fact the only setting explicitly described as dangerous. When Charlie enters and watches the Oompa-Loompas busy with a massive camera, he feels "a queer sense of danger" (Dahl, *Charlie* 125). Mike Teavee, on the other hand, is thrilled by the thought of being "the first person in the world to be sent by television" (Dahl, *Charlie* 130) and steals away to try out Wonka's invention. Despite Willy Wonka's concerns (the method has not been tested on humans before), the boy finally appears on the screen: "'Hooray!' cried Mr. Wonka. 'He's all in one piece! He's completely unharmed!' 'You call *that* unharmed?' snapped Mrs. Teavee, peering at the little speck of a boy who was now running to and fro across the palm of her hand, waving his pistols in the air. He was certainly not more than an inch tall" (Dahl, *Charlie* 134).

So far, all of the four naughty children have experienced violence in one form or another. As for Augustus and Veruca, the case of physical violence is very much evident. Both children clearly had to endure pain when stuck in the pipe or pinned down, dragged across the floor and thrown into the garbage chute by the squirrels. Violet and Mike, on the other hand, did not have to suffer from any pain (at least Mike's form of punishment did most certainly not hurt, as is apparent from the description in the book). However, their bodies are altered and hence injured in the broader sense. Additionally, the treatment awaiting the four children on recommendation of Willy Wonka clearly can be considered quite creative and at the same time brutal when viewed from a realistic perspective: "'[S]mall boys are extremely springy and elastic,'" Wonka tells Mike's parents. "'They stretch like mad. So what we'll do, we'll put him in a special machine I have for testing the stretchiness of chewing gum! Maybe that will bring him back to what he was'" (Dahl, *Charlie* 135). In the case of Augustus Gloop, Willy Wonka orders an Oompa-Loompa to "take a long stick and start poking around inside the big chocolate-mixing barrel" (Dahl, *Charlie* 77), Violet Beauregarde even is to be juiced: "'Squeeze her,' said Mr. Wonka. 'We've got to squeeze the juice out of her immediately. After that, we'll just have to see

how she comes out” (Dahl, *Charlie* 99) and Veruca Salt along with her parents is in danger of being burned: “‘But what about the great fiery incinerator?’ asked Charlie. ‘They only light it every other day,’ said Mr. Wonka. ‘Perhaps this is one of the days when they let it go out. You never know ... they might be lucky....’” (Dahl, *Charlie* 116). Beside the physical pain the children have to endure, there is also the psychological harm they suffer when humiliated in front of their parents and peers, as a consequence of their loss of control and the display of their sudden weakness and physical deformation.

As has been shown in the initial chapter of this thesis, an action causing someone pain or harm can only be labeled violence if there is a perpetrator performing the act intentionally. Although the accidents of the four children in *Charlie* clearly harm them and, in most cases, are also painful, the violence seems unintentional mainly due to the fact that the source of it is missing¹⁶. Or is it? This question shall be clarified in the following.

4.1.2. Crime and Punishment

All the incidences of violence in the chocolate factory are reminiscent of Grandpa Joe’s story of the Indian Prince mentioned at the beginning of the previous section. Again, the reader is confronted with a person and their vice, combined with their disobedience and once more, this leads to the unfortunate events. However, while Pondicherry is obviously defeated by natural circumstances, the scenes in the chocolate factory are much more mysterious. In fact, Dahl, although never mentioning it explicitly, constantly indicates a greater plan behind the violent scenes. On the one hand, Willy Wonka appears only as a helpless observer of the violence happening to the four children. Indeed, he almost desperately warns the young visitors in each case against the danger awaiting them and the deficiencies of his creations. For example, in the inventing room at the gum machine, there is a lengthy discussion in which Wonka mentions several times that the chewing gum has not been tested properly and begs Violet to stop eating it:

¹⁶ Only in Veruca’s case, the squirrels can be interpreted as the source of the violence the girl has to endure.

“I want that gum!” Violet said obstinately. [...] “I would rather you didn’t take it,” Mr. Wonka told her gently. “You see, I haven’t got it *quite right* yet. [...]” At once, her huge well-trained jaws started chewing away on it like a pair of tongs. “Don’t!” said Mr. Wonka. “Fabulous!” shouted Violet. [...] “Stop!” said Mr. Wonka. “The gum isn’t ready yet! It’s not right!” “Of course it’s right!” said Violet. [...] “Spit it out!” said Mr. Wonka. [...] Mr. Wonka was wringing his hands and saying, “No, no, no, no, no! It isn’t ready for eating! It isn’t right! You mustn’t do it!” (Dahl, *Charlie* 95-96)

On the other hand, the narrative structure, particularly in this scene, emphasizes Wonka’s deliberate hesitation to save the children from the pending accidents. In fact, one whole page is dedicated to the description of Violet chewing the magical gum and commenting on the delicious meals she tastes, only interrupted by Wonka’s worried remarks that are in the end merely words but no actions. Similarly, he neither steps in when Augustus is nearly drowning in the chocolate river, nor when Veruca marches into the nut room, or Mike runs off to the camera (at least in the last case one could claim that Wonka has been overwhelmed by the swiftness of the boy’s actions). In the two film adaptations, and especially in the 1971 version, Wonka’s real intention is accentuated by Gene Wilder’s acting: After having warned Violet against the chewing gum, Wonka casually takes a seat. Then, with a distinctly bored undertone to his voice, he says “Stop, don’t...” before he lapses into silence and does not even watch the scene anymore.

In addition, the tour through the factory, consisting of apparently random visits to the different rooms where the naughty children are punished, turns out to be in fact carefully planned by Wonka. This becomes most obvious in chapter 22, in which Wonka, after Violet has been brought to the juicing room, rushes down a corridor to his next surprise, ignoring his guests’ wishes to stop at several attractions while simultaneously drawing their attention to these. When Veruca finally asks why they “have to go rushing on past all these lovely rooms”, Wonka replies angrily: “We shall stop in time!” [...] “Don’t be so madly impatient!” (Dahl, *Charlie* 105). Moreover, Wonka’s occasional comments also suggest that he is not as innocent as it might seem at first sight: “Well, well, well,” sighed Mr. Willy Wonka, “two naughty little children gone. Three good little children left” (Dahl, *Charlie* 102). Right on the next page, when Charlie asks if Violet has to stay purple forever, Wonka declares almost satisfied: “That’s what comes from chewing disgusting gum all day long!” “If you think gum is so disgusting,” said

Mike Teavee, 'then why do you make it in your factory?' 'I do wish you wouldn't mumble,' said Mr. Wonka. 'I can't hear a word you're saying.'" (Dahl, *Charlie* 103). Mr. Salt seems to have sensed Wonka's involvement in the strange goings-on, as he tells him that he believes Wonka has gone "*just* a shade too far this time" (Dahl *Charlie* 114) when his daughter has been carried off by the squirrels. In chapter 28, the reader ultimately is provided with the most obvious clue when Willy Wonka is depicted as "*pretending* to be surprised" [emphasis added] (Dahl, *Charlie* 142) when noticing that Charlie is the only one of the young visitors who has remained and assures him that he "'had a hunch, you know, right from the beginning, that it was going to be you!'" (Dahl, *Charlie* 142). Apparently, the author assumes that the reader has already figured out the idea behind the strange calamities, since Wonka's reaction is narrated matter-of-factly as if it would not come as a surprise to the reader.

All these examples point to Willy Wonka as the actual perpetrator in what appears to be natural consequences of the children's behavior. He knows about their bad habits and weaknesses and does not hesitate to use them in order to lead the children into temptation. Charlie, the only one who is able to resist, is rewarded in the end, while the other children are punished. Thereby, Dahl subverts the genre of the moral tale, since the offenses in *Charlie* are not morally wrong in the strict sense but merely resulting from parental inability to control and train children properly. This argument reflects the story's implied criticism on all too mild parents. In this respect, it makes perfect sense that not only Veruca but also her parents are thrown into the garbage chute, which is also underscored by the Oompa-Loompas' song:

'Who spoiled her, then? Ah, who indeed?
 Who pandered to her every need?
 Who turned her into such a brat?
 Who are the culprits? Who did that?
 Alas! You needn't look so far
 To find out who these sinners are.
 They are (and this is very sad)
 Her loving parents, MUM and DAD. (Dahl, *Charlie* 117-118).

As has become evident from the analysis above, the violence happening in the chocolate factory is no less than the punishment the four children receive as a result of their misbehavior. Although this might be obvious to an adult, the child

reader may not be able to look behind the colorful façade of the chocolate paradise and interpret Willy Wonka's often confusing behavior. Violence in *Charlie* is therefore ambiguous: It is apparent on a superficial level, that is, the four children experiencing it as a consequence of their vice. Thus, there is an implied criticism at the as 'bad' established manners, which a child is likely to grasp. However, the fact that Willy Wonka is the actual evildoer and hence, that what happens to Augustus, Mike, Violet and Veruca is indeed violence and not merely tough luck, may escape young readers' attention, since they may not be ready to understand the subtle hints installed in the story. Moreover, the treatment the four children receive in the aftermath of their ordeal is presented as a cure for their awkward situation but is nevertheless violent in itself, especially when perceived as perfecting Willy Wonka's punishment. Other than in conventional fantasy literature or fairy tales, the cure for an evil curse is not a magic potion, but rather somewhat grotesque techniques under the pretext of attempting to save the children.

As has been mentioned already, Dahl never romanticized children but rather viewed them as sometimes obnoxious and annoying. Given that there are some parallels between the author and his main character Willy Wonka¹⁷, it makes sense that the factory owner has no misgivings about using violence on the young secondary characters. This puts Wonka in the role of a judge who uses violence as a means of disciplining in order to tame the naughty children. Nevertheless, he does so in an indirect way, therefore concealed as the actual perpetrator and avoiding any confrontation. Yet, it can be speculated that young readers may fail to comprehend Wonka's actual role in the story. On the other hand, this may have been precisely Dahl's intention¹⁸.

To conclude, the violence experienced by Augustus, Violet, Veruca and Mike in the chocolate factory cannot be attributed directly to a definite perpetrator. It therefore works on a subtle level and is little apparent. However, the author has implemented subliminal hints that point to Willy Wonka having planned the tour through his factory more carefully than the superficially random choice of the

¹⁷ As Treglown (142) points out, one similarity between Dahl and Wonka is "Dahl's third-person narrative voice and Mr. Wonka's own hectic, exaggerated way of talking". Additionally, Sturrock (400) mentions the "'No arguments, please' public manner" as a character trait of both Dahl and his creation.

¹⁸ A more detailed discussion with regard to this point will be included in chapter 5 of this thesis.

route may suggest. Willy Wonka neither uses direct physical force to castigate the children, but rather provides the necessary circumstances in order to leave them to their own vice, nor does he carry out the violent treatment completing their punishment since this is done by the Oompa-Loompas (and in Veruca's case possibly by the furnace). According to Buss' classification with regard to the source of the violent action, the reader of *Charlie* is therefore mainly confronted with physical-active-indirect violence. Furthermore, psychological violence is a side effect of the brutal events, as the victims are humiliated and publically denigrated.

4.1.3. Forms of Violence in *Matilda*

Other than in *Charlie*, the scenes of violence in *Matilda* are more obvious and more cumulative as well. The book starts with a recapitulation of Matilda's life, thereby describing her cognitive maturity, such as her ability to teach herself to read at the early age of only three years (Dahl, *Matilda* 11). Matilda, the narrator makes explicit, is an "extra-ordinary" girl "and by that I mean sensitive and brilliant" (Dahl, *Matilda* 10). From the very beginning, the rest of Matilda's family is portrayed in marked contrast to her. Her brother Michael, for example, is a pretty ordinary boy while her parents are absolutely revolting¹⁹. Matilda is for them "nothing more than a scab" (Dahl, *Matilda* 10) and especially her father frequently insults her. For instance, when Mr. Wormwood explains the secret behind his dubious second-hand car dealing business, he denigrates his daughter in a very rude way: "I don't see how sawdust can help you to sell second-hand cars, daddy.' 'That's because you're an ignorant little twit," the father²⁰ said. [...] 'You must be very clever to find a use for something that costs nothing,' she said. 'I wish I could do it.' 'You couldn't,' the father said 'You're too stupid. [...]" (Dahl, *Matilda* 22). In another episode, he accuses Matilda of cheating when she solves a mathematical problem with which he has confronted Michael:

¹⁹ This typically Dahlesque illustration of "people of limited culture and intelligence" has informed many works of Children's Literature to come, such as the Dursley family in J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* novels (Eccleshare 36).

²⁰ It is noticeable that in *Matilda* the members of her family are more often than not referred to as "the father", "the mother", and "the brother" as can be seen in this short passage. By avoiding the pronoun and using the definite article instead, Matilda's alienation from her family is emphasized.

“You ... you little cheat!” the father suddenly shouted, pointing at her with his finger. “You looked at my bit of paper! You read it off from what I’ve got written here!” “Daddy, I’m the other side of the room,” [sic] Matilda said. “How could I possibly see it?” “Don’t give me that rubbish!” the father shouted. “Of course you looked! You must have looked! No one in the world could give the right answer just like that, especially a girl! You’re a little cheat, madam, that’s what you are! A cheat and a liar!” (Dahl, *Matilda* 54-55)

When the girl is not shouted at or humiliated, her parents ignore her. For example, while Mr. Wormwood is at work, Michael is at school and Mrs. Wormwood is away playing Bingo, Matilda is left alone in the house (Dahl, *Matilda* 12). Her parents’ negligent treatment goes so far that they miss the right time to send Matilda to school, resulting in her entering the educational system half a year later than normally (Dahl, *Matilda* 66). All in all, the Wormwood’s behavior towards their youngest daughter, although portrayed in a very exaggerated way, clearly is abusive. Using Leeb et al.’s typology, the acts of omission committed by the Wormwoods consist of inadequate supervision and educational neglect, in addition to psychological abuse, as for example denigrating Matilda and rejecting her in general.

Since she loves to read and learn new things, the opportunity of finally going to school is like a dream come true for the small girl. However, in Crunchem Hall rules the evil headmistress Miss Trunchbull, who sadistically enjoys insulting and violently punishing the children when they have done something wrong in her opinion. Such crimes can range from spelling a word incorrectly to wearing pigtails:

[Miss Trunchbull] lunged forward and grabbed hold of Amanda’s pigtails in her right fist and lifted the girl clear off the ground. Then she started swinging her round and round her head, faster and faster and Amanda was screaming blue murder and the Trunchbull was yelling, “I’ll give you pigtails, you little rat!” [...] And now the Trunchbull was leaning back against the weight of the whirling girl and pivoting expertly on her toes, spinning round and round, and soon Amanda Thrupp was travelling so fast she became a blur, and suddenly, with a mighty grunt, the Trunchbull let go of the pigtails and Amanda went sailing like a rocket right over the wire fence of the playground and high up into the sky. (Dahl, *Matilda* 114-115)

In contrast to *Charlie*, this description of a violent episode is more brutal. This is due to the fact that the violence is more immediate since the violent act is performed by an actual person. This use of physical violence appears multiple

times in the book. During her weekly visit to Matilda's class, Miss Trunchball in fact lifts two further children into the air by grabbing their hair and ears (Dahl, *Matilda* 148, 152). According to her belief, this is the only way to properly teach children: "You take it from me, it's no good just *telling* them. You've got to *hammer* it into them. [...]" (Dahl, *Matilda* 155).

Furthermore, Miss Trunchbull has other ways as well to teach her students a lesson. In one episode, she is determined to publically torture and humiliate Bruce Bogtrotter, a "decidedly large and round" (Dahl, *Matilda* 118) boy who has stolen a piece of her private chocolate cake. In the course of the events, the headmistress sadistically takes revenge on Bruce in front of all the other students, who have been summoned to gather in the Assembly Hall. After an enormous chocolate cake has been brought in, the Trunchbull urges Bruce to eat a piece. Whereas many children fear that the cake is poisoned, it turns out to be perfectly fine. Nevertheless, after he has finished the piece, the Trunchbull forces Bruce to eat some more: "Eat!" she shouted, banging her thigh with the riding-crop. "[...] You stole cake! And now you've got cake! What's more, you're going to eat it! You do not leave this platform and nobody leaves this hall until you have eaten the entire cake that is sitting there in front of you! [...]" (Dahl, *Matilda* 127).

Another one of Miss Trunchbull's cruelties is the Chokey, which is described to Matilda in detail by an older student:

"The Chokey", Hortensia went on, "is a very tall but very narrow cupboard. The floor is only ten inches square so you can't sit down or squat in it. You have to stand. And three of the walls are made of cement with bits of broken glass sticking out all over, so you can't lean against them. You have to stand more or less at attention all the time when you get locked up in there. It's terrible." (Dahl, *Matilda* 104)

Evoking pictures of a medieval instrument of torture, the Chokey is not only used to punish the students physically, but also to damage them psychologically (at least temporarily) when forced to stay in all day "I was off my rocker when she let me out. I was babbling like an idiot" (Dahl, *Matilda* 106).

The forms of violence exerted by the Trunchbull can be found in the theoretical part of this thesis. Besides abusing her charges physically, she also harms

them psychologically by restricting their movement when thrown into the Chokey, scapegoating them, such as Matilda when the culprit who put a newt into her water jug cannot be identified (Dahl, *Matilda* 161ff), denigrating them by calling them names and using obscene language in front of them, or, as in one episode, day-dreaming about “getting rid of them”:

“I have never been able to understand why small children are so disgusting. They should be got rid of as early as possible. We get rid of flies with fly-spray and by hanging up fly-paper. I have often thought of inventing a spray for getting rid of small children. How splendid it would be to walk into this classroom with a gigantic spray-gun in my hands and start pumping it. Or better still, some huge strips of sticky paper. I would hang them all round the school and you’d all get stuck to them and that would be the end of it. [...]” (Dahl, *Matilda* 159)

Apart from that, she also threatens the students: “I’ll very soon rub you out if you try getting clever with me” (Dahl, *Matilda* 152) and it goes without saying that her punishing methods ridicule the victim (as in the scene with Bruce Bogtrotter or Amanda Thripp) and scare the children.

However, Matilda’s parents and Miss Trunchbull are not the only parties who use violence in the story. When Matilda asks one evening to leave the living room, where the whole family has dinner in front of the TV on a regular basis, her father refuses to let her go, ironically arguing that “[s]upper is a family gathering and no one leaves the table till it’s over” (Dahl, *Matilda* 28). Matilda therefore decides to punish her parents every time they are cruel towards her since “[a] small victory or two would help her to tolerate their idiocies and would stop her from going crazy” (Dahl, *Matilda* 29). The series of punishments Matilda invents for her father starts with superglue Matilda applies on the rim of her father’s hat (Dahl, *Matilda* 30). Mr. Wormwood, unaware, puts it on and only when he arrives at his garage does he notice that he cannot take it off. This evolves into a funny episode when Mr. Wormwood is forced to keep his hat on the whole day and even in bed, until Mrs. Wormwood decides that her husband looks too ridiculous. With a pair of scissors, she cuts the hat off his head, leaving him with “a bald white ring round his head, like some sort of a monk” (Dahl, *Matilda* 36). Miraculously, after this event, Matilda notices that her father is unusually nice and calm (Dahl, *Matilda* 38). Yet, a little while later, when he has obviously recovered, he resumes his old habit of bullying Matilda and his

daughter plays two more tricks on him. For the first one, she borrows her neighbor's parrot which, once hidden in the chimney, starts talking and frightens her whole family, who think a burglar or a ghost has found their way into the house (Dahl, *Matilda* 45ff). Next, she pours the contents of her mother's bottle of platinum blonde hair-dye into her father's hair oil, provoking a chaos in the family household that is again narrated in a very comical way (Dahl, *Matilda* 59ff).

These incidents of violence can be compared to Violet's and Mike's experiences in the chocolate factory since, although Mr. Wormwood does not suffer from any pain, he is harmed nevertheless by the inconvenient circumstances he has to face. Furthermore, when Matilda is wrongly accused by the Trunchbull of having put the newt into her water jug, she all of a sudden finds out about her peculiar power of telekinesis. Thus, in this scene and also later on, she does not have to use violence directly in order to defeat the headmistress, but is able to act in secrecy. It can therefore be concluded that, while Matilda's parents as well as Miss Trunchbull use direct violence, Matilda's way is very subtle and indirect. For now, this shall serve as a sufficient summary of the forms of violence in *Matilda*. However, the following section will go into further detail, as the forms of violence featured in *Matilda* perform an important function.

4.2. Functions of Violence in *Charlie* and *Matilda*

After having identified the forms of violence in both narratives, the focus shall now be laid upon its functions. In the analysis of *Charlie*, it makes sense to compare the story to the cautionary tale, as it bears obvious similarities to this branch of children's literature. In a second step, *Matilda* will be scrutinized with regard to the function violence fulfills in the negotiation of power positions, as has already been mentioned above. Hence, it can be anticipated that violence accomplishes different purposes in both narratives, as will become more obvious in the following.

4.2.1. *Charlie* as a Cautionary Tale

Violence functioning as a means of punishing deviant behavior as in *Charlie* is reminiscent of other, more ancient works of children's literature, such as the

German picture book *Struwwelpeter*, written in the mid-nineteenth century, which fundamentally changed and revolutionized the traditional picture book (Metcalf 202). In this book, illustrated by its author Dr. Heinrich Hoffmann, various isolated stories, whose purpose - typical for children's literature of that time - was to teach the moral, feature child protagonists who are punished for their deviant behavior. Written in short iambic couplets, the tales can be classified as examples of the cautionary verse. In the following, parallels between *Charlie* and Hoffmann's morality tale shall be pointed out and explored, since it can be argued that Dahl's narrative stands in the tradition of *Struwwelpeter* and similar moral tales for children of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

What is striking about the violence in *Charlie* is that it seems to occur only in separate episodes. In other words, the tour through the chocolate factory appears to serve as a frame narrative for the main plot, the ill-mannered children's disobedience resulting in the four individual climaxes of them being punished. This can be understood as the first general similarity between Dahl's narrative and *Struwwelpeter*, which also consists of separate stories narrating children's transgressing of rules or generally bad behavior, which brings the negative – and violent – consequences. A further similarity can be found in Dahl's employment of the Oompa-Loompas who "love dancing and music", "are always making up songs" (Dahl, *Charlie* 71) and appear at the end of each punishment-scenario. These scenes are always marked by a song the Oompa-Loompas seem to have composed in honor of the child just punished. The metric style of these songs as well as their content establishes an even stronger connection to the famous picture book. The verses are very catchy, due to their shortness and rhythm, and the songs are modeled after the cautionary tale in structure and content. The cautionary tale, otherwise known as cautionary verse, is "[a] tradition of verse principally dating from the Victorian period, generally delivered in rhyming couplets, that relates the seemingly minor misdemeanors of children, acquiring its ruthless humour from the punishment or misfortune that befalls them" ("Cautionary Verse" 133). The beginning of Augustus Gloop's song shall serve as only one example here:

'Augustus Gloop! Augustus Gloop!

The great big greedy nincompoop!
 How long could we allow this beast
 To gorge and guzzle, feed and feast
 On everything he wanted to?
 Great Scott! It simply wouldn't do
 However long this pig might live,
 We're positive he'd never give
 Even the smallest bit of fun
 Or happiness to anyone.
 [...] (Dahl, Charlie 78-79)

This introduction can be compared, for example, to Hoffmann's tale of the Suppenkaspar. Such a comparison suggests itself since Hoffmann's protagonist Kaspar was renamed into Augustus in the English translation. Smith Chalou (39) has pointed out the rhyming component of *Gloop* to *Soup* as well as the antithetic character of *Augustus Who Would Not Have Any Soup* and Augustus who greedily devours vast amounts of candy²¹. In Hoffmann's narrative, Augustus, or Kaspar, is introduced as follows:

Der Kaspar, der war kerngesund,
 Ein dicker Bub und kugelrund,
 Er hatte Backen rot und frisch;
 Die Suppe aß er hübsch bei Tisch.
 Doch einmal fing er an zu schrei'n:
 „Ich esse keine Suppe! Nein!
 Ich esse meine Suppe nicht!
 Nein, meine Suppe ess' ich nicht!“ (Hoffmann 17)

Similar to the Oompa-Loompa-song, the reader is given some information on the protagonist and his demeanor, which finally becomes his downfall. Next, the consequences of the child's deviant behavior are pointed out. In the case of Hoffmann's Augustus, these are realized in the (unnaturally quick) loss of weight and, eventually, Augustus' death. Dahl's Augustus, on the other hand, is to live on after his adventure in the chocolate room:

But don't, dear children, be alarmed;
 Augustus Gloop will not be harmed,
 Although, of course, we must admit
 He will be *altered* quite a bit.
 He'll be *quite* changed from what he's been,

²¹ The *Struwwelpeter*-book's German heritage may also have inspired Augustus Gloop's nationality in the first screenplay *Willy Wonka & the Chocolate Factory* (1971), of which Dahl, after all, is the main author. In the 2005 version, Augustus is portrayed as German too.

When he goes through the fudge machine:
 [...]
 This boy, who only just before
 Was loathed by men from shore to shore,
 This greedy brute, this louse's ear,
 Is loved by people everywhere!
 For who could hate or bear a grudge
 Against a luscious bit of fudge? (Dahl, *Charlie* 79-80)

The Oompa-Loompas' songs in the style of the cautionary tale, as well as the plot of *Charlie*, point to the story having been fashioned in the tradition of the moral tale. It seems as if Dahl uses violence in an effort to deter the young readers from deviant and morally non-permissible behavior. This argument becomes all the more logical when interpreting the four nasty children's vice as representing four of the seven deadly sins, as has been done by several readers (e.g. Pierce): Augustus Gloop embodies gluttony and Violet Beauregarde is prideful since she brags about her achievement of beating the gum-chewing world record: "it may interest you to know that this piece of gum I'm chewing right at this moment is one I've been working on for over *three months solid*. That's a record, that is. It's beaten the record held by my best friend [...]" (Dahl, *Charlie* 31). Veruca Salt, who is spoiled by her parents and gets everything she asks for immediately, represents greed and Mike Teavee is sloth, due to his rather passive hobby of extensively watching television. The ill-mannered children thus function as cautionary examples since their vice, and at the same time, four of the seven cardinal sins are sanctioned by means of violence. In this sense, *Charlie* receives a strong biblical connotation, and the role of Willy Wonka is similar to that of the Old Testament God, as has been pointed out by Kachur (224-225). In his chocolate realm, Willy Wonka is in control of everything and he wields power over those who enter this magical world. Thus, his taking charge of the four children's moral education seems very much legit, although outside the factory it would appear completely out of place.

However, relating the four children to the deadly sins is just one way of interpretation and it appears to jettison the previously established image of Dahl as a writer not intending to teach his readers lessons through his stories. It is also flawed by the author's notes and early drafts of the book, which give no account of any motives of that kind. Although Dahl sketches Augustus as "a greedy boy", all the other minor characters are merely outlined as "a girl who is

allowed to HAVE anything she wants” (Veruca Salt), “a girl who chews gum all day” (Violet Beauregarde) and “a television-crazy boy” (in this manuscript named Herpes Trout) (The Roald Dahl Museum and Story Centre RD 2/7/4), and there is no trace whatsoever of the author’s intention to promote Christian values and condemn deviation thereof. In fact, such evidence seems to be in favor of Reese (149) claiming, as mentioned above, that Dahl demonizes things and habits he personally finds disgusting or reprehensible²², thereby conveying this negative image to his readers.

The possible functions the theme of violence fulfills in the story of Charlie depend on how the narrative is interpreted. Read as a cautionary tale, the violent scenes have a rather didactic function, although their value may be questioned. On the other hand, if the reader fails to establish a connection between the secondary characters’ demises and him or herself, the story’s potential cautionary quality is shed. In this regard, *Charlie* is not more or less than a modern fairy tale, an argument which will be elaborated in section 4.3. Before turning to this point, however, the functions of violence in *Matilda* shall be examined.

4.2.2. Empowerment and Disempowerment – Functions of Violence in *Matilda*

Tedeschi and Felson’s theory, which postulates that violence works as a means of seizing power in a social context, can easily be applied to the protagonists’ behavior in *Matilda*. One incident that seems appropriate to analyze in this regard is the Bruce Bogtrotter-scene. Contrary to the Trunchbull’s expectations, Bruce does not give in but manages to eat the whole gigantic cake. Furious about the boy’s success, the Trunchbull then grabs the huge plate the cake has been sitting on and “[brings] it down with a crash right on the top of the wretched Bruce Bogtrotter’s head” (Dahl, *Matilda* 133).

Drawing upon the social interactionist theory of aggression, this event can be analyzed as follows: The Trunchbull is willing to exercise retributive justice for the crime of stealing Bruce has committed. This alone is not reprehensible,

²² *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* is in fact not the only one of Dahl’s children’s books where this can be observed. *The Twits* is a good example of Dahl denigrating men who wear beards (Dahl, *The Twits* 1) and as Sturrock (542) mentions in his biography, it was a widely known fact that Dahl did not exactly like facial hair.

although the means she uses to teach the boy the lesson is of course questionable. However, by forcing the other students to watch, the punishment also serves the purpose of assertive self-presentation in order to establish herself as strong and powerful. When the intended goal is not achieved, that is, when Bruce is able to defeat her by managing to eat the whole cake without collapsing, she smashes the plate on his head in order to maintain her reputation. According to the social interactionist theory of aggression, this action serves the purpose of self-protection. Similarly, when the Trunchbull later on is forced to show weakness in class due to a prank Lavender played on her, she immediately searches for a scapegoat and, once found, starts shouting at Matilda and humiliating her, using very primitive language: “Stand up, you disgusting little cockroach!” [...] ‘Stand up at once, you filthy little maggot!’” (Dahl, *Matilda* 161). Obviously, the Trunchbull is a sadistic, self-righteous person who hates children and therefore enjoys torturing them. On the other hand, downrightly celebrating the punishments publicly, the methods also serve the purpose of assertive self-presentation. By establishing her personality as evil, brutal and merciless, she can be sure that every member of her school, including the teachers, fears her, thus enabling her to force her will on all her subjects and giving free rein to her terror regime.

Taking the Trunchbull as an example, it can be argued further that the majority of the violence happening in *Matilda* is nothing less than the characters’ attempts to establish and perpetuate power. Trites (2000) has pointed out that power is a motif present in young adult’s literature and Nikolajeva (7) confirms this position, adding that it is “in some way or other” inherent in all juvenile literature”. At the beginning of *Matilda*, the hierarchy between the adults and the children in the story is illustrated according to the social norm. Matilda’s parents are the powerful while Matilda, powerless, is subject to their negligent treatment. Mr. and Mrs. Wormwood’s authority is, however, questioned multiple times. In fact, Dahl subverts adult power by ridiculing Matilda’s parents, who can often be regarded as very exaggerated projections of awful grownups. For example, when Matilda’s mother vents on children who pick their nose Matilda remarks: “Grown-ups do it too, mummy. I saw you doing it yesterday in the kitchen.” (Dahl, *Matilda* 34). The same is true for Miss Trunchbull and her utterly ridiculous claim that she has never been a baby:

“I cannot for the life of me see why children have to take so long to grow up. I think they do it on purpose.” [...] “But surely *you* were a small person once, Miss Trunchbull, weren’t you?” “I was never a small person,” she snapped. [...] “But you must have started out as a baby,” the boy said. “*Me!* A baby!” shouted the Trunchbull. “How dare you suggest such a thing! [...]” (Dahl, *Matilda* 151).

Thus, in unmasking the grownups in the story by children, their power, if not subverted, is questioned. Furthermore, Matilda very soon starts to surpass her parents in terms of knowledge, which is the cause for her father’s aggression towards her, as becomes obvious by the following passage:

With frightening suddenness [the father] now began ripping the pages out of the book in handfuls and throwing them in the waste-paper basket. Matilda froze in horror. The father kept going. There seemed little doubt that the man felt some kind of jealousy. How dare she, he seemed to be saying with each rip of a page, how dare she enjoy reading books when he couldn’t? (Dahl, *Matilda* 41)

All this, Matilda’s remarkable intelligence, which dwarfs that of many adults, as well as the use of her incredible brainpower to outwit her parents and later even the tyrannical Trunchbull, can be subsumed under the concept of carnival. Elaborated by the Russian critic Mikhail Bakhtin, it draws on medieval carnival, “a temporary reversal of the established order when all societal power structures changed places” (Nikolajeva 10). Carnival is highly relevant for children’s literature since although children are basically not granted a voice under normal circumstances, in the literary works written for them the child protagonists are empowered “*on certain conditions and for a limited time*”, as Nikolajeva (10, emphasis in the original) stresses. This also corresponds to *Matilda* since at the end of the story, her mysterious powers vanish as quickly as they have appeared and Matilda is nothing more than a little girl, although outstandingly intelligent.

Nikolajeva (41) furthermore identifies fantasy as “the most common carnivalesque device in children’s literature”. This has to do with certain properties of the genre that allow for the empowerment of an otherwise ordinary child, such as the sudden equipment with a magical force, which would not be possible under normal circumstances (Nikolajeva 41-42). Indeed, most of Dahl’s

fiction for children is marked by the incorporation of the fantastic, starting out with the description of realistic circumstances and realistic characters in a realistic environment, only to eventually introduce a not-so-realistic element. Combining mimesis and fantasy, his juvenile books can be described borrowing Jackson's (34) words when she outlines fantastic narratives as stories which "assert that what they are telling is real – relying upon all the conventions of realistic fiction to do so – and then they proceed to break that assumption of realism by introducing what – within those terms – is manifestly unreal".

While certain characters, like Matilda's parents and especially Miss Trunchbull, cannot be exactly described as realistic in the strict sense of the word, it is their actions which eventually unmask them entirely as characters belonging to the fantasy genre. To be more precise, the violence they exert is so unbelievably brutal and exaggerated that it is very unlikely to happen in a realistic setting. Although it can be argued that Matilda's parents in all their negligence, indifference and blatant vulgarity are – sadly but truly – not at all unrealistically portrayed, Miss Trunchbull's abusive behavior clearly takes on a fantastic scale. Yet, only when Matilda discovers the power to move objects without touching them does the actual fantasy become obvious. Thus, Matilda's acquisition of the magical force and furthermore, its use (or abuse) for the sake of violence, empowers her and starts the carnival. However, not only does the story experience a carnivalesque twist when Matilda is not able to control her anger against Agatha Trunchbull, but already in the first chapters of the book this power shift can be observed. Each time Matilda punishes her father for his nasty behavior, the adult authority is overthrown and Matilda, the little girl, gains power. Additionally, Matilda is not the only child who experiences empowerment when faced with the adult villains. Bruce Bogtrotter is one example of a child character, who literally defeats the Trunchbull in the cake battle, and also the tiny Lavender comes up with a plan to make the mighty headmistress scream with hysteria when she finds a newt in her water jug (Dahl, *Matilda* 160f).

Those incidents of the reversion of order, however, do not last long and soon the adult villains have reclaimed their power status. Although Matilda notices a "comparative calm in the Wormwood household" (Dahl, *Matilda* 38) after the first trick she played on her father, Mr. Wormwood quickly recovers from his

shock and rips one of Matilda's library books into pieces. Similarly, after the Trunchbull's evil plan involving Bruce Bogtrotter has backfired, the next time she shows up she is her old nasty self, humiliating and torturing the children in Matilda's class during her weekly visit. The only thing which can stop her is Matilda's peculiar power and her ingenuity, which not only helps to free the school from the terrible headmistress but also enables Miss Honey to return to her former home and live happily ever after.

Obviously, the majority of the carnivalesque episodes in *Matilda* are rendered possible through violence. While it could be argued that strictly speaking, violence is not what empowers Matilda, since the one thing which gives her the extraordinary force is her intelligence combined with the boredom she experienced when she was unchallenged in Miss Honey's class (as the teacher reasons in the last chapter of the book), the outcome is all the same. Matilda uses her wits and later on her powers with the aim to exert violence²³ when she feels unfairly treated by the grownups in the story. Furthermore, the adults exploit violence in order to dominate the children. Although adults do draw upon their authority in everyday life to control children, Dahl exaggerates this imbalance of power by using violence as a device to underscore this unequal relationship. Violence in *Matilda* is therefore a means of emphasizing power structures that shift in the course of the narrative.

A further point to mention is the author's employment of different forms of violence as a characteristic for the various protagonists in the book. It shall be noted that Mrs. Wormwood, although she most of the time shows disregard for her daughter, cannot be directly accused of violence, since she most probably does not intent to harm Matilda. Yet, Mrs. Wormwood's indifferent behavior towards her daughter can at any rate be considered psychologically harmful, and is in accordance with the definitions of child abuse mentioned above. Mr. Wormwood's actions may be much more obviously associated with psychological violence since he mainly insults his daughter or destroys her beloved books. The Trunchbull, on the other hand, uses all forms of violence

²³ The view that Matilda's deeds are in fact violent might be challenged but nevertheless, they fulfill all the requirements for an action to be considered violent: The actor (Matilda) shows a certain behavior (the various tricks she plays on the adults) with the intent to harm the victim (her parents, Mrs. Trunchbull) psychologically but also physically.

but for the most part physically maltreats her charges. Finally, Matilda's ways to punish her parents and the abusive headmistress are so subtle that they can hardly be identified as violent. Nonetheless, in each of the three cases there is clearly the intent to harm the other party, although the degree of the intended damage, as well as the actual outcome, can be assumed to vary greatly. Using Buss' categorization once more as a framework, it can be said that while Mr. Wormwood and Agatha Trunchbull use direct physical and psychological violence, Matilda's violent acts are merely of passive nature. Thus, the way violence is used by the protagonists characterizes them: Mr. Wormwood, occasionally insulting or emotionally hurting the heroine, is mean but by far not as horrible as the Trunchbull, the most villainous character, whose manifold violent nature portrays her as the epitomized wickedness. In contrast, Matilda, whose use of violence can be said to be merely harmless pranks big with consequences, is the good character. Moreover, since she uses violence against the villains, it appears in a different light: the negative connotation inherent in the concept of violence recedes almost entirely.

Summing up, violence in *Matilda* serves as a device in order to render the power positions of the protagonists visible. Moreover, it also works as a means of characterization, depending on the forms of violence used by the different parties. However, although Matilda is clearly portrayed as the innocent underdog who merely tries to defend herself against the adults' unfair treatment, she is not so naïve indeed. The very fact that she deliberately chooses to punish the adults through - albeit very mild - violence implies that she actually enjoys inflicting harm upon her oppressors. Dahl therefore presupposes a measure of cruelty within the child readers of *Matilda*, as he does in *Charlie*, and in celebrating the violent retaliation of the villains, appeals to the audience's sadism, who enjoy the violence experienced by the evil characters.

This effect violence can achieve within the reader is of course not exactly new. It can be found, for example, in fairy tales, written for the entertainment of the audience and not, as has been argued often, for children's guidance and moral education. The next section deals with this aspect of violence in literature and explores the feelings it possibly evokes in the reader of *Charlie* and *Matilda*.

4.3. Effects of Violence in *Charlie and Matilda*

Maria Tatar claims in one of her texts on violence in fairy tales that violence in juvenile fiction can be explored from two very different perspectives, which she specifies as its production and its perception (Tatar, "Violent Delights" 72): "First, there is an author or agent of representation responsible for the violent event in the text. Then, there is the reader or recipient who responds in some way to the constructed violence" (Tatar, "Violent Delights" 72). Having investigated *Charlie and Matilda* so far with regard to the first aspect only, more attention shall now be directed to the latter one.

4.3.2. A Fairy Tale in Disguise

As has been shown above, violence in *Charlie* may be said to work as a cautionary device, although it has to be mentioned that the punishment is in each case disproportionate to the children's "crimes". Moreover, the portrayal of Augustus Gloop is especially problematic, since it serves in establishing obesity as an offense that has to be punished. Thus, the book may have an unfavorable influence on young readers' worldview, teaching them intolerance towards otherness, instead of assisting them in becoming open-minded adults.²⁴

Regardless of the moral universe established in *Charlie*, the story may be interpreted in many ways. One level of the narrative, for example, is its fairy tale structure, that has been identified as a characteristic of Dahl's juvenile literature (Petzold 186). Sturrock (400) summarizes the fairy tale plot of *Charlie* in the following sentence: "A child, starved of opportunities and avenues of self-expression, finds an unexpected soulmate, who believes in him and empowers him to succeed". It may not be a very complex story, but it is powerful nevertheless and therefore very similar to most fairy tales, which capture the reader by addressing universal problems and desires of the human mind.

Originally aimed at an adult audience and reflecting everyday life, fairy tales and folk tales have always been a genre marked by violent content, simply because violence does occur in real life (Martin 1014). Only in the late sixteenth and

²⁴ This argument, along with the critical voices against further unfavorable influences of the book may, however, be easily refuted by the point that the mindset of children is fashioned by their environment and not merely by one single story they read.

early seventh century fairy tales gradually were regarded as part of children's literature, although the motifs of the original adult literature remained the same, therefore still featuring violence to a great extent (Martin 1014). This was, however, changed with the Brothers Grimm's seminal *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*. Collected in the early nineteenth century, the tales were then purposely adapted for a child readership. Obviously, the historical epoch and the romantic notion of the child as an innocent, naïve and fragile being must have influenced the brothers in their decision to eliminate anything detrimental to this ideal, such as sexual content (Martin 1014). Nonetheless, most of the violence was retained as a didactic or cautionary example, in other words, "as a fitting (if extremely exaggerated) punishment for a crime" (Martin 1014).

In her work *Off with their Heads*, Maria Tatar observes multiple times that even though the intention of an author clearly is to frighten children into behaving well by implementing violence in a story, children often find the violent scenes amusing for its own sake. Children's strong sense of poetic justice may lead to them anticipating punishment for the evil characters in a story, but they nevertheless fail to transfer it to themselves (Martin 1015). Moreover, a clear difference between Dahl's story and other moral tales is that it does not follow the common pattern of an initial warning disregarded by the child protagonist, which sets the unfortunate events in motion. In Hoffmann's tale *Die Geschichte vom Daumenlutscher*, for example, Konrad's mother warns him not to suck his thumb while she is not at home:

"Konrad!" sprach die Frau Mama,
 „Ich geh' aus und du bleibst da.
 Sei hübsch ordentlich und fromm.
 Bis nach Haus ich wieder komm'.
 Und vor allem, Konrad, hör'!
 Lutsche nicht am Daumen mehr;
 Denn der Schneider mit der Scher'
 Kommt sonst ganz geschwind daher,
 Und die Daumen schneidet er
 Ab, als ob Papier es wär'! (Hoffmann 15)

Although the reason for the mother's word of caution as well as the ending of the story seem quite ridiculous, the message is clear. Similarly, other well-known cautionary tales, such as *Little Red Riding Hood* also start with parental warnings and the child reader (or listener) can therefore establish a connection

between the disobedient main characters of the tale and their eventual doom. In *Charlie*, however, no such warning appears. Quite on the contrary, the parents of the four naughty children seem to be responsible to a great extent for their offspring's bad behavior, which is nicely emphasized by Veruca's overindulgent mother and father. The story seems to be a hidden criticism on parents rather than on children, and the violence the narrative features might thus be more likely to contain a message for an adult reader of the tale, while through the eyes of a child it may simply be what Tatar (*Off* 168) calls "festive violence", created by combining sadism and slapstick. In other words, violence in *Charlie* seems to happen for the sake of entertainment and without any didactic purpose.

Considering this, *Charlie*, when read as a cautionary tale, may be entirely misguided in its purpose of scaring the readers away from eating too much candy, chewing gum, watching TV, or just being all too demanding towards their parents. Moreover, since the children who get their retaliation in the end are all secondary characters, the young readers are not likely to identify with them. Charlie, on the other hand, is the character from whose point of view the story is narrated. At the beginning of the book, a lot of time is taken to introduce the little boy to the reader, as well as his family and the miserable conditions they have to endure. Therefore, the author makes sure that the reader relates to Charlie, which would be less likely if the five children had been presented all at once. A further point can be inferred from Bruno Bettelheim, who argues in his famous volume *The Uses of Enchantment* that children most often relate to the characters they feel sympathy for, thus at the same time rejecting characters which arouse their antipathy (Bettelheim 9-10). By portraying the other children as annoying and obnoxious from the very beginning, while Charlie is illustrated as a modest and well-behaved child, the reader's identification with Charlie is reinforced once more. According to Bettelheim (9), the juxtaposition of polarizing characters in a story allows the child to consider their dissimilarities:

Ambiguities must wait until a relatively firm personality has been established on the basis of positive identification. Then the child has a basis for understanding that there are great differences between people, and that therefore one has to make choices about who one wants to be. This basic decision, on which all later personality development will build, is facilitated by the polarization of the fairy tale. (Bettelheim 9)

In this regard, the fact that Charlie only is presented in a positive light, while the other children are nothing else apart from disgusting, helps the young readership to choose the 'right' side. In the course of the events, the reader then gets to enjoy the violent punishment experienced by the secondary characters. While the reader might draw the conclusion that the four children's behavior is bad and therefore learn a lesson if they were main characters, the didactic value is less effective in the story as it is.

Psychological approaches towards fairy tales often stress the therapeutic benefits of the reading of these stories gained by the deeper meanings inherent in the tales. One of the most famous and equally influential works vindicating this point of view is the afore-mentioned work by Bettelheim. In this study, the author also argues that violence in fairy tales can have a positive and therapeutic effect on the children reading or hearing the narrative (Bettelheim 7). His ideas have not remained uncontested since the book's publication in the late 1970s; for example, Maria Tatar critically comments on his "anecdotal evidence" and the absence of any "documented, clinical evidence whatsoever in his book demonstrating an individual or global human need for reading about violence" (Tatar, "Violent Delights" 70). Yet, Tatar ("Violent Delights" 71-72) concedes that although violence in fairy tales mainly "is driven by the psychological needs of the adults" who created the stories (mostly for themselves and not for children), "violence is not without a certain appeal for the child". As she mentions later on, Dahl himself "believed in the cathartic pleasures of violence" gained when "[t]hrough identification, the reader comes to feel the agonies experienced by the characters, yet remains safely ensconced in a chair, experiencing the pleasures of the witness/survivor" (Tatar, "Violent Delights" 81).

It is true that Bettelheim at times tries a little too hard to detect the chance to discharge of negative or aggressive emotions between the lines of the fairy tales he discusses. This becomes especially obvious by Tatar's work, which traces fairy tales back to their pre-literary times and convincingly argues that violence in fairy tales chiefly was aimed at an adult audience. Only later on, at a time when fairy tales were more and more geared towards a young audience, it came in handy to "instrumentalize violence in order to discipline and socialize

children" (Tatar, "Violent Delights" 71). Nevertheless, although the purpose of the implementation of violence in fairy tales may have changed since their times as a genre for adults, the effects may be the same either way.

Thus, when applied to *Charlie*, it can be argued that children, sometimes feeling at a disadvantage when comparing themselves to their peers, may find relief in the cruel punishment of Veruca, Violet, Augustus and Mike²⁵. While these children get everything they want from their parents, even though it might do them no good most of the time, every day in Charlie's life is a struggle. On a metaphoric level, Charlie's suffering may therefore speak to many children feeling unfairly treated when their friends or schoolmates get what they are not allowed to have. This claim may also be valid since Charlie at no point makes any attempt to save his fellow visitors from their ordeal. Contrary to other child protagonists of Dahl, as for example James in *James and the Giant Peach*, Charlie clearly is comparatively pale. For instance, James bravely jumps off the flying peach in order to save the centipede (Dahl, *James* 95), whereas Charlie watches the other children's misery without batting an eyelash, that is, apart from his occasional sorrowful questions concerning their wellbeing after they have disappeared. Thus, although Dahl explicitly introduces Charlie as the hero of the story initially (Dahl, *Charlie* Epigraph), he does not have any heroic qualities at all²⁶, or else, actually enjoys watching the other children suffer.

Due to Charlie's passivity, the narrative does not seem to entail any moral message whatsoever. Charlie is rewarded merely for obeying a dubious adult and for not standing up for other people in distress (even though they may deserve some punishment). In this regard, violence in *Charlie* may be said to function as an outlet for the child reader's negative feelings, such as jealousy towards their peers, whose temporary success may appear to them unmerited. This retributational violence, or poetic justice, may therefore have a cathartic effect on the reader, rather than a didactic.

²⁵ This of course rejects once more the romantic notion of children.

²⁶ In fact, Dahl conceded several years after the release of the book that Charlie was "a rather boring little bugger" (Sturrock 400).

4.3.2. A Modern Cinderella

Like *Charlie*, *Matilda* too can be interpreted along the lines of a modern fairy tale. For instance, critics such as Petzold (189) or Hunt ("Roald Dahl", 184) have pointed out the similarity between *Matilda* and *Cinderella*. The fairy tale model seems to convey a message typical for many fairy tales and is subsumed by Bettelheim (8) as follows: "[T]hat a struggle against severe difficulties in life is unavoidable, is an intrinsic part of human existence – but that if one does not shy away, but steadfastly meets unexpected and often unjust hardships, one masters all obstacles and at the end emerges victorious". Although he did not write this passage with a specific fairy tale in mind, it can be easily applied to the tale of *Cinderella*. In this regard, *Matilda* seems to stray from this common fairy tale path, for Bettelheim's lines seem to imply the quiet endurance of all adversaries, however unfair they may be. *Matilda*, however, does not tolerate patiently but rather fights and resist. She therefore might be said to be a modern Cinderella, a literary heroine resulting from the subversion of the classic tale.

Violence in *Matilda* has been identified to serve the purpose of emphasizing power structures within the narrative. Furthermore, as already indicated previously, children are likely to enjoy the violence in *Matilda*, as in many other stories before, for the sake of entertainment. This is especially to be assumed since violence always occurs with elements of humor, as shall be elaborated in the following chapter. What is worthwhile mentioning in this respect is not only the pure amusement children may get from the description of the violent scenes, but also a further factor having to do with children's experience of power positions in everyday life. Their frequent confrontation with adult (arbitrary) authority results in children perceiving themselves as weak and defenseless when faced with the 'powerful' adult. Therefore, it can be reasoned that the pleasure the young readers gain from the description of such violent scenes is not only caused by spitefulness, but is also the result from the catharsis inherent in this kind of narrative. In other words, the story of *Matilda* punishing the adults may bear the chance for the reader to live out the (unconscious) aggression they feel confronted with their powerlessness in the face of parents and teachers. Taking this into account, *Matilda* and *Charlie* are quite similar in the ways they offer chances for reprocessing aggression caused by feelings of inferiority. This may also be the reason why most grownups in the

story, and above all Miss Trunchbull, are illustrated so monstrous. While she certainly seems very much exaggerated, the way she is described may correspond to the impression a little child gets from a very strict and unfriendly teacher. Overall, when read by children, the violence used to defeat the adults in the narrative may have a therapeutic effect. This may be precisely what Dahl means when he speaks about allying with the children against grownups.

Before turning to the discussion of representations of violence in *Charlie* and *Matilda*, a few further considerations shall be mentioned. First of all, the question if the violent content in Dahl's books may add to the reader's increased aggression shall be tackled. Many psychological studies conducted in the twentieth century (e.g. Bandura, Ross & Ross 1963; Wood et al. 1991) have found a direct relation between violent footage and children's antisocial behavior. One may be tempted to translate these results to violence in books, especially in light of the absence of scientific investigations considering the effects of violence in literature. However, in the case of *Charlie* and *Matilda*, it can also be speculated that the violence in both texts does not affect children's aggressive potential in a negative way. In *Charlie* only indirect violence occurs and thus, children do not have a violent role model to identify with at all; in *Matilda* the heroine does not make use of direct physical violence, which is merely exerted by the Trunchbull, who children are most likely to reject. It may therefore be safe to say that the violence in both books does not have an immediate negative impact on the reader's behavior.

Second, although the arguments regarding the effects of violence in *Charlie* and *Matilda* are plausible, they cannot be freely applied to each single reader of the books. Readers' responses to literary texts are as diverse and distinct as the individuals themselves. As Cullingford (8) points out, "[i]t should be recognized that each reader brings his or her own prior experience and individuality to the reading, and will take unique associations from it". Hence, it may well be assumed that violence in *Charlie* and *Matilda* may affect child readers in the ways described above, however, different children may respond differently and perhaps totally unpredictably to the stories.

5. An Inappropriate Read? Representations of Violence in *Charlie and Matilda*

Taking up the question embedded in the title of this chapter, the following lines shall be dedicated to the discussion of the notion of appropriateness, or suitability, in children's books. Heather Worthington equally addresses this topic in her essay on violence in Roald Dahl's juvenile fiction and elaborates on the problematic status of the concept of suitability since "decisions as to what is 'suitable' or indeed 'unsuitable' for children are inescapably subjective and temporally and culturally contingent" (Worthington 123-124).

Indeed, in our present day and age people have grown more and more immune towards violence in the media and popular culture, due to its ubiquitous occurrence. Dahl's children's books have therefore lost to a great extent what may have offended adult readers in the past and sparked the criticism regarding his implementation and alleged glorification of violence in the 1970s. Nevertheless, a closer examination of Dahl's use of violence in his juvenile fiction reveals that the claim to affect the recipients in a negative way seems more and more unfounded, even when viewed from a less apathetic position. The purpose of the next sections is to verify this statement by once more scrutinizing the two literary works that have already been subject of the analysis in the previous chapter.

5.1. Dahl's Strategies of Presenting Violence

Accusing Dahl of an alleged irresponsible use of violence in his juvenile fiction is quite an easy venture. A more complicated task is to prove the opposite, since he draws upon a great variety of techniques when it comes to the portrayal of violence. The following arguments have been gathered in order to show in what way the reader of *Charlie and Matilda* encounters violence, and which methods the author applies in order to eliminate most of its potentially frightening effect. Dahl once noted that "[c]hildren know that the violence in my stories is only make-believe ... when violence is tied to fantasy and humour, children find it ... amusing" (West qtd. in Worthington 133). This claim shall be investigated with regard to its substance by again taking *Charlie and Matilda* as examples. First, humor, a device the author uses multiple times throughout his

works, shall be examined, with special focus on its role in the representation of violence. Next, attention will be paid to the fantasy genre, in which Dahl places most of his juvenile fiction, and its implication for his portrayal of violent scenes. Finally, a few textual clues and narrative strategies with regard to violence occurring in *Charlie* and *Matilda* will be mentioned.

5.1.1. Humor

Dahl's indebtedness to fairy tales has been pointed out various times elsewhere in this thesis. Thus, it is little astonishing that his use of the theme of violence bears great resemblance to that of many folk tales. The term 'folk tale' here is chosen purposely to denote the pre-literary form of fairy tales, since only by collecting, printing and publishing those tales explicitly for a child audience they lost the cathartic function inherent in their festive violence (Cogan 19). Those stories no longer featured violence for its own sake but rather in the sense of a pedagogy of fear to socialize and educate children (Cogan 19). Dahl, however, implements this "cathartic and playful violence" (Cogan 19) in his stories, thereby recognizing children's needs for its power. One of the chief qualities of festive violence is its ability to evoke laughter, as Tatar (*Off* 169) states: "The more hair-raising an event [...], the more comical its effect". Hence, the following paragraph shall investigate the comical effects Dahl's stories have and in what way he uses humor in combination with violence in his children's literature.

One very obvious statement to make about violence in Dahl's children's literature is that it is always closely linked to humor. This is not surprising considering that Dahl was a famous humorist, whose penchant for the comic can not only be detected in his children's books, but also informed his writing for adults. Stallcup (32) states that "[m]uch of Dahl's humour [...] turns upon cruelty or situations of disgust or debasement and abuse, and [...] may make readers laugh out loud and cringe simultaneously".

This appears to be the secret behind Dahl's use of violence; indeed, no description of a violent episode dispenses with humorous remarks, or else contains funny elements in the way it is narrated. Mr. Wonka's remedy for Mike Teavee's shrinking-accident is only one of many examples: Wonka suggests to

administer to the boy his “wonderful Supervitamin Candy” (Dahl, *Charlie* 136), which contains all vitamins from A to Z except for vitamin S “because it makes you sick” and vitamin H “because it makes you grow horns out of the top of your head, like a bull” (Dahl, *Charlie* 136). Additionally, Supervitamin Candy contains vitamin Wonka which will “make his toes grow out until they’re as long as his fingers’ ‘Oh, no!’ cried Mrs. Teavee. ‘Don’t be silly,’ said Mr. Wonka. ‘It’s most useful. He’ll be able to play the piano with his feet’” (Dahl *Charlie* 136). Thus, much of the overtly cruel or brutal content of such scenes, in Mike Teavee’s case his ordeal and the quite dreadful imagination of stretching the tiny boy in a machine, is mitigated leaving the reader more likely to laugh instead of shocked, frightened or disgusted. The comical parts may not entirely be able to erase these negative emotions, however, this tightrope act between the impulse to laugh and the feeling of repulsion is what makes reading those stories so pleasurable.

Much like the cathartic function of violence in fairy tales, humor can have a similarly beneficial effect as well, in that it has the power to give the reader “explosive forms of release through laughter” (Stallcup 32). This is also known as comic relief, one of the chief functions of grotesque humor which “makes us laugh at the same time it repulses and shocks” (Rishel 172). Violet Beauregarde and Mike Teavee can be mentioned as two examples “that suggest how Dahl encourages young readers to laugh at issues related to their own expanding, developing bodies” (Stallcup 32). If this is true, the violence inherent in these two scenes recedes to a great extent, eclipsed by their more superior purpose of evoking laughter, in order to assist the young readers in “work[ing] through anxieties about impending maturity” (Stallcup 32).

In her article on humor in Dahl’s juvenile fiction, Stallcup investigates various features of humor and the extent to which they influence Dahl’s stories. One of those features is incongruity, a strategy which “involv[es] setting up a particular set of expectations and then suddenly pulling the rug out from under the reader’s or listener’s feet” (Stallcup 33). What evokes laughter, then, is the discrepancy between the prepared expectations and the punch line, which “suddenly switches the joke to a radically different script” (Davies 7). One example for incongruity in Dahl’s *Charlie* would be a scene taking place right

after Augustus Gloop has disappeared through the pipe. This incident, quite alarming indeed, assumes a comical note in the conversation taking place between the worried mother and Willy Wonka:

“You think it’s a joke, do you? You think that sucking my boy up into your Fudge Room like that is just one great big colossal joke?” “He’ll be perfectly safe,” said Mr. Wonka, giggling slightly. “He’ll be chocolate fudge!” shrieked Mrs. Gloop. “Never!” cried Mr. Wonka. “Of course he will!” shrieked Mrs. Gloop. “I wouldn’t allow it!” cried Mr. Wonka. “And why not?” shrieked Mrs. Gloop. “Because the taste would be terrible,” said Mr. Wonka. (Dahl *Charlie* 76)

Here, Dahl builds up the expectation that Willy Wonka is trying to calm Mrs. Gloop, by indicating that he too cares about Augustus’ well-being. This is especially evoked by his exclamation “I wouldn’t allow it!” However, his following utterance “Because the taste would be terrible” creates an inconsistency between the reader’s expectation (that Wonka cares for Augustus’ life) and his actual worry, the taste of his chocolate fudge. Thus, the aftermath of Augustus’ terrible accident is marked by humor instead of hysteria. With that said, it is important to note that incongruity does not necessarily have to become evident by a verbal remark but can occur merely in the form of an ambiguity between the recipient’s anticipation and the actual goings-on. For example, in *Charlie* the squirrels tap the nuts with their knuckles to ensure that they are not bad. “‘If it’s bad, it makes a hollow sound, and they don’t bother to open it,’” (Dahl, *Charlie* 110) Willy Wonka explains to his guests. The incongruity is created later on, when the leader of the squirrels taps Veruca Salt’s head and Willy Wonka concludes: “‘My goodness, she *is* a bad nut after all,’ [...] ‘Her head must have sounded quite hollow’” (Dahl, *Charlie* 112). The squirrel’s behavior certainly gives a comical note to the whole scene, which also prevails during the more violent scenario of the animals getting hold of Veruca and throwing her down the garbage chute.

Similar examples can be found throughout the whole book and equally in *Matilda*. Miss Trunchbull’s reaction to her violent treatment of the children is very much comparable to Willy Wonka’s in terms of her indifference. Dahl even uses a similar strategy as described above in the scene with Amanda Thripp. After tossing her over the fence, Miss Trunchbull, who has once thrown the hammer in the Olympic Games, remarks “‘Not bad,’ [...] ‘considering I’m not in

strict training. Not bad at all.” (Dahl, *Matilda* 116). By combining Miss Trunchbull’s sportive ambitions with the act of child maltreatment, a humorous effect is achieved resulting from the incongruity of those two very different scripts. Miss Trunchbull’s handling of her students is one example of incongruity mentioned by Stallcup (34). Since the reader does not expect adults to use such inappropriate language and behave in such an exaggerated and brutal way in front of children, those scenes shift into the comic.

Derision, which “is based on the premise that we laugh down at others” (MacHovec 31) is a further form of humor Dahl draws on quite extensively in combination with violence. In essence, all secondary child characters of *Charlie* can be used to exemplify the effect of derisive humor. As already mentioned above, Charlie’s impoverished situation caters for the readers’ sympathy, therefore ensuring that they are on his side. Thus, they can enjoy the other children’s ordeal, which has very much to do with the cathartic effect those stories offer, as described earlier. In *Matilda*, the derisive humor is rather targeted against the adults in the story. When Matilda plays all the mean tricks on her father and later on the Trunchbull, those characters are ridiculed, thus elevating the child character (and hence the child reader) over the grownups in the story. However, not only does derision play a role in the episodes marked by child characters rising up against the adult oppressors, but also time and again when Mr. Wormwood denigrates Matilda. For instance, the reader is invited to laugh at Mr. Wormwood’s stupidity when arguing that supper is a family gathering, although the evenings in the Wormwood household entirely disregard the actual purpose of a family eating together. This is equally true for the other scenes in which he insults Matilda, for each time he is portrayed as silly and ignorant compared to his minor daughter. Especially with derision, violence and humor are hard to tell apart since they interact so closely. In this respect, derision exemplifies the unavoidable correlation of violence and humor in Dahl.

As has been shown in this subsection, Dahl frequently draws upon humor to ensure for his children’s books a light and unthreatening atmosphere. The humorous effects are achieved most often through the glee provoked by the violence experienced by Dahl’s characters. This is enabled by the fact that the

reader does not identify with those literary figures, mainly due to them being merely minor characters. Furthermore, incongruity plays an equally important role in the humorous stories. This is achieved by the obvious clash between the violent scenes and the perpetrator's cheerful indifference, as well as the author's linking of violence to completely harmless actions.

5.1.2. Fantasy

As has already been mentioned before, Dahl's stories are firmly established in the fantasy genre. His use of the fantastic mode may be attributed to various purposes, one of which clearly is in relation to the theme of violence. Violence is an integral part of fairy tales, which set a safe frame for aggressive acts since they allow for them not to be connected to realism, which would make the violence unpleasantly immediate. The same is true for Dahl's stories: Since they are clearly marked as fantasy, violent acts take on an unreal and thus lighter note. Often, the fantastic nature of the story can be said to partly lie in the very much exaggerated violence itself. This may best be illustrated by the following conversation in *Matilda*. After having witnessed the Trunchbull throwing Amanda Thripp and being told quite a few of the headmistress' nasty deeds by Hortensia, Matilda's friend Lavender is shocked:

"How can she get away with it?" Lavender said to Matilda. "Surely the children go home and tell their mothers and fathers. I know my father would raise a terrific stink if I told him the Headmistress had grabbed me by the hair and slung me over the playground fence." "No, he wouldn't," Matilda said, "and I'll tell you why. He simply wouldn't believe you." "Of course he would." "He wouldn't," Matilda said. "And the reason is obvious. Your story would sound too ridiculous to be believed. And that is the Trunchbull's great secret." (Dahl *Matilda* 117).

This, in essence, appears to be a key feature of the violence in Dahl's stories. When Violet Beauregarde is turned into a human blueberry, and when later one reads about her being juiced in order to restore her original shape, it is clear that this merely is a fun story that is in no way connected to realism. Likewise, even the Trunchbull's behavior is so exaggerated that the reader simply does not believe it to occur in reality because, as Matilda notes, "it sounds too ridiculous to be believed". Worthington (129) rightly claims that in *Matilda* "the demarcation between fantasy and realism is less clearly marked" than in other works by Dahl. However, although episodes such as Bruce Bogtrotter and the

gigantic chocolate cake are not so unrealistic at all, they shed a good deal of their credibility due to the prevailing fantastic tenor of the narrative. Furthermore, most of the violent scenarios that leave the reader in doubt about their realistic or fantastic nature feature indirect violence, which mitigates their terrifying effect.

A further point that is related to the previous is the fact that the secondary characters are illustrated as one-dimensional stereotypes. For example, Augustus Gloop is a clichéd example of an overweight and lazy boy, whose only passion in life is candy. Similarly, the Trunchbull is the epitomized evil and her actions are invariably marked by maliciousness. Her character traits are reflected in her physical appearance which is that of a large, heavily built and ugly woman. Thus, Dahl's minor characters are illustrated as utterly unreal figures. When violence is targeted against those caricatures of realistic people, it takes on an unreal note very similar, if not identical, to violence in cartoon films. This is only reinforced by the fact that none of those characters is seriously injured or even dies, again underscoring the stories' unrealistic nature.

While all those points mentioned may be taken as evidence of Dahl's intention to illustrate violence as funny within stories that are more or less obviously located in fantasy literature, it can still be argued that children are not yet able to grasp the fictional character of the texts, thus being left with feelings of fear. A recent study in the field of pediatrics (van der Molen & Bushman 2008), however, suggests that children at a very young age (between 9 and 11) are indeed already able to discriminate violent real-life events from violence taking place in fiction. Although this study was, again, limited to television programs, its results may be transferred to literature just as well. Such evidence suggests that children do not find the violence in the Dahl books threatening, other than violence in cautionary tales, such as *Struwwelpeter*, which are set in front of a realistic background. Dahl therefore seems to be right in claiming that children do not take violence seriously when it is contained within the fantasy mode.

5.1.3. Narrative Strategies

Apart from the blatantly humorous portrayal of violent episodes and the texts' fantastic or at least exaggerated character, Dahl makes use of a myriad of

further techniques in order to avoid scaring the young readers of his texts. For the sake of clarity, those are subsumed under “narrative strategies” and shall be discussed in the following.

One goal Dahl clearly pursues in his children’s books is letting the audience know that the perceived violence has in fact no tragic outcome. This is realized in more than one way. For example, in *Charlie* the Oompa-Loompas’ song dedicated to Augustus Gloop contains the following lines directly addressing the readers of the story:

But don’t, dear children, be alarmed;
Augustus Gloop will not be harmed (Dahl, *Charlie* 79)

Besides such direct hints guided towards the reader, there are also indirect clues to the victims’ further state. In Veruca’s song, they sing of the girl encountering various kinds of rotten food thereby stressing her survival which could be doubted due to Willy Wonka’s rather obscure comment that the great fiery incinerator is only lit every other day and “[p]erhaps this is one of the days when they let it go out. You never know ... they might be lucky” (Dahl, *Charlie* 116). Moreover, Willy Wonka himself reassures the startled parents that their children do not have to expect any serious harm. For instance, he calms Mrs Gloop by telling her that her “darling boy is perfectly safe” (Dahl, *Charlie* 76) and promises Mrs. Beauregarde that everything will be done to “get [Violet] repaired if it’s the last thing we do” (Dahl, *Charlie* 99). Such remarks seem not only to be included in order to calm the parents in the story who, quite naturally, are concerned about their offspring. Additionally, they are, and in the case of the Oompa-Loompa songs explicitly, directed towards the reader, who may be unsettled by the rough treatment of the four naughty children.

Towards the end of the book then, Charlie, Grandpa Joe and Willy Wonka observe the four other kids together with their parents walking out of the chocolate factory. Augustus, Mike, Violet and Veruca are perfectly alright, apart from some minor unpleasant remains of their accidents (Dahl, *Charlie* 147-150). This scene is essential since after the children have disappeared in the factory, they have faced all kinds of different machines and remedies, and the reader is left in the dark about their further condition until this point. Likewise, all the victims of violence in *Matilda*, adults and children, survive the more or less

brutal attacks unharmed, or at least without being seriously hurt, which is especially important in cases where violence is disturbingly rough. Amanda Thripp's flight across the schoolyard, for example, is presented like a little miracle considering the brutality with which she has been treated. The description of Amanda "descending in a long graceful parabola on to the playing-field beyond" (Dahl, *Matilda* 116) stands in direct contrast to the brute force she has just encountered. "She landed on the grass and bounced three times and finally came to rest. Then, amazingly, she sat up. She looked a trifle dazed and who could blame her, but after a minute or so she was on her feet again and tottering back towards the playground" (Dahl, *Matilda* 116). Bruce Bogtrotter, when hit by the huge cake platter, is "so full of cake he [is] like a sackful of wet cement and you couldn't [hurt] him with a sledge-hammer" that "[h]e simply [shakes] his head a few times and [goes] on grinning" (Dahl, *Matilda* 133). Other children in *Matilda*, such as Matilda's class mates Rupert and Eric, who all get a taste of Agatha Trunchbull's pedagogical methods, are not seriously injured either, although Eric reports that his ears, on which the Trunchbull lifted him up, are bigger than before (Dahl, *Matilda* 215).

By casually mentioning the rather minor effects of such violent actions, Dahl portrays those assaults in a cartoonish and thus harmless style, thereby coaxing the reader to regard the violence as pure slapstick rather than gravely realistic. This is also reinforced by the reactions of witnesses of violence in the stories, which is most of the time quite serene. Neither the adults in *Matilda*, that is, other teachers or parents, take actions against the brutal headmistress, nor are the parents in *Charlie* startled by the seemingly grotesque procedures Wonka is about to perform on their children. Quite on the contrary, Mrs. Gloop and Mrs. Beauregarde show no reaction at all on hearing what is going to happen to their children, which is particularly surprising in the latter case, since Violet is going to be squeezed like a blueberry. The two mothers' acquiescence is only topped by Mrs. Teavee who even shows gratitude when she hears that her son is going to be stretched in order to make him taller again: "'Oh, thank you!' said Mrs. Teavee. 'Don't mention it, dear lady,'" (Dahl, *Charlie* 135) Wonka replies nonchalantly. Similarly, the Oompa-Loompas sing of trying to prevent Violet "from suffering an equal fate" (Dahl, *Charlie* 102) as the unfortunate Miss

Bigelow²⁷, thus rejecting any possible accusation of a spirit of mischief or retaliation and presenting Wonka rather as the savior of the ill-mannered young lady, that is, “provided she survives the cure” (Dahl, *Charlie* 102).

Yet another strategy Dahl employs in mitigating the violence in his juvenile books can best be described in terms of what he leaves out rather than what he includes. In other words, it is quite striking that by and large, he does not really describe violent acts in great detail. It is true that in *Charlie* he engages in rather lengthy depictions of the wretched children’s accidents, however, those are rather marked by humor than by violence, as has already been discussed above. The whole brutality of the attempted restoration of Mike’s and Violet’s original physical state, Augustus’ fate - at the end of the book he is “thin as a straw” since “[h]e got squeezed in the pipe” (Dahl, *Charlie* 148) – and the Salt family’s journey through the garbage is not fully covered. Dahl explains this technique as follows:

You never describe any horrors happening, you just say that they do happen. Children who got crunched up in Willy Wonka’s chocolate machine were carried away and that was the end of it and the parents screamed, “Where has he gone?” and Wonka said, “Well, he’s gone to be made into fudge”, and that’s where you laugh, because you don’t see it happening, you don’t hear the child screaming or anything like that ever, ever, ever. (“An Interview with Roald Dahl”)

In *Matilda*, however, Dahl seems to have broken with this principle, since the violent attacks by the Trunchbull are indeed described quite lively. Nonetheless, the violence portrayed in *Matilda* mostly affects the secondary characters. This is equally true for *Charlie*, and Smith Chalou (38) sees in this the most significant difference between Dahl’s children’s book and *Struwwelpeter*. Thus, comparing both cautionary tales it can be stated that what might make *Struwwelpeter* quite a traumatic read for a child, whereas *Charlie* is much less threatening than the nineteenth century picture book, lies in the employment of the characters. While the reader of *Struwwelpeter* relates to the protagonists, and thus experiences their demise more actively, Dahl only lets his secondary characters encounter violence. This can also be perceived in *Matilda*, where the heroine only experiences violence in psychological and often merely indirect

²⁷ Miss Bigelow is the star of the Oompa-Loompas’ song dedicated to Violet. A passionate gum chewer herself, she trains her jaws to chew all day long until they develop a life on their own and bite her tongue in two while she is sleeping (Dahl, *Charlie* 99-102).

form. The majority of the marginal child characters, however, are flung around on their pigtails and thrown across the playground, shut into the Chokey or lifted up on their ears and hair, as a consequence for their lack of knowledge of spelling and multiplication tables. Matilda, however, is miraculously spared any harm by the brutal headmistress, making the story less threatening for the reader who experiences the goings-on from the heroine's point of view^{28 29}.

To sum up, a close analysis of the two books reveals Dahl's implementation of a variety of narrative techniques in order to reduce possible terrifying effects of the violence occurring in the stories. This can be observed in occasional comments made by the characters - which sometimes even directly address the reader, Dahl's avoidance of any extensive descriptions of extreme violent events and lastly, his tendency to let direct physical violence only affect the secondary characters, while the hero or heroine of the story is spared. Particularly this final point appears to be most efficient and can equally be observed in many fairy tales, in which the main characters are mere witnesses of physical violence, while their siblings, relatives and of course the villains are punished or victimized quite brutally in the end. Once more, Dahl seems to have drawn upon the rich corpus of fairy tales and folk tales of Western culture.

This subsection on narrative strategies used to tone down the violence in Dahl's juvenile literature, together with the parts on humor and fantasy, completes the analysis of *Charlie* and *Matilda*. Still, there seems to be need for discussion on one component of the Dahl books that is not directly related to the author's work, but nevertheless influences it greatly. This is the artwork by Quentin Blake, who is able to look back on many years of successful collaboration with the famous writer. Thus, the following and final section is dedicated to Blake's line drawings in both books and the way they portray the violent scenes.

²⁸ In Danny DeVito's 1996 movie adaptation, Matilda does not get off so cheaply: After an argument with the Trunchbull, the headmistress locks her into the Chokey and she only is saved quite some time later by Miss Honey, visibly traumatized.

²⁹ Even Lavender, Matilda's friend, who is at one time the focalizer of the story (Dahl, *Matilda* 134-140) and thus not as distant as the other child characters, is spared from violence.

5.2. Visualizing Violence: Quentin Blake's Illustrations in Dahl's Children's Books

Roald Dahl's collaboration with his illustrator Quentin Blake started out in 1978 for his picture book *The Enormous Crocodile*. Ever since, Blake has provided a visual translation of Dahl's children's stories and did not even shy away from re-illustrating Dahl's earlier works after the writer's death in 1990 (Scott 160-161). Perhaps their special partnership was built in part on the grounds of their shared opinion concerning an ideal author-illustrator collaboration. Blake, like Dahl, believed "that the author and illustrator could work together as a team to reflect and augment each other's contribution, so that the ultimate work of art would embody a combination of the two" (Scott 160).

Illustrated books, like Dahl's children's books, may either be placed inside the picture book category, or can be regarded as an independent genre of picture books, along with the exhibit book, the picture narrative and the picturebook [sic], or picture storybook (Gregersen qtd. in Nikolajeva & Scott 6). What almost all of these types of picture books have in common is that they are brought into life by the dynamic interplay of word and image. With Quentin Blake, the Dahl books grant parts of their popularity to an illustrator who understands this process of interaction between the visual and the verbal and knows how to enhance Dahl's stories with his drawings that "develop and define character and interpersonal relationships, sustain and reinforce tone and mood, and support Dahl's distinctive narrative voice" (Scott 161). Scott (161) further notes that "Blake matches the affect of his illustration to the genre of the piece, exaggerating the bizarre and mediating the violent as he judges appropriate". In his first book by Dahl, for example, Blake mitigates the violence of the enormous crocodile by carefully creating "a kind of puppet crocodile with jagged teeth formed with a single up-and-down line [...] in some hilarious attempts at camouflage, which undermine the seriousness of his evil intent" (Scott 164). *The Enormous Crocodile* is a book for very young children and Dahl takes care of taming the violent content by, again, using humor and making fun of the crocodile (Scott 164) - and Blake follows suit.

Charlie and particularly *Matilda*, however, are intended for an older audience. Especially in the latter case, violence is very much prominent and, at times, not

even moderated in the text by means of humor or other devices mentioned above. An examination of Blake's illustrations and a discussion as to what extent they mirror the descriptions of the author may therefore reveal interesting outcomes.

In general, it can be stated that Blake proceeds in illustrating both books in the style typical for his work with Dahl. In each of the two books, there are a great number of the simple line drawings in black and white with only few details. Sometimes they occupy very little space, sometimes they spread over one whole page, but Blake never sets them off from the text by means of frames or the like, thereby "giving the impression that they are truly part of the action" (Scott 163). For example, in *Charlie* there is a depiction of quite a few Oompa-Loompas surrounding blueberry Violet (see Fig. 2 below). Some of them are running ahead, one is a little behind, but most of them are rolling her with united forces out of the right hand page, as the direction of their movement (from left to right) suggests. Thereby, she is moved away from the witnesses, including the reader, and never to be seen again until the end of the story. This picture accompanies the cautionary verse sung by the Oompa-Loompas, and it seems to complement their performance that is represented by the lyrics of their song but otherwise not described in great detail in the text.

5.2.1. Censoring Overt Violence in *Charlie*

Although this and other examples from *Charlie* suggest that Blake's illustrations reinforce the effectiveness of the events described by Dahl, violent scenes appear to be a different case. Only a few small illustrations depict Augustus', Violet's and Mike's accidents, that is, Mike and Violet are shown during and after their bodies' alterations, while Augustus is merely portrayed swimming in the chocolate river without any visual representation of him stuck in the see-through pipe. Veruca's punishment then, which is realized in the most active-direct physical form of all four, is entirely left out, and only her father is shown standing bent over the garbage chute with the squirrels running towards him, ready to push him down. This is quite striking since it can be concluded that Blake decided to leave out the more violent punishments of Augustus and Veruca, who clearly had to endure a more brutal fate than their fellow visitors, and only depict the less threatening scenes of punishment.

Admittedly, Mike Teavee's transformation into a tiny version of himself would have been impossible to illustrate, but Blake compensates for this by providing even two pictures of Violet's accident: In the first, Violet is shown in the middle of her transformation with her upper body swollen up already and her skin darkened, indicating the blue color already spread all over her body. Her facial expression appears quite agonized with her eyes popping out in what appears to be a mixture of discomfort and disbelief, and her mouth is a compressed, scrawly line. The second picture of Violet's punishment is the one accompanying the Oompa-Loompas' song, which has already been described above. Her transformation has been completed and her entire body is one gigantic ball with her head, arms and legs sticking out. Since compared to her body, her head is extremely tiny, any expression of pain or fear recedes and the focus is really on her grotesquely and therefore funnily transformed body. The picture thus supports the comical effect described by the text, hence moderating the violence experienced by the girl.



Fig. 1: Violet turns into a blueberry (Dahl, *Charlie* 98)

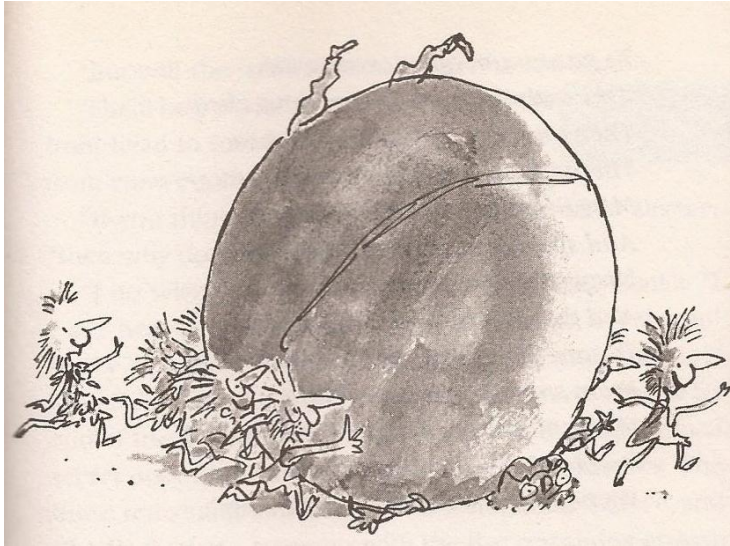


Fig. 2: The Oompa-Loompas role Violet away (Dahl, *Charlie* 101)

Violet is the only naughty child whose comeuppance is illustrated by Blake in greater detail, which may have to do with the comic substance of her punishment providing sufficient material for a visual depiction. Apart from this case, violent scenes are not illustrated, which may partly be due to the impossibility of visual representation underlying some of the scenes, such as Mike Teavee being shrunk when he actually is not visible for the spectators. However, it is worth mentioning that the most violent scenes, that is, Augustus' and Veruca's accidents, are not portrayed at all, although they might have been easier to visualize, whereas at least in Violet's case, whose punishment seems quite civilized compared to Augustus' and Veruca's, Blake does provide a visual representation of her retaliation. It seems reasonable to claim that this punishment scenario may have been more difficult to depict than Augustus' and Veruca's, since it is a rather long sequence consisting of different phases of transformation that are quite complicated to capture properly on a static image. Therefore, Blake's decision to illustrate this scene gives rise to the conclusion that he purposely chose events marked by indirect and, strictly viewed, not even very dreadful physical violence.

Moreover, the process of reformation the children pass through behind closed doors, and which is only quickly mentioned by the author, is not portrayed either. Even though it might be argued that this is not really part of the story, it still would have been an interesting task for an illustrator to contribute a picture of Augustus getting squeezed in the chocolate pipe, or Mike being stretched in

a machine, as a sort of side note. However, the last drawing of the children shows them already on their way out of the factory, after they have undergone the various processes described by Willy Wonka. Like Dahl, Blake does not go into detail about what they experience after they have disappeared in the factory and only assures the reader that they get out more or less unharmed. Overall, it can be concluded that Blake took up Dahl's rather downplaying mode he displays in *Charlie* as far as violence is concerned and therefore somewhat censored many of the violent scenes.

5.2.2. Toning Down Violence in *Matilda*

In *Matilda* violence is not shut away from the reader as it is to a great extent in *Charlie*. Although the violent scenes are still, to some degree, undermined by humor and safely contained in the fantasy genre, they occur more often, are more overt and manifold in form. In *Charlie* violent scenes were automatically mitigated due to their indirect nature. This bears certain limitations when it comes to visual representation since, as the perpetrator is missing, the violent character inherent in the events is more difficult to portray. The benefit of the violence in *Matilda*, when compared to *Charlie*, is that there are not only cases of indirect violence but that it often appears in direct form through the Trunchbull's treatment of her students. Such scenes are easier to analyze from a visual aspect, since direct physical violence is easier to illustrate due to the fact that there is always a clear perpetrator. In a discussion of Blake's contribution to this book the focus shall thus be laid upon direct physical violence for indirect violence, as exerted by Matilda and the other children in the book, has already been covered sufficiently in the previous subsection.

First of all, Blake does not avoid picturing the overtly violent scenes in *Matilda* as is the case in *Charlie*. This points once more to the overall darker tenor of the story and may be interpreted as the illustrator's endeavor to support the violence described by Dahl instead of censoring it. Nonetheless, certain details of Blake's work in *Matilda* point at him moderating the violent scenes quite subtly but nevertheless effectively. The often-cited example of Amanda Thripp can be adduced here as well since Blake provides an illustration accompanying the description of this unfortunate event. In the picture, one sees the massive Trunchbull in her smock, leather belt and breeches, grabbing a small girl with

her right hand by her hair and spinning her around in the air. The Trunchbull's hands look enormous, like the rest of her body, making her appear even stronger and more dangerous. Her mouth is curled into a smile indicating the pleasure she gains from the violent treatment of Amanda. The girl is depicted as very small and fragile reinforcing the impression of her helplessness in the face of the abusive headmistress. It is remarkable that Blake decided to draw her face, which could have been easily avoided due to Amanda being flung around. Amanda's mouth is drawn with one single line, like it is often the case in Blake's illustrations, in an upside-down u-shape indicating her feelings of fear and inconvenience. With nothing more than a few dots and lines used to shape her face, however, she looks very similar to a child's sketch rather than a real human which tones down the violence to a great deal. Moreover, Blake also included four other children in the background staring up at Amanda with similar looks on their faces that can be interpreted as ranging from amazement to sympathy. Thus, they give weight to the seriousness of the situation. However, one girl's expression may also be interpreted as a smile, therefore pointing to the humorous content of the event, be it in order to laugh at the miserable Amanda or as a mere hint to not take the scene too seriously.



Fig. 3: Throwing the hammer (Dahl, *Matilda* 115)

Two further pictures illustrating the Trunchbull's favorite way of dealing with her students, however, are less suggestive in their way of presenting violence. The scene in which the Trunchbull lifts Matilda's class mate Rupert by his hair has all the elements occurring in the Amanda Thripp image: The Trunchbull is portrayed as disproportionately large, with her huge hands grabbing the hair of a little boy looking startled. In the background there are three children watching the scenario, all looking shocked and one boy even covers his eyes in abhorrence. In this illustration, there is no hint of a smile or anything else that could be perceived as the illustrator's invitation to view the violence as merely tongue-in-cheek. Only a few pages later, there is yet another drawing of the Trunchbull, this time lifting up Eric by his ears. Again, her face and body are depicted as threatening and the little boy's expression is that of a sad stick-figure like Amanda's. This is what all of these three illustrations of violence have in common: Although they represent violence as more or less threatening, depending on the details of the drawing, Blake makes sure that the facial expression of the victims is quite flat, thus not showing any pain or torture.



Fig. 4: The Trunchbull lifts Rupert up by his hair... (Dahl, *Matilda* 149)



Fig. 5: ...and Eric by his ears (Dahl, *Matilda* 153)

The final illustration worth mentioning in this discussion is one portraying the angry Trunchbull, standing next to Bruce Bogtrotter who has just finished the chocolate cake forced upon him by the evil headmistress. As has already been described above, she takes the big cake platter and smashes it on Bruce's head. This scene is so brutal that it leaves the reader in shock, almost not able to believe that Dahl actually did include this scene in a children's book. Blake provides a series of drawings illustrating the whole event of Bruce's public humiliation, from him crouching in a corner faced with the Trunchbull's riding crop (Dahl *Matilda* 121) to the boy sitting over the cake that is exaggeratedly enormous in size, flanked by the Trunchbull and the cook watching him sternly (Dahl, *Matilda* 126). The last picture then, shows the boy obviously exhausted from the vast amounts of cake he has just devoured with a proud smile on his face, not noticing the Trunchbull towering over him with the platter raised high, ready to bring it down. However, Blake does not illustrate the moment when it shatters on Bruce's head, thus avoiding picturing a more violent scene. Additionally, the knife resting on the table in front of the boy may even lead the viewer to speculate that Blake included it in order to indicate that the Trunchbull using the plate instead of the knife in her attempt to hurt the boy is the lesser evil after all. Once more, it can be inferred that Blake's way of illustrating

violence in *Matilda* is quite mild, compared to the opportunities the text offers for the blatant depiction of violent scenes.

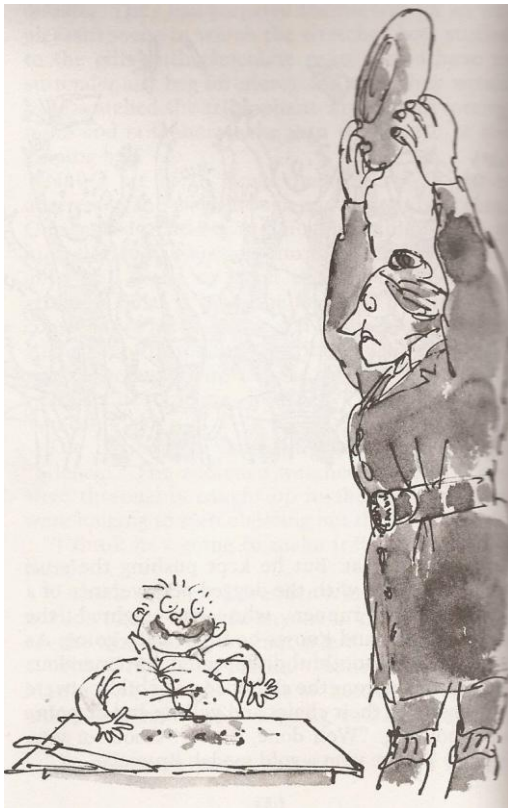


Fig. 6: The Trunchbull takes revenge on Bruce Bogtrotter (Dahl, *Matilda* 132)

All in all, the analysis of Blake's illustrations portraying violence in both books yields that the artist mitigates violence in each story to a great deal via his drawings. Although in *Charlie*, the indirect violence entails far less threatening effects, that are generally more difficult to visualize due to the absence of a definite perpetrator, it can still be argued that Blake deliberately chose certain scenes over others in order to sanitize some of the all too overtly brutal situations in the story. In other words, the moderation of violence in the illustrations featured in *Charlie* happens through the purposeful exclusion of certain events and letting Dahl's comic and exaggerated descriptions speak for themselves. *Matilda* is a slightly different case, which is partly based on the great number of violent scenes, as well as their often, to use Buss' terminology, physical-active-direct nature. In general, it can be stated that Blake depicts the majority of the violence used by the Trunchbull against her students, which is very striking when taking into account that many of them are indeed quite cruel, and also in light of Blake omitting most of the violent events in *Charlie*. Yet,

while in Dahl's earlier children's book *Blake* censored violence by not including visual representations of such actions, he embarked on a different strategy in *Matilda*. To be more precise, in Dahl's last children's book Blake includes elements in his drawings that let the violence appear less threatening, such as smiling bystanders or roughly sketched faces of the victims that do not mirror any pain, which doubtlessly would be felt by a real person. A related point to be mentioned is the general style of Blake's work, that is, line drawings in black and white reminiscent of cartoons and thus adding an unrealistic atmosphere to Dahl's already exaggerated descriptions. To conclude, the scenes of violence in Dahl's children's books can be perceived as examples of author and illustrator cooperating in the attempt to portray violence both on a textual as well as a graphic level, while at the same time moderating these scenes to make them suitable for a young readership.

6. Conclusion

To summarize the main findings regarding the analysis of *Charlie* and *Matilda*, a short comparison shall be included at this point. In both works, various forms of violence can be identified, with physical and psychological violence distributed unevenly between the two texts. In *Charlie*, physical violence prevails, even though the source of it is not clearly definable. The victims of violence are rather led into temptation, in other words, they are lured into traps, thereby distracting from the real perpetrator, Willy Wonka. Thus, physical violence in *Charlie* is primarily active and indirect, whereas in *Matilda* the person exercising violence is always visible, therefore making these actions direct and also more threatening, that is, in the case of violence realized by physical force.

What is also worth mentioning about *Matilda* is that the heroine of the story as well as the evil Trunchbull both use physical violence. However, in *Matilda*'s case it is always of indirect nature, such as when she plays all the different kinds of tricks on her father. Even when she actually had to use direct physical violence under normal circumstances, that is, when she tips over the glass with the newt in it during the headmistress' lesson and the animal lands on the Trunchbull's chest, *Matilda*'s super power enables her not to exercise violence in a direct way. Combined with the psychological violence she uses in order to

scare the Trunchbull, so she disappears never to be seen again, Matilda seems much more innocent than she would if she used physical-active-direct violence against the evil adults.

While violence in *Charlie* does not seem to fulfill any purpose apart from a slight didactic aim, whose meaningfulness can be questioned, its role in *Matilda* is more complex. In Dahl's last children's book he published before his death, violence clearly is of a carnivalesque nature, as has been shown in section 4.2. In both narratives, however, violence can be perceived as fulfilling the function of empowering the underdog, although this is more obvious in *Matilda*. Still, Charlie is made powerful through violence too, since he is the one to win the main prize due to his companions being eliminated by violence.

Comparing the two stories on a timeline and agreeing upon dropping all the other works of Dahl's juvenile fiction, it may be concluded that overall, the violence has become more immediate, more diverse and also more prominent from the author's first children's book to his last publication. Additionally, the theme fulfills a more significant function in the later work, apart from the entertaining quality, that clearly is also very much its purpose in *Charlie*.

Both stories feature violence in a way that can be said to have a cathartic impact on the child reader, since the violent actions are aimed at the revolting secondary child characters and on adults illustrated in a similarly negative way. Especially in the last case, the criticism of many grownup readers thus stands to reason, as the literary figures bear no relation to real parents and teachers and may therefore cast a poor light on these authority figures.

This being said, it seems overanxious to attribute a detrimental influence on young readers to the stories. Not only are the descriptions of the violent scenes in the books a far cry from the graphic and often disturbingly realistic representations in other literary works, comics, films and video games nowadays marketed for an underage target group, but the author also ensured to provide a safe frame for the violent episodes. This is done by means of certain strategies, such as the framing of the violent events by fantasy and humor, as well as the general avoidance of descriptions of such scenes.

Such methods of mitigation may not only be observed in word but also in image. Quentin Blake's illustrations accompanying the texts depict the violence present in both narratives in different ways. In *Charlie*, many of the violent scenes are simply censored, in other words, there are hardly any images visualizing violence. This corresponds to the author's employment of violence in the story, who merely describes those instances in detail which involve transformation of physical appearance. Violence expressed by bodily force is for the most part withheld from the readers, probably for their own safety. *Matilda*, which clearly is more violent than its predecessor, features much more overt illustrations of the violent episodes, thus mirroring the prevailing mood of the story. Nevertheless, certain images only seem at first glance to be as cruel as the text suggests, since the illustrator undermines the violence by subtly establishing elements of humor. Furthermore, the cartoon style of his drawings points to the unrealistic nature of the violent scenes.

Reconsidering the results yielded from the analysis of this thesis, it can be concluded that violence is an undeniably important element of Dahl's juvenile fiction. This may have its roots in the fairy tale genre, setting the frame for most of the famous author's children's books. In both works, violence is more present than initially obvious, due to its diverse forms that often contribute to the concealment of the actual violent character inherent in a scene. Sometimes, violence even plays a more significant role as may be apparent on the surface, such as in *Matilda*. The often used accusation that violence in Dahl's books is gratuitous, however, has to be rejected, at least partially. True, none of the secondary characters punished by Miss Trunchbull in *Matilda* deserve the brutal treatment. Yet, most of the time violence befalls those characters who are presented as evil or despicable, such as the four naughty children in *Charlie* or the Trunchbull in *Matilda*. Thus, evil is punished and good is rewarded in the end, a pattern common in fairy tale and children's stories.

What has to be emphasized, however, is the fact that in *Charlie* the punishment does not fit the offenses committed by Violet, Veruca, Mike and Augustus either. In this regard, they can be compared to the unfortunate secondary characters in *Matilda*, such as Amanda, Bruce or Rupert. The only difference is that in the second case, Dahl deliberately evokes the reader's sympathy by

portraying those children as innocent victims of the Trunchbull's aggression drive, while in *Charlie* the children are presented as loathsome. In both cases, the violence can be seen as gratuitous, since it may be said that it is unnecessary to punish those poor children, at least by using such violent methods. Nevertheless, both stories would be a great deal less exciting if those scenarios were omitted. In fact, the story of *Charlie* relies to a great extent on the punishment scenes of the ill-mannered children, since without them Charlie's journey from a poor little boy to the lucky winner of the chocolate factory would be pointless. Similarly, the violence used by the Trunchbull against her students adds to the portrayal of the headmistress as an evil monster and otherwise, Matilda's triumph over her would seem not half as victorious. So, the apparently gratuitous violence in *Charlie* and *Matilda* has an important function, not only as an element within the story, as has been discussed above, but also in order to provide more depth to both narratives.

As a final point, the question of suitability shall be addressed once more by focusing on the reading of Dahl's books in ESL classes. In terms of language and style, both stories are simple enough to be read in lower-secondary forms, approximately from year two upwards. Even in the first grade, the teacher could occasionally read passages from the books to the students, for example, as a treat after a test. This is likely to be of benefit for the learners, since they can get used to the pronunciation of words and maybe even pick up some new vocabulary or grammatical structures. With regard to violence, it makes sense to discuss some of the more extreme episodes in class, thus ensuring that the learners have grasped the humorous undertone or the fantastic frame, especially when it is less apparent in the text. With this in mind, it may be safe to say that often, Dahl's tongue-in-cheek tone of voice may most easily be echoed by an adult reading the stories to children³⁰. As Smith Chalou (29) notes, "the child's interpretation is heavily influenced by the tone of the adult voice reading the story – lighthearted or disdainful".

³⁰ This shared reading experience was obviously an element that Dahl kept in mind when writing his children's stories. Perceiving himself as an accomplice of children, he often undermines the power position of the adult reader by forcing them to read things aloud they probably do not want a child to hear. A similarly clever trick is used in *The Witches* (10), where the narrator states that even "your lovely school-teacher who is reading these words to you at this very moment" might be a witch (Thacker 17). Here it is obvious that Dahl assumed a teacher reading the story to her class and by "unmasking" her, he subverts her authority.

To conclude, the weak point of this thesis certainly is its limitation to only two of Dahl's children's books, mainly due to reasons of time and space. A more extended survey may provide further intriguing findings with regard to the aspect of violence in Dahl's juvenile literature. This being said, there are some interesting parallels between those two books, which mainly concern the representations of the violent scenes. Overall, violence in *Charlie* and *Matilda* fulfills many purposes. On the one hand, it is undeniably entertaining, not least because it usually is presented in a comic way. On the other hand, it works on more than just one level, thus adding meaning to the narratives. Without it, *Charlie* would merely be the story of a small deprived boy who wins a tour through a chocolate factory and additionally the whole company. While this may still be a fairly decent story, although rather dull, *Matilda* would not work at all without violence, since the whole story revolves around children's battle against adults.

To sum up, violence in the Dahl books ensures laughter, suspense and the triumph of the underdog. It is therefore an integral component of the author's juvenile fiction, because he knows how to employ the theme so it caters to a considerable extent for what, in his view, children love reading about. Thus, the last word in this thesis shall be granted to the famous author himself, giving away the secret of a good children's book writer:

[Children] love to be spooked. They love suspense. They love action. They love ghosts. They love the finding of treasure. They love chocolates, toys and money. They love magic. They love being made to giggle. They love seeing a villain meet a grisly death. They love a hero and they love the hero to be a winner. (Sturrock 547)

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Abstract English

Roald Dahl is one of the most renowned writers of the twentieth century who especially one fame for his children's literature. Loved by his young readers, many of his children's books have been repeatedly criticized for various elements allegedly inappropriate for a child audience. One of these elements is violence, a recurring theme in Dahl's juvenile fiction. This diploma thesis seeks to examine violence in two of Dahl's best-known children's stories, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (1964) and *Matilda* (1988). The theoretical part looks at violence from different angles in order to establish a definition of this phenomenon. Not only is it important to examine different forms of violence but also to point out its connection to power. Furthermore, the ever-changing notion of the child in the course of the centuries is investigated, starting with the Age of Enlightenment when the concept of the Romantic child emerged for the first time and moving on to the nineteenth century and the Victorian child. This is necessary in order to establish a link between popular concepts of childhood and Dahl's portrayal of his literary heroes. In the analytical part, the two books are scrutinized with regard to the forms of the violence featured, such as physical or psychological, active or passive, direct or indirect violence. Moreover, the functions violence fulfills as an element within the story are analyzed. While in *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, violence can be said to be employed by the author for didactic reasons, in *Matilda* its clear aim is to highlight power structures between the protagonists of the story. Additionally, the effects violence in both stories may have on the young readers are taken into account. In so doing, it is crucial to consider the fairy tale structure of both narratives and investigate the role violence plays in many fairy tales. As a final point, the thesis examines the representations of violence in the books both on a textual as well as a graphic level by looking at different illustrations by Quentin Blake. The results of this analysis point to author and illustrator censoring or mitigating the violence in the stories in order to make those scenes appropriate for children.

Abstract Deutsch

Roald Dahl ist einer der bekanntesten Schriftsteller des zwanzigsten Jahrhunderts, der sich vor allem durch seine Kinderliteratur einen Namen

machte. Von seinen jungen Lesern geliebt, wurden viele seiner Kinderbücher doch auch wiederholt für einige Inhalte kritisiert, welche angeblich nicht für Kinder geeignet sind. Dazu gehört Gewalt, ein immer wiederkehrendes Motiv in Dahls Kinderliteratur. Das Ziel dieser Diplomarbeit ist es, zwei von Dahls Kinderbüchern, *Charlie und die Schokoladenfabrik* (1964) und *Matilda* (1988), hinsichtlich dieses Aspektes zu untersuchen. Der theoretische Teil der Arbeit betrachtet Gewalt aus verschiedenen Blickwinkeln um eine Definition des Phänomens herzuleiten. Hierbei ist es nicht nur wichtig die verschiedenen Formen von Gewalt zu untersuchen, sondern auch einen Bezug zwischen Gewalt und dem Begriff der Macht herzustellen. Des Weiteren wird die sich über die Jahrhunderte ständig verändernde Vorstellung von Kindheit in Augenschein genommen, beginnend mit dem romantischen Kindheitsbild der Aufklärung bis hin zum Bild des Kindes der viktorianischen Epoche, um einen Anknüpfungspunkt an Dahls Darstellung seiner Romanhelden zu schaffen. Im analytischen Teil werden die beiden Bücher hinsichtlich der Formen von Gewalt analysiert, wie etwa physische oder psychische, aktive oder passive, direkte oder indirekte Gewalt. Außerdem werden die Funktionen von Gewalt als Element in den Geschichten analysiert. Während in *Charlie und die Schokoladenfabrik* Gewalt eine didaktische Funktion zu erfüllen scheint, ist ihr klares Ziel in *Matilda* die Kennzeichnung von Machtstrukturen zwischen den Protagonisten der Geschichte. Zusätzlich werden die Auswirkungen des Motivs der Gewalt auf die jungen Leser in Betracht gezogen, wobei es wesentlich ist, die Märchenstruktur beider Erzählungen zu beachten und die Rolle von Gewalt in Märchen zu untersuchen. Abschließend werden die Darstellungen von Gewalt in den Büchern sowohl auf der textlichen, als auch auf einer bildlichen Ebene erforscht indem verschiedene Illustrationen von Quentin Blake analysiert werden. Die Ergebnisse dieser Analyse deuten darauf hin, dass sowohl Autor als auch Illustrator die Gewalt in beiden Geschichten zensieren, bzw. abschwächen, sodass jene Szenen einer kindlichen Leserschaft gerecht werden.

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