



An Analysis on the Themes of Oppression and Violence in Roald Dahl's Select Works

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Abstract

The present study aims to highlight the themes of oppression and violence in Roald Dahl's select novels. The significant characters from the select novels are from financially and emotionally underprivileged families. Those characters pass through a series of events that make them suffer as they go through various stages of social and emotional disconnection. Their lives become difficult when adults failed to play a positive role; but on the contrary they were ill-treated by them. Dahl's novels highlights children's vision and multiple perspectives towards life amidst the conflicts faced by them. He also addresses the idea of confrontation, hope, courage among children. This paper attempts to analyse the oppression and violence faced by the children in the select works of Roald Dahl.

Keywords: Oppression, violence, Childhood, imagination, fantasy.

Introduction

Roald Dahl was a famous British novelist, short story writer, poet, screenwriter, and also served as a fighter pilot in the Royal Air Force during World War II. Dahl's works have contributed much to the children literature. The author had spent most of his childhood living in Wales with his mother and extended family after the death of his father which helped Dahl to explore and understand many things around him. Dahl's short stories are known for their bleak, supernatural, and often darkly hilarious tone, which is also well-known for their unexpected endings. In his works, Dahl highlights the significance of

compassion and sympathy towards hardships. His famous works include James and the Giant Peach, Charlie and the Chocolate Factory, Matilda, The Witches, Fantastic Mr Fox, The BFG, The Twits, George's Marvellous Medicine and Danny, the Champion of the World which are majorly popular among children. Roald Dahl used some intertwined themes like self-resilience, kindness, triumph of good over evil and empowerment to engage young children.

The present paper will critically analyse Dahl's most significant characters that include Charlie



Bucket from *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* and Matilda Wormwood from *Matilda* to discuss the themes such as oppression and violence. This paper attempts to bring out an optimistic vision of hope and courageousness through the select characters. The following part will discuss the select themes from the chosen novels respectively.

Oppression in Charlie and the Chocolate Factory

Charlie Bucket, the protagonist of the novel *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* is portrayed as a generous and selfless boy. He comes from an impoverished household consisting of his mother, father, and four grandparents. Charlie's family is too poor and deprived to afford three meals per day, and he only eats a small bit. Charlie wants nothing more than to see his family members happy, and he is giving and caring. But as a young child, he also yearns for chocolate because he must pass Mr Wonka's chocolate factory every day on his route to and from school. However, due to their financial difficulties, the Bucket family was unable to buy Charlie Wonka's chocolate all the time but except on the day of Charlie's birthday.

When Mr. Wonka reveals that he has hidden five Golden Tickets in five Wonka bars as an access ticket to tour around the chocolate factory. However, Charlie's chances of finding a ticket are minimal. Despite their financial difficulties, the Bucket family was able to buy Charlie with a chocolate that, fortunately, had the golden ticket. Along with Charlie, other spoilt children such as Augustus, Veruca, Violet, and Mike discover their Golden Tickets. Charlie understands that the other golden tickets were unfairly gained by the privileged children of wealthy families in order to fulfil their greed.

Roald Dahl illustrates how the upper class completely enjoys wealth while lower-income individuals, like Charlie's family, must face the injustices of poverty for decades. As an example, Dahl describes Bucket's home as being incredibly confined and uncomfortable, stating that, cold drafts blew across the floor all night long, and it was awful (CCF, 5).

An essay 'The Theme of Social Class in Charlie and the Chocolate Factory', compares the household

of Charlie's and Willy Wonka that, "Charlie has to make do with an ill-conditioned house where he is forced to sleep on the floor and hardly get enough food, Willy Wonka's factory, Dahl describes Willy Wonka's factory as a place to behold, as characterized by graceful trees, a chocolate river, glass elevators, long corridors, and countless rooms. This is a clear indication that Charlie's family is living in abject poverty, even as Mr. Wonka lives a life of plenty".

Charlie expresses pleasure and delight throughout the industrial tour. He obeyed every direction and instruction from Mr. Wonka, while the other children were mischievous and careless about the factory infrastructure. Charlie ended up being the last kid to complete the factory tour successfully. After examining Charlie's involvement, Mr Willy Wonka announces that Charlie will inherit the factory after Mr Wonka's death and believes that the work will keep going on. This opportunity is given to Charlie to overcome his poverty so that the Bucket family will never go hungry again. Charlie's integrity and good character earned him a huge fortune for life.

The above analysis tries to highlight that the protagonist's integrity and the tolerance against his hard times earned him a fortune to overcome his financial oppression. Through this character Roald Dahl incorporates moral and virtues among his young readers

Violence in Matilda

Matilda, the protagonist of the novel *Matilda*, is a very intelligent little girl. Despite having a challenging upbringing, she is smart, powerful, creative and compassionate. Matilda is mistreated by her parents, Mr. and Mrs. Wormwood, since they are not proud of her; yet, she escapes such conduct by immersing herself in the world of books. Despite feeling helpless at home, Matilda makes use of her intelligence to keep other characters from doing injustice. Matilda gains a moral compass through reading and learns that Mr. Wormwood's used car business is unethical. She also gains certain magical abilities in an attempt to outwit Miss Trunchbull.

Matilda's parents, Mr. and Mrs. Wormwood, don't give her any thought or concern. They have no favourable opinion of her. They view her as a scab and are eager to get rid of her from the family;



it's because of her gender. Matilda's parents do not acknowledge her unique talents and consider her as a good-for-nothing girl. To put in Dahl's words, he says that

The parents looked upon Matilda in particular as nothing more than a scab. A scab is something you have to put up with until the time comes when you can pick it off and flick away. Mr and Mrs Wormwood looked forward enormously to the time when they could pick their little daughter off and flick her away, preferably into the next country or even further than that (Matilda, 4).

Matilda's father insults her with a variety of discriminatory remarks. Mr. Wormwood disregards Matilda's brilliance and prodigious talent. Rather, he gives preference to his less talented son. Mr. Wormwood's attitude towards gender stereotypes can be observed by his statement that "girls should be seen not heard." Likewise, Miss Trunchbull also despises girls and uses sexist language when she says,

I have discovered, Miss Honey, during my long career as a teacher that a bad girl is a far more dangerous creature than a bad boy. Nasty dirty things, little girls are. Glad I never was one (Matilda, 80).

In Adhithya and Latha's article, they closely observe the courage that broke the obstacles of Matilda as a great thing in the novel. As they compared Matilda with other characters that, "Mrs Wormwood is a self-absorbed and useless mother. Miss Honey is painstaking to be dynamic woman. She is considered as an inert when she fails to take steps to change her own situation. Finally Matilda who is a brave one does everything for her. Matilda is a robust female. Though she is a child she is independent and dynamic." (Adhithya & Latha, 46).

As a little girl, the protagonist Matilda experiences mistreatments by her own family and encounters gender violence from Mr Wormwood and Miss Trenchbull. Yet she has broken all the adversities at a small age and earned to live where she is well treated as she was taken by Miss Honey.

So the analysis tries to convey that intelligence and tolerance helped Matilda to overcome her hurdles. Through this character Roald Dahl incorporates moral and virtues among his young readers.

Conclusion

Children all throughout the world have responded overwhelmingly to Roald Dahl's works. In contrast to adult novels, children's books examine the struggles and problems that young characters face on a daily basis. His writings have positively impacted among young readers to acknowledge morality, kindness and justice in their lives. Likewise the characters Charlie Bucket and Matilda Wormwood from the select works have addressed troublesome childhood upbringing. Charlie Bucket from Charlie and the Chocolate Factory is a victim of financial oppression as he couldn't wish for anything and Matilda Wormwood from Matilda is seen as a victim of gender based violence as she finds hard to exist among her parents and Miss Trunchbull. However, these two children have successfully encountered their hurdles with kindness, toleration, courage and integrity.

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