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Didactic Tales

Roald Dahl and the Traditions of the Fable and Fairy Tale

Master's thesis in Language Studies with Teacher Education

Supervisor: Paul Goring

May 2020



Illustration: Quentin Blake



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Abstract

This analysis of the works of Roald Dahl with reference to the Grimm brothers' fairy tales and Aesop's fables evaluates the didactic elements in children's literature. There are many connections between Dahl and the works of the Grimms and Aesop, both by direct references to fairy tales and through recurring themes such as character traits, endings, the supernatural, and anthropomorphism. Dahl's novels include adapted elements of the fairy tale, which in turn includes adapted elements of the fable. Like fables and fairy tales, Dahl's works may be seen as moralistic, as this thesis argues. Moralistic elements found in Dahl include the integrity of the protagonist, rewards for the morally "good", and punishment of the villain. The techniques used to implement the desired moral values in the reader are mostly humor and horror. Dahl's works are often both horrifying and humorous; his works tread a fine line between encouraging and frightening children into behaving according to social norms. This thesis argues that scaring children into behaving properly builds on extrinsic motivation, since the child will behave well in order to escape punishment. This type of didacticism may be considered old-fashioned and out of date, and thus brings into question the suitability of the didactics in Dahl's novels in modern society.

Abstrakt

Denne analysen av verkene til Roald Dahl, med henvisninger til Grimm-brødrenes eventyr og Æsops fabler, tar stilling til de didaktiske elementene i barnelitteratur. Det finnes mange forbindelser mellom Dahl og verkene til Grimm-brødrene og Æsop, både gjennom direkte referanser til eventyr og ved gjennomgående tematikk som karaktertrekk, avslutninger, det overnaturlige og antropomorfisme. Dahls romaner inkluderer tilpassede elementer fra eventyr, som igjen inneholder tilpassede elementer fra fabelen. I likhet med fabler og eventyr kan Dahls verk anses som moralistiske, hvilket denne oppgaven argumenterer for. Moralistiske elementer i Dahl inkluderer protagonistens integritet, belønninger for moralske personer, og straffelse av skurken. Teknikkene som er brukt til å implementere ønskede moralske verdier i leseren er hovedsakelig humor og skrekkelementer. Ofte er Dahls verk både skremmende og morsomme; verkene veksler mellom å oppmuntre og skremme barn til å oppføre seg i henhold til sosiale normer. Denne masteroppgaven argumenterer at å

skremme barn til å oppføre seg bygger på ytre motivasjon siden barnet oppfører seg pent for å unnsnippe straff. Denne formen for didaktikk kan anses som gammeldags og utdatert, og dermed setter spørsmålstejn ved hvorvidt didaktikken i Dahls verk er passende i det moderne samfunn.

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1.0 Introduction

It seemed so unreal and remote and fantastic and so totally away from this earth. It was like an illustration in Grimm or Hans Andersen. It was the house where the poor woodcutter lived with Hansel and Gretel and where Red Riding Hood's grandmother lived and it was also the house of The Seven Dwarfs and The Three Bears and all the rest of them. It was straight out of a fairy-tale (Dahl, 2016b, p. 180).

Matilda's visit to Miss Honey's cottage in *Matilda* makes it evident that fairy tales are part of Roald Dahl's universe by including a direct reference to fairy tales. Furthermore, the passage establishes a connection between esteemed fairy tales and *Matilda* through the simile of the cottage resembling an illustration in Grimm or Hans Andersen. The description of Miss Honey's cottage applies the mystical and adventurous qualities of fairy tales to Dahl's work, which is an indicator of shared traits between *Matilda* and fairy tales, such as supernatural or magical powers. One may argue that this link between fairy tales and *Matilda* is transferable to other works of Dahl even when there are no direct references to fairy tales, but rather overlapping themes or techniques. This thesis argues that his works are closely connected to different types of children's literature, mainly the fairy tale and the fable.

Fables and fairy tales originate in oral stories passed down through generations, and therefore provide an excellent insight into traditions and culture. They are a "collective bank of attitudes and opinions shaped during past acts of storytelling but also constantly changing" (Birketveit & Williams, 2013, p. 93). One might develop a greater understanding of how our society has developed its norms and rules by examining the heavily moralistic nature of old fables and fairy tales. Even though Dahl's novels are contemporary, critics argue that some of their underlying ideas can "be placed in quite a long-standing tradition" (Petzold, 1992, p. 186). This thesis argues that these are the traditions of the fable and the fairy tale, exemplified by selections from *Aesop's Fables* and the Grimm brothers' *Household Tales*. The thesis engages with existing critique of Dahl's novels, such as claims that the works inspire rebelliousness, fascism, and sadism in children, and that they contain crude humor and gratuitous violence. The contribution of this thesis in a discussion of Dahl's works is an assessment of the didactic techniques found in his works, and how these techniques - which are part of a long-standing tradition - may justify controversial elements in his novels.

Didactic techniques as tools to promote moralistic behavior in Dahl's works have not been part of this debate before, which is why this thesis can argue against critics who have condemned Dahl's novels earlier since the focus on didacticism brings new meaning to controversial parts in his works. This study discusses the intertextual relationship between the works of Dahl, Aesop, and the Grimms, while examining existing critique of Dahl's works and their moralistic tendency. It does not voice arguments about fables or fairy tales, but studies the didacticism in *Dahl's* works with references to Aesop and the Grimms.

The thesis examines the portrayal of desired values and behavior in literature spanning 2500 years. The works chosen from 500 B.C. are "The Fox and the Stork", "The North Wind and the Sun", and "The Wolf in Sheep's Clothing" from *Aesop's Fables*. The Grimms' fairy tales "Cinderella", "The Wolf and the Seven Little Kids", and "Hansel and Gretel" are chosen from the 19th century. The 20th-century literature by Roald Dahl examined in this thesis comprises *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, *The Twits*, *George's Marvellous Medicine*, *The Witches*, and *Matilda*. This thesis discusses the similar themes addressed in these works in order to assess whether Dahl's works honors the traditions of fables and fairy tales. Furthermore, the didactic techniques used in Dahl's works are discussed in order to evaluate the suitability of these works for child readers, with reference to existing critique of Dahl's works.

This thesis will first differentiate the three genres before moving on to theory concerning literature as a didactic tool, the effects of humor and horror, and the development of their usage through time, with a continuous presentation of the methodology. The analysis of the works will then begin by identifying recurring themes in all the works before addressing whether these might be considered indications of Dahl's works being modern adaptations of fables and fairy tales. The thesis will then assess the didactic techniques used in Dahl's novels to discuss whether they might be perceived as moralistic works, in accordance with fables and fairy tales. This will be wrapped up with a discussion of the suitability of Dahl's works for children before the thesis is concluded.

1.1 Differentiating the genres

Since different types of literature are analyzed in this thesis, one must first define the three genres that make up the primary literature in this study. In order to distinguish the fable from the fairy tale, and Dahl's novels from these, all three genres are briefly defined before they are compared with each other.

1.1.1 Fable

The fable has been written in both prose and poetry since the late eighth century B.C. (Holzberg, 2002, p. 2), thus making it a genre spanning three millennia. Due to the enormous time span, our knowledge of ancient fables and fabulists, such as Aesop, is lacking. Holzberg (2002, pp. 3-4) catalogues the fragmentation of ancient books containing fables and their authors, of which several were unknown. Despite a lack of information about their origin, the stories have still survived, and have - as traditional tales of morality - been able to influence morals throughout generations.

Fables are often summed up in the title or in a moral at the end (Blackham, 2013, p. xiii). The moral of the story is embodied rather than delivered directly to the reader (Blackham, 2013, pp. xviii-xix). Lewis (1996, p. 9) states that the plots of fables always generate explicit morals, which are often embodied through the use of animals without a complexity of character. Lewis (1996, p. 8) argues that the underlying meaning of fables has enabled generations of readers to have a common understanding of symbolic practice. This means that the dramatic nature of the fable and its characters symbolizing traits or morals have taught readers to understand meanings below surface meanings. The value of the fable as a tool for cognitive development, exemplified by the understanding of symbolism, is therefore highly relevant for upbringing and education of children.

Aesop's Fables is a collection of "cautionary tales illustrating foolish or bad conduct, teaching prudence in a memorable way that appeals to children" (Blackham, 2013, p. 8). One may infer that these tales are didactic when it comes to their moralistic inclination of teaching acceptable behavior.

1.1.2 Fairy tale

The genre of the fairy tale is rooted in oral history. The tales were never given titles or were told in the form that they have today (Zipes, 2012, p. 2). Fairy tales begin with conflict as “[humans] all begin [their] lives with conflict”, and must try to resolve conflicting desires and instincts as well as attempting to fit in with the world (Zipes, 2012, p. 2). Fairy tales reflect general conflicts that are typical in human lives, and offer tales of how to overcome these difficulties. This genre also tends to revolve around adapting the world, and includes finding magical instruments or technologies, as well as powerful animals or humans that can aid the protagonists in achieving their goals (Zipes, 2012, p. 2). Protagonists conquering the world and finding help along the way are thus common elements in this genre. A classic fairy tale includes “magic, gross violence, retribution, no well-rounded [or] three-dimensional characters, good triumphing over evil”, and a “gifted” hero (Petzold, 1992, p. 186).

Additionally, the protagonist is often neglected in some way, and the tales deal with children’s fears of being abandoned as one may observe that evil stepmothers and ogres or tyrannical kings tend to replace loving parental figures (Petzold, 1992, pp. 188-189). Fairy tales thus tackle difficult themes and horrific images in a way that is appealing to children. As children are frightened by the idea of evil, they become fascinated with tales that overcome this fear, and even become personally invested when evil is vanquished and good triumphs (O’ Dwyer, 2007, p. 190). The vivid images, repeated themes, obvious good-and-evil alignment, as well as villains often having a striking physical attribute in fairy tales (Culley, 1991, p. 62) help children become emotionally invested in fairy tales that address themes resonating with the conflicts they face in life.

1.1.3 Children’s novels

Children’s literature and the novel developed at the same time, often considered the 1740s, though as two separate genres that have later merged together into the modern children’s novel (Fleming, 2013, p. 463). Patrick Fleming argues that “moral tale” is a more suitable word for describing the first children’s novels, and exemplifies this by naming the work that is considered the first children’s novel: John Newbery’s *A Little Pretty Pocketbook, Intended*

for the Instruction and Amusement of Little Master Tommy and Pretty Miss Polly with Two Letters from Jack the Giant Killer; as also a Ball and Pincushion; The Use of which will infallibly make Tommy a good Boy, and Polly a good Girl from 1744 (Fleming, 2013, p. 463). This title undoubtedly demonstrates a moralistic attitude as it is insistent on making children good boys and girls. The fact that the first children's novel had an obvious moralistic angle illustrates the characteristics of this genre in its origin, which may explain certain aspects of the children's novel today.

Key features in a children's novel are "realism, didacticism, and digression" (Fleming, 2013, p. 468). Jan Susina argues that children's literature is a product of a certain period in time, and "embodies that period's assumptions about children and appropriate behaviour" (2004, p. 178). Children's novels should therefore be considered novels written *for* children *by adults*, encouraging values and behavior appropriate for their time of production.

1.1.4 Comparisons

When comparing the three genres, the first obvious connection is that children are considered the target audience. Secondly, even though there are moralistic elements in all three genres, there are variations in how much this plays a role in the literature. Fables are considered thoroughly moralistic throughout the plot, and are often short. Fairy tales become more elaborate moralistic tales by including several important characters, an adventurous narrative, and overcoming evil after making allies along the way. The novel is a longer text, and is therefore able to wrap its moral into a more complex packaging, including a larger number of characters, plot events, and themes. The children's novel thus becomes a more comprehensive work with a greater potential, even though it may still be perceived as moralistic in some sense.

2.0 Theory and Methodology

Before presenting the theory and methodology, it is necessary to clarify why the thesis uses the chosen terminology. The terminology in this thesis is founded on the history of the field of didactics, which is why a brief history of the field is presented below.

The origin of the study of didacticism is difficult to place in time since this field has developed over a longer period of time. The term may be traced back to Ancient Greece where *didascalía* (“matters instructional”) was used in association with Greek choirs and their rehearsals, while *didaskaleion* referred to the house in which teachers taught (Nordkvelle, 2003, p. 316), and thus described an ancient version of a school. The suffix *-tik* or *-ik* is a Latinized version of the Greek word *techne*, which translates to “art”, “skill”, “science”, or “profession” (Nordkvelle, 2003, p. 321). The Northern European term *didaktik*, meaning the art of teaching, came into use around 1612-1613 (Nordkvelle, 2003, p. 315) when the *methodus didactica* was described for teaching Latin, invented by Wolfgang Ratke (Nordenbo, 2006, p. 213).

Didactics and pedagogy may be difficult to distinguish from each other, especially as the two words were used interchangeably the first century after being coined, until *Pädagogik* became the main term (Nordkvelle, 2003, p. 315). However, as *Paidagogike* means “the art of upbringing” (Nordkvelle, 2003, p. 321), it is differentiated from the art of teaching. This thesis uses “didactics” as the dominating term due to the focus on teaching rather than upbringing. Even though one may argue that the morals found in Dahl’s novels fall under upbringing rather than teaching, this thesis focuses on *the way the morals are taught*: the didactics behind the teachings in Dahl’s novels.

Additionally, one must distinguish between moralism and didacticism. Moralism concerns itself with questions about moral right and wrong (Nussbaum, 2010, p. 248). Moralism is also presented as a scale representing the intensity of right and wrong, meaning people can vary in their extremity of moralistic thinking (Mulhall, 2010, p. 331; Hache, Latour & Camiller, 2010, p. 312). Didacticism, on the other hand, encompasses the method of teaching, and therefore provides tools as to how morals are taught.

2.1 Literature as a didactic tool

Since didacticism in children’s literature is the focus of this study, one must explore literature as a didactic tool. Literature is not only a carrier of didactic techniques found in the text, but also holds didactic value in itself as it enables skills in the reader. Literature opens up

“imaginative perspectives, interrogate[s] values and assumptions, and lead[s] to enhanced understanding of global cultures and differences” (Birketveit & Williams, 2013, p. 7). There are, in other words, many possibilities when using literature as a didactic tool since readers will develop their understanding, reflective capacities, and imagination.

2.2 The effects of humor and horror

Even though there are many didactic tools found in literature, this thesis focuses on humor and horror due to the frequency of these elements in Dahl’s children’s novels. Since reading for pleasure has significant cognitive, emotional, and social benefits (Hempel-Jorgensen, Cremin, Harris & Chamberlain, 2018, p. 87), enjoyable techniques such as humor increase motivation for reading. As this thesis examines the didactics in Dahl’s children’s novels, the focus will be on the text rather than the author or reader, since the didactic techniques are presented in the work itself. Since the effects of the didactic techniques are evaluated, the text is the interesting focus rather than the author and his intent. This thesis does not assess whether Dahl’s use of didactic techniques is conscious or unconscious since this would transfer the focus from the text to the author.

2.2.1 *Humor*

Children learn to use humor to give relief when dealing with feelings of hostility or anxiety, and this can assist in mitigating frightening elements in a story (West, 1990, pp. 115-116). It may resemble a form of catharsis as it is an emotional release of feelings of hostility in a harmless manner. Humor directed at children often deals with “the taboo” (West, 1990, p. 115), or what Mikhail Bakhtin calls “the carnivalesque” (Scanlon, 2011, p. 72). Bakhtin’s theory of the carnivalesque is based on the medieval dualism of the official seriousness of power and religion and the festive imagery of the carnival: “Laughter was of central importance to this popular festive imagery, linking together the marketplace, the banquet, the lower stratum of the body and the grotesque” (Taylor, 1995, p. 2). This medieval form of comedy found its ambivalence in ridiculing through the grotesque as something or someone revered was “uncrowned and transformed into a funny monster” (Bishop, 1990, p. 49). The carnivalesque is depicted in children’s novels by the hero sometimes being a clown or a fool, as it is grounded in playfulness and non-conformity (Scanlon, 2011, p. 72). This type of

Medieval humor may seem simple, but has philosophical depth: “Carnival laughter was a serious way of understanding the world. In fact, some truths were not amenable or knowable through any other medium” (Bishop, 1990, p. 50). This way of knowing and understanding resembles children’s way of dealing with overwhelming emotions.

Humor may be used as a “distancing device” (Petzold, 1992, p. 192), which makes it easier to deal with difficult subjects. This may even be the only way of dealing with complex emotions and hard truths since the seriousness of the world can sometimes be overwhelming. Humor may thus be understood as a cathartic tool that has a didactic function.

2.2.2 Horror

The carnivalesque humor is built on ridiculing the grotesque, but the horrifying realities of the world have been used as a teaching method without being a laughing matter. For example, fear of death or pestilence was used by theologians, doctors, and authors in moral teachings during the Middle Ages by connecting the bubonic plague to sin (Lawrence, 2017, p. 867). This was used as a didactic technique to make people abstain from certain sins in order to escape illness and pestilence. Furthermore, physical horror has also been a technique to achieve learning, in the sense that failure brought physical pain (Grue-Sørensen, 1966; Hailman, 1874). Frightening people as a means of teaching is built on outlining consequences for undesired actions. The motivation for learning or behaving well thus originates from escaping negative consequences. This touches upon the differentiation of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation is based on an inner reward such as genuine interest, enjoyment, or feeling competent and self-determining (Cameron & Pierce, 1994, p. 364). Not lying due to a moral obligation to one’s own integrity is an example of intrinsic motivation for moral behavior. Extrinsic motivation is controlled by external factors such as reward or punishment, and is characterized by “pressure and tension and result[s] in low self-esteem and anxiety” (Cameron & Pierce, 1994, p. 364). Not lying due to fear of being caught and facing punishment is an example of extrinsic motivation for behaving morally. Horror as a didactic tool falls under extrinsic motivation as it encompasses negative consequences for one’s actions.

Not all types of extrinsic motivation have positive effects. Fear of consequences is damaging to a person's confidence and self-worth as "[i]ndividuals believe personal value depends on their ability to achieve" (Covington, 1985, p. 390). When people fail and face negative repercussions, it is directly related to one's self-worth. As opposed to intrinsic motivation where one only faces a lack of an inner reward following failure, extrinsic motivation has noticeable consequences after failures due to the consequences being external. Whether it be being reprimanded, physically punished, or spiritually punished through eternal damnation, this has psychological consequences for one's perception of self-worth.

2.3 Usage through time

Horrorifying children in order to teach them something is a technique that has old roots. In Ancient Greece, pupils were hurt by their teachers if they did not understand (Grue-Sørensen, 1966, pp. 84). Medieval times brought the Catholic Church as a dominant educational power (Grue-Sørensen, 1966, p. 124), and the promise of reward and punishment became evident through eternal happiness or damnation. Frightening people with damnation in order to encourage moral behavior thus became a popular didactic technique. During the Renaissance, children were encouraged to attend public executions as it was believed that seeing others being punished for immoral actions could positively affect children's moral development (Grue-Sørensen, 1966, p. 177). The Enlightenment brought philosophers into the field of didacticism. John Locke refrained from promoting the rod as a corrective tool because it accustomed children to "act less from reason than from fear of pain", and he was only willing to allow it in extreme cases of malice, stubbornness, or lying (Hailman, 1874, p. 65). Johann Gottlieb Fichte insisted upon morality being the absolute aim of education, and that as a last resort, parents "may - nay, must - employ force" (Hailman, 1874, pp. 86-87). The Industrial Revolution brought professionalization to the field of didactics by acknowledging teachers as experts in the field of didactics, not religious institutions or philosophers. For example in Denmark, a teacher's union was formed in 1874 in order to find a scientific psychological approach in "didactics of a guild" (Nordenbo, 2006, p. 215), professionalizing the study of didactics with scientific methods lead by experts in relevant fields. However, didactic theorists had limited influence on teaching practices used in the classroom before the 1960s (Nordenbo, 2006, p. 217).

Modern times brought academics such as John Dewey, who presented didactics modelled on the pupils' experiences in order to make tasks relevant and relatable for children (Nordenbo, 2006, p. 220). This paradigm shift opened for connecting with the child, and the use of techniques that appealed to children. Despite humoristic approaches in didactics emerging during the 1900s, beginning with Sigmund Freud who in 1928 claimed that laughter was a method of restoring balance after tension or conflict (Long & Graesser, 2009, p. 36), the study of humor in education was not widespread until decades later. Neal Norrick classified in 1984 witticism into i) comparisons, ii) retorts, iii) quips, and iv) stock conversational witticisms (Schmitz, 2002, pp. 90-91). Long and Graesser (2009, p. 39) presented taxonomies of jokes and wit (see Image 1) by ranging them according to complexity, making humor a field of scientific examination. Due to the academic scrutiny of humor, the 20th century may be considered a period in which humor was acknowledged as a technique. Due to the paradigm shift in didactics concerning teaching based on pupils' experiences, it was natural for humor to seep into didactics. One must also note that humor as a didactic tool is fairly new compared to horror. The former was developed as a technique during the last century, while horror has been part of both teaching and upbringing for millennia. This development in didactics is relevant to the didactic techniques found in Dahl's novels, as there are indications of the development of humor and horror as accepted didactic techniques in Dahl's own works.

3.0 Analysis

In this section of the thesis, Dahl's children's novels are evaluated in two different ways: first as literature honoring the traditions of fables and fairy tales, and then whether the moralistic techniques used in the novels may be considered suitable for the target audience. The discussion concerning adapted elements from fables and fairy tales revolves around central themes found in the different genres. When assessing the didactics in Dahl, the varying moralistic elements and effects of the techniques used supply the arguments in the discussion concerning the suitability of these works as entertainment for children.

3.1 Dahl's relation to fables and fairy tales

When performing an analysis of Dahl with reference to fables and fairy tales, one will observe that there are several similarities in these works. For instance, classic elements of fairy tales such as the triumph of good over evil, supernatural elements, and animals imbued with human characteristics (O' Dwyer, 2007, p. 190), may be identified in Dahl's works.

In addition to similar themes and features, Dahl's novels include direct references to fairy tales, as presented in the introduction when Matilda visits Miss Honey's cottage. Another direct reference to fairy tales in Dahl's works is the opening of *The Witches*: "In fairy-tales, witches always wear silly black hats and black cloaks, and they ride on broomsticks. But this is not a fairy-tale. This is about REAL witches" (Dahl, 2016c, p. 1). Once again we see an undeniable relation between Dahl's work and fairy tales. Witches from classic fairy tales are described, and thereby acknowledged, before the text continues by distancing itself from this type of witch. It is interesting to see how Dahl first creates a connection between his work and fairy tales before trying to distance himself from the link that has just been established. This gives the reader an impression of being introduced to something new that is based on traditions one is already familiar with. Throughout *The Witches*, the letters in the word "real" are always capitalized when introducing the witches. It is therefore stated numerous times that Dahl's witches are not the same type of witches that are found in fairy tales. By doing so, Dahl establishes his own lore, and almost copyrights his own type of witch. However, the connection to classic witches found in fairy tales is still present, which presents the possibility of Dahl's witches being based on the ones in pointy hats and black cloaks. Dahl's witches become a continuation of the classic lore of witches, originating from fairy tales, and modernizes this view on witches. It may even be argued that Dahl's witches are adaptations of classic witches, which is discussed later on.

3.1.1 Recurring themes

Having seen evidence of an intertextual relation between some of Dahl's works and fairy tales, one must examine specific themes that are recurring elements in the relevant works. In

which aspects are Dahl's works similar to fairy tales and fables, and to what extent do these similarities connect the works in question?

3.1.1.1 Character

Protagonists in fables and fairy tales often have similar character traits that make them sympathetic to the reader. Some of the recurring sympathetic traits are to be good, kind and honest. For instance, Cinderella's kindness is frequently juxtaposed to the terrible stepsisters and stepmother. The encouragement of good behavior is particularly noticeable when Cinderella's biological mother's final words before she dies are: "Dear child, be good and pious, and then the good God will always protect thee, and I will look down on thee from heaven and be near thee" (Grimm, 2017, p. 138). This last commandment sums up the sympathetic traits that are often found in fairy tale protagonists. Another example of such an instance in fairy tales is when Hansel overhears his parents discussing leaving their children in the woods, and he picks white pebbles before comforting his sister: "Be comforted, dear little sister, and sleep in peace, God will not forsake us" (Grimm, 2017, p. 95). Both kindness and piety is promoted, of which the latter most likely is a result of the religious importance during the 1800s.

Even though Dahl does not encourage piety, as fitting the contemporary society of the second half of the 20th century, the good and kind protagonist is prominent in his works. Both Matilda and George are falsely accused of lying (Dahl, 2016b, p. 49; Dahl, 2016a, p. 43), which are incidents that address honesty and unfairness. Furthermore, both George and Matilda perform pranks on their awful family members, George on his Grandma and Matilda on her parents, but they are still inherently good with a moral compass even though they enjoy making mischief. The most obvious case of how being a good person pays off in Dahl's novels is when Charlie becomes Willy Wonka's heir by being good and kind. His adversaries all show negative traits that eliminate them from the competition, and Charlie eventually wins the heritage by not showing any negative qualities. As a contrast to the gluttonous Augustus Gloop, the prideful and gum-chewing Violet Beauregarde, the greedy and spoiled Veruca Salt, and the lazy Mike Teavee who only watches television, Charlie does not inhibit any of the seven deadly sins. Even though his poor background could have made him envious, Charlie is simply kind, and is seen to marvel at Mr. Wonka's ingenuity rather

than coveting a potential inheritance of the chocolate maker's property. This is a sympathetic trait that resonates with the tradition seen in fairy tales, and ultimately makes Charlie the inheritor of Mr. Wonka's chocolate imperium.

The theme of kindness is also included in *Aesop's Fables*, for instance in the fable "The North Wind and the Sun" when the Sun is able to undress the man by shining brighter after the North Wind has failed by blowing harder. The final words in the fable are: "Gentleness and kind persuasion win where force and bluster fail" (Aesop, n.d.). Such positive traits are thus recurring in Aesop's, the Grimms' and Dahl's works, and contribute to make the protagonists sympathetic characters.

Additionally, the protagonist in a fairy tale is often seen to be oppressed or facing an evil that contrasts their own character traits. Cinderella is mistreated by her stepmother and stepsisters, and is oppressed in her own home. She eventually wins her freedom by being good and kind. The seven little kids oppose the fearsome wolf, who shows his greediness by swallowing six goat kids whole. The wolf's greed juxtaposes the seven kids' patience as they wait for their mother to bring home food from the forest. Another example is Hansel and Gretel who face two sorts of evil: being left in the woods due to shortage of food, and being captured and enslaved by a cannibalistic witch. They defeat the first evil through intellect by using pebbles to get home safely. They overcome the second evil by exposing the witch's plan of luring Gretel to check if the oven is hot enough, and then use it against the witch by making her show Gretel how to get in. Even though Gretel kills the witch, it is portrayed as an act of self defense since Gretel turns the witch's evil acts against her. This tradition is also present in *Aesop's Fables*, where the contrast between evil and goodness is addressed in "The Wolf in Sheep's Clothing". The hungry wolf disguises himself as a sheep in order to sneak closer to his food, and is eventually killed by the shepherd who fancies mutton broth for dinner, while the innocent sheep are left in peace. Even though the oppression of sheep does not appear clearly in this fable, it portrays both facing and defeating evil by the fact that the antagonist's tricks are turned against them.

The issues of oppression and facing evil are grounds for the main conflict in Dahl's works. The monkeys in *The Twits* are oppressed in their cage by having to perform tricks upside

down all day, and birds are regularly eaten by the Twits. The birds and monkeys eventually fight back by joining forces, and defeat the terror and oppression they have faced by playing pranks on the Twits. By doing so, they end their oppression by eliminating the evil Twits, which ends the conflict of the novel. Another example from Dahl's novels is *George's Marvellous Medicine*. George and his family are also subjected to cruelty from the terrorizing grandmother, whom George ultimately kills by accident when experimenting with self-made potions on her command. Despite the rather unsympathetic act of killing his grandmother, George maintains his innocence and good nature since the grandmother is the one who pushes him to make more of his homemade potion. His oppression thus ends accidentally after having followed the instructions of the terrorizing grandmother. Similarly to George, Charlie in *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* escapes oppression by accident. The evil that oppresses him is poverty rather than a person, and he overcomes this by being appointed Willy Wonka's heir. This is the result of his good traits, as argued above, which makes his fight against - and triumph over - evil a rather abstract struggle that is solved by being a good person. Contrasting this abstract fight, the protagonist in *The Witches* faces evil in the very tangible shape of witches as well as having been robbed of his parents in a car accident. In addition to overcoming the grief of losing his parents, he is in constant danger when facing witches, and must rise to the occasion, which in the end makes him a hero in the face of adversity. He thereby escapes oppression by fighting against the evil witches, and heals from the loss of his parents in the process. Another example of oppression of the protagonist in Dahl's novels is Matilda who is hindered in mental development by her parents and Miss Trunchbull. The parents' reluctance to acknowledge their daughter's skills, as well as Miss Trunchbull's objection to moving Matilda to a higher grade where her mental abilities may be challenged, eventually trigger the girl's powers of levitation. This magical ability is what she ultimately uses to escape oppression by exposing Miss Trunchbull's murderous past. Matilda's suffering thereby becomes the source of her strength, which she uses to save Miss Honey from oppression. Matilda's own parents are removed from her life through karma when her father's fraud is discovered, leaving Matilda with Miss Honey.

3.1.1.2 Ending: reward and punishment

Concluding a story involves resolving conflicts, and since Dahl's works are mainly children's stories, the endings are usually happy. Even though the protagonist in *The Witches* remains a

mouse, he comes to terms with this, and realizes that his shortened life span will let him die at about the same time as his grandmother, which relieves him of the burden of having to live without his best friend. Their collective newfound purpose in life is also decided, and their mission to wipe out all witches in the world begins, creating a new adventure ahead. So even though not all conflicts are resolved, this ending is characterized by the promise of adventure and a lack of future loss, which can be considered a happy ending. This type of wrapped up conclusion is a signature move in Dahl's children's novels, as endings include justice being served by punishing the oppressor and empowering the oppressed.

What is striking about Dahl's works is his faithful adherence to the classic "happy ending" found in fairy tales. One is able to deduce a common theme within the happy endings in the novels discussed in this thesis: liberation. Matilda is liberated from parents who do not appreciate her genius after having freed Miss Honey from her abusive aunt. Both Matilda and Miss Honey are thereby liberated, and get their happy ending together when Matilda is adopted by Miss Honey. In *George's Marvellous Medicine*, George and his family get rid of the horrific grandmother, who is the source of their misery. Even though her death is accidental, the result is still a happy ending, emphasized by George's mother who initially is sad after losing her own mother: "Ah well, I suppose it's all for the best, really. She was a bit of a nuisance around the house, wasn't she?" (Dahl, 2016a, p. 82). As mentioned earlier, Charlie is liberated from poverty as he becomes Willy Wonka's heir, and the Roly-Poly Bird and the monkeys rid the world of the awful Twits. One of the interesting stories of liberation found in Dahl's novels is when the protagonist in *The Witches* and his grandmother free England from all witches, and begin a scheme to liberate the entire world from this pest. This sense of freedom and liberation is the end game of the protagonist's struggle, and reflects the typical happy ending of fairy tales. As we know, Cinderella escapes an abusive household by marrying a prince; Hansel and Gretel escape the witch and return to their kind father; and the goats are freed from the wolf's belly by their mother. Liberation is thus seen to be a common theme in the conclusion of fairy tales, and Dahl does not hesitate to implement it in his own children's novels.

One of the traditions from fairy tales and fables that are present in Dahl's endings is the theme of justice. In the different stories, justice is served at the very end, which often

includes punishing the villain. The evil stepsisters are blinded for their foulness in Cinderella's wedding; the witch is pushed into a cauldron by Gretel and their scheming mother dies; and the wolf drowns when he tries to drink from the well. These punishments are always justified due to the terror the villains have caused the protagonist of the stories, and may be perceived as poetic justice suitable for the crimes of the individual villain. Cinderella's stepsisters are blinded, robbing them of the cause for their vanity; the witch is cooked in the stove she intended to cook Hansel and Gretel in, while their mother dies after having left her children in the woods; and the wolf falls into the well when the rocks in his stomach slide forward, punishing his own greed of eating the goat kids. These examples of poetic justice clearly punish the main crime of the villains, and are therefore seen as justifiable means of treating a character. However, it must be noted that the treatment of the villain does not necessarily mirror modern ideas of justice, but rather resembles a type of justice system found in fairy tales that does not acknowledge gray areas or basic human rights.

Poetic justice in the downfall of the villain is a trait that Dahl has fully embraced in his stories. In *Matilda*, Miss Trunchbull is intimidated and scared into leaving town after the murder of Miss Honey's father is exposed, robbing her of her confidence and superiority that has terrorized the community. She therefore flees town, and lives the rest of her life in exile. Matilda's parents are equally removed from the community as the father's fraud in his car-selling business is discovered, leading to the family fleeing to Spain. The punishment of these characters is therefore directly related to their own wrongdoings, and end in exile. Likewise, George's grandmother shrinks down to nothing after having been greedy and over-ambitious in growing, ultimately eliminating her from existence. Her own greed when it comes to growing is thus her downfall. Charlie's competition in becoming Mr. Wonka's heir are all subject to personal punishments concerning their main flaw, and they are both humiliated and discarded as potential heirs to Mr. Wonka's factory. Each of these characters embody a cardinal sin, which is exposed and punished accordingly, after which the Oompa-Loompas sing a song tailored to their specific character flaws. The poetic justice is therefore heavily underlined. Additionally, The Twits get "the dreaded shrinks" (Dahl, 2013, p. 75) after being treated by the monkeys and birds the same way the Twits treated the animals, and shrink to nothing. Their own horrific actions are therefore reversed, which is

especially noticeable when they stand on their heads in order to prevent “the shrinks” as it mirrors the monkey’s miserable lives as upside down circus animals. Furthermore, the witches in *The Witches* are all turned to mice themselves after having plotted to turn children into mice, and are then exterminated as vermin by the hotel staff. This being their own plan for the children of Britain, their own punishment becomes an elegant solution. We can see that the villains often get a taste of their own medicine, and that this poetic justice is entirely called for by fairy tale logic.

These incidents of poetic justice may be perceived as moralistic elements, and the readers are left with a sense of the saying “what goes around comes around”. This line of thought is also prominent in *Aesop’s Fables* as “The Wolf in Sheep’s Clothing” ends with the wolf being slaughtered by the hungry shepherd, and the final words sound: “The evil doer often comes to harm through his own deceit” (Aesop, n.d.). This is highly relevant to the poetic justice that is served the villains in both fairy tales and Dahl’s works, as their punishments often match their wrongdoings. Furthermore, the fable “The Fox and the Stork” condemns pranks by having the fox trying to eat from a tall jar after having served the stork soup in a shallow dish, ending on the words: “Do not play tricks on your neighbors unless you can stand the same treatment yourself” (Aesop, n.d.). This saying is also relevant for the poetic justice discussed, as many villains cannot stand a taste of their own medicine. For example, the Twits both play pranks on each other, but are horrified when the animals treat them as they have been treated. They are not happy when they are bombarded with glue, which they have used to catch birds for their Bird Pie, nor when they stand on their heads to prevent the shrinks which the monkeys have had to endure for days on end. Similarly, the witches do not enjoy being turned into mice after having concocted many horrific ways to kill children. Likewise, Miss Trunchbull is scared to the point of fainting after having tyrannically reigned the community through the use of fear. The poetic justice in Dahl’s endings therefore reflects traditions in both Aesop’s fables and the Grimms’ fairy tales, suggesting a connection in thematics.

3.1.1.3 Supernatural elements

A classic element in fairy tales is magic or the supernatural. Cinderella can get anything she asks for from the white bird sitting in the hazel tree planted on her mother’s grave, which has been watered by her own tears. This comes in handy when a ball lasting for three days is

announced, and Cinderella can get a new outfit every day. As a comparison, Hansel and Gretel come across a house made of candy, which would be impossible to clean and to keep free of rodents, ants, or other animals hungry for sweets. The house must therefore be magically protected by the witch living there, which is consistent with a witch being a female practitioner of magic. Even though the magical element is not explicitly stated in “Hansel and Gretel”, the presence of the witch and her clean house of sweets is clearly supernatural. The supernatural element is also evident in “The Wolf and the Seven Little Kids”, in which the wolf is cut open while he sleeps, and then sewed up again without being harmed or awakened. The kids who are swallowed whole being unharmed and able to jump out of the wolf’s stomach is also not a realistic event. This fairy tale is therefore not bound by the laws of our known universe, creating a sense of the supernatural. By this element of fantasy, the supernatural proves to have a significant prominence in fairy tales.

The supernatural is also evident in Dahl’s works, in one way or another. One of the more literal evidences of magic is the medicine that George makes for his grandmother, which has an especially supernatural effect when it is heated:

A rich blue smoke, the colour of peacocks, rose from the surface of the liquid, and a fiery fearsome smell filled the kitchen. [...] It was a brutal and bewitching smell, spicy and staggering, fierce and frenzied, full of wizardry and magic. [...] And suddenly, George found himself dancing around the steaming pot, chanting strange words that came into his head out of nowhere” (Dahl, 2016a, pp. 27-28).

There are obvious references to magic and witchcraft in this quotation. The alliteration in the description of the smoke’s smell further emphasizes how powerful the magic is. George’s state of trance, which makes him dance and chant unfamiliar words, resembles a ritual with spells that one would associate with witchcraft. The magic seemingly takes control of George’s actions, which underlines the supernatural overpowering capacity of this magic. The effect of the medicine is, of course, also entirely supernatural as it makes George’s grandmother both levitate and grow to the size of a house, amongst other things. The supernatural thereby has a strong presence in *George’s Marvellous Medicine*. In Dahl’s other works we see that Matilda can make objects levitate; the Twits get “the dreaded shrinks” and shrink down to nothing; Willy Wonka has a supernatural candyland with teleportation and gum that changes taste; and the witches are able to turn children into animals with their magic

potions. There is without a doubt elements of magic in Dahl's works, which is a continuation of the traditions of fairy tales.

3.1.1.4 Anthropomorphism

A common element in both fables and fairy tales is the presence of animals imbued with human traits. Fables often contain animals being able to communicate with each other, unrestricted by a difference of species. In "The Fox and the Stork", a rather human culture of having dinner from a container is presented as the stork serves fish from a tall jar and the fox serves soup - which he would have had to make - in a shallow dish (Aesop, n.d.). These are cases of human behavior, and are therefore examples anthropomorphism in Aesop's fables. One may observe the same in the Grimm brothers' fairy tales: Cinderella's stepsisters are both hindered in becoming the prince's wife as two doves in the hazel tree point out their bloody feet to the prince after the stepsisters have cut off portions of their feet to fit into the shoe (Grimm, 2017, pp. 144-145). Furthermore, the wolf in "The Wolf and the Seven Little Kids" is able to communicate with both the goat kids and the miller who makes his paw white (Grimm, 2017, pp. 36-37), suggesting communication unhindered by a difference of species. Talking and understanding are thereby representations of anthropomorphism in the Grimms' fairy tales.

Dahl uses anthropomorphism in *The Twits* in an original and humorous way. The monkeys from Africa are unable to warn the birds from sitting on the branches with sticky glue due to not knowing English, which is solved when the Roly-Poly Bird from Africa shows up on holiday as he believes it is "no good going to a country and not knowing the language" (Dahl, 2013, p. 43). The Roly-Poly Bird is able to translate the monkeys' warning to English, which prevents the Twits from having Bird Pie, and thus begins the couple's frustrations. In the same novel, the monkeys and birds collaborate in glueing the Twits' furniture to the ceiling, resembling the birds in "Cinderella" who help the protagonist pick lentils out of the ash in order for her to be allowed to attend the ball (Grimm, 2017, p. 140). The resemblance corroborates the theory of Dahl's stories honoring the traditions of fables and fairy tales. However, Dahl does not use anthropomorphism in all the novels examined in this paper. Neither *Matilda* nor *George's Marvellous Medicine* include animals imbued with human characteristics or traits. The lack of such a fantasy element is, however, made up for by

featuring the supernatural more prominently in these novels through George's potion and Matilda's powers of levitation. One may argue that the mice in *The Witches* are subject to anthropomorphism, but as they are victims of magic and retain all human qualities after having been turned into mice, one may address them as humans with a new corporeal form. It is thus not a typical situation from fables or fairy tales in which normal animals are in possession of human characteristics or abilities since these mice are not normal animals, but rather humans turned into animals who *keep* their characteristics and abilities. One may therefore argue that *The Witches* does not contain elements of anthropomorphism.

Another of Dahl's novels that one can discuss whether or not contains anthropomorphism is *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. The trained squirrels in the Nut Room check if walnuts have gone bad by knocking on the shell with their knuckles, and they are able to pin down Veruca Salt while one knocks on her head, checking if she is a bad nut (Dahl, 2005, pp. 110-112). Even though there is no description of a consciousness resembling that of a human in the squirrels, the words used to describe their actions are usually reserved to human actions: tapping shells with their *knuckles* and *pinning* down a girl. Even though the squirrels remain wild animals, they are imbued with human characteristics to some extent through their actions in addition to the fact that they are employed by Mr. Wonka. One might therefore argue that there are traces of anthropomorphism in *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* as well, creating a resemblance to fairy tales and fables in this adventurous novel.

3.1.2 Adaptations of fables and fairy tales?

Since there are many similarities between fables, fairy tales, and Dahl's children's novels, one may evaluate whether the latter may be considered modern adaptations of the traditional genres of the fable and fairy tale. An adaptation can have variations of characters, plot, narrative, context, medium etc. without being eliminated as an adaptation (Griggs, 2016, p. 4). As long as the main thematics - the essence - of the original work is present, the adaptation may alter every other aspect of the story while still being an adaptation of the source work.

A recurring theme in Dahl's novels is liberation of the protagonist, whether it is from poverty or an oppressive society. One may observe a similar thematic in fairy tales through liberation

from evil wolves, witches or stepmothers. This similarity alone is not enough to call Dahl's works adaptations of fairy tales, but when combined with an ending with reward or punishment for one's actions as well as elements such as the supernatural and anthropomorphism, the argument for Dahl's works being adaptations of fables and fairy tales grows in conviction. Even though the genre is adapted to children's novels, Dahl's works include themes of classic fairy tales through the struggle of liberation with just endings. However, in order to claim that Dahl's novels are adaptations of fairy tales, there should be connections between individual Dahl novels and specific fairy tales. For example, *The Twits* can be perceived as an adaptation of "Cinderella" due to anthropomorphism, animals teaming up, and liberation from oppression, but *The Twits* also includes elements that are not addressed in "Cinderella", such as pranks, solitude of the villain, and neglect of nature and hygiene. Thus, arguing that Dahl's works are adaptations of certain fairy tales may be a bit of a stretch. However, arguing that Dahl has adapted *elements* of the fairy tale is more sensible. One may therefore argue that Dahl's works honor the traditions of fairy tales to such an extent that his works include adapted elements of the stereotypical fairy tale.

Even though Dahl's works include adapted fairy tale elements, one must evaluate their intertextual relation to fables as well. The *essence* of the fable tends to be the moralistic function, which Aesop summarizes with one sentence at the end of each fable. As demonstrated later, Dahl's novels include moralistic elements. These are relatable to Aesop's fables that convey lessons such as "what goes around comes around". The endings in Dahl's novels portray this by rewarding good deeds and punishing the villain. However, it would be a leap to consider Dahl's works adaptations of Aesop's fables since the children's novels contain much more than a short fable is able to. There are many themes in Dahl's works that are not present in Aesop's fables due to the briefness and lack of complexity of the fable as a genre. One may instead see more similarities between Dahl and fairy tales, and between fairy tales and fables. Thematics found in fables are repeated and embellished in fairy tales. As mentioned, "The Wolf and the Seven Little Kids" contains a similar theme to "The Wolf in Sheep's Clothing" where the moral is "The evil doer often comes to harm through his own deceit". The wolf's greed turns out to be his own downfall in both stories. Furthermore, "Hansel and Gretel" resembles "The Fox and the Stork" in its moral "do not play tricks on your neighbors unless you can stand the same treatment yourself". The witch is fully

prepared to eat both Hansel and Gretel, and is about to trick Gretel into the stove when Gretel sees through her scheme. The girl makes the witch show her how to get into the stove, and kills the witch in the same way that was intended for herself. The essence of the stories are thus fairly similar. Even though one might not argue that Dahl has adapted elements from fables, one might claim that fairy tales include elements of the fable, which later have been adapted by Dahl in his novels. The fable as a source text for Dahl's works may be distant inspiration, and the traditions of fables are brought to Dahl's children's novels through the fairy tale as a middle man.

3.2 Didactic techniques in Dahl

As stated earlier, children's novels tend to instill appropriate values and behavior for the time of their production (Susina, 2004, p. 178), which is probably caused by the genre being heavily moralizing and didactic in its origin. Due to Dahl's works being children's novels, one may expect to find evidence of attempts to encourage certain types of behavior or values. Evidence of moralistic inclinations in his novels may provide valuable insight to studies of change in "appropriate" values over time, the didactics involved in teaching morals, and which children's novels are considered to encompass the morals and methods appropriate for one's time. This thesis first evaluates the didactic techniques used in Dahl's works before exploring which values and behaviors are being promoted in his novels.

3.2.1 *Techniques*

The way something is expressed significantly affects how it is received. The didactic techniques used in Dahl's novels are communicated through the text, and are crucial as to the impression the reader is left with; how different values and behaviors are encouraged and discouraged.

3.2.1.1 Horror

One of the more characteristic traits evident in Dahl's works is the presence of horror in both the text and illustrations. The graphic illustrations of The Grand High Witch without her mask, as well as the following revelation of the witches' natural looks at the Annual Meeting as they remove their gloves, shoes, and wigs, are terrifying and grotesque. The decayed face

of *The Grand High Witch* (see Image 2), and the attributes of witches that seem like normal women, strike a chord with a child's fear of monsters and strangers. There is no question as to whether a child faces great horror, and possibly one's own fears, when reading this section of Dahl's *The Witches*. Such an emotion is sure to have an impact on the child reader, which indicates that the reader is likely to remember this incident. This is consequent to the traditions of fairy tales, such as "Hansel and Gretel" where the witch is described to have red eyes and the scent of a beast as she lays in wait for children she can eat (Grimm, 2017, p. 100). Horror is therefore a trait also found in fairy tales, which Dahl's works tend to honor. The scary physical attributes of such villains resonate with the cruelty associated with these villains, explained in *The Twits*: "If a person has ugly thoughts, it begins to show on the face" (Dahl, 2013, p. 9). The villains in Dahl's works are seldom beautiful, which is consistent with the moralizing sentence in *The Twits* concerning the correlation between thoughts and physiognomy. The horrific illustrations in *The Witches* underline this to a great extent, scaring the reader in the process.

Such strong impressions are not only found in the illustrations. David Rees criticizes Dahl for including "gratuitous violence" in his children's novels, and claims that Dahl "enjoys writing about violence, while at the same time condemning it" (Rees, 1988, p. 144). The presence of violence is easily spotted in *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* through the constant elimination of the children competing for Mr. Wonka's heritage, for instance in the case of Violet Beauregarde who turns blue and swells up to resemble a large blueberry. After the swelling stops, Mr. Wonka wants to remedy the situation by taking Violet to the Juicing Room where the Oompa-Loompas are to "roll her into the de-juicing machine, and she'll come out just as thin as a whistle" (Dahl, 2005, p. 102) even though she will keep the discoloration. The violence that lies in this horrific treatment of children can be perceived as shocking. This absurd and violent scene is moralistic since Mr. Wonka directly afterwards explicitly states: "[t]hat's what comes from chewing disgusting gum all day long!" (Dahl, 2005, p. 103). By punishing Violet for the - apparently terrible - habit of chewing gum, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* instills a desired type of behavior in the reader. The reader is urged not to chew gum through the use of horrific consequences in Dahl's novel, which creates a strong impression on the reader. Whether Dahl enjoys writing about violence

is up for discussion, but the constant presence of horror is still a technique used regularly in his novels, with the occasional moralistic inclination.

3.2.1.2 Humor

Another technique that has a constant presence in Dahl's children's novels is the use of humor. His novels are written in a humoristic and light manner that make them easy and enjoyable to read for a child. This is also a tradition from fables and fairy tales that is continued in Dahl's novels, as "The Fox and the Stork" includes pranks and "Cinderella" escapes the prince on the second night in the absurd way of just climbing down on the other side of the tree that the prince is observing (Grimm, 2017, p. 143). When studying what motivates children to read, one finds that children respond to the humor of texts (O'Sullivan & McGonigle, 2010, p. 56). Children's enjoyment of books is found to increase the motivation for reading for pleasure, and humor is a helpful tool in achieving that goal, making it a didactic tool. Dahl's usage of humor in close dialogue with horror has the interesting result of taking the edge off fears and wishful fantasies, exemplified by the use of preposterous exaggerations (Petzold, 1992, p. 191). The ludicrous exaggerations found in the examples above concerning the witches' looks and Violet's fate takes the edge off the possible gravity in such scenes, and reassures the child reader of the lack of such incidents in real life.

In Dahl's novels, horrific scenes are often closely followed by humor to defuse the situation. Humor serves as a "distancing device" (Petzold, 1992, p. 192), and reminds the reader of the fantasy universe these incidents are taking place in. By distancing the situation through humor, especially through nonsensical exaggerations, there is no question as to whether the situation is realistic. This lack of realism defuses solemn situations described in the novels. In the examples provided above, humor is used shortly after the horrifying moments. The Annual Meeting in *The Witches* soon evolves into a series of complaints about children, especially their smell: "'Children are smelling of *dogs' drrroppings!*' screeched The Grand High Witch. 'Pooooooo!' cried the audience. 'Pooooooo! Pooooooo! Pooooooo!'" (Dahl, 2016c, p. 71). Children are fascinated by taboo topics, especially that which is associated with toilet training (West, 1990, p. 115). Consequently, the thought of a whole room full of respectable women shouting "Pooooooo!" repeatedly quickly defuses the tension created by

the protagonist being locked in a room with all the witches in Great Britain. The novel thus refrains from becoming too scary for children to keep on reading; a fine line that Dahl frequently finds himself on both sides of in several of his novels.

The other example mentioned earlier also introduces humor shortly after Violet Beauregarde's grim fate. The tour of the factory continues, and they soon pass the room making Fizzy Lifting Drinks, in which CO²-bubbles work as helium and lift the person off the ground until reaching the ceiling. Upon encountering this room, Charlie asks Mr. Wonka how one comes down again, upon which the latter answers: "You do a burp, of course [...] You do a great big long rude burp, and *up* comes the gas and *down* comes you!" (Dahl, 2005, pp. 105-106). Mr. Wonka further warns them about drinking this outdoors since nothing is to stop you from disappearing into the great sky, which one of his Oompa-Loompas did as he didn't burp: "[H]e didn't or couldn't or wouldn't, I don't know which. Maybe he was too polite. He must be on the moon by now" (Dahl, 2005, p. 106). As children often laugh at what adults find revolting (West, 1990, p. 115), the idea of something as socially unacceptable as a burp being the solution to the levitating problem becomes hilarious to children. By using humorous elements, the text distracts the child reader from Violet's recent fate, affirms social norms of not burping in polite company, and completely ignores the fact that a person would die from exiting the stratosphere without protective equipment by insinuating that the Oompa-Loompa probably is in perfectly good health on the moon. West argues that Dahl uses humor and fantasy to "mitigate the aggressive elements of the story", which supposedly is "the same technique that children learn to use when expressing feelings of hostility" (West, 1990, p. 116). Children using humor as a way of processing complex emotions that they do not necessarily have a healthy outlet for, is consistent with Freud's release theory and the popular use of humor in children's literature.

By balancing horror and humor, Dahl's works encourage children to deal with a wide range of problems, some of which may resonate with their own personal fears and issues, in a relatively healthy manner by promoting laughter. This didactic technique is thus both a contrast to and a close companion of the other technique Dahl uses regularly: horror. Their intertwined usage enables exploration of a wide range of difficult themes, while guiding the child reader through it with ease.

Anne Merrick critiques Dahl's sense of humor by claiming that it "is fairly crude" (Culley, 1991, p. 67). The examples above deal with scatological humor, which Long and Graesser place at the bottom of their taxonomy of jokes (see Image 1), which would indicate that Merrick's criticism holds value. However, the humor found in Dahl's novels also includes more refined examples, such as nonsense in Dahl's made-up words - placed at the top of the taxonomy of jokes - as well as overstatements and understatement, which are placed high on the taxonomy of wit. Even though there are incidents of what may be considered "crude humor", the humor in Dahl's novels cannot simply be classified as such due to the presence of advanced humor. One may also argue that the carnivalesque humor is philosophical (classified third in the taxonomy of jokes), which lifts the Medieval way of dealing with difficult subjects to a higher level than Merrick bestows Dahl.

3.2.2 *Moralistic elements*

The techniques used in Dahl's works are especially interesting when assessing which particular moral ideas are promoted in these novels. In accordance with traditions of fables and fairy tales, a clear moralistic aspect is included, which is the essence of each fable and is exemplified in fairy tales, e.g. by Cinderella's mother's last instructions of being good and kind. Through the use of the techniques mentioned, the reader is encouraged to absorb values and behavior. Petzold claims that critics of Dahl's works often fear that his novels put "wrong ideas into children's heads" (1992, p. 185). One must naturally explore *which* values and behaviors are encouraged in Dahl's novels in order to get an extensive comprehension of the moralistic aspect of Dahl's novels, before the discussion of wrong or right morals can take place.

3.2.2.1 Integrity of the protagonist

Dahl's works are fairly consistent when it comes to promoting integrity as a key value. This is a characteristic often used to create sympathetic characters. By having protagonists that are honest and have a proper moral compass, as well as juxtaposing these values with their opposites in antagonists, the reader's attention is drawn to what differs between these characters, and what makes one a good person and the other a bad person. Culley argues that by "'purifying' the characters into archetypes, Dahl enables the child to focus more clearly on

the dilemmas involved”, including the “delicate moral implications” (Culley, 1991, p. 63).

This is in line with Rees’ critique of Dahl (1988, p. 144) that his characters are black and white archetypes with little or no depth. Culley’s explanation is a useful point when assessing the moralistic features of Dahl’s works, as it claims that children can follow complex moral issues with greater ease if characters are fairly simplistic. It thus makes perfect sense that positive morals are stressed in Dahl’s protagonists, as their integrity creates sympathy.

One way the importance of integrity is stressed in Dahl’s novels is through discouragement of lying. Honesty is portrayed as one of the more positive features in a person. There are several instances in Dahl’s works where the protagonist is falsely accused of lying, where the novel explores the injustice the protagonist feels in such a situation. For instance, when George admits to his Grandma that she did not grow on her own account, but because of his homemade potion, she answers: ““You’re lying as usual! [...] You’re always lying!”” (Dahl, 2016a, p. 43). These false accusations make George frustrated as he contemplates the injustice of not being believed when telling the truth, which many a child reader may be familiar with. Matilda experiences the same when Miss Trunchbull falsely accuses her of putting a newt in the mistress’ drinking water, and the feeling of injustice is elaborated upon:

Matilda was also beginning to see red. She didn’t in the least mind being accused of having done something she had actually done. She could see the justice of that. It was, however, a totally new experience for her to be accused of a crime that she definitely had not committed (Dahl, 2016b, p. 156).

This incident is what triggers Matilda’s telekinetic powers, as her rage becomes so powerful due to the abhorrent injustice. By basing the rest of the novel’s plot on this moment of injustice, the significance of having and maintaining one’s integrity is heavily underlined. Matilda’s father has also accused her of being a “cheat and a liar” (Dahl, 2016b, p. 49) earlier in the story, when dismissing her mathematical capacity. By juxtaposing Matilda with her infallible integrity to both Miss Trunchbull and Mr. Wormwood, who have cheated others, a very clear moral is foregrounded.

The reader is confronted with Mr. Wormwood’s cheating habits and the morality involved after he tells his family of how he reduces the mileage of the cars he sells:

‘But Daddy, that’s even more dishonest than the sawdust. It’s disgusting. You’re cheating people who trust you.’

‘If you don’t like it then don’t eat the food in this house,’ the father said. ‘It’s bought with the profits.’

'It's dirty money,' Matilda said. 'I hate it.' (Dahl, 2016b, p. 19).

Matilda's open disgust when it comes to dishonesty is expressly stated, and once more the contrast between Matilda and Mr. Wormwood is evident. This heavily moralistic scene promotes honesty as a key value, and is highly relevant for the plotline when Matilda's own integrity is questioned. The examples presented demonstrate the obvious moralization in Dahl's works when it comes to instilling the value of integrity.

3.2.2.2 The "happy ending"

One of the ways Dahl honors the traditions of fairy tales and fables is through the happy ending. The moralistic aspect of the happy ending is the fact that the ending is only happy for "good" persons. Since Dahl has a tendency to write his protagonists as honest people with good intentions, the happy ending is often given his protagonists. This is in line with traditions of the fable as the Sun, not the North Wind, wins their bet due to the Sun's good and kind actions. One of the more prominent examples of different endings for the "good" and the "bad" in Dahl's novels is the ending of *Matilda*. Due to her father's illegal business, the family must flee from local authorities to Spain, and Matilda asks to live with Miss Honey instead, which all adults give their consent to:

Matilda leapt into Miss Honey's arms and hugged her; and Miss Honey hugged her back, and then the mother and father and brother were inside the car and the car was pulling away with the tyres screaming. The brother gave a wave through the rear window, but the other two didn't even look back (Dahl, 2016b, p. 232).

Matilda being adopted by a woman who has been the victim of Miss Trunchbull's scheme, leaves both of them to have a happy ending after years of suffering. The contrasting ending of the Wormwoods, as well as Miss Trunchbull's prompt disappearance from their lives, serves as a moralistic encouragement demonstrated by which types of persons get happy endings and which do not. The values embodied in Matilda and Miss Honey are complete opposites to those of both the Wormwoods and Miss Trunchbull, leaving the reader with the following message: you are rewarded if you are a good person, and you are punished if you are a bad person. The happy ending thus serves as a "carrot" of sorts for being moral persons of integrity, providing the reader with extrinsic motivation for behaving morally. A child reader will, consciously or subconsciously, pick up these differences in character traits, and is taught a lesson involving being rewarded or punished for one's actions and persona. Due to the

tendency of character archetypes with rather simplistic good or evil alignment, the differences in character traits and the fates that await them are easily identifiable by a child reader.

3.2.2.3 Punishing the villain

Even though the happy ending is more noticeable when contrasted to the unhappy ending, one cannot explore the ending of the villains in its entirety without examining it on its own. This thesis has already pointed out the intertextual relationship between the ending in Dahl's works and in fables and fairy tales. Dahl follows the tradition of poetic justice, in which one's wrongdoings tend to match the punishment. As this resembles other moralistic genres, such as the fable and fairy tale, one may conclude that the poetic downfall of the antagonist is a moralistic tool to emphasize that each person digs their own grave, as stressed in the fable "The Wolf in Sheep's Clothing" when the evil doer succumbs to his own deceit. This idea instills values of being good, kind, and honest since the alternative seems to involve some sort of punishment. As a contrast to the happy ending being a "carrot", the unhappy ending could be perceived as a "whip". The reader becomes motivated to be a good person, not with the hope of reward, but due to a desire of escaping punishment. The idea of reward or punishment as a result of one's own actions relates to didactic theory of extrinsic motivation. Such trends are consequent with the moralistic literature that was popular for children during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries when children were "advised to read the Bible and books promoting the Puritan ethos" (Angelidou, 2013, p. 15). Punishing the villain follows the historic trend in moralistic works that urges children to behave morally by promoting extrinsic motivation, which fables and fairy tales are prime examples of. Dahl's tendency to picture both reward and punishment as a result of one's actions could be a continuation of moralistic literature throughout history.

An interesting critique of Dahl's punishment of his villains is Charles Sarland's claim that the ridicule and annihilation of the villain hold an underlying fascist message that children unconsciously will pick up on (Culley, 1991, p. 60). The totalitarianism in removing or punishing the characters who deviate from the acceptable norms of behavior is an interesting observation that ties together with the emphasis on tangible negative consequences for one's actions: extrinsic motivation for behaving morally. However, to go as far as to call it fascism is, in my opinion, an admission of failure due to the unnecessary harsh vocabulary and its

associations. Calling underlying messages in Dahl's novels "fascist" is a step too far since that word holds many connotations that are not applicable to his novels. An example that could have supported Sarland's claim of underlying fascism is the ridicule and punishments of the four other children in *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, which are prime examples of punishing and ridiculing characters who show major flaws. However, the consistent elimination of children is always broken up by the Oompa-Loompas singing a tailored song about the character and their flaws. This pause in the narrative resembles Bertolt Brecht's distancing effect, which is a technique that hinders the audience to be too invested in a play by using pauses that enable the audience to think critically about the play. After the gluttonous Augustus Gloop is sucked into a pipe, the Oompa-Loompa song ends with the following words:

*We boil him for a minute more
Until we're absolutely sure
That all the greed and all the gall
Is boiled away for once and all.
Then out he comes! And now! By grace!
A miracle has taken place! [...]
This greedy brute, this louse's ear,
Is loved by people everywhere!* (Dahl, 2005, p. 80).

The song assists the child reader in critically thinking about Augustus' flaws, and what must be changed in him in order to make him likeable. The song thereby assures the reader that such a change for the better will take place, which contradicts Rees' critique of how Dahl's novels are built up: "[E]vil is evil and good is good, and evil is not to be tamed - it is to be punished or destroyed" (Rees, 1988, p. 152). The four children's punishments are moralistic elements that show the child reader that improvement is possible. Sarland's fascist-argument becomes too harsh in its critique of ridiculing and eliminating unlikable characters, since the Oompa-Loompa song explains the character's faults and promotes improvement. Rees' critique of static characters, as well as Sarland's comment about fascism, are therefore not nuanced enough to appreciate the morality in Dahl's novels or the value of Brecht's distancing effect that enables critical thinking.

3.2.3 *Non-moralistic elements in Dahl*

After having looked at moralistic features in Dahl's children's novels, one must also assess whether there are incidents that may be perceived as the complete opposite. In order to determine whether Dahl's works can be understood as moralistic, it is important to evaluate if there is an encouragement of unwanted behavior or values in his works, which would render his works non-moralistic.

3.2.3.1 Violence

It was mentioned earlier that Rees believed there to be "gratuitous violence" in Dahl's novels - in other words, violence for the sake of violence, and therefore without any didactic or moralistic function. One of the more prominent incidents portraying extreme violence without an obvious moralistic inclination is Miss Trunchbull's treatment of little Amanda because she wears pigtails to school:

[S]he 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 went sailing like a rocket right over the wire fence of the playground and high up into the sky (Dahl, 2016b, pp. 108-109).

The detailed description of this incident creates vivid images, further fuelled by the graphic illustrations (see Image 3). The absurdity of such a violent reaction to a mundane incident is upsetting and terrifying, creating a fearsome reputation for Miss Trunchbull, as well as a strong impression on the reader. One must consider why this scene is included in a children's book if one is to argue that the novel is moralistic, or maybe Rees is correct in his statement that Dahl simply enjoys writing about violence. Before assessing the effects of this violence, it must be mentioned that Amanda is considered unharmed directly afterwards:

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, 2016b, p. 110).

The words used to describe Amanda after being handled by Miss Trunchbull mitigates the damage that would have taken place in a realistic universe, and the child is seen to be unharmed both physically and mentally due to her untroubled nature in the aftermath of the incident. The humorous description of her bouncing and her perplexedness defuses the situation, which might be vital after the graphic description of Miss Trunchbull's horrific act.

Even though Amanda is unharmed, this is a violent scene that may seem far more extreme than necessary. How can such violence be justified in a children's novel? The answer could be that this incident is not an encouragement of immoral behavior, but rather a demonstration of unwanted behavior. The "gratuitous violence" is precisely what is criticized when this extreme event takes place because of something as mundane as pigtails at school. Due to it being the antagonist exercising the violence, and the fact that she is punished for her actions at the end of the novel, this scene becomes moralistic as it depicts unwanted behavior. The extreme horror present in this incident discourages the child reader from understanding it as a portrayal of desired behavior, as most children will become wide eyed at the thought of a teacher treating children that way. Even though some may argue that the violence depicted is non-moralistic, this thesis argues that it *is* moralistic due to the exaggeration in the display of unwanted behavior.

3.2.3.2 Pranks

Another aspect to consider when assessing potential non-moralistic aspects of Dahl's novels, is the constant reference to pranks of various kinds. For starters, Puffin Books includes a separate page for the owner to write one's name in the book, encouraged by the words "Quick! Mischief makers, sign here so everyone knows this book belongs to you" (Dahl, 2013; Dahl, 2016b; Dahl, 2016c). This may be understood as a call to mischief, and may result in an inclination towards pranks. Parents may not be especially happy with this since this encourages potential unwanted behavior. There are many examples that may indicate an encouragement of pranks as valued behavior. For instance, the entire first half of *The Twits* consists only of pranks that the Twits perform on each other, while only the second half includes any plot development. The fact that such a significant part of the novel is dedicated to describing different pranks, might provoke adults who do not want to encourage this type of behavior: "There must be quite a number of us - teachers, librarians, parents, critics - who wish that some of the books had never been written" (Rees, 1988, p. 154). This attitude is surely intensified when Matilda pranks her parents as punishment for the way they behave, which may be understood as encouraging children to prank their own parents.

Eleanor Cameron accuses Dahl's novels of "fostering sadism in children" (Culley, 1991, p. 59), which such pranks might be an indicator of. However, these examples of criticism are not necessarily sufficient descriptions of the morals implied in the many pranks that take place in Dahl's stories. One may observe that Dahl's works suggest that there is a fine line between harmful and harmless pranks. A good example of this is found in *George's Marvellous Medicine* when George concocts the medicine he believes will cure his Grandma of her cruelty. When he searches the house for ingredients, there are certain things he will not put into his magic medicine due to the harm they may cause:

In the bathroom, he gazed longingly at the famous and dreaded medicine cupboard. But he didn't go near it. It was the only thing in the entire house he was forbidden to touch. He had made solemn promises to his parents about this and he wasn't going to break them. There were things in there, they had told him, that could actually kill a person, and although he was out to give Grandma a pretty fiery mouthful, he didn't really want a dead body on his hands (Dahl, 2016a, p. 15).

This is a prime example of what distinguishes a prank from something that may cause serious harm: no harmful intent, obedience with regard to promises, and common sense when it comes to avoiding serious harm. Not only is George's integrity intact as he keeps his promise of not touching the medicine cupboard, but the novel also expressly states that George takes care not to harm the intended victim of his prank. The moral could be understood as to not *intentionally* harm someone, but that it is okay to have a little fun with minor frights. In other words, there is a clear distinction between actions that may have dangerous results and actions that merely will frighten the intended victim or make them jump. Rees argues that Dahl's moral universe "seems confused and full of contradictions" (1988, p. 143), which he exemplifies with George's decision of staying out of the medicine cabinet, but throws in all sorts of other "household poisons" (1988, p. 148). This, however, underestimates a child's judgement and common sense as they learn early on not to eat shampoo or house paint. The humor of overstatement is present when George includes ingredients like flea powder and hair remover, which Rees seems unable to appreciate. Even though some adults do not take well to pranks, the example presented above is careful to still be moralizing through encouraging integrity and refraining from harmful intent. The aspect of pranks as a non-moralizing element in Dahl's novels does therefore have its limits as there are obvious references to instilling good values in a child reader while promoting harmless pranks. Thus, Dahl's novels should not be blatantly categorized as non-moralistic or as a source of

promoting inappropriate values, like Rees argues, due to the finesse that lies in distinguishing pranks from what can be considered unwanted.

3.2.4 Suitability for the child reader

One key aspect to discuss when evaluating the didactics in Dahl's works is the suitability of his novels for the child reader. One must assess what the child reader is left with after having read Dahl's works, and whether these novels are to be considered appropriate for the intended age group. This includes addressing both the values and behaviors that are encouraged in the novels as well as the didactic techniques used in order to encourage these morals.

A child reader is encouraged to maintain their integrity after having read Dahl's novels. The promotion of honesty, kindness and an investment in a just society is not something one would deem inappropriate or negative in any way. The values may thus be considered suitable to include in a children's novel since these morals are considered positive by society's norms. If one was to consider the suitability of Dahl's works purely on the encouragement of integrity, there would be no problem deeming their moralizing message appropriate. However, there are several other moralistic elements included in his novels.

Due to contrasting treatment of protagonists and villains in Dahl's novels, the child reader perceives that one's behavior has consequences in the form of either reward or punishment. This results in extrinsic motivation for behaving morally correct, which is less fulfilling than intrinsic behavior. However, it might be easier for a young child to deem extrinsic rewards valuable than it would be to enjoy a sense of fulfillment or self-determination. Due to intrinsic motivation being an abstract concept, it may be easier for a child to be extrinsically motivated as the rewards are empirically perceivable. Even though the field of didactics may favor intrinsic motivation, one may consider extrinsic motivation appropriate due to the age group in question. However, this might not be the case when it comes to negative consequences for one's actions. Extrinsic motivation that originates from fear of being punished results in anxiety, low self-esteem, and pressure. These are not favorable effects of a didactic technique. Even though fear may be useful when discouraging certain types of behavior, the negative consequences can be considered to outweigh the effectiveness. One may therefore condemn the suitability of extrinsic motivation when it comes to punishments,

and support it when dealing with rewards. Since Dahl's works deal with both reward and punishment, one may be ambivalent when assessing whether these works are suitable for children.

Another issue the child reader is exposed to when reading Dahl's works is violence. There are many incidents of violence in Dahl's children's novels, which have led to heavy critique concerning the suitability of these works, for example by Rees, Sarland, and Cameron. As discussed earlier, the violent incidents present in the novels may be considered moralistic if one perceives them as demonstrations of unwanted behavior rather than an encouragement of such behavior. Still, there is a question as to whether it is appropriate to expose children for violence, even if it is done to condemn types of behavior. Violence is often the reason for age restrictions to movies as one would not display horrifying scenes before children, regardless of whether the characters performing violent acts are punished for them later on. The level of seriousness in the display of violence becomes important in this discussion, as one would consider a child watching a fist fight less serious than a child watching a massacre. As mentioned earlier, Dahl tends to defuse violent incidents in his novels with humor shortly after. Even though the example of Miss Trunchbull throwing Amanda across the playground as the little girl screams "blue murder" is terrifying, the cartoonesque indestructibility of Amanda downplays the seriousness of the event. Likewise, cartoon violence such as what is found in "Tom and Jerry" always seems less serious due to the lack of lasting consequences of violence in these fantasy universes, which contrasts the real world. Even though there are copious amounts of violence in such types of entertainment, they are considered child friendly due to the lack of permanent or serious harm found in these worlds, which is applicable to Dahl's own universes. One can still claim that violence fosters violence in humans, which often is used as an argument against computer or console games that feature shooting. The issue of violence is therefore complex when deeming the suitability of works intended for children.

In addition to the controversial use of violence in Dahl's novels, there is frequent encouragement and idolization of pranks in his works. As mentioned, the novels walk a fine line between promoting dangerous behavior and minor scares, and thus refrain from inciting harmful behavior. However, the issue of pranking lies in its disregard for authoritative figures

such as parents or teachers. One may argue that Dahl's novels encourage a lack of respect for authority, which may not be considered as appropriate behavior. Dahl's works may thus be deemed unsuitable for children since they do not reflect desired values in society. Petzold touches upon this as he indicates that Dahl seems to "undermine authority and to pander to the children's natural rebelliousness" (1992, p. 191). Nevertheless, one may argue that challenging authority promotes independent thinking, and creates reflected and individualistic children that are capable of source criticism since they do not automatically accept everything that comes from authoritative figures. Such traits are desirable in society as people are encouraged to think for themselves. Even though promoting pranks may have some disadvantages in regards to respect for authority, it also assists in creating independent thinking and reflected individuals. There are therefore both positive and negative consequences in the encouragement of pranks found in Dahl's works, which makes it difficult to conclude one answer in regards to the question of suitability.

Furthermore, one should consider whether these works may be considered appropriate today, as opposed to when they were written. Are the morals promoted in Dahl's works still desired in 2020? Dahl's works have been criticized for "vulgarity, fascism, violence, sexism, racism, occult overtones, and promotion of criminal behavior" (Culley, 1991, p. 59), of which fascism, violence, and promotion of undesired behavior are addressed in this thesis. Due to desired values and morals changing over time, Dahl's works may no longer be representative for appropriate behavior or values, if they have ever been considered so. For instance is fear as extrinsic motivation frowned upon nowadays in didacticism, as opposed to how it has been throughout history. The violence and portrayal of negative consequences for one's actions that are found in Dahl's novels may therefore be considered less in tune with the times in 2020 than several decades ago. As argued earlier, violence is a continued tradition from fables and fairy tales as a didactic tool, as exemplified by the wolf in "The Wolf in Sheep's Clothing" who is slaughtered, Cinderella's stepsisters losing their eyes at Cinderella's wedding, the wolf's death in "The Wolf and the Seven Little Kids" which is celebrated by the goats, and the witch's demise in "Hansel and Gretel". Violence has been included in the endings of children's literature for ages, though often as punishment for the villain's crimes. The use of violence in Dahl's novels may therefore be considered a tradition of fables and fairy tales, which might render his novels outdated since violent endings may not be as

acceptable today. Rees criticizes Dahl by saying the author reminds him “of writers in earlier centuries [...] who had no qualms about frightening children into being good” (1988, p. 149). There is openly disregard for horror as a didactic tool in Rees’ critique, which corroborates the argument of Dahl following the traditions of fables and fairy tales even though this feature may be considered outdated. Nonetheless, the use of humor in Dahl’s novels is a didactic tool that is more favored in teaching now, which makes Dahl’s works more in line with modern teachings in regards to humor. Furthermore, source criticism and independent thinking has become more necessary with the development of the Internet, and influences from a globalized world easier find their way to an easily influenced child. This means that even though disregard for authority still has its disadvantages, as Petzold argues, the resulting independence is highly important today. One may argue that authority was more regarded in Dahl’s lifetime, for example by looking at the portrayal of caning or other punishments in school that are found in his novels. The tolerance for blind acceptance of authority has gone down during the last decades since people are encouraged to think for themselves and be critical of all sources of information. This thesis therefore considers Dahl’s novels to be more in tune with modern times than with the contemporary values of the period when he wrote his works when it comes to challenging authority.

4.0 Conclusion

Having evaluated Dahl’s works as upholding traditions of fables and fairy tales, and as moralistic works, several issues come to light. By focusing solely on the text, several connections have been identified between Dahl’s works and the Grimms’ fairy tales, of which many have roots in Aesop’s fables. The protagonist is often promoted as kind and honest, thus creating a sympathetic character in the face of adversity. The protagonist is usually liberated from oppression after having faced some sort of evil. The ending is often found to be a classic “happy ending” where good people are rewarded while the villain faces punishment, introducing a sense of poetic justice where one’s undoing has been of one’s own making. Furthermore, the supernatural has a significant place in these fantasy universes, distancing the fictitious world from reality. Magic is evident in both fairy tales and Dahl’s works, and is often central to the development or conclusion of the story. Another similarity between the selected stories is the element of anthropomorphism. Human characteristics

imbued in animals are present in fables, fairy tales, and Dahl's works, and therefore furthers the notion of an intertextual connection between these works. Having explored the similarities between the selected works, one might conclude that Dahl's works include adapted elements of fairy tales, and that fairy tales have adapted elements of the fable. The similar thematics are developed and expanded in each new stage, leading to the moral in a short fable to mirror the lesson of a more extensive piece of work such as Dahl's children's novels.

Given the traditional history of fables and fairy tales being moralizing stories, one must assess whether Dahl's novels also may be considered to be moralistic, as well as evaluating the didactic techniques used. Dahl's works tend to use humor and horror as main techniques in order to encourage desired values and behavior. Even though Merrick claims Dahl's use of humor is crude, Long & Graesser's taxonomies of jokes and wit also indicate a presence of advanced humor in Dahl's novels. The techniques of humor and horror are applied to recurring moralistic elements, such as the integrity of the protagonist, the happy ending, and punishing the villain. The reader is exposed to a notion of extrinsic motivation when an external reward or punishment is presented as the result of one's actions, which Sarland claims fosters fascism. One might argue that the constant presence of violence and pranks in Dahl's works may be considered non-moralistic, as Cameron and Rees both argue, which would separate Dahl's novels from Aesop's and the Grimms' moralistic works. However, the violence found in Dahl's works may be perceived as a demonstration of unwanted behavior since the characters who execute violent acts are usually punished later. Furthermore, the seemingly non-moralistic aspect of the encouragement of pranks is never an endorsement of harmful behavior. Pranks are distinguished from unwanted behavior since one's intent is never more than giving someone a fright, which excludes harmful intent as part of pranks. Rees' accusations of Dahl's moral universe being confusing thus falls flat. Given these arguments for and against Dahl's works as moralistic works, one might ask whether these novels can be considered appropriate for the intended age group. Due to the use of the more tangible concept of extrinsic motivation rather than intrinsic motivation, the cartoonish characteristics of the violence portrayed, and the encouragement of independent thinking, Dahl's novels may be considered suitable for children in its didactic values and techniques, despite Petzold's arguments against inspiring rebelliousness in children.

These explorations challenge existing critique of Dahl's works, such as Rees, Sarland, Cameron, Merrick, and Petzold. The findings also suggest a connection between Dahl's novels and earlier moralistic works that have been thought suitable for children throughout history. In this discussion of suitability of similar children's literature, one might consider assessing different versions of fairy tales as an interesting subject for further studies as censored versions might be perceived as a representation of what was considered suitable for children at the time of production.

5.0 Relevance for Teaching

This thesis has been especially interesting to work on due to its relevance for me as a future teacher. The study concerns children's literature that most Norwegian pupils have encountered during their childhood. Even though the difficulty level of the literature might be considered lower than what is expected at middle school or high school, there are many ways in which one might use this study in the classroom.

The thesis performs an analysis of Dahl's children's novels with reference to fables and fairy tales, which provides an insight in recurring themes of children's literature. Such studies may be directly used in the classroom as exercises in comparative analysis, which might be more comprehensive for the pupils when dealing with elementary literature that they most likely already know. By supplying the pupils with familiar and/or rather unchallenging literature, their analytic skills can be the main focus in such tasks.

One of the more interesting points of the thesis for me as a future teacher is the issue of didactic techniques used in children's literature. By having assessed the consequences of different techniques, I am more aware of the outcome when deciding on literature as well as considering techniques used by me as a teacher. The discussion of the suitability of known children's literature has made me reevaluate how appropriate classic literature often used in the classroom really is. As I have addressed how a work's suitability may change over time, it has raised my awareness concerning the importance of regularly evaluating the appropriateness of works I will use in the classroom. One may, of course, use works that no longer may be considered appropriate as a study of how morals and values change over time in upper grades. However, this discussion might be too advanced in lower grades, and one might instead refrain from choosing literature that no longer reflects modern values.

In conclusion, by combining literary analysis with didactic theory, this thesis is highly relevant for the teaching programme, and has provided me with valuable insights for the future.

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Images

Image 1

Taxonomies of jokes and wit presented by Long and Graesser (2009, p. 39).

TABLE 1

A Taxonomy of Jokes
1. Nonsense
2. Social satire
3. Philosophical
4. Sexual
5. Hostile
6. Demeaning to men
7. Demeaning to women
8. Ethnic
9. Sick
10. Scatological

A Taxonomy of Wit
1. Irony
2. Satire
3. Sarcasm and hostility
4. Overstatement and understatement
5. Self-deprecation
6. Teasing
7. Replies to rhetorical questions
8. Clever replies to serious statements
9. Double entendres
10. Transformations of frozen expressions
11. Puns

Image 2

The Grand High Witch removes her mask, and reveals her true face (Dahl, 2016c, p. 61).

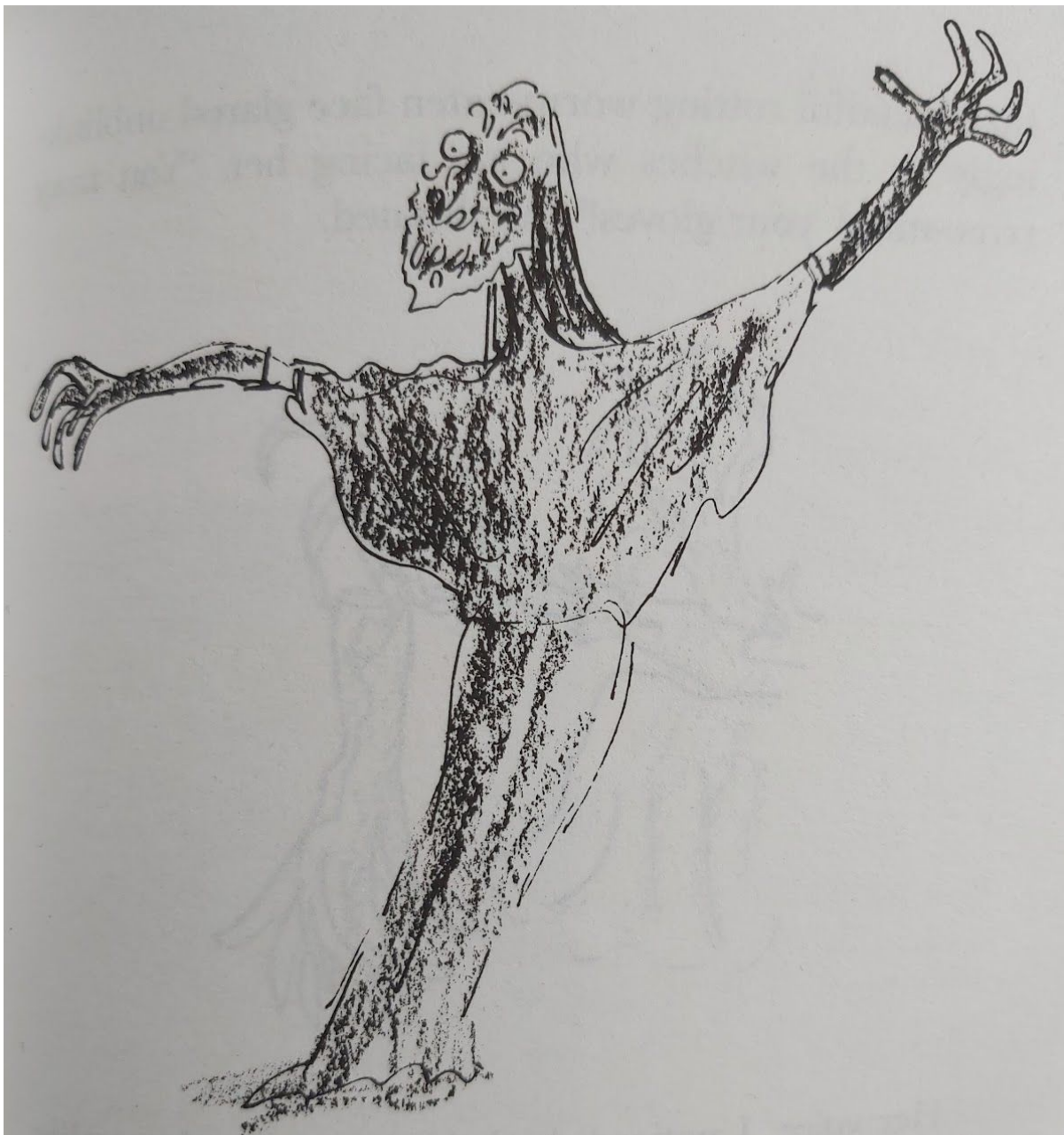


Image 3

Miss Trunchbull throws Amanda across the playground because the girl wore pigtails to school (Dahl, 2016b, p. 109).



