

HATE, VIOLENCE AND ABUSE IN ROALD DAHL'S CHILDREN'S NOVELS

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Abstract: The present study aims to highlight the theme of hate, violence and abuse in Roald Dahl's novels. The protagonists are children from unhappy families – Dahl starts from the idea that life is chaotic and often painful, it is not as it should be. They pass through a series of events that make them suffer, they go through various trials, states and feelings. Life itself is difficult, and in their case, adults do not play a positive role, on the contrary, they submit them to an aggressive treatment. Dahl's fiction puts children in the center of the action, confronts different representations and thus they become agents of change, they struggle, suffer, but, in the end, they find a solution to save, to cope with life, find meaning and value in a chaotic world, they create a cathartic exit. His books also contain a message for adults, a kind of reminder that a child's world is not only light and joy or pleasure, but also contains complicated shadows, fears and various emotional states.

Keywords: abuse, hate, violence, conflict, childhood, emotional crises.

Wars, terrorism, assassinations, abuses, social issues, social indifference, fears, anxieties, various violent acts are presented to us through the media, in order to denounce some acts of aggression, creating strong emotions. A series of researches approach these topics in literature in general or interdisciplinary (C. Ghiță, JH Campos, R. Beshara, M. Hodalska, I. Dixon), focusing on the relatively recent past, from the last centuries, in Europe and not only. Some studies have traveled further into the past, with different views on the topic, highlighting evolutionary trends.

In the evolution of children's literature we find themes from all fields of knowledge, experience and subjective or objective human reality, synthesized from different perspectives, on certain general dominances (childhood, adolescence, nature, living things, time, history, family, school, love, magic) and particular (modesty, generosity, justice, humanity, freedom, knowledge, destiny, time, courage, fear, abandonment, diligence, pride, stupidity, greed, generosity, work, wickedness, hunger, indifference, religion, etc.). In particular, in the modern period, they have diversified, addressing less comfortable or common issues, such as physical or moral violence, psychological – humiliation, discrimination, threats, hatred, jealousy, death, war, terrorism, racism, feminism, drugs, etc.

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Children's literature promotes values, one of its purposes being to educate, to cultivate certain feelings, states or feelings, in order to familiarize and help express emotional states, optimism, perseverance, confidence and dynamism, good manners. According to Denise Escarpit, the author of children's literature is not only determined to make children read, to give them a taste for reading, but he must be a trainer: "Offering to the reader solutions to the present problems or which he might have in the future, through the anti-hero models, he wants to help him resolve his psychological, emotional, family, social and ideological conflicts. He wants to be a means of integrating young people into society"¹. The author of children's literature seeks to put the little ones "on guard" against these aggressive acts, to prevent them from being victims themselves, seeks to inform them and make them understand what they it could happen, offering them a reflection on this subject in order to empower the future adults they represent. Thus, according to S. Lalouette, the writer is no longer considered just a simple narrator, but takes the place of a "trainer, who transmits to innocent children his knowledge and life experience. His vocation is therefore to answer questions, in order to solve problems that adults do not always understand as serious"².

Children's literature has never ceased to make them dream, while talking to them about them, about real things, while introducing them to the real world and to the awareness of human nature, with good and bad, the authors being aware of the fragility of their audience and very careful when approaching sensitive topics that help them express their own opinion, to grow up.

Regarding children's literature, a number of studies have focused on the analysis of these themes and their recurrence in children's works, following violent aspects, horror in fairy tales, (K. Reynolds), childhood anxieties (E. Erhart), violence (S. Lalouette), witches and wizards (KM Baker), monsters (L. Christie) revenge and bullying (M. Yeni and S. Ariska), to name just a few examples.

In the following, we will approach one of the legendary authors of modern children's literature – Roald Dahl, novelist, short story writer, poet and screenwriter, whose volumes are very influential in the field of English literature, the author being awarded since 1954. R. Carter and J. McRae³ consider that Roald Dahl is a representative author of children's literature at the end of the twentieth century, which, through the topics and characters approached, quickly became known throughout the world, so many of them they have been adapted into films and theater. Other critics have debated the issues raised by Dahl, saying they are not appropriate for children because they are less common: some of them talk about issues such as violence, vulgarity, fascism, sexism and racism⁴.

¹ Denise Escarpit, *La littérature de l'enfance et de jeunesse. Panorama historique*, Paris PUF, 1981, p. 15. Trad.ns.

² Sophie Lalouette, *La violence dans la littérature de jeunesse*, Sciences de l'information et de la communication, 1997, p. 5.

³ *The Routledge History of Literature in English, Britain and Ireland*, Routledge, UK, 2001.

⁴ Jonathon Culley, *Roald Dahl – "It's About Children and It's for Children" – but is It Suitable?*, in "Children's Literature in Education", vol. 22, No. 1, 1991, pp. 59–73.

“Roald Dahl was an unpleasant man who wrote macabre books – and yet children around the world adore him. This should probably not surprise us”, writes Hephzibah Anderson⁵. It was claimed that many of Dahl's writings came from his experience as father and that, at the first reception, many were deeply disturbed by the subject, which featured controversial elements of racism, blasphemy, drugs and drink, and other insinuations, such as disobedience and communism. Maria Nikolajeva, a professor of children's literature at Cambridge, disputes these views, saying there is nothing “dark” in Dahl's volumes, seeing him as one of the “most colorful and brilliant authors for children”.

James and the Giant Peach (1961), *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (1964), *The Magic Finger* (1966), *Fantastic Mr. Fox* (1970), *Charlie and the Great Glass Elevator* (1972), *Danny, the Champion of the World* (1975), *My Uncle Oswald* (1979), *George's Marvelous Medicine* (1981), *The BFG* (1982), *Revolting Rhymes* (1982), *Dirty Beasts* (1983), *The Witches* (1983), *Matilda* (1988) are some of the children's writings which have been remarkably successful.

The novel *Matilda* presents a genius character, a 5-year-old girl with a telekinetic power, whose parents do not appreciate her:

“Occasionally one comes across parents who take the opposite line, who show no interest at all in their children, and these of course are far worse than the doting ones. Mr and Mrs Wormwood were two such parents. They had a son called Michael and a daughter called Matilda, and the parents looked upon Matilda in particular as nothing more than a scab. A scab is something you have to put up with until the time comes when you can pick it off and flick it away. Mr and Mrs Wormwood looked forward enormously to the time when they could pick their little daughter off and flick her away, preferably into the next county or even further than that. It is bad enough when parents treat ordinary children as though they were scabs and bunions, but it becomes somehow a lot worse when the child in question is extraordinary, and by that I mean sensitive and brilliant. Matilda was both of these things, but above all she was brilliant. Her mind was so nimble and she was so quick to learn that her ability should have been obvious even to the most half-witted of parents. But Mr and Mrs Wormwood were both so gormless and so wrapped up in their own silly little lives that they failed to notice anything unusual about their daughter. To tell the truth, I doubt they would have noticed had she crawled into the house with a broken leg”⁶.

The girl spoke from the age of one and a half, she spoke fluently and had the vocabulary of an adult, she had learned to read alone at the age of three, with the help of newspapers and magazines in the house, but already, at 4 years old, she had nothing to read. “The only book in the whole of this enlightened household house

⁵ *The dark side of Roald Dahl*, 13 sept., available on <https://www.bbc.com/culture/article/20160912-the-dark-side-of-roald-dahl>, 2016.

⁶ Roald Dahl, *Matilda*, English translation and notes by Christina Anghelina, Bucharest, Arthur Publishing, 2020, p. 2

was something called Easy Cooking, belonging to her mother”⁷. When she asks her father – a seller of counterfeit used cars – to buy her a book, he states:

“A *book*?” he said. “What d’you want a flaming book for?”

“To read, Daddy”.

“What’s wrong with the telly, for heaven’s sake? We’ve got a lovely telly with a twelve-inch screen and now you come asking for a book? You’re getting spoiled, my girl!”⁸.

In multiple passages, Dahl outlines the portrait of Matilda’s parents, in which he captures an accumulation of malicious attitudes, negative character traits, malice and indifference. “My mother doesn’t like to see me read. Neither they nor Daddy like books. (...) In fact, my mother cares little for me, said Matilda, with a trace of sadness in her voice”⁹. The father is described as “a small, rat-like individual with front teeth protruding from under a thin mustache”¹⁰. The mother, “a strong woman, in whose dyed blond hair could already be seen by its gray roots. She had a sharp make-up and was one of those fat women on whom the flesh seems to be tied with string so as not to fall”¹¹. Matilda’s mother, Mrs. Wormwood, was crazy about bingo and played five times a week.

A scene in which Dahl captures the girl’s hatred: “Matilda did not dare to answer, so she fell silent. But she could feel the anger boiling inside her. He knew it wasn’t nice to hate your parents so much, but it was very hard for him to control himself. Reading so much, he had gained a vision of life that they lacked. If they read Kipling or Dickens, they would understand that life means more than cheating and watching TV, Matilda thought. And there was something else. She couldn’t bear to be told how stupid and ignorant she was when she knew it wasn’t. The fury of rage (...) will somehow pay off for her parents, whenever they treat her badly”.

Matilda devises a plan of revenge on her father, putting glue on the inside of her father’s favorite hat, so that he fails to take off his hat all day and the girl ironically asks him: “What happened to you, Dad? she asked. Did your head suddenly swell?”.

The father did not even consider Matilda, telling her that she was a girl and would not be able to carry on the family business. The fact that he was reading made his father terribly angry, “maybe he was angry to see that she was enjoying something that was inaccessible to him.

“Do you ever stop reading?” he shouted.

“Hello, Daddy”, she said very calmly. Did you have a nice day?

– What’s that mess? he said, snatching the book from his hand.

⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 3.

⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 18.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 4.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 28.

– Daddy, it's not a mess, it's a wonderful book. It's called *The Red Pony*, it's by John Steinbeck. He's an American writer. Don't you want to read it? Would you like to go crazy...

“Garbage”, said Mr. Wormwood, “if it's written by an American, it must be garbage”. I don't know how to write anything else.

– No, Daddy, she's beautiful, honestly. It's about...

“I don't care what it is”, barked Mr. Wormwood. I'm tired of seeing you keep reading. Go and find something useful to do.

Suddenly, he snatches the pages of the book with frightening speed and throws them in the trash¹².

The little girl does not burst into tears when she is treated in this way, but, on the contrary, she tries to control herself and to draw up revenge plans. “She would have loved her parents to be kind, loving, understanding, honest and intelligent. The fact that they did not have any of these attributes bothered her quite badly. It wasn't easy with them. But this new game still consoled her by punishing one from time to time¹³”.

Matilda's parents did not care about the girl's education and enrolled her in school later than other children. The girl walks into Crunchem Hall¹⁴ Primary School, where she meets another evil character, Miss Trunchbull, the school principal, but also her teacher – Miss Honey, the only one who will appreciate, motivate and love her.

Miss Trunchbull is described as an abusive adult, who “looked like terror wherever she went, being a giant monster, a tyrant who frightened students and teachers alike. Even from a distance you could see a menacing aura floating around her, and as she approached you could almost feel the heat of the anger radiating from her body like a hot metal rod. When she was marching – Miss Trunchbull never walked, she was marching like a soldier through the storm, with huge steps and her hands moving beside her body – so when she was marching down a corridor, you could hear her snorting from time to time, and if somehow a group of children got in her way, passed by them like a tank, and the little ones were thrown as far as there, to her left and to her right¹⁵”.

There are several scenes of violence in *Matilda*, who is waging a real war with the tyrannical school principal who humiliates, kidnaps and tortures students. After witnessing her abuse, Matilda decides to take control of the situation, uses her intelligence to develop her telekinetic skills and does not let her torture her students anymore, she decides that she should be expelled from school. After a series of difficult revenges, Miss Trunchbull is finally defeated by the school community, especially Matilda and Mrs. Honey. She is scared to death by Matilda,

¹² *Ibidem*, p. 43.

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 54.

¹⁴ A play on words, specific to Roald Dahl, which meant “crush everyone” – an allusion to how the school crushes the individuality of the child.

¹⁵ Roald Dahl, *op. cit.*, pp. 74–75.

who, with her telekinetic power, makes the chalk write some truths on the board in front of Miss Trunchbull. She is shocked and falls to the floor, faints, and disappears the next day. Culley (1991) concludes that at the end of the story, Matilda, who has been depressed and continues to be assaulted, eventually turns into a mature woman with a strong character. He argues that the popularity of this story comes not only from the conscious appreciation of readers, but also from the unconscious satisfaction offered by transformation.

The novel *Witches* focuses on the theme of hatred towards children. The author places the action in Norway and, partly, in England and presents the experiences of an English boy and his Norwegian grandmother, in a world where the secret societies of witches who hate children exist in every country. The protagonist is therefore a seven-year-old English boy, who goes to live with his Norwegian grandmother, after his parents died in a car accident. The boy loves his grandmother's stories and is fascinated by real-life witches who he says are horrible female demons trying to kill children. She tells him how to recognize them, as she is a retired witch hunter who had an encounter with a witch when she was a child. According to the boy's grandmother, a witch can be anywhere, she can look like a real woman, but there are some ways she can find out. The real witches have claws instead of nails, which they hide wearing gloves; they are bald, but they wear wigs, etc. Most importantly, we are told, "real witches hate children with a hot hatred that is hotter than any hatred you could imagine". They hate children and look for ways to destroy them. From their hands (or claws), young children are not only mutilated, but exterminated.

James M. Curtis¹⁶ observes that descriptions of witch cruelty "echo the cruel and abusive measures taken by adults in the treatment of children, and the concept of hatred of children, described by Lloyd Demause and other critics, is an effective goal by to observe the hyperbolized hatred of children (...)". According to the same critic, Dahl's text deals more with explicit hatred of children. In fact, in characterizing the grandmother as an adult who truly values childhood and Dahl's narrative approach to both her protagonist child and her child's audience, the text contradicts the idea that we have progressed to a culture that appreciates, and sometimes sanctifies the child. *Witches* present to readers the possibility that hatred for children is not a now defunct phenomenon, but rather a danger in the present history of childhood, a danger increasingly threatening by its ability to hide under a mask of goodwill. J. M. Curtis states that *Witches* show an ambivalent attitude towards children. On the one hand, it is an attitude of protection, in which adults are kind and gentle; on the other hand, there is also the reflection of hatred towards children wrapped in good deeds such as charity¹⁷.

¹⁶ James M. Curtis, *We Have a Great task Ahead of Us!: Child-Hate in Roald Dahl's*, in "The Witches in Children's Literature in Education", vol. 45, No. 2, 2014, p. 170.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 166–177.

Hatred of children, including their neglect and abuse, discrimination, abandonment and torture are topics that, although considered taboo, today, being explained, presented in contrast, can have a positive impact, both in society and in children's thinking. While Dahl's narratives highlight children's vulnerability to trauma, the protagonists show how childhood can be an isolating experience, but ultimately triumphant. Sometimes life is not right and the child has to learn this too early.

A disturbing narrative, *James and the Giant Peach* (1961), introduces us James, a four-year-old orphan, sent to live with his evil, wealthy aunts, who starve and abuse him, forcing him to sleep on the floor. The narrative illustrates the two favorite themes: hunger and abandonment. Like Hänsel and Gretel of the Brothers Grimm, James has a savior – the giant peach.

In his works, Roald Dahl often describes the suffering, unhappiness and hatred generated by seemingly hopeless situations. Greg Littmann argues that he is probably “the greatest horror writer for children who has ever lived”¹⁸. Many of his characters, says Littmann, are threatened with horrific death, either as punishment for their sins or simply as a form of aggressive behavior they must do. Interestingly, Littman presents how Dahl's works can be classified as horror fiction, very valuable for children. Referring to the theories of Aristotle and David Hume, he argues “... to enjoy the dark art that allows us to cleanse ourselves of negative emotions, such as pity and fear, by feeling them fictitiously”¹⁹. He sees Dahl's children's works as valuable because if the little ones feel sorry for Charlie Bucket's poverty, they will be less afraid to deal with such situations later in real life, because they have worked their feelings over time, what they were reading the novel. Littmann also states that Dahl “... makes us hungry for answers and turns it into pleasure as he slowly satisfies it”²⁰.

Marliza Yeni and Shintia Ariska²¹ focus specifically on explaining the structures of novels to see how Dahl empowers child heroes to take revenge on adult aggressors. Moreover, they aim to demonstrate that the past victimization of an aggressor at Dahl's school strongly influenced him in creating such revenge stories.

All the aggressors in these novels are adults and are relatives (parents, grandparents or aunts), authoritarian figures (teacher and principal) or strong figures (rich people or those with certain types of power). With their roles in society, they abuse children. These children (Matilda, The Girl, Sophie, George, James, The Boy and Danny) spend some time thinking about why these aggressors have such misconduct. Matilda struggled the most to ignore, to forgive her parents,

¹⁸ Greg Littmann, *Charlie and the Nightmare Factory: The art of children's Horror Fiction*, in Jacob M. Held (ed), *Roald Dahl and Philosophy: A Little Nonsense Now and Then*, Rowman and Littlefield, UK, 2014, p. 173.

¹⁹ G. Littman, *op. cit.*, p. 182.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 187–188.

²¹ Marliza Yeni, Shintia Ariska, *Children's revenge on the bullying adults in Roald Dahl's children's literature*, in “Proceeding of the 13th International Conference on Malaysia-Indonesia Relations (PAHMI)”, 2019, pp. 164–171.

and to Miss Trunchbull's misbehavior until she could no longer bear the burden. George continues to wonder if his grandmother is serious or not, James has no idea why his aunts are so cruel. The actantial diagram of each story made by Marliza Yeni and Shintia Ariska²² shows us that Dahl makes three pairs of axes (desire, power and transmission) through the main characters of children. They are the senders, the subjects and also the helpers. Therefore, when they finally lose patience or decide to fight back, the result is amazing. They choose the best solution to save their lives; aggressors abuse power, so the only way to prevent them from aggressing others is to mutilate their power. These children make these aggressors lose their power; it mutilates their power of aggression and saves society forever. This mutilation of power takes three forms, making the aggressor leave the area, the neighborhood, change the aggressor into another creature and make them disappear forever.

Matilda is the one who dominates in the end, due to her magical power. These models apply similarly in the other volumes. The girl, Sophie, George (George and his miraculous medicine), James (*James and the Giant Peach*), the Boy (*Witches*) and Danny (*Danny World Champion*) occupy the same positions. They see the injustices caused by adult aggressors and feel the need to do something to rectify the situation. They take revenge on aggressive adults for stopping their aggression, exploring their ultimate ability to achieve their goal (some receive help from others, some do not).

Dahl's protagonists find a way in life, they find value in a chaotic world. Matilda's parents are either indifferent or abusive, but the girl, although she seems helpless at first, manages to defeat her destiny. Charlie starves to death in a poor family, James' parents are killed, leaving him in the care of his abusive aunts, and so on.

Dahl's volumes do not begin with a description of joy, the author shows us children in extreme situations, in the turmoil of life, on the border between desires and a disappointing world. J. Held speaks of a common theme in Dahl's novels: "Our lives speak of the absurdity of human existence, the fact that there is an unstoppable gap between what we expect or demand from life and what we know, what is true"²³. Children find themselves, in a humanity, somewhere between their ideals, their fantasies about life or what life and the reality of their situation should be like – disappointment and suffering.

Dahl creates child characters who come from unhappy families, their lives are not easy, they are active and they become agents of change to put an end to the aggressive behavior of vile adults. Some of them are critical from the beginning, such as Matilda, the girl and Sophie. Others are shy and silent, but turned into brave and determined children after becoming victims of aggression (such as George, James, the boy and Danny). They have to struggle, to suffer, to find a solution to succeed, to cope with life. Dahl starts from the idea that life

²² *Ibidem*.

²³ Jacob M. Held, *Roald Dahl and Philosophy: A little nonsense Now and Then*, Lanham, Maryland, Rowman & Littlefield, 2014, p. 2.

is chaotic and often painful, it is not as it should be, but the reality is this and a series of events make them suffer, to go through various trials, states, feelings. In this sense, Held makes a comparison with Camus – the world is absurd – but, even so, “the only coherent way to break through is revolt”²⁴.

The onomastics chosen by Dahl help the reader to identify himself with the personality and features of the characters, and the excess of descriptive adjectives gives the reader a lot of information about the character and the situation. He often uses exaggeration to make the characters look more evil or heroic. He believes that all good books should have a mixture of ugly people you hate and nice people. In this way, the reader can fully enjoy the “bad”, obtaining its origin. Most of Dahl's novels involve this combination. The author writes from a modern world of fairy tales, focusing especially on the magical world, which excites children and attracts them to explore. He likes to twist and invent words and play with the structure of the sentence, trying to immerse the reader in the story. He uses verses, similarities, metaphors, alliterations and puns that entice the reader. Personification is often used to transform characters, mainly animals, into human-like shapes or vice versa, with a mind of their own and where they can speak like real people. Dahl also quite often describes the image of children as “better” than adults, giving children room for imagination in a world like this.

Through these novels, Dahl shows that intimidating behavior, or so-called bullying, could have become a social habit that people sometimes consider normal. Thus, he builds his conviction that aggression is a crime against which everyone should fight. Her novels become a means to promote new habits in society, urging her to fight aggression, even if the aggressor is an adult or even from his own family. At the end of each story, we will see how the children manage to stop the aggressors by mutilating their power. The terminators are the children themselves. With his black humor, Dahl ridicules the aggressors and makes them helpless in the hands of innocent children.

Held (2014) argues that Dahl's child characters face a difficult and dark life. Not only because life itself is difficult, but also because adults do not play a positive role in children's lives. They are careless and abusive. These children find that life is different from the one they dreamed of. They are presented with a fact of the “divorce between our desires and a disappointing world”. He never imagines that the adults who should protect him are not really trustworthy. There is no need for these adults to intimidate their children, to aggress them; they seem to believe that being an adult gives them the privilege of dictating to children and treating them as they wish. They continue to abuse and torture children, who are left helpless and bewildered. However, these children are not passive. They quickly realize that their life is at stake. Each of them finds a way to survive.

The psychologist Bruno Bettelheim in his study, *The Uses of Enchantment. The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* (1976), examines some children's stories in terms of Freudian psychoanalysis, stating that fairy tales help children

²⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 4.

solve certain existential problems, such as separation anxiety, Oedipal conflict, and sibling rivalries. that the extreme violence and ugly emotions encountered in some children's works lead to some changes or deviations that may occur in a child's mind, emphasizing that some hypothetical, unrealistic fears require unrealistic hopes. The macabre in children's literature has an important cathartic function: "Without such fantasies, the child fails to get to know his monster better, nor is he offered any suggestions on how he can gain control of it. As a result, the child remains helpless in his worst anxieties – all the more so than if he had been told fairy tales that give shape and body to these anxieties and also show him ways to overcome these monsters", says the psychologist.

So the real threats to the protagonist's children of the *Witches*, *Matilda* and *James and the Giant Peach* are not the monsters under the bed, but adults whose hatred of children is disguised behind a mask of goodwill. He met such "splendid ladies" and "wonderfully kind people", but soon this image of the facade shattered: "Down with the children!" he hears the witches singing. "Boil their bones and fry their skin!, Crush them!, Crush them!" Although the violence present in Dahl's work can easily be perceived as morbid, hatred of children is a necessary part of the writer's project. If at the beginning they are helpless, in the next stage, the downed children come out victorious by deceiving their abusers, by inventiveness and a little magic. Initially, violence is used to reinforce the child's initial "victimization", then it is redistributed in the final stages of each story to punish and defeat the perpetrator.

In addition to his childhood memories, the inspiration to write his books came to Dahl from the evening stories he composed for his children. In an interview, Dahl said, "If I hadn't had children, I wouldn't have written children's books and I wouldn't have been able to do that". Roald Dahl's childhood experiences, some painful, some unpleasant, played a significant role, being a source of inspiration for his wonderful works, as well as his vivid imagination. Although Dahl had a seemingly pleasant life, his childhood experiences were quite unhappy with the death of his sister, his father, and his unhappy years at the boarding school. The book *Matilda* and Miss Trunchball's idea came from the overwhelming matrons and school principals Dahl endured during his school years. Dahl's social critique focuses on the analysis of human defects. His style is sometimes cynical and ironic, sometimes full of humor to engage his readers. His humor and sarcasm appeal to the desired audience, because children like to read funny stories with meaningless words and absurd behavior. Normally, he writes from the child's perspective, one that children can become familiar with.

Dahl's fiction puts the child at the center of the action, confronts different representations and creates a cathartic way out. Roald Dahl has a very distinct way of writing, which many children enjoy, with a humorous style. The writer is able to create characters that children find pleasant and full of humor, training them in a play on words. Write so intentionally so that the children can read the text and engage in all aspects of the story. By placing poetry in his works, he allows more children to seek and understand it.

Compared to child protagonists, Dahl has a rather negative approach to adults, criticizing certain groups or individuals in society for abusing their authority to dominate and manipulate young people: "Parents and teachers are enemies. The adult is the enemy of the child because of the terrible process of civilization of this thing which, when born, is an animal without manners, without any moral sense"²⁵. Critics have argued that the presentation of authority figures (parents, teachers, school principals) and their humiliation, often brutally, give way to feelings of rebellion and antipathy. "The growing disapproval of adults is largely due to the understanding of absolute morality in Dahl's books, which has also been criticized. In an article published in *Children's Literature in Education* (1998), David Rees addresses this issue, stating that "The problem with Dahl's world is that it is black and white – two-dimensional and unreal" (Rees: 144). This complete contrast between the good and the bad does not apply to real life and gives false impressions to young readers who may be easily affected by the books they read. "Totally brutal" and "absolutely evil" adults in Dahl's works lead young children to believe that such stereotypes can also be applied to the people around them"²⁶. This negative approach to adults also comes from the life experience of Dahl, who lived a series of not very pleasant events.

His books also contain a message for adults, a kind of reminder that a child's world is not only light and joy or pleasure, but also contains shadows, sometimes complicated and scary. Dahl treats everything with caution. Aware of the psychological effects of catharsis, if their heroes act violently, they always have a good reason and, if not, they repent. It is a matter of moralizing violence: when we cannot "excuse it, at least we try to explain it. Famous for his black humor, Roald Dahl makes children fight adults in many of his novels, and children's revenge against adult aggressors is seen, according to Bettelheim, as a punishment for someone who has done something cruel and satisfies a deep need of justice.

It is a question of moralizing violence: cannot excuse it, at least to explain it. The violence in his books is one in the limits of a fantastic world and is doubled by humor, it is not a simple violence, and it makes children laugh²⁷. Fear remains at the center of many stories. K. Reynolds²⁸ talks about a change in modern books, about turning this fear into something playful, which helps children overcome their fears. Ultimately, Dahl's narratives can also be seen as moral stories. Peter Hunt points this out in *Children's Literature and Childhood*: "Dahl acts not only as a companion-narrator, but also as a guide to the world around him, highlighting his particular weaknesses and exposing his hypocrisy while entertaining children readers"²⁹.

²⁵ Jonathan Yarley, *Roald Dahl, beyond the Chocolate Factory*, in "Washington Post", 27 March 2004.

²⁶ Apud Irem Tümer, *Analysing Roald Dahl's Works For Children As a Means of Social Criticism*, available on <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/11725502.pdf>, p. 14.

²⁷ Kyriaki Angelidou, *The Invention of Children's Literature: The Case of the Mischievous Roald Dahl*, available on <http://ikee.lib.auth.gr/record/135332/files/GRI-2014-13318.pdf>, 2013, p. 54.

²⁸ Kimberly Reynolds, Michael Rosen, *Go deeper: fear in children's books*, available on <https://www.bl.uk/childrens-books/articles/fear-in-childrens-books>, 2020.

²⁹ Peter Hunt, *op. cit.*, p. 66.