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Breaking of Stereotypes and Taboos in the Depiction of
Family in the works of Roald Dahl and David Walliams

Bakalářská práce

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INTRODUCTION

Generations of children grew up with the number of eternal stories, whether they were transmitted orally from generation to generation or later written by very best children's authors. This is the first contact children make with literature. Children's literature plays a very important part in a child's life, from helping to develop intelligence and creativity to helping them cope with their lives. As Seth Lerer states: "Ever since there were children, there has been children's literature."¹

From *Once upon a time* to *and they lived happily ever after*, these cliché phrases are very frequently used in the introduction and at the end of many various stories, from folk tales and classic fairy tales such as *Little Red Riding Hood*, *Cinderella*, *Hansel and Gretel* to stories such as *Snow White*, *Beauty and the Beast* and more. However, there is a wide range of stories that never start or end happily. The focus of this thesis, therefore, will be on such stories, which differentiate in the style they are written, explore taboo areas, and often break stereotypes. Thereby, a special focus will be given to the depiction of a family and relationships in Roald Dahl's and David Walliams's children's books. The special focus will be given to Dahl's children's books such as *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, *Matilda*, *The BFG*, and *James and the Giant Peach*; and David Walliams's *The Gangsta Granny*, *The Boy in the Dress*, and *The Midnight Gang*. Both these children's writers differentiate from others by portraying harsh life situations children must face. Each of these children's books portrays unusual themes and wild scenarios concerning children's suffering and the obstacles life offers.

The introductory chapter of this thesis provides context for the Victorian era, including the division of society during the reign of Queen Victoria, and the literature of this era. The following part of the first chapter focuses on the traditional depictions of the Victorian family in the 19th and 20th centuries. In the past children's literature tended to be didactic and portray family in an idealized way. As argued in *Secret Gardens* by Humphrey Carpenter: "Adult fiction sets out to portray and explain the world as it really is; books for children present it as it should be."²

¹ Seth Lerer, *Children's Literature: A Reader's History, from Aesop to Harry Potter* (The University of Chicago Press, 2009), 1.

² Humphrey Carpenter, *Secret Gardens* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1985), 1.

In the second chapter, I would like to introduce the lives of the authors this thesis will be focused on; Roald Dahl, who is frequently called the greatest children's writer, and David Walliams whose literary style of children's books is compared to Dahl's and is, not surprisingly, called the new Roald Dahl.³ The first part of the second chapter deals with Dahl's life and his experience during his childhood and his school days that played the important part in writing his children's stories. As well as Dahl's, David Walliams's life and work is also mentioned in this part. Furthermore, I would like to introduce and analyse some of the important taboo themes these authors have also included in their children's stories because most of them are based on their own experience. For instance, I will look at the theme of school villains in Dahl's *Boy*, *Tales of Childhood*, and *Matilda*; Walliams's *Boy in the Dress*, dealing with crossdressing and gender identity, or theme of death in Dahl's *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, and *James and the Giant Peach*.

In the subsequent chapter I would like to analyse how these authors broke the idealized depiction of family and relationships in their children's books and the way they portrayed those issues concerning children and family relationships. This chapter consists of several subchapters and each of them will deal with a specific relationship. First, I will focus on the relationship between parents and children. Naturally, parents play the most important model role in a child's life but the relationship does not always work the way it should. The focus will be on a relationship between parents and their children in Dahl's books *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, and *Matilda*, in which the author has portrayed various types of this relationship. The following subchapter deals with a relationship between grandparents and children. The children's attitude towards the old adults has changed over the course of time, and a great example of this issue represents David Walliams's book *Gangsta Granny*. In the following subchapter, I will analyse role of a substitute parent in Roald Dahl's *Matilda*, and *James and the Giant Peach*. The last part will cast light on themes such as orphans and neglectful parents that appear either in Dahl's *The BFG*, and Walliams's *The Midnight Gang*.

Overall, this thesis aims to analyse Dahl's and Walliams's depiction of family and relationships in their children's books and the way they broke the stereotype of an idealized family portrait in literature that dominated during the Victorian era. Both

³ See <https://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2013/sep/04/david-walliams-booksforchildrenandteenagers>.

writers celebrate children's anarchy and portray adults in a negative way. Dahl and Walliams wrote their children's books in a distinctive and humorous literary style, which is distinguish from other authors either by their wicked sense of humour, and by portraying taboo themes concerning family relationships and issues, such as nonfictional or broken families, parental irresponsibility, parental neglect, substitute parents, and many other obstacles children are forced to face.

1 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The first chapter of this thesis aims to provide background information about the Victorian Era, Victorian society, and Victorian Literature. Furthermore, the last part of this chapter will describe a depiction of family in the 19th and 20th centuries.

1.1 Victorian Era

Victorian Era is the period between 1820 and 1914, which is corresponding and known as the period of Queen Victoria's reign from 1837, during the industrialization of England until she died in 1901. This period is known for dramatic progress in a society, a growing economy, and political reforms. During the Victorian period, the British Empire has the status as the most powerful empire in the world.

1.1.1 Victorian Society

In this part, I drew heavily on *A Brief History of Great Britain*, by Williams E. Burns,⁴ and *Encyclopaedia Britannica*.

Victorian society was organized hierarchically. The society was divided into the Upper Class, the Middle Class, and the Working Class. The Upper Class was in the most powerful position and very often they represented a Royal Class. The Victorian Upper Class consisted of the Nobles, Aristocrats, Dukes, and other wealthy families of that time who did not need to work. The Middle Class consisted of clerks, businessmen, bankers, etc. Although the Victorian Era was very prosperous for this class, the Middle Class was not very large. The last one and the lowest class among the Victorian social hierarchy were the Working Class. The Working Class (“about 70 to 80 percent of the population, got its income from wages usually not more than £100 per annum”)⁵ was the most diverse occupational group, which consisted of skilled laborers, and craftsmen, such as coachmakers. However, most of the working class were not factory laborers but rather skilled laborers. Only 10 percent of the working-class formed *the labour aristocracy*. People who belonged in this class had to work in poor and unsanitary conditions. The living conditions were so brutal that they required their children to work

⁴ William E. Burns, “Britain in the Age of Empire (154-184),” in *A Brief History of Great Britain* (New York, NY: Facts on File, 2010).

⁵ See <https://www.britannica.com/event/Victoria-era>.

to help them to survive. In some cases, the families were forced to live on streets or in some public housing if there was no income. Devastation became a part of life for the majority of the working-class people. At the end of the 19th century, the horrific living conditions improved by receiving increases in wages, reductions in working hours, and creating public holidays.⁶

One of the main principles of Victorian society was gender and class. Men and women differentiate from each other and were meant for different things. Men were considered as strong and independent, while women were considered weak and dependent. For instance, the middle- and upper-class women could not be educated the same way as the men were. They could not participate in the institutions of electoral politics, could not possess property in her name, or get divorced. Moreover, middle-class women had to face great problems unless they got married. One of the options was becoming a governess, which refers to “a woman charged with the education and disciplining of young children.”⁷ In many cases, a governess was a substitute for a parent.

Life was not easy for the children during the Victorian era either. Except for the upper-class children whose living conditions were incomparable with conditions of the working-class children. The upper-class children were well fed, well clothed, and more importantly well educated. Moreover, they did not need to work. On the other hand, the working-class children were forced to work as soon as they were old enough and they had to work long hours. Some parents considered and thought of their children as income. Victorian Children were considered cheap labour and worked in many types of jobs. They often lived with their families in filthy conditions, and that also included poor food. More sadly, living neglected in streets was not uncommon for working-class children. Many children did not survive those brutal conditions and died at a young age. The Prevention of Cruelty to, and Protection of, Children Act was created in 1889.

1.1.2 Victorian Literature

The literature of the Victorian era, known as the Victorian era literature, evolved during the reign of Queen Victoria. This literature was preceded by romanticism and

⁶ William E. Burns, “Britain in the Age of Empire,” in *A Brief History of Great Britain*, 167-168.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 171-172.

was followed by the modernist literature of the 20th century. The leading form of English literature became a novel. As it is said by Burns: “The second half of the 19th century was a golden age for the novel in England.”⁸ It is known that the Victorian literature, especially the Victorian novels, tended to be idealized in a depiction of life and put the main emphasis on the moral values.

1.2 Depiction of the Victorian Family

In this chapter, I heavily drew on *Family Ties in Victorian England*, by Claudia Nelson,⁹ and *The Family in English Children’s Literature*, by Ann Alston.¹⁰

The history of families is complexed due to many factors such as culture, traditions, social environment, etc. It seems to be impossible to exactly define the right and fixed meaning for a family. Nevertheless, the simple concept of a family is genetically set. It is natural and essential for a human survival to live in groups rather than as the individual. As it is said by Ann Alston in *The Family in English Children’s Literature* : “The grouping of humans for safety and survival is a basic Darwinian Concept.”¹¹ Despite many cultural changes over the course of time this conception of family has remained crucial to human ideology. The depiction of a traditional family as an idealised or its ideology has been portrayed in children’s literature for a long time. Despite depiction of the individual which maintained in the adult’s literature.¹²

Over the course of time the depiction of a family has changed. During the nineteenth and twentieth century the children’s literature has portrayed family in a didactic even pedagogical way full of ideals and moral values. The children’s literature of the 19th century used to portray lives only of middle- and upper-class families. As Alston explains: “Concept of the family as a perfectible version of an imperfect world has shaped children’s literature for nearly two centuries.”¹³ Generally, the society of the

⁸ Ibid., 165.

⁹ Claudia Nelson, *Family Ties in Victorian England* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2007).

¹⁰ Ann Alston, *The Family in English Children’s Literature* (New York, NY: Routledge Taylor & Francis, 2008).

¹¹ Ann Alston, “History of Family: The Growth of a Cherished Institution (7-26)”, in *The Family in English Children’s Literature*, 8.

¹² Ibid., 7-8.

¹³ Alston, “Depictions of the Nineteenth and Turn of the Century Family: From a Good Beating to the Flight to Neverland (27-45),” in *The Family*, 27.

Victorian era made an impression of being safe, stable and family-centred, although it was not entirely true. As Claudia Nelson says in *Family Ties in Victorian England*, the purpose of the books during that time was to explain and enrich the simple pictures that show only a partial truth. She also claims that the Victorian family was often idealized as a model of parental authority, and loving relationships.¹⁴

Although, there appeared children's stories at this time, mentioning serious issues such as poverty or child labour, the emphasis was put on the solution of salvation rather than on the key issue concerning working class people and children of that period. Moreover, a frequent theme which appeared in 19th century stories was the theme of a child as a saviour of the adult.¹⁵

Children's literature of that period rarely exposed the hard life of working-class family and their children, it used to portray a family life in a perfect idealised way defining good homes with a correct moral behaviour.

¹⁴ Nelson, *Family Ties in Victorian England*, X-XI.

¹⁵ Alston, *The Family*, 27-28.

2 ROALD DAHL AND DAVID WALLIAMS

This chapter contains biographies of Roald Dahl and David Walliams. Furthermore, I will introduce the most frequent themes in both authors' works.

2.1 Dahl's life: *The Boy, Tales of Childhood*

In this chapter about Roald Dahl's life, I heavily drew on *The Boy, Tales of Childhood* by Dahl¹⁶.

Roald Dahl was born in Wales of Norwegian parents, his father Harald Dahl and mother Sofie Magdalene Hesselberg. Dahl, alongside with his five siblings, grew up in the South Wales, where his father had established his shipbroking company called *Aadnesen & Dahl*. Although, the family lived in Wales and children were educated in England, Norway was still regarded as home for the Dahls.¹⁷

When was Dahl 6 years old, he went to his first school, a kindergarten called *Elmtree House*. One year later, he started to attend a Preparatory School called *Llandaff Cathedral School*. In September 1925, Dahl started to attend *St Peter's School*, in England. Dahl later described in his autobiographical book the reality of education during his Prep School days: "An English school in those days was purely a money-making business owned and operated by the Headmaster."¹⁸ As he further described, the pupils did not get enough food there, except for parcel-posts from their homes which usually contained some treats. Moreover, Dahl considered all his headmasters for giants who did not care about the pupils.¹⁹

From 1929 to 1936, Dahl attended a very famous Public School called *Repton*. We can learn from Dahl's own experiences that he mentioned in his work *Boy, Tales of Childhood* that beating was very common at schools. He did experience that himself as a young boy and disagreed with this common practise until his old age. As Dahl claimed in his book: "The masters and senior boys were allowed literally to wound

¹⁶ Roald Dahl, *The Boy, Tales of Childhood* (London: Puffin Books, 2008).

¹⁷ Ibid., 11-19.

¹⁸ Ibid., 77.

¹⁹ Ibid., 78.

other boys, and sometimes quite severely. I couldn't get over it. I never have got over it."²⁰ One of the positive memories of Dahl's days at *Repton*, which he described in *Boy, Tales of Childhood*, was that every boy was given a box of *Cadbury* chocolates. Now and again the boys were asked to taste twelve different chocolate bars and mark them from the best one to the most disliked one. This memory of little cardboard boxes lasted in Dahl's mind all the time until he began to write a book called *Charlie and Chocolate Factory*.²¹

After school, Dahl started to work for an oil company called the *Shell Company*. In 1936, Dahl was sent to East Africa by the company and stayed there until the outbreak of the Second World War. In 1939, he joined the Royal Air Force and became a fighter pilot.²²

Roald Dahl wrote several books of a different genre before he turned primarily to writing the children's books. His first book, *The Gremlins* (1943) was not very successful. The following work of Dahl was a story collection *Over to You: Ten Stories of Flyers and Flying* (1946), which was inspired by his service in the RAF. The first success brought him his collection of stories for adults *Someone like You*, followed by *Kiss Kiss* (1959).²³

A burst of success brought him his children's books which are written in "a darkly comic nature frequently including gruesome violence and death."²⁴ In 1961, it was *James and the Giant Peach*, followed by *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, *Fantastic Mr. Fox* in 1970, and *Matilda* in 1988. Moreover, Dahl wrote two autobiographical books. *Boy* ("a tale of child abuse at the hands of school administrators")²⁵ in 1984, and *Going Solo*, in 1986.

Roald Dahl is a remarkable children's author and his stories are known throughout the world. By all accounts, it is because of his unusual style of writing and portraying the reality of violence and death and exploring the taboo areas. Dahl is also known for portraying the adults in a negative way: "Dahl's villains are often malevolent

²⁰ Ibid., 145.

²¹ Ibid., 147-149.

²² Ibid., 167-176.

²³ See <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Roald-Dahl>.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Jacob M. Held, *Roald Dahl and Philosophy: A Little Nonsense Now and Then* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), 3.

adults who imperilled precocious and noble child protagonists.”²⁶ Almost every Dahl’s book never starts happily and more often it does not end happily. This is the main difference between Dahl’s stories and many other fairy tales. Dahl’s stories are focused on real life. Whether it is poverty, violence, child abuse, or family issues such as abusive and neglectful parents, substitute parents, and orphans.

2.2 Walliams’s life

In this chapter of David Walliams’s life, I drew on *Encyclopaedia Britannica*.²⁷

David Walliams, the original name David Edward Williams, was born on 20 August 1971, in Banstead, England. He is an English comedian, especially known for his television show called *Little Britain*, actor, presenter, and a successful children’s book author, whose books have been compared to Roald Dahl’s work.

Walliams grew up in Banstead, England with his parents and his sister. He was educated at *Collingwood Boys’ School* in Wallington, and later at *Reigate Grammar School* in Surrey. He studied drama at the *University of Bristol* and graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in 1992. He used to perform at the *National Youth Theatre*.

Walliams started writing and acting along with his friend Matt Lucas. Their first television appearance was in 1996 with the comedy *Mash and Peas*, followed by *Sir Bernard’s Stately Homes*, in 1999, and *Rock Profile*. The biggest success brought them the show called *Little Britain*, in 2003. *Little Britain* is a British sketch comedy where Walliams and Lucas played “eccentric, sometimes grotesque characters living in all parts of Great Britain.”²⁸ As an actor, Walliams played in many films, such as *Capturing Mary* (2007), *Dinner for Schmucks* (2010), and in the TV series *Partners in Crime* (2015). Walliams starred in the theatre performance called *No Man’s Land* in 2008, and *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, in 2013. In 2012 Walliams has become one of the four judges on the talent show *Britain’s Got Talent*.

Moreover, the additional success Walliams gained as a children’s book author. Walliams’s first two books, *The Boy in the Dress*, which was published in 2008, and *Mr. Stink*, published in 2009, made him known as Dahl’s worthy successor. “Many

²⁶ <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Roald-Dahl>.

²⁷ See <https://www.britannica.com>.

²⁸ <https://www.britannica.com/biography/David-Walliams>.

reviewers and readers have compared his work to Roald Dahl's – more readily his first two books, which are illustrated by Dahl's long-time collaborator Quentin Blake."²⁹ Walliams's success of children's books followed by publishing *Billionaire Boy* in 2010, *Gangsta Granny* (2011), *Ratburger* (2012), *Demon Dentist* (2013), *Awful Auntie* (2014), *Grandpa's Great Escape* (2015), *The Midnight Gang* (2016), and *Bad Dad* (2017). Besides, Walliams published several picture books as *The Slightly Annoying Elephant* (2013) and wrote the autobiography called *Camp David*, in 2012.

Walliams also explores taboo areas in his books as well as Roald Dahl. He drew on his own life experience and even explores the taboo areas of gender stereotypes. For instance, the book *The Boy in the Dress* explores the themes of the camp humour, cross-dressing, and effeminacy. Walliams's books are set in the real world and capture the life of British social class.

2.3 Introducing Dahl's and Walliams most frequent themes

In these following chapters, I would like to expound on Dahl's and Walliams's style of writing and themes that are mostly displayed in their books. I would like to describe the characters and the environments that are set in the stories. Furthermore, I will analyse the themes of family, either in Dahl's and Walliams's books, dealing with the relationships between family members including parents, and grandparents, and themes such as non-functional families, cruel and neglectful parents, orphan hood, etc.

2.3.1 School villains

Many authors draw from their childhood when writing a book, and either Dahl's or Walliams's books are a great example. The main literary influence in Dahl's books stemmed from his childhood, mostly during his school days at boarding schools. In almost every book of Dahl, there is an adult villain who hates, abuse, or mistreats children, either it is someone of the school's administrators such as the headmaster, prefects, or even parents and close relatives. In Dahl's autobiography, called *The Boy*,

²⁹ <https://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2013/sep/04/david-walliams-booksforchildrenandteenagers>.

Tales of Childhood, Dahl described the abuse he experienced himself during his school days. I am of the conviction that the inspiration of an adult villain that is created in his books stemmed exactly from those experiences. A great example is the character of the headmistress Miss Trunchbull in his book *Matilda*. Dahl's description of Miss Trunchbull is more than clear that she is the one who manifests the adult villain in this story. This is apparent not only in her physical appearance from Dahl's description as a "formidable female with big shoulders, thick arms, sinewy wrists, and powerful legs, wearing odd clothes"³⁰ but rather her behaviour full of hatred towards small children, who she keeps punishing in a brutal and wild way: "She looked, in short, more like a rather eccentric and bloodthirsty follower of the stag-hounds than the headmistress of a nice school for children."³¹

It seems that the character of Miss Trunchbull referred to the Headmaster at Repton during Dahl's school days, in *The Boy, Tales of Childhood*. Each of them, as we know from Dahl's description, is not suitable for their position as a schoolmaster. Neither of them possesses the qualities of teachers. They do not understand children, do not care about them, and do not treat the children right. Moreover, the Headmaster at *Repton* later became a famous Archbishop of Canterbury. As Dahl said: "I remember at the time trying to puzzle out how on earth a person could suddenly leap from being a schoolmaster to becoming a Bishop... and this was the man who used to deliver the most vicious beatings to the boys under his care!"³²

2.3.2 Poverty and hunger

It has been already said that Dahl's books never start happily. It is no surprise when the main characters must face the most enormous obstacles life could give. This paves the way to the theme of poverty in another Dahl's book called *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. This story introduces us to a family of seven members, the six grown-ups and a little boy. Right at the beginning of the story is clear that the Buckets live in very poor living conditions. It has been found right at the beginning of the

³⁰ Roald Dahl, *Matilda* (London: Puffin Books, 2016), 76-77.

³¹ Roald Dahl, *Matilda*, 77.

³² Dahl, "The Headmaster (144-146)," in *The Boy, Tales of Childhood*, 144.

author's descriptions of their home that the family belongs to the working-class people and cannot afford better living.

There were only two rooms in the place altogether, and there was only one bed. The bed was given to the four old grandparents because they were old and tired. There wasn't any question of them being able to buy a better house, or even one more bed to sleep in. They were far too poor for that.³³

The poor and uncomfortable living was not the only problem the Buckets had to face. Since only one member of the family was working, Mr. Bucket, thus the income of one working man was not enough for the whole family. There was not a chance to afford proper food for all of them. As it is described by Dahl: "The only meals they could afford were bread and margarine for breakfast, boiled potatoes and cabbage for lunch, and cabbage soup for supper."³⁴ Looking back into the past, one of the main issues the working-class people must deal with was hunger. It is no surprise Dahl subsumed this also in his book. However, it seems to be horrific to read about starvation one of the main characters of the children's book suffers. As Jacob M. Held states in *Roald Dahl and Philosophy: A Little Nonsense Now and Then*: "At least Charlie has a happy home life. He'll be loved as he starves to death."³⁵

A horrible empty feeling in their tummies... Charlie felt it worst of all and although his father and mother often went without their own share of lunch or supper so that they could give it to him, it still wasn't nearly enough for a growing boy.³⁶

As it is already known, The Buckets family lives in poverty but not all circumstances of their hard life are bad. The most important thing depends on our attitude whether we live in poverty or a luxury. The more we have, the more we want. There is no guarantee that life cannot be miserable when living a wealthy life. In this case, we see Charlie, a little boy who can better appreciate moments of joy in his difficult life rather than a person living a life full of material possessions. Living a good

³³ Roald Dahl, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (London: Puffin Books, 2016), 5.

³⁴ Roald Dahl, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, 5.

³⁵ Jacob M. Held, "On Getting Our Just Desserts (19-32)," *Roald Dahl and Philosophy: A Little Nonsense Now and Then*, 19.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 6.

life full of high pleasures does not depend on how much wealthy a person can be but rather how healthy and natural his state of mind is. The highest pleasure comes always from within.³⁷

2.3.3 Elements of horror: Death and darkness

Dahl's stories contain elements of horror, yet he does not belong to the horror writers but children's books writers. Very often his characters are forced to face the theme of death. As Held explains, Dahl's stories are full of pain and suffering:

In the work of Roald Dahl, there is no shortage of pain and suffering. His protagonists never come from happy homes. And that is probably a good thing. Who wants to read about a spoiled child or one who has always had things easy? Such a story wouldn't resonate because we'd see it for what it was: an irrelevant fantasy, a simple distraction. But no child's life will be pain-free or easy; we all have to struggle and suffer, and we have to learn how to deal with the fact, how to cope with what life is: hard.³⁸

The suffering, in this case, the slight glimpse of death represents the starvation of the Buckets in *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. In Dahl's book *James and the Giant Peach*, the first contact with death begins the whole story and that is the death of James Henry Trotter's parents who were eaten up by a rhinoceros: "James's mother and father went to London to do some shopping, and there a terrible thing happened. Both of them suddenly got eaten up by an enormous angry rhinoceros which had escaped from the London Zoo."³⁹ As a children's books writer, Dahl used his wicked sense of humour in portraying death-dealing situations like this one:

Their troubles were all over in a jiffy. They were dead and gone in thirty-five seconds flat. Poor James, on the other hand, was still very much alive, and all at once he found himself alone and frightened in a vast unfriendly world.⁴⁰

³⁷ Jacob M. Held, "Epicurus and The Chocolate Factory (7-18)," in *Roald Dahl and Philosophy: A Little Nonsense Now and Then*, 7-9.

³⁸ Held, *Roald Dahl and Philosophy*, 3.

³⁹ Roald Dahl, *James and the Giant Peach* (New York, NY: Puffin Books, 1961), 1.

⁴⁰ Dahl, *James and the Giant Peach*, 1.

Dahl tries to emphasize the importance of a lonely child being suddenly neglected in this world. Whereas the theme of death seems to represent relief compared with the hard life James will have to face since now. Also, in this story, Dahl did cover the theme of an adult villain, in this case, James's two aunts, Aunt Sponge and Aunt Spiker: "James was sent away to live with his two aunts. They were selfish and lazy and cruel, and right from the beginning they started beating poor James for almost no reason at all."⁴¹ As it is said by Held:

If we begin revisiting Dahl's most well-known protagonists, we see that the question of suicide, or rather the question of finding value in a chaotic world, is not so out of place. Roald Dahl's stories don't begin joyfully. He never opens a book with the words 'Everything was pleasant....' Dahl would only start out uplifting to make the inevitable fall more poignant.⁴²

Dahl's children's books often contain violent scenarios, but there is always hidden a bit of good. Dahl is known for somebody who is celebrating childish anarchy and portraying adults in a negative light. His stories are written to empower children who must face a hard and chaotic life. As Held states:

Dahl doesn't lie to children, like so many fantasy tales. So much of children's literature ends cheerfully. What a let-down life must be for children who buy into this lie. How incapable these children must be of becoming adults who can handle the real world of failure and misery.⁴³

2.3.4 Gender issues

David Walliams, just as Roald Dahl, drew from his childhood experience. Furthermore, Walliams's stories as well as Dahl's, portray issues many children have had to face at some point. The most personal theme of Walliams that can be found in his stories, especially in his book called *Boy in the Dress*⁴⁴, is the question of gender. The

⁴¹ Ibid., 1.

⁴² Held, *Roald Dahl and Philosophy*, 1-2.

⁴³ Ibid., 5.

⁴⁴ David Walliams, *The Boy in the Dress* (London: HarperCollins *Children's Books*, 2008).

author during his childhood, as well as the main character of the story, have been teased for their effeminate appearance and behaviour. The main character, a twelve-year-old boy called Dennis, has found an interest in cross-dressing. Even though he likes playing football and is good at it, his young heart seeks for colours, beauty, and fashionable items. Moreover, he has missed hugging and expressing feelings since his mother has left his life. This book is about somebody based on the theme of being different, in this case, it is a young boy who feels comfortable being a dressed-up girl.

Walliams tries to emphasize the importance of a human being no matter the colour of your skin, the gender, or your sexuality. David Walliams's work is concerned about important issues the youth must face at a young age and tries to depict the importance of embracing and loving yourself. Moreover, he tries to empower his characters in his books as it is in *Boy in the Dress*: "You can be whoever you want to be!"⁴⁵

2.3.5 Bullying and friendship

Another frequent theme of both writers that is portrayed in their stories, is bullying. The main characters either of Dahl or Walliams are mostly underdog child heroes who must fight their way in this cruel and chaotic world. Either they face bullying at school from their schoolmates or much worse from their own families. In Dahl's book *Matilda*, the little girl must face many obstacles at such a young age. The story itself contains many messages of bullying. One of the bullies in Matilda's life, except the Miss Trunchbull, is her father Mr. Wormwood. In another book of Dahl, called *The BFG*, the bullies are the bad malicious giants who bully the Big Friendly Giant for not eating humans and for his rather small giant size. Also, in David Walliams's book called *The Midnight Gang*, one of the characters, the Matron at the children's ward of Lord Funt Hospital represents the bully here by disliking and mistreating the children. As it is clear of Walliams's description right at the beginning of the story: "Matron. Despite running the children's ward, she doesn't like children at all."⁴⁶

⁴⁵ David Walliams, *The Boy in the Dress*, 38.

⁴⁶ David Walliams, *The Midnight Gang* (London: HarperCollins Children's Books, 2018).

As I have already mentioned, both authors used to portray adults in a negative light, therefore, it is not surprising when the bullies of small children, are just adults. I believe that both authors want to emphasize the vulnerability of children and how fragile these human beings are during their childhood. It is clear these authors do not agree with a way when adults choose to bully someone who cannot equally defend himself, as it is portrayed in their children's books.

3 DEPICTION OF FAMILY AND RELATIONSHIPS IN DAHL AND WALLIAMS'S BOOKS

This chapter aims to portray a depiction of family in Dahl's and Walliams's children's books. The special focus is given to the relationship between parents and children, grandparents and grandchildren, substitute parents, orphans and neglectful parents.

3.1 Parents and children

This part will deal with the relationship between a parent and a child, in Dahl's and Walliams's books. As we know from Dahl's autobiographical book *The Boy, Tales of Childhood*, his father died when he was still a small child, but he did stay very close to his mother until her last days. It might be a reason why Dahl did not cover the theme of a functional parenthood in his children's books since he lost one of his parents during his childhood.

As first, I would like to begin with Dahl's book *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. The main character of the story Charlie Bucket has, surprisingly, both parents. His mother Mrs. Bucket, who is taking care of their household and four old grandparents, and Charlie's father Mr. Bucket, who is the only one who has a job. Although the family has been struggling financially and they find themselves living in poverty, they seem to represent a loving family. As Held states: "Charlie and his family have a hard life. But even in poverty and discomfort, they share moments of happiness, when, because of the joy of each other's company."⁴⁷

We might say that Charlie represents in Dahl's view, the most positive relationship between a child and a parent, in his *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. Other examples of relationships between a parent and a child portray the rest of the characters of the book. Having already mentioned the theme hunger, the other example of a parental relationship that is negatively seen by Dahl represents his other child character Augustus Gloop. In Dahl's words, he is described as "a nine-year-old boy who was so enormously fat."⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Held, "Epicurus and the Chocolate Factory (7-18)," in *Roald Dahl and Philosophy*, 8-9.

⁴⁸ Dahl, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, 26.

I just knew Augustus would find a Golden Ticket. He eats so many bars of chocolate a day that it was almost impossible for him not to find one. Eating is his hobby, you know. That's all he's interested in. But still, that's better than being a hooligan and shooting off zip guns and things like that in his spare time, isn't it? And what I always say is, he wouldn't go on eating like he does unless he needed nourishment, would he? It's all vitamins, anyway.⁴⁹

In this case, there is a child who has never experienced starving, not even hunger. By introducing Augustus, Dahl did portray another theme that corresponds to very serious issues children and even adults might face, and it is self-control, in this exact case overeating or obesity.⁵⁰ More importantly, Dahl tried to emphasize that parents do not always act right concerning their children. In this example, Augustus's mother is defending his eating, even though she should not. She does not acknowledge the consequences of Augustus's overeating.

Another example of parenting that is negatively conceived by Dahl is spoiling a child. This example represents the character of Veruca Salt who is described by Dahl as "a small girl who lived with her rich parents in a great city far away."⁵¹ As we further know from Dahl's *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*:

As soon as my little girl told me that she simply had to have one of those Golden Tickets, I went out into the town and started buying up all the Wonka bars I could lay my hands on... Every time I went home she would scream at me, 'Where's my Golden Ticket!' And she would lie for hours on the floor, kicking and yelling. I just hated to see my little girl feeling unhappy like that...⁵²

It is more than obvious from Dahl's description of Veruca and her behaviour, that she is very spoiled by her rich parents. Her parents do what she wants and spoiling a child might cause too much damage in a child's behaviour, from taking everything for granted to being ungrateful. Dahl also tried to emphasize the meaning and value of respect that is mostly missing in a relationship between parents and their children, and

⁴⁹ Ibid., 26-27.

⁵⁰ Held, "On Getting Our Just Desserts" (19-32)," *Roald Dahl and Philosophy*, 26.

⁵¹ Dahl, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, 29.

⁵² Ibid., 30.

he did that by introducing his other character of Miss Violet Beauregarde, who is a gum chewer in *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*:

I just adore gum. I can't do without it. My mother says it's not ladylike and it looks ugly to see a girl's jaws going up and down like mine do all the time, but I don't agree. And who's she to criticize, anyway, because if you ask me, I'd say that her jaws are going up and down almost as much as mine are just from yelling at me every minute of the day.⁵³

Dahl does not agree with such a behaviour of children towards their parents and Violet's behaviour is the case. The last child character of Dahl's book *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* is Mike Teavee, a nine-year-old boy who was a television lover as we learn from the book. Again, Dahl portrayed a child character who suffers from obsession concerning unhealthy attitude, almost addiction, towards modern technology of television.

Every child in this book, except for Charlie, represents a glimpse of failure of parental responsibility. The children cannot control their desires which leads them into trouble. Dahl portrayed in this story the negative cases in parenting and the results of bad children. The transformation of each of them in Wonka's factory might represent the punishment they deserve.⁵⁴ As it is further said by Held:

The others have similar stories – because their parents can't tell them no and they were never compelled to learn their limits or develop self-control, their 'hobbies' became obsessions, indulgences became entitlements, and before long, their empty and unnatural desires took over their lives.⁵⁵

In this part, I would like to focus on another famous children's book of Roald Dahl, *Matilda*. Also, the main character of this story, a little girl Matilda, must face the most difficult obstacles a life offers, even at such a young age. In this story, Matilda's cleverness, brilliance, and curiosity she possesses as a small girl, will not bring her happiness and appreciation but rather a hard time. From Dahl's description, it is known

⁵³ Ibid., 37-37.

⁵⁴ Held, "Epicurus and The Chocolate Factory," *Roald Dahl and Philosophy*, 15.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 14.

that Matilda is not a normal child but rather, in Dahl's words, an "extra-ordinary"⁵⁶ one. She was not even two years old when she was able to speak fluently and when she was three, she had taught herself to read.⁵⁷ Many parents would be happy and lucky to have such a child, but not in Dahl's story. The author gave his protagonist Matilda one of the most difficult experience she must face in her childhood and that is parental neglect. As we learn from the beginning of the book *Matilda*:

Mr. and Mrs. Wormwood 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. 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 extra-ordinary.⁵⁸

Matilda's parents did not care about their daughter at all. They did not spend enough time with her as much as responsible parents do. Mrs. Wormwood was interested in playing bingo and played it five afternoons a week, and her husband Mr. Wormwood worked as a car dealer.⁵⁹ What Matilda's parents did lack were intelligence and responsibility. Dahl introduced them as "gormless and so wrapped up in their own silly little lives."⁶⁰

In this story, it is already known that Matilda's parents did not give her enough praise and love she deserved but instead they felt hatred for her. As well as Held says: "Dahl tells us that Mr. and Mrs. Wormwood are not at all interested in parenting their children."⁶¹ Dahl included a theme of resentment, especially in the relationship between Matilda and her parents. Held described the theme of resentment and compared that with the philosophies of Søren Kierkegaard and Friedrich Nietzsche. Both philosophers noticed how difficult living might become for someone who stands out from the crowd. The more different or special as an individual you are, the more expelled by society you might become.⁶² Furthermore, Held states:

⁵⁶ Dahl, *Matilda*, 4.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 6-16.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁶¹ Held, "Matilda, Existentialist Superhero (33-45)," *Roald Dahl and Philosophy*, 35.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 33-34.

Roald Dahl's character Matilda can be understood as an existentialist hero or even, considering her remarkable abilities, an existentialist super-hero. We will see that Matilda with her genius rise above the mediocrity of her surroundings, she encounters resentment from most of the adults in her life.⁶³

It is obvious Matilda has neglectful parents concerning the upbringing of her and her brother. Furthermore, she must face bullying from her father, Mr. Wormwood. He keeps insulting her every time she shows one of her skills, whether it is her ability to speak, cleverness, or even reading a book. The first example of underestimation that Matilda got from her parents was when she started to talk, and her parents did not appreciate that. As Dahl described: "The parents, instead of applauding her, called her a noisy chatterbox and told her sharply that small girls should be seen and not heard."⁶⁴ Her father even called her "stupid" and "an ignorant little twit"⁶⁵ when talking about the second-hand cars and admitting his cheating in selling them. As Held confirms:

Matilda's parents seek constant distraction in the television. They take no responsibility for parenting their children, no responsibility as members of their community, and no moral responsibility either, as their livelihood is based on criminal activities at the car dealership.⁶⁶

Also, in David Walliams's books, the main characters must cope with their parents. In this part, I would like to focus on David Walliams. I would like to introduce one of the main characters of Walliams, from his book called *Gangsta Granny*, a small boy Ben. In this book, Walliams has portrayed the theme of a child whose desires are not approved by his parents. In this case, it is Ben, who admires plumbing and wishes to become a plumber one day:

Ever since he had been old enough to hold things, Ben had loved plumbing. When other children were playing with ducks in the bath, Ben had asked his parents for bits of pipe, and made complicated water channelling systems. If a tap broken in the house, he fixed

⁶³ Ibid., 34.

⁶⁴ Dahl, *Matilda*, 5.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 16.

⁶⁶ Held, "Matilda, Existentialist Superhero" *Roald Dahl and Philosophy*, 38.

it. If a toilet was blocked, Ben wasn't disgusted, he was ecstatic! Ben's parents didn't approve of him wanting to be a plumber, though. They wanted him to be rich and famous.⁶⁷

One of the most common issues parenting contains is wanting your child to fulfil your ambitions instead of his, and Walliams knows that very well and has involved that in this story. Walliams described Ben's feelings and doubts about himself: "Ben he always felt like a disappointment to his mum and dad. They desperately wanted him to fulfil the ambition they had never managed: to become a professional ballroom dancer."⁶⁸

Many children have had to face those issues at some point. The author himself wanted to portray how difficult it is to be independent as a child when your parents have the power over you. As Walliams says:

In a real life, as a kid, you can actually feel a bit powerless, which I certainly did, so I didn't want to completely betray that feeling. I wanted to reflect how you are dependent on adults to make decisions for you, and to some extent, run your life.⁶⁹

Instead of supporting a child in his desires, there is a child who keeps his passion quiet in front of his parents. As Walliams further describes in *Gangsta Granny*: "Ben tried to keep his passion private. To avoid hurting his mum and dad's feeling, he stashed his copies of *Plumbing Weekly* under his bed."⁷⁰

Furthermore, spending nights somewhere else but not at home when the parents want to enjoy themselves, might become very frustrating for some children. Walliams's books are set in the real world, and every parent needs a break from time to time. In Ben's case, he was supposed to spend every Friday night at his granny's house. By the author's description, it seems that Ben considers himself as a burden which his parents wish to remove from rather than a grandson who visits his granny: "Friday night was their date night, and ever since Ben could remember, they had been dropping him off with his granny when they went out."⁷¹

⁶⁷ David Walliams, *Gangsta Granny* (London: HarperCollins *Children's Books*, 2012), 29-30.

⁶⁸ David Walliams, *Gangsta Granny*, 30.

⁶⁹ See <https://www.stuff.co.nz/entertainment/celebrities/99126650/david-walliams-i-thought-i-would-write-just-one-or-two-books--just-for-myself>.

⁷⁰ Walliams, *Gangsta Granny*, 31.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 20.

Now, I would like to look at the first book Walliams has written, called *The Boy in the Dress*. The main character of this story, Dennis, a twelve-year-old boy, must face parental neglect of his mother. He lives only with his dad and older brother as we learn from the author right at the beginning:

Dennis's mum had left home a couple of years ago. Before that, Dennis used to creep out of his room and sit at the top of the stairs and listen to his mum and dad shout at each other until one day the shouting stopped. She was gone. Dad banned John and Dennis from ever mentioning Mum again.⁷²

Losing a loved one or a parent hurts too much and it is difficult to cope with the feelings of grief and sadness. Especially, during childhood. From Walliams's description, it becomes clear that Ben is the most sensitive person from his family. Unlike his brother who is, from Walliams's description "full of silent rage with his mum for leaving."⁷³ After Ben's mother had left, the relationship with his father turned to cold as we know from the author: "No talking about Mum. No crying. And worst of all – no hugging."⁷⁴

Physical touch is one way of affection that children need during their childhood. It has many positive effects that are indispensable during children's development. In this case, hugging from a parent makes a child feel secure, loved, and happy. Walliams has portrayed the importance of a parent's presence in a child's life and the harsh consequences when a parent turns his back on his children, no matter the situation or the cause. As we know from Walliams, the main character felt worse the loss of a parent:

Dennis did miss being hugged. His mum had hugged him all the time. She was so warm and soft, he loved being held by her. Most children can't wait to grow up and get bigger, but Dennis missed being small and being picked up by his mother. It was in her arms that he had felt most safe. It was a shame Dennis's dad hardly ever hugged him.⁷⁵

⁷² Walliams, *The Boy*, 5.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 6-7.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 8.

Moreover, not only Ben, the main character, suffered after his mother had left. Walliams has also shown in this story that an adult can be affected by the loss of a beloved person. As we know, Ben's Dad did suffer too even, he did not want to show it. As the father is described in the book: "Dad was fat. He just got fatter and fatter after Mum left. Dennis wondered whether his dad was comfort eating, having one more sausage or slice of fried bread at breakfast to - fill the emptiness inside."⁷⁶

Walliams states that every person copes with his feelings differently, whether it is an adult or a child. Unfortunately, this story shows how easily parents can drift themselves apart from their children due to their actions or changes in behaviour. Thereby, Walliams gave us a perfect example of this story.

3.2 Grandparents and children

As the previous chapter begins with Dahl's book *Charlie and Chocolate factory*, also in this part of the thesis I would like to begin with this book and with the depiction of the main protagonist Charlie and his relationship between his grandparents.

As we already know from Dahl, the early start of the story begins with an introduction of the members of the Buckets family, including the main protagonist's grandparents Grandpa Joe, Grandma Josephine, Grandpa George, and Grandma Georgina.⁷⁷ It is not always the case that generations share one household but this story of Dahl does contain three generations under one roof. As well as Held confirms:

Charlie's family is an interesting one, and one that might be unfamiliar to people living in an era which older adults are warehoused in long-term care facilities and ignored. His mother, father, and biological grandparents all live together.⁷⁸

As it is already known from the book, the only family in which we can find grandparents who live with their children and grandchildren is the Buckets. As I have already mentioned in the previous chapter, the character of Charlie and his relationship

⁷⁶ Ibid., 20-21.

⁷⁷ Dahl, *Charlie and Chocolate Factory*, 1-2.

⁷⁸ Held, "Willy Wonka and the Imperial Chocolate factory (137-148)," *Roald Dahl and Philosophy*, 141.

with his parents is seen by Dahl as the purest one. Thereby, there is no surprise the author has already included the characters of grandparents exactly in this family. It might portray Dahl's attitude towards living between multigenerational households and I assume that the author portrayed it positively.

The grandparents are described by Dahl as "shrivelled as prunes, as bony as skeletons, dozing the time away with nothing to do,"⁷⁹ and yet, there is someone who makes them feel alive and happy, and that is their grandson Charlie who is considered for being "their only bright thing in their lives."⁸⁰ As well as Held claims:

Charlie and his family have a hard life. But even in poverty and discomfort, they share moments of happiness when, because of the joy of each other's company, they forget their cares and lose themselves in the stories told by Charlie's four ancient grandparents.

Dahl created a perfect example of a relationship between grandchildren and grandparents where the grandparents are loved and respected by their grandchildren, in this example by their grandson Charlie. I am of the conviction that the author wanted to emphasize that children are not always fortunate enough to have the opportunity to grow up with their grandparents.

I would like to at this point look at David Walliams's book entitled *Gangsta Granny*. Also, in this story, the author has portrayed how it nowadays goes between children and adults. Walliams's books are set in real life and the way he has portrayed the relationship concerning children and old adults is the most accurate one. This story of *Gangsta Granny* tells us a relationship between the main protagonist Ben, and his old Granny. Walliams's first sentence of the story, where Ben calls his Granny "soooo boring"⁸¹, gives a melancholic beginning where it is obvious that the grandson is not happy to visit his Granny. This is the first sign that something is not right when the grandchildren do not feel happy to spend their time with their grandparents. As it is obvious, he finds her boring, but not only her but even "all old people."⁸² It is sadly common in today's society that the youth and even children at the young age, lack respect for the elderly and even look down on them. Walliams has portrayed this current

⁷⁹ Dahl, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, 9.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁸¹ Walliams, *Gangsta Granny*, 11.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 11.

issue of a boy, who finds his Granny boring in all ways, and hates spending time with her: “But Granny is soooo boring, I hate spending time with her. Her TV doesn’t work, all she wants to do is play Scrabble and she stinks of cabbage,” protested Ben.⁸³

Generations differ from each other in many ways and it is not always easy for one generation to clearly understand the other. Yet, the consideration of one generation to be less important or being treated as unworthy is the worst case.

It is known that grandparents usually spoil their grandchildren and would do anything for them. Not always the children feel the same. As Walliams’s story tells, the grandchildren not always appreciate their grandparents. In Ben’s case, it rather looks like a punishment for him when he stays at his granny’s. As I have already mentioned, grandparents would do anything for their grandchildren and Walliams has done the same in this story with his characters. Soon, as the Granny learns how unhappy Ben is when he is forced to spend Friday’s nights with her, she does not hesitate and take action to change that in a hope to look in his grandson’s eyes more important rather than a boring old adult.⁸⁴ Granny gains Ben’s interest by pretending to be a jewel thief and thanks to that they build a strong relationship with each other.

Unfortunately, the ending of this children’s book is rather sad and might surprise its readers. Walliams has also included the theme of death in this story, and that is death of Ben’s Granny due to illness. Even though, the story is hilarious and heart-warming, it gives a lesson to young children to appreciate time spent with their grandparents. I believe Walliams wants to highlight the fact that children take their grandparents for granted and do not cherish them enough. As we learn from Walliams’s Ben, a boy who did not like spending time with his Granny and did not appreciate her earlier than during the last moments they had together.

3.3 Substitute parents

In this part, I would like to analyse the theme of a substitute parent in Dahl’s books *Matilda* and *James and the Giant Peach*.

As I have already described in the previous chapters, Matilda does not have a loving home, and loving parents. Her parents do not cherish having such a child. Quite

⁸³ Ibid., 11.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 47-55.

the opposite. Mr. and Mrs. Wormwood neither support nor encourage their daughter Matilda in her fondness for reading and learning new things at such a young age. Even, after entering school there is almost no one who would be interested in helping Matilda to develop her skills in learning, except for one person, Miss Honey. As Held explains the relationship, to be exact the student-tutor relationship, between Matilda and Miss Honey has become very strong and illustrates the educational philosophy of progressivism.⁸⁵ Although the most important reason why Matilda is so close to Miss Honey, is the concept of goodness in Miss Honey's character. As Ann Alston says in *The Family in English Children's Literature*, Dahl created good and bad characters in this story. Miss Honey represents the goodness and Matilda's parents represent the badness. As Alston further says:

The Wormwoods are presented as unloving and unnatural because they do not conform to middle-class sensibilities of how a family should behave. Dahl produces here a very black and white portrait of family life. There is an acknowledgement that bad families exist.⁸⁶

There is no surprise that the Wormwoods willingly abandoned Matilda when they were just about to escape to Spain after Matilda's father had been exposed of selling the stolen cars in his workshop. As it is already known, they have never represented loving and caring parents who would offer a heart-warming home for their daughter Matilda. As it is clear of Dahl's description, getting rid of one of their children did not make them hesitate for a second:

‘Why don't we let her go if that's what she wants? It'll be one less to look after. If she wants to stay, let her stay. It's fine with me,’ the father said.⁸⁷

Dahl created in this story a loving home for Matilda represented in a single person, Miss Honey. As Alston explains, Dahl broke the conventions of a traditional family in

⁸⁵ Held, “Matilda and the Philosophy of Education (93-106),” *Roald Dahl and Philosophy*, 99.

⁸⁶ Alston, “1920-2003 Depictions of the Twentieth-Century Family: From ‘Just William’ to ‘Harry Potter’ (47-67),” in *The Family in English Children's Literature*, 66.

⁸⁷ Dahl, *Matilda*, 232.

children's literature, by introducing a family of a single woman as a substitute parent, and a little girl:

The reader is shown that the best conclusion for Matilda is a life with unmarried Miss Honey rather than with Matilda's blood-related nuclear family. It appears that Dahl's text here departs from the normative traditions of fictional families in children's literature. The only real change here, I suspect, is the recognition that families do not have to consist of the two-parent, two-children model any more.⁸⁸

In this following part I would like to look at Dahl's book called *James and the Giant Peach*. In this story, Dahl portrayed how quickly life changes no matter the cost, and the consequences might very differ from the previous life. The main protagonist James had a great life, a loving home, and loving parents. Unfortunately, it has changed when his parents tragically died in London and little James has become an orphan, who was sent to live with his horrible aunts, Aunt Sponge and Aunt Spiker. In Dahl's words, they were horrible people:

They were selfish and lazy and cruel, and right from the beginning they started beating poor James for almost no reason at all. They never called him by his real name, but always referred to him as "you disgusting little beast" or "you filthy nuisance" or "you miserable creature," and they certainly never gave him any toys to play with or any picture books to look at. His room was as bare as a prison cell.⁸⁹

In the previous example, a character of Miss Honey in *Matilda*, represents a positive case of a substitute parent. On the contrary, in James's story Dahl created the worst situation any child would dream about. It seems harsh enough for a child character to lose his parents but much worse seems to become somebody who is not loved, treated well, and being considered for a burden by people who should offer you their hearts and home. As Held explains:

Dahl establishes the tension that exists between the infinite and the finite in the life of young James Henry Trotter. It seems, along the thought of Jean-Paul Sartre, that

⁸⁸ Alston, *The Family in English Children's literature*, 66.

⁸⁹ Dahl, *James and the Giant Peach*, 1.

humans are thrown into the finite and that in a jiffy the rather absurd movements of fate can extinguish one's existence. Once his evil aunts adopt James, a radical discontinuity between the infinite and the finite emerges. He is no longer James Henry Trotter, but "the filthy nuisance."⁹⁰

Fortunately, almost each of Dahl's famous protagonists are given a piece of superpower that might help them and change their fate. Whether we are talking about Matilda's telekinesis, Charlie's golden ticket, or James's magical crocodile tongues which he was given by "an old in a crazy dark-green suit."⁹¹ The story of an unhappy boy living with his terrible aunts, has quickly changed into a big adventure James experiences along side with seven large garden bugs who soon become his new family. In this story a substitute of a loving family represent the insect James has met inside of the giant peach.

3.4 Orphans and neglectful parents

In this part, I would like to examine the theme of orphan hood in Dahl's *The BFG*⁹² and Walliams's *The Midnight Gang*.

Dahl's book, entitled *The Big Friendly Giant*, portrayed an unusual relationship between a small girl and a big giant. The main protagonist of this book, Sophie, is an orphan and lives in an orphanage with many other children. The second main character is the Big Friendly Giant who kidnapped her out of the orphanage right at the beginning of the story during the witching hour. Dahl introduced two characters who differentiate from each other very much, and yet, they share many similar things. Dahl portrayed the theme of being an orphan in various ways in this story. Being an orphan does not always mean losing a biological family, it might correspond to being refused by society, minority, or species. As Held says: "Both are orphans of a kind; Sophie lacks a biological family, and the BFG has been ostracized from the other giants."⁹³

⁹⁰ Held, "The Existential Journey of James Henry Trotter (47-58)", *Roald Dahl and Philosophy*, 50-51.

⁹¹ Dahl, *James and the Giant Peach*, 3.

⁹² Roald Dahl, *The BFG* (New York, NY: Penguin Group, 1982).

⁹³ Held, "Crodswoogle, Flushbunking, and All Things in The BFG (161-172)," *Roald Dahl and Philosophy*, 171-172.

Moreover, the relationship between Sophie and the BFG indicates the value of true friendship. In this story, Dahl portrayed the real importance of a good friendship, even between dissimilar persons. As Held says:

I would encourage anyone who is interested in finding and developing a genuine friendship to follow Dahl—to look for someone who shows affection and wishes one well in all aspects of one’s life. This person doesn’t have to be similar to oneself. As we learn from the BFG and Sophie, a potential friend may be much older, inhabit a radically different world, and have different interests than ourselves; yet she will also be there when we need her and help us develop a good character. They teach us the importance of staying true to who we are, while still recognizing our limitations and being open to change.⁹⁴

In this last part, I would like to look at David Walliams’s book *The Midnight Gang*.

Walliams’s story called *The Midnight Gang* includes many various themes; from a parental abandonment, death, loneliness, and sickness to friendship. Yet, this story is full of funny moments thanks to Walliams’s writing style. The story begins with an introduction of a boy Tom, who is taken to the hospital due to an injury on his head during playing the cricket. Right at the beginning of the story, Walliams reveals first theme of parental irresponsibility. In many families, children feel lonely and abandoned by their parents who are busy with their works and have no time for their children. Usually they hire somebody else, a nanny or an au-pair, to take care of their children. Walliams is aware of this issue and has involved it in his story. Tom is a perfect example of this situation. As Walliams further describes:

His parents weren’t here. They were never here; they were always there. For some years now, they had packed their only child off to a posh boarding school deep in the English countryside. Tom would only see them on school holidays. Even though Tom had travelled alone for hours to see them, his father would often still have to work all day and his mother would leave him with a nanny while she went shopping. All he really wanted was to spend time with Mum and Dad, but time was the one thing they never gave him.⁹⁵

⁹⁴ Ibid., 172.

⁹⁵ Walliams, *The Midnight Gang*, 37-38.

During the story, Tom meets with other four children at the hospital, and will soon join them in their night adventures they take as the Midnight Gang. Although the children turn into the midnight gang during a night and feel happy for a couple of hours, the rest of the time does not feel same. Walliams also includes the theme of loneliness there.

They all are lonely in their kind as we learn of Walliams's description:

The children in this ward are all ones whose parents don't ever visit for one reason or another. They are either too poor to travel like Amber's, or too ill like Robin's, or live too far away like Sally's. George has the best reason, though. George's father is in prison!⁹⁶

The loneliness might be the reason why children have created their Midnight Gang. It does not portray only a gang but rather a small family of friends in which every one of them can feel happy for a while. As Held says: "It is nearly impossible to imagine going through life without friends. When we face hardships, it is important to have friends see us through despair, and in good times, we love to share the moments with others."⁹⁷

Another theme Walliams has involved in this story is physical deformity in a character of the porter, who, as we learn from Walliams, was raised in the hospital because his mother had left him on the steps of the hospital in the middle of the night.⁹⁸

The author is very well concerned about the issues children face today and has portrayed them in his stories. Walliams has portrayed in this story that every child faces his fears and insecurities and deals with obstacles of loneliness and despair, but it does not mean it will last forever. As we learn at the end by the story, Tom is reunited with his parents and the porter will be allowed to work and live at the hospital until the end of his days. As Alston mentions, it appeals to children's writers to include a theme of orphans in their stories:

Family, it seems, is the essential happy ending of a great deal of children's literature, from Jo March's compliance to the domestic role to the frequent theme of orphans

⁹⁶ Ibid., 62.

⁹⁷ Held, *Roald Dahl and Philosophy*, 161.

⁹⁸ Walliams, *The Midnight Gang*, 373.

finding solace in a new substitute family. Indeed, there is positively a fashion in children's literature to follow the plight of an orphan.⁹⁹

Neither Walliams's nor Dahl's protagonists live a fairy-tale life. Both authors portrayed real-life situations in their children's books, no matter how hard they seem to be. I am of the conviction that the purpose of putting their characters through so much suffering and challenging situations, will help them to cope with reality and the life's true face.

⁹⁹ Alston, "1818-1914 Depictions of the Nineteenth and Turn of the Century Family: From a Good Beating to the Flight to Neverland (27-45)", *The Family*, 44.

CONCLUSION

Roald Dahl was one of the major authors of children's literature who celebrated children's anarchy and changed the view of an idealized family in his work. David Walliams has likewise approached the literary style full of uncommon themes which appear in his children's books.

In this thesis I aimed to study breaking stereotypes and taboo themes in the depiction of family and relationships in the children's books of Roald Dahl and David Walliams. Both authors break the view of an idealized family, which dominated during Victorian literature, and focus on real issues that accompanied a family life and relationships between children and adults.

The first chapter provided the historical overview of the Victorian period. The chapter described the Victorian society of this era and its division of social classes, and literature produced during this period. The main focus was put on the depiction of the Victorian family. The concept of family in Victorian Age used to be cherished and considered the most significant social institution. It dominated in the Victorian literature for a long time and served as the major example of moral values.

The next chapter was devoted to the lives of Roald Dahl and David Walliams. In this chapter, I introduced the authors' lives and experience they gained during their childhood which later appeared in their work. The last part of this chapter expounded on such experience that turned into the most frequent themes that could be found in Dahl and Walliams's children's books. I have analysed the theme of bullying children by school administrators and family members, as well as the themes of hunger and poverty resembling the harsh and poor living conditions that prevailed among working-class people during 19th century. I have also analysed the unusual theme of gender identity and cross-dressing in one of Walliams's children books.

The main focus of this thesis, the depiction of family and relationships in Dahl and Walliams's children's books, was portrayed in the last chapter. In this chapter, I have analysed Dahl and Walliams's perceptions of family relationships and the most current issues children face today. This chapter was divided into four subchapters. The first part dealt with the relationship between parents and children, which I have

analysed in Dahl's books *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, and *Matilda*, and Walliams's *Gangsta Granny*, and *The Boy in the Dress*. Each of these children's books portray various family environments and the relationships between the main protagonists and their parents. Dahl and Walliams introduced serious issues concerning children's hardship and the obstacles they are forced to face by breaking the stereotype of an idealized family in their books.

When it comes to the relationship between generations, it might include conflicts between older and younger generations due to misunderstandings caused by the generation gap and changing society. For this reason, the following part dealt with the relationship between the old adults and children, especially grandparents and children in Dahl's *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* and Walliams's *Gangsta Granny*.

In the last parts, I concentrated on the issue of a parental substitute, neglectful parents, and orphans. I have analysed the theme of substitute parents in Dahl's *Matilda*, and *James and the Giant Peach*, in which both main characters lose their biological family but fortunately, gain new ones. The last part presented themes of orphans and neglectful parents are in Dahl's *The BFG*, and Walliams's *The Midnight Gang*.

In general, children's literature is viewed as a source of entertainment, and yet, it is considered to have a strong influence on children's development. In the past, there appeared children's stories that were banned for their violent content or lack of moral values, which were perceived as having a negative impact on a child's development. For instance, the concept of family in Victorian literature used to be idealized and presented as something pure and untouched by the taint of the imperfect world. Nevertheless, the reason why Dahl ranks among the most beloved children's authors and his books are still admired by many children is because he always empowered the children into mischief by giving them access to superpowers, or unconventional situations they can experience in his children's books. Dahl was aware that literature gives children an opportunity to escape into the fantasy world and allows them to cope with the emotions and situations they have to face in real life. Dahl broke the social conventions in his children's books by encouraging children to disobey adults and by celebrating children's anarchy and putting adults in a negative light, which might be perceived by some as inappropriate. Yet, Dahl and Walliams are considered writers who do not underestimate children in their stories and treat them with respect.

Dahl and Walliams used their humorous literary style to portray challenging real-life situations in the lives of their children's characters. Their children's stories differentiate from other children's writers by the real interpretation of life and depiction of true human nature, and that is what make their stories so unique.

RESUMÉ

Cílem této bakalářské práce je vyobrazení rodiny v dětských literárních dílech Roalda Dahla a Davida Walliamse a způsob, kterým tito autoři prolomili stereotyp týkající se vzoru rodiny, který převládal v literatuře v průběhu viktoriánské doby. Oba autoři zahrnuli ve svých dílech různorodá témata, která se zabývají problematikou panujících v rodinách a v rodinných vztazích. Oba autoři se zaměřují na děti, které často představují hlavní postavy jejich tvorby.

První kapitola se zabývá kontextem viktoriánské doby. V této kapitole jsem nastínila situaci v Anglii v době vládnutí královny Viktorie a vyobrazení tehdejší společnosti, která byla rozdělena do společenských tříd. Jak je známo, jednou ze společenských tříd, která žila v nejhorsších životních podmínkách, byla dělnická třída. Kvůli nízké životní úrovni této společenské třídy, docházelo k využívání dětí jako levné pracovní síly. Náročná práce a nevhodné podmínky vedly k vysoké úmrtnosti dětí ve velmi nízkém věku.

V další části této kapitoly se věnuji dětské literatuře viktoriánské doby, která byla zaměřena pouze pro střední a vyšší společenskou třídu a zobrazovala rodinu, jako řádný vzor morálních hodnot. Pojetí rodiny bylo často v dětské literatuře idealizováno a mělo za účel ztvárnit celistvost a soudržnost rodiny v lepším světle, než bylo ve skutečnosti.

V druhé kapitole jsem představila životy autorů Roalda Dahla a Davida Walliamse. Oba autoři čerpali ze svých životních zážitků a zkušeností a zobrazili je ve svých dílech. Jedním z témat, které jsem analyzovala v této kapitole, je téma šikany a přísných trestů, se kterými se sám Roald Dahl setkal v době svého studia na internátní škole, a které později ztvárnil ve svých dílech jako je Matilda. V dalších částech této kapitoly jsem se zabývala analýzou nevšedních témat, které jsou zobrazeny v dětských dílech těchto dvou autorů. Například v díle Roalda Dahla, Karlík a továrna na čokoládu, jsem analyzovala téma chudoby a hladovění. V díle Davida Walliamse, Kluk v sukních jsem nastínila problematiku transvestitismu.

V hlavní části této práce jsem se zabývala pojmem rodiny a rodinných vztahů v dílech těchto autorů. Tuto kapitolu jsem rozdělila na čtyři podkapitoly. V první části jsem analyzovala vztah mezi dětmi a rodiči v dílech Karlík a továrna na čokoládu,

Babička drsňačka, a Kluk v sukních. Každé z těchto děl, představuje jinou rodinnou situaci a útrapy, kterými se hlavní hrdinové potýkají. Každý příběh se liší od viktoriánského vzoru rodiny a zobrazuje problematiku ve vztazích mezi rodinnými příslušníky, v tomto případě mezi rodiči a jejich dětmi. V druhé části jsem analyzovala vztah prarodičů a dětí, a problematiku týkající se vztahu mezi dětmi a seniory. Vztahy mezi generacemi jsou často plné nedorozumění a bohužel také nedostatkem respektu, který převládá v chování jedinců mladších generací ke starším lidem.

V posledních částech jsem napřed analyzovala téma náhradních rodičů, a to v dílech Matilda, a Jakub a obří broskve od Roalda Dahla. V těchto dílech se hlavní postavy potýkají se ztrátou biologické rodiny, ale zároveň se jim dostane nové příležitosti o vybudování nového rodinného zázemí. Poslední téma této kapitoly se týkalo sirotek a rodičů zanedbávajících své povinnosti vůči dětem. Tato témata jsem analyzovala v dílech Obr Dobr od Roalda Dahla, a Půlnoční Gang od Davida Walliamse.

Hlavní postavy dětských příběhů Roalda Dahla a Davida Walliamse, nežijí pohádkové životy, nýbrž naopak. Tito autoři ztvárnili ve svých dílech situace, v kterých jsou jejich hrdinové nuceni čelit reálné a často bolestivé pravdě života. Ať už se jedná o kruté nebo nedbající rodiče, či špatné životní podmínky rodin, zobrazením této problematiky ve svých dílech Dahl a Walliams prolomili stereotyp ideálu rodinného života.

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ANNOTATION

- Author: Regina Martynková
- Department: Department of English and American Studies
- Title of Thesis: Breaking of Stereotypes and Taboos in the Depiction of Family in the works of Roald Dahl and David Walliams
- Supervisor: Mgr. David Livingstone, Ph.D.
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- Abstract: This thesis focuses on breaking stereotypes in the depiction of family and relationships in the children's literature of Roald Dahl and David Walliams. Both these writers broke taboo areas in their stories by using unusual themes of children's suffering and the hardship of family and relationships.

ANOTACE

Autor:	Regina Martynková
Katedra:	Katedra anglistiky a amerikanistiky
Název práce:	Prolomení stereotypů a tabu ve vyobrazení rodiny v dílech Roalda Dahla a Davida Walliamse
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Klíčová slova:	děti; dětská literatura; vztahy; rodina; stereotyp; prolomení stereotypů; tabu; viktoriánská rodina; nefunkční rodiny
Abstract:	Bakalářská práce se zaměřuje na prolomení stereotypů a tabu témat ve vyobrazení rodiny v dětské literatuře, a to především v dílech Roalda Dahla a Davida Walliamse. Oba autoři ve svých dílech zobrazují nevšední témata týkající se útrap dětí a nefunkčních rodin, a jejich vztahy.