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READING TRAUMATIZED LIVES THROUGH CHILDREN'S LITERATURE: REFLECTIONS, REVERBERATIONS, AND PRESUMPTIONS ^{1 2}

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Abstract

Matilda by Roald Dahl can be categorized as a children's story, but it can gain new dimensions through different readings by its readers as contributors in the production of the meaning. The characters in *Matilda* are described exaggeratedly; they are either unremarkable or possess supernatural powers. The traits, circumstances, and positions of specific characters are repeatedly underlined, which may seem too much to be a coincidence. It might thereupon be helpful to consider any information that could contribute to the analysis, including details that seem to be outside of the text but might be related to it, such as the life of its author. At this point, although semiotics carefully distinguishes between the author and the narrator, with the inclusion of translation purposes in the analysis, reading the author's life may become a necessity since the translator needs to know whose word s/he is to reproduce. In line with this, *Matilda* is analyzed from the perspective of the semiotics of translation in this study, and the emphasis put on the marginalities or marginalization of the characters is hypothesized to create "isotopies" (Greimas & Courtes, 1982, 163) and allude to people in Dahl's life. This analysis is supported by an emphasis on the "role of the receiver of discourse in the production of the meaning," which, like the concept of isotopy, is one of the operations of analysis developed by the Paris School of Semiotics and compiled by Öztürk Kasar (2009, p. 166-172) within the framework of her approach to the semiotics of translation. The analysis is further expanded from a feminist

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perspective, suggesting an analogy between gender-discriminatory discourses against girls in *Matilda* and against boys in Dahl's life. This study concludes that certain traumatic events in Dahl's life may be thought to have prompted him to create characters who reflect people from his life, perhaps in an attempt to relay to readers particular critical perspectives on societies, families, and education systems, and perhaps quite unintentionally.

Keywords: Semiotics, isotopy, trauma, *Matilda*, Roald Dahl.

INTRODUCTION AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Every form of communication consists of a producer and a receiver. Discourse is constituted to produce meaning and maintains its existence through signification made by its receivers. Within the framework of the "role of the receiver of discourse in the production of the meaning" (Öztürk Kasar, 2009, p. 171), the receiver, who is as important as the producer, interprets the producer's discourse based on her/his own reading as an individual with a different background as well as under different circumstances at the moment of the reception, which shapes the way the text is perceived and evaluated.

Matilda by Roald Dahl can be categorized as a children's story. However, like any other literary text, it is open to gaining new dimensions through multiple different readings by its readers as, in the first place, receivers of discourse, and then as producers of significance contributing to the story's universe of meaning. The characters in *Matilda* are constructed as positioned outside the mainstream and described at extremes in an exaggerated manner; they are either somehow unremarkable or possess supernatural powers. Their accentuated traits, attitudes and circumstances are repeatedly highlighted and reminded to the reader, which may be perceived as too purposeful to be a coincidence. In semiotic terms, this kind of constant repetition and recurring emphasis "on different levels and through different signs" (Childers & Hentzi, 1995, p. 161) is defined as "isotopy" (Greimas & Courtés, 1982, p. 163) and is deemed to be worthy of examination.

The main idea behind the concept of isotopy is iterativity; originally, isotopy designated the iterativeness of *classemes*, but then its scope was expanded "as the recurrence of semic categories, be they thematic (or abstract) or figurative" (Greimas and Courtés, 1982: 164), and over time its span was redefined with the inclusion of new perspectives. Within the framework of this study, the concept of isotopy is considered as achievable "through the repetition of synonymous words that possess shared meanings, through the repetition of words that are only related to one another to a certain extent, or even through the repetition of words with opposite meanings" (Tuna & Kuleli, 2017, p. 37). For example, binary oppositions such as fat-thin, poor-rich, and well-behaved-badly-behaved, and their constant repetition in the text, cause isotopies to emerge, through which specific messages shaping the universe of the text seem to be intended. Therefore, the consideration of isotopies in the analysis constitutes an integral part of the theoretical framework of this study.

As already mentioned, since the isotopies constructed through the characters seem too conspicuous to be coincidental, it might be worthwhile to consider any information that could possibly contribute to inquiry concerning the reason behind their creation, and further extend the analysis to consider any details, including those that seem to be outside the text but might be related to it, such as its author and his life. In fact, although semiotics may essentially focus on "only the text, completely the text within its integrity and nothing outside of the text" in Greimas' approach (Öztürk Kasar, 2003, p. 139) and carefully distinguish between the author and the narrator as the instance of origin, in many cases,

such as the inclusion of translation purposes in the process of analysis, reading the author's life may become a necessity beyond its usefulness since the translator will need to know whose words s/he is to reproduce in the target language. Sometimes, the connections between the author and the text may be clear, or even openly stated, as in the case of George Orwell, who talks about the experiences by which he arrived at his political position and wrote *Animal Farm*, in the preface to the Ukrainian translation of the book⁵. All the same, the connections may not always be sufficiently obvious to make any meaningful inference; or sometimes no connection can be established at all. In any case, it might be helpful to consider and evaluate any detail that could possibly have a contribution to make to the analysis. Based on this idea, in the present study, Dahl's life is included in the analysis of *Matilda* as one of "the elements surrounding the text" (Öztürk Kasar, 2009, p. 172) in terms of any eventual parallelisms.

This analysis, originated with a focus on isotopies and further expanded with the inclusion of the author's life, is supported by an emphasis on the "role of the receiver of discourse in the production of the meaning" (Öztürk Kasar, 2009, p. 171), which, like the concept of isotopy and the elements surrounding the text, is one of the operations of literary text analysis compiled by Öztürk Kasar (2009, pp. 166-172) as part of her approach to semiotics of translation. The idea behind this emphasis is that the connections established are based upon subjective readings carried out within the framework of the analysis in this study, and the signification achieved is an outcome of the understanding of the receiver of discourse rather than the declaration of its producer.

In the Theory of Instances of Enunciation developed by Jean-Claude Coquet, *you* is as important as *I* in a discourse (Öztürk Kasar, 2009, p. 171). In the context of a literary text, when "I" is considered to be "the author" as the producer of discourse, "you" becomes "the reader." What the producer wishes to communicate is important, but an equally significant aspect is that "what is understood from what is said is as important as what is said" (Tuna, 2016, p. 34). In other words, when the producer finishes producing the discourse and the discourse is received by the receiver, the discourse is removed from the initiative of the producer as the receiver contributes to it by making sense of it in her/his own way. In conclusion, production and reception can be viewed as "an outcome of action and reaction in the connection between *I* and *you*" (Tuna & Kuleli, 2017, p. 40).

In this study, based on the above-mentioned theoretical framework, *Matilda* is analyzed with a focus on the marginalities or marginalization of the characters, in order to reveal any allusions to people and events in Dahl's life. With the use of the operations of analysis as well as a feminist perspective, implicit signs in the text as conveyed through fantastic elements, interesting characters, and the creative plot are disclosed. In addition, how these implicit signs reflect the traumatic events in Dahl's life is scrutinized in order to highlight the importance of an analysis that is not limited to the text itself.

TRAGEDY AND TRAUMA: ROALD DAHL AND THE DEATH OF OLIVIA

At the age of seven, Dahl's oldest daughter Olivia contracted measles, an illness that was rampant throughout England at the time. Even as the illness was taking its natural course, Olivia's condition suddenly took a turn for the worst, and the Dahl family, much like Olivia's doctors, were unable to remedy her sudden deterioration. The abrupt decline in Olivia's health and the resulting irrevocable consequences clearly indicated that this condition was

⁵ Orwell, G. George Orwell's Preface to the Ukrainian Edition of *Animal Farm*. <https://www.orwellfoundation.com/the-orwell-foundation/orwell/books-by-orwell/animal-farm/preface-to-the-ukrainian-edition-of-animal-farm-by-george-orwell/> [22.07.2021].

no regular case of measles. It had developed into a fatal disease called measles encephalitis, which is "a result of the brain becoming infected with the virus during the rash phase of the illness or by an immune-mediated brain inflammation subsequent to measles infection."⁶ Measles encephalitis, a much more dangerous illness for children than regular measles, rendered Olivia's case lethal, and before the family had realized it, her condition suddenly worsened and Olivia lost her life:

[...] She had always succumbed heavily to minor ailments, but when she slept for twenty-four hours at a stretch, Pat called the doctor. [...] That evening, drowsiness became coma. The doctor returned, went white, and called an ambulance. Olivia died in hospital the same night (Treglown, 2016, chapter 8, p. 10).

Olivia's contraction of the illness and subsequent death occurred within a brief period and created fresh scars in the hearts of a family that had yet to overcome a previous trauma – their son Theo had had an accident. Dahl, who had at least been able to attempt to cure Theo, felt helpless in the case of Olivia's sudden death. Accordingly, to serve as a guide for other families, Dahl shared his feelings about the matter as follows:

There is today something that parents can do to make sure that this sort of tragedy does not happen to a child of theirs. They can insist that their child is immunised against measles. I was unable to do that for Olivia in 1962 because in those days a reliable measles vaccine had not been discovered. Today a good and safe vaccine is available to every family and all you have to do is to ask your doctor to administer it⁷.

The lack of a reliable vaccine for measles at that time stripped Olivia and her family of the opportunity of a happy future together. Moreover, her death "brought a new degree of grimness to Dahl's already often cynical emotional life" (Treglown, 2016, chapter 8, p. 2), and he was unable to overcome his dolor for a long time. As for *Matilda*, the book constituting the corpus of this study, it was published in 1988, many years after Olivia's death. In *Matilda*, through the voice of the narrator, Dahl created a clear divide between the virtuous and evil characters, using an exaggerated narrative tone. This approach was intentional, as indicated by Dahl himself:

When you're writing a book, with people in it as opposed to animals, it is no good having people who are ordinary, because they are not going to interest your readers at all. Every writer in the world has to use the characters that have something interesting about them and this is even more true in children's books. I find that the only way to make my characters really interesting to children is to exaggerate all their good or bad qualities, and so if a person is really nasty or bad or cruel, you make them very nasty, very bad, very cruel. If they are ugly, you make them extremely ugly. That I think is fun and makes an impact.⁸

The characters in *Matilda* are categorized as wicked or righteous, in line with this justification. However, Dahl may have segregated them to bring particular characteristics into focus, perhaps as an implicit reflection of the traumas he had experienced. The hypothesis that may lead to this thought is the identification of the characters who are brought into focus via individuals from Dahl's own life, thereby resulting in the attribution of special meaning to these characters.

⁶ Encephalitis Society. <https://www.encephalitis.info/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=48aa149f-750d-42d8-823c-e9c414307525>, [16.09.2019].

⁷ Roald Dahl. <https://www.roalddahl.com/roald-dahl/timeline/1960s/november-1962>, [16.09.2019].

⁸ Scholastic Kids Books Clubs. https://clubs-kids.scholastic.co.uk/clubs_content/1491, [16.09.2019].

FROM FICTIONAL CHARACTERS TO PEOPLE IN REAL LIFE

Matilda is a book that chronicles the tale of a young girl who is quite intelligent for her age. Based on the role of the receiver of discourse in the production of the meaning, this study considers its author, Dahl, as the producer of discourse, and the subjective readings shaping the analysis in this study are considered an outcome of the understanding of the receiver. When *Matilda* and Dahl's life are compared in an intertextual context, eventual relationships may be established. To reveal these relationships, characters in *Matilda* who may presumably allude to notable people in Dahl's life and related discourses are analyzed in this study, within the context of "the role of the receiver of discourse in the production of the meaning" (Öztürk Kasar, 2009, p. 171).

Matilda

Matilda is the protagonist of the story, who is otherized at home and at school by her family and headmistress due to her "oddness," which causes her to be misunderstood, as well as her gender and intellect. She possesses extraordinary skills and remarkable intelligence compared to her peers, but her family remains unresponsive toward her, while they regard Matilda's brother, Michael, as the most valuable and clever member of the family. Matilda begins to attend school later than her peers because of her family's indifference. She is otherized and mistreated at school because of Miss Trunchbull, the horrible headmistress. By contrast, Miss Honey is a wonderful teacher and the only decent adult in Matilda's life.

Example 1 (Narrator)

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 country or even further than that (Dahl, 2001b, p. 4).

The narrator largely ignores Matilda's brother, whom Mrs. and Mr. Wormwood offer an excessive amount of affection, viewing him as superior to Matilda. Just as a scab's only function is to protect a wound in the process of healing and it subsequently becomes useless, Matilda is viewed as a scab by her family and will probably be regarded as such until she leaves her family behind. Based on this line of thought, Mrs. and Mr. Wormwood trust Michael over Matilda. They suppose that Michael is the only child who can continue the family name and business, and thus they deem Matilda unnecessary.

Example 2 (Miss Trunchbull)

He [Mr. Wormwood] said if anything bad ever happened in the school, it was certain to be his daughter who did it. I haven't met the little brat yet, but she'll know about it when I do. Her father said she's a real wart (Dahl, 2001b, p. 79).

The headmistress's hasty acceptance of Mr. Wormwood's prejudiced opinion of Matilda even before she has met the young girl exemplifies the latter's beforehand ostracization. The narrator uses a harsh narrative tone to pointedly express the family's hatred toward Matilda. The words "brat" and "wart" (Dahl, 2001b, p. 79) serve as emphasis, and aside from the consonance, Matilda's being referred to as a "naughty child" and a "nauseating scab" is evidence of the treatment that she receives.

Michael

There are only a few descriptions of Michael, Matilda's brother. As siblings, Matilda and Michael's distance from each other is marked. Their parents prefer to focus on Michael and do not realize that Matilda is a prodigy. Michael acts indifferently when their parents mistreat Matilda. This portrayal may signify Dahl's intentional lack of focus on Michael, resulting in the absence of dialogue between the siblings.

Example 3 (Mr. Wormwood)

'Listen boy,' he said, addressing the son and ignoring Matilda, 'seeing as you'll be going into this business with me one day, you've got to know how to add up the profits you make at the end of each day. Go and get yourself a pad and a pencil and let's see how clever you are.'

The son obediently left the room and returned with the writing materials (Dahl, 2001b, 44).

Mr. Wormwood considers Michael his successor due to his gender, and seeks to measure his intelligence through his ability to calculate the profits he makes. Michael is unable to do it, and in his stead, Matilda quickly and correctly performs the calculation; however, her father accuses her of cheating and reprimands her. Matilda has the ability to think for herself; by contrast, Michael obeys his parents without second thoughts.

Mrs. and Mr. Wormwood

Two characters whose discourse is present throughout the story are Matilda's parents. Mr. Wormwood is a fraudulent car salesman and a neglectful father who does not feel any affection for his daughter. Matilda's mother Mrs. Wormwood cares for nothing except her own appearance. Like her husband, she has no affection for Matilda; however, she sometimes complains about her husband to Matilda. An assessment of their common traits denotes that they are adults who neglect their daughter, prefer watching television to reading and focus more on their own outward appearance than their children's education.

Example 4 (Mr. Wormwood)

"We don't hold with book-reading,' Mr Wormwood said. 'You can't make a living from sitting on your fanny and reading story-books. We don't keep them in the house'" (Dahl, 2001b, pp. 90-91).

Matilda's intelligence is underscored throughout the story and further emphasized using the titles of classic literature she has read. In contrast to Matilda, her family is addicted to watching television and disdainful of reading. Mr. Wormwood is only capable of contemplating the means of committing fraud, and the only text he has ever read is a car magazine. He views himself as the head of the family and does not want Matilda to become more knowledgeable than him. He therefore goes to extremes in his behavior, such as ripping up her books.

Example 5 (Mrs. Wormwood)

"I'm not in favour of blue-stockings girls. A girl should think about making herself look attractive so she can get a good husband later on. Looks is more important than books, Miss Hunky" (Dahl, 2001b, p. 91).

"A girl doesn't get a man by being brainy" (Dahl, 2001b, p. 93).

These excerpts are examples of the use of gender-discriminatory discourse in the story. Mrs. Wormwood accepts and believes in the taboos and socially constructed gender roles imposed upon women. She adopts a harsh attitude toward Miss Honey, who comes to defend Matilda, and she upholds her opinion that a woman's highest priority should be to take care of her appearance (Dahl, 2001b, p. 91).

Miss Trunchbull

The most remarkable character in the text in terms of peculiarity, as well as personal and physical traits, is Miss Trunchbull. Evidence for her being an unnerving and malicious character includes the narrator's use of the word "barked" (Dahl, 2001b, pp. 79-80) instead of "said" or "told." Trunchbull detests little girls, although she administers a school full of girls and metes out cruel punishments to them. Trunchbull is described in an exaggerated manner in the text, and her negative traits are harshly illustrated through the narrator.

Example 6 (Narrator)

Miss Trunchbull, the Headmistress, was something else altogether. She was a gigantic holy terror, a fierce tyrannical monster who frightened the life out of the pupils and teachers alike. There was an aura of menace about her even at a distance, and when she came up close you could almost feel the dangerous heat radiating from her as from a red-hot rod of metal (Dahl, 2001b, p. 61).

As illustrated, the impression that Trunchbull leaves on people is one of fear. This situation is highly unfavorable for children who are yet to know how to express themselves, as they are incapable of defending their rights or speaking their minds in the face of Trunchbull. As the children cower in fear, they have no option but to accept Trunchbull's punishments and verbal abuse. In this discourse, through the narrator, Dahl apparently attempts to conjure an education system that is filled with fear.

Example 7 (Hortensia & Trunchbull)

"She hates very small children. She therefore loathes the bottom class and everyone in it. She thinks five-year-olds are grubs that haven't yet hatched out" (Dahl, 2001b, p. 96).

"I was never a small person," she snapped. "I have been large all my life and I don't see why others can't be the same way" (Dahl, 2001b, p. 145).

Trunchbull detests little girls so much that she denies ever having been one, thereby rejecting her own existence and identity. She is convinced that she would not have succeeded at anything as a girl; she must therefore have adopted masculine traits based on her belief that she would be capable of achieving much more in that manner.

Miss Honey

Miss Honey, the kindest adult in the story, treats children the best. As a teacher, she guides Matilda, helping her find a way out of the hard times.

Example 8 (Narrator)

Their teacher was called Miss Honey, and she could not have been more than twenty-three or twenty-four. She had a lovely pale oval Madonna face with blue eyes and her hair was light-brown. Her body was so slim and fragile one got the feeling that if she fell over she would smash into a thousand pieces, like a porcelain figure (Dahl, 2001b, p. 60).

In this example, Miss Honey's physical traits are described in a manner different from those of the other adults in the story. Mrs. and Mr. Wormwood are portrayed as ridiculous and insensible, and Trunchbull is portrayed as muscular and terrifyingly powerful. On the contrary, Miss Honey is described as fragile. An examination of the narrator's description of this teacher indicates at the outset that the children will love their new teacher.

Parallelisms and Isotopies

The results of examination of the characters highlight the fact that Mrs. and Mr. Wormwood are extremely neglectful as parents and other parental figures are nearly non-existent. Also, despite being a woman, Trunchbull finds girls disgusting. Overall, each character has uncommon or extraordinary aspects that may signify Dahl's eventual attempt to convey specific messages to readers.

The death of Dahl's daughter Olivia and the violence Dahl suffered during his school years were traumatic experiences, and particular characters and events in the story may be a reflection of these experiences. The most notable aspects of the text include merciless behavior toward children, gender discrimination toward girls, and a corrupt education system. Considering Dahl's experiences throughout his education, Trunchbull as a character may have been inspired by his violent, tyrannical teachers. Furthermore, the other children's negative aspects are disclosed, whereas Matilda's supernatural abilities and intelligence are brought to the fore by the narrator. All the same, some of the negative descriptions of Matilda originate from her family and the headmistress. Considering Matilda's supernatural powers and precedence over the other characters, together with the fact that Dahl's daughter Olivia passed away at a young age, he may have created a semblance between the two girls. Olivia's death at a young age is known to have triggered in Dahl and his wife feelings of guilt, which is perhaps reflected in the characters of Mrs. and Mr. Wormwood. Such potential parallelisms are examined in this part of the study through discourses from the text and experiences from the author's life, some of which can be considered in tandem with the concept of isotopy. A key point to highlight prior to the evaluation is that the isotopies used in the course of the analysis do not consist of a reiteration of words. The isotopies revealed in this part of the study are thematic and based on parallelisms of the events from the text and real life.

REPRESENTATION OF SCHOOL LIFE: DAHL'S TEACHERS AND TRUNCHBULL

In the text, references to school life and the traits of the cruel Trunchbull are emphasized consistently. Trunchbull despises, torments, and humiliates the children and inflicts unjust and unimaginable punishments on them. These punishments contain violent elements that are highlighted in various parts of the text, thus constituting an isotopy regarding "violence." A review of Dahl's school life based on this isotopy suggests that he and his friends were repeatedly exposed to violence. Given Dahl's life and his traumatic experiences, the first analogy is established between Trunchbull and Dahl's brutal teachers. Dahl was exposed to violence in each school he was enrolled in and also witnessed violence against his friends, which he was unable to forget: "All through my school life I

was appalled by the fact that masters and senior boys were allowed quite literally to wound other boys, and sometimes quite severely. I couldn't get over it. I never have got over it" (Dahl, 2001a, p. 145). These unpleasant memories may have provided the inspiration for the descriptions of school life and the elements of violence in *Matilda*.

In his book *Boy: Tales of Childhood* (1986), Dahl offers detailed information about the education system during his childhood. According to the book, Dahl was initially exposed to violence by a headmaster, Mr. Coombes, while he attended Llandaff Church School, in Cardiff, between the ages of 7 and 9. Dahl and his friends always purchased sweets from a confectionery store on their way to school. Since the store owner, Miss Pratchett, treated the boys in a very mean manner, the children placed a dead mouse in a candy box. Upon Miss Pratchett's complaint, Dahl and his friends were beaten by Mr. Coombes (Dahl, 1986, pp. 35-46). Dahl's mother withdrew him from the school after learning of the incident and enrolled him in another.

A similar incident of violence occurred when Dahl attended Peter's School, between the ages of 9 and 13. The Matron, who was a nurse and also responsible for supervising the children in the dormitory, scared the children with a bastinado in her hand, punished them whenever they made the slightest noise and threatened to send them to the headmaster. The children were afraid of her because the headmaster would punish them with a rod of steel (Dahl, 1986, pp. 85-92). While enrolled in this school, Dahl was accused of cheating in a test by a teacher named Captain Hardcastle, although he did not. The headmaster did not believe that he was innocent, and proceeded to punish him with a cane (Dahl, 1986, pp. 108-122).

After completing his studies at Peter's School, Dahl attended Repton School between the ages of 13 and 20. He was similarly bullied at this school and employed by the prefects, the Boazers, as a Fag for study-cleaning and arbitrary works. These prefects beat junior students as they wished. Among these harsh people, Dahl recalled only two teachers who had treated him well. One of them was Mr. Corkers, a mathematics teacher who did not really teach mathematics. The other was the silent art teacher, Arthur Norris, who recognized Dahl's talent in photography and eventually organized a photo exhibit for the young boy (Dahl, 1986, pp.141-163). Nevertheless, following so many adverse incidents, Dahl decided to discontinue his education and skip university altogether, and instead started his business career.

Based on these traumatic events that Dahl experienced and witnessed, as described in *Boy: Tales of Childhood* (1986), and the examination of the discourses and descriptions of Trunchbull in *Matilda*, Dahl may have constructed the headmistress as a representation of all these violent teachers and headmasters. In addition to this portrayal of violence, the text includes a single virtuous person in the school, Miss Honey. The fact that Miss Honey is highly interested in her students and treats them well is a recurring idea in the text, and, at this point, she constitutes the isotopy of "kindliness." In creating this isotopy, Dahl may have been inspired by Arthur Norris, his kindly and helpful art teacher. To enhance the concretization of such similarities and emphasize the isotopies "violence" and "kindliness," related discourses from the source text are selected, as shown below.⁹

⁹ Boldfaced words in examples 9-14 are our emphasis.

Example 9 (Narrator)

She was above all a most **formidable female**. She had once been a famous athlete, and even now the muscles were still clearly in evidence. You could see them in the **bull-neck**, in the **big shoulders**, in the **thick arms**, in the **sinewy wrists** and in the **powerful leg** (Dahl, 2001b, p. 77).

In this excerpt, Trunchbull's physical traits are overemphasized through the use of stark language. The expression "formidable" (Dahl, 2001b, p. 77) is used to indicate that Trunchbull is highly different from other women, and phrases such as "thick arms, bull-neck, big shoulders, powerful leg and sinewy wrists" (Dahl, 2001b, p. 77) are used to convey Trunchbull's tough, frightening, powerful, and overdeveloped features. Based on the assumption that Trunchbull's appearance may be construed as having been inspired by Dahl's teachers, the first person who comes to mind, as she is a woman, is the Matron, whom Dahl describes as follows:

The Matron was a large fair-haired woman with a bosom. Her age was probably no more than twenty-eight but it made no difference whether she was twenty-eight or sixty-eight because to us a grown-up was a grown-up and all grown-ups were dangerous creatures at this school (Dahl, 2001a, p. 85).

Similar to Trunchbull, Matron has traits that were prone to violence. Considering their common characteristics, Trunchbull could be a reflection of Dahl's traumatic experiences at school as a child. The fact that both Trunchbull and Matron are large women and a danger to children presents parallelism. Additionally, they provide evidence for the isotopy of "violence."

Example 10 (Narrator)

The Trunchbull was leaning back against the weight of the whirling girl and pivoting expertly on her toes, **spinning round and round**, and soon Amanda Thripp was **travelling so fast** she **became a blur**, and suddenly, with a mighty grunt, the Trunchbull let go of the pigtails and Amanda went **sailing like a rocket** right over the wire fence of the playground and **high up into the sky** (Dahl, 2001b, p. 109).

The excerpt reveals the unimaginable punishment and cruelty that Trunchbull inflicts on the little girl. The girl, Amanda, has very long hair that her mother braids on both sides; however, as Trunchbull cannot tolerate feminine appearances like fuss and feathers, she asks Amanda to have a haircut. When Amanda declines and says that her mother loves her hair, Trunchbull grabs her by the hair and throws her. Similarly, the Matron meted out incredible punishments to children, one of which is described by Dahl as follows:

She always had a pair of scissors hanging by a white tape from her waist, and with this she began shaving thin slivers of soap into the palm of one hand. Then she went over to where the wretched Tweedie lay and very carefully she dropped these little soap-flakes into his open mouth (Dahl, 2001a, p. 91).

In Dahl's account, the Matron put soap into the mouth of a little boy because he snored while sleeping. As a result, the child's mouth began to froth, causing him to wake up in a panic. The traits of Trunchbull and the Matron are similar in terms of their brutal and violent nature and tendency to unjustly punish the children, reinforcing the isotopy of "violence" created in the text.

Example 11 (Narrator)

"Miss Jennifer Honey was a **mild and quiet person** who **never raised her voice** and was seldom seen to smile, but there is no doubt she possessed that **rare gift for being adored by every small child under her care**" (Dahl, 2001b, p. 61).

Miss Honey is a quiet, friendly, and moderate person, described as the best adult in the book, always treating children properly. Her most notable traits are compassion and a propensity to lovingly guide, properly educate, and willingly help the children to be successful, and the words chosen to describe her are deemed to form an isotopy of "kindliness." Other adults, especially Trunchbull, are depicted as evil and ruthless, emphasizing the isotopy of "violence;" which forms a sharp contrast ensuring the opposition between two isotopies. Miss Honey's character may present parallelism with Arthur Norris, whom Dahl remembers as the only admirable teacher in his life, describing him as follows:

Our Art Master was a shy retiring man called Arthur Norris who kept himself well apart from the rest of the staff. Arthur Norris and I became close friends and during my last year he organized an exhibition of my photographs (Dahl, 2001a, p. 202).

Miss Honey, like Norris, has compassion for children and guides them. In particular, she becomes close friends with Matilda and helps her survive the difficult times. Miss Honey offers Matilda tea at her cottage, like Arthur Norris, who would give Dahl tea and cakes in his flat (Dahl, 2001a, p. 163). Overall, Miss Honey and Arthur Norris are alike in being the only exemplary and guiding teachers, thereby contributing in the creation of the isotopy of "kindliness" in the text.

In addition to these isotopies, there are other factors that may contribute to the analysis. These factors include the fact Trunchbull's major dream is a school with no students—of which she would be the headmistress—and her assessment of girls as insects. No explanation is given in the text as to how Trunchbull came to be a school headmistress. As for the life of Dahl, how these violence-prone people became teachers or headmasters also remained unknown to him in his school years:

So what was it all about? I used to ask myself. Did they preach one thing and practise another, these men of God? And if someone had told me at the time that this flogging clergyman was one day to become the Archbishop of Canterbury, I would never have believed it (Dahl, 2001a, p. 146).

At Repton School, where Dahl studied between the ages of 13 and 20, the headmaster preached good behavior to students while concurrently being adamant in his belief that his students were telling lies, eventually punishing them mercilessly. As stated in *Boy: Tales of Childhood* (1986), despite such behavior, the headmaster's position gradually improved until he reached the status of Archbishop of Canterbury. Nobody outside the school was aware of his real nature. Moreover, as no one believed children's words at the time, his cruel behavior was not revealed (Dahl, 1986, pp. 144-146). The fact that this headmaster both preached religiously and exhibited cruel behavior had always been a matter of concern for Dahl, and he may have thought of reflecting this contradiction in Matilda through Trunchbull, since parallelism seems to exist between her hateful approach and the attitudes of Dahl's teachers.

TWO PARENTAL FIGURES: WORMWOODS AND DAHLS

Dahl married Patricia Neal in 1953. Initially, their marriage proceeded smoothly; however, it started to deteriorate after multiple traumatic events and ended in divorce in 1983. Patricia, an actress, "was beautiful and famous. She was also young—10 years his junior—and Dahl hadn't previously been attracted to many younger women" (Treglown, 2016, chapter 6, p. 6). Dahl and Neal were smitten at first sight, and Neal was devoted to him in many ways. However, the traumas caused by Theo's illness, Olivia's death, and an aneurysm suffered by Neal inevitably shook their relationship. In her autobiography *As I Am*, written four years after their divorce in 1987, Neal exposed her true feelings towards her ex-husband, portraying him through her writing as "a truly rude, arrogant, and disloyal husband who regularly belittled her during their marriage."¹⁰ In the light of this information, the second analogy considered in this part of the study involves the parallelism concerning the irreversibly transformed relationship between Dahl and his wife and the perfunctory relationship between Mrs. and Mr. Wormwood. However, it should be stated that this parallelism does not cover all aspects of the Dahls' relationship.

First, the text mentions certain tasks that mother and father figures are supposed to undertake based on gender clichés: the mother does the housework, prepares meals for her husband, and pursues enjoyable activities, whereas the father works, earns money, and represents the important person whom his wife should serve. At this point, the behaviors of the characters transpire from a traditional perspective. When all the repetitive clichés are taken into account for the case of Mrs. Wormwood as the mother figure, socially constructed "gender roles" constitute an isotopy. Considering Dahl's life based on this isotopy, his wife Patricia Neal expresses her adoption of these roles, in spite of being an actress who starred in many films: "I did the cooking, I did the children, keeping the house, the garden, the weeds—and then when I got ill, everything changed in the end" (Treglown, 2016, chapter 9, p. 11). And both women have similar attitudes towards money. Patricia Neal's outlook changed after she married Dahl and started to consider money and association with rich people to be more important than anything else.

Some of Patricia Neal's friends say that after she met him, she became less nice to know. In the opinion of one, "She adopted Roald's values, and one of them was a prodigious amount of name-dropping, and a prodigious amount of gossiping about the people they were name-dropping about. And also a tremendous attention to money. Who was rich and famous was important (Treglown, 2016, chapter 6, p. 7).

Patricia Neal's valorization of people with money and her adoption of Dahl's values are similar to the case of Mrs. Wormwood, who considers her husband to be the head of household and regards herself as superior to Miss Honey because, owing to her beauty, she has a husband. Furthermore, Mrs. Wormwood's addiction to playing bingo coincides with Patricia Neal's love for games and socializing: "Pat, too, has her own happy domestic memories: games of scrabble with Roald's sisters, outings to the village pub with Roald, dinner parties with friends" (Treglown, 2016, chapter 11, p. 8).

However, in certain discourses in which she expresses her feelings toward her husband, Mrs. Wormwood sounds dissatisfied with her marriage, although she generally continues to act as if she is happy. Similarly, Patricia Neal suppressed her feelings, describing her situation as follows: "Frequently my life has been likened to a Greek tragedy, and the actress in me cannot deny that comparison" (Neal, 1988, p. 13). She continued to appear

¹⁰ The Conversation. <https://theconversation.com/the-man-behind-matilda-what-roald-dahl-was-really-like-62810>, [01.08.2021].

on films while struggling with her own sorrowful state and also her children's troubling situations. From this perspective, both women seem to be unhappy in their inner worlds, but they continue to act as if they are content, and the reinforcement of this situation by reiteration in *Matilda* can be placed within the isotopy of "gender roles."

Meanwhile, the father figure, Mr. Wormwood, is a very strict person. The traditional father figure is dominant in the text, and this aspect is repeatedly emphasized. At this point, the isotopy based on "gender roles" reemerges through the father figure. Mr. Wormwood views himself as the head of the family and an individual to be respected. The father is portrayed in the story in accordance with these socially imposed cliché "gender roles," thereby consolidating the already created isotopy under this theme. The fact that the father figure accepts his own opinion as the correct one and applies pressure on the people around him overlaps with certain considerations regarding Dahl: "His view was the only view. If black is white today, then that is it" (Treglown, 2016, chapter 15, p. 1). However, considering Dahl's love of books and writing, the father figure in the text is clearly the opposite of its author.

In addition to this isotopy, another theme is predominant in the text: the neglect of children by adults. This situation repeatedly transpires in the text and thus constitutes an isotopy of "indifference and negligence." Following the trauma Dahl experienced, especially after Olivia's death, Dahl was unable to concentrate on his work and produce new texts: "Six months after Olivia's death, he told his publishers: 'I feel right now as though I'll never in my life do any more! I simply cannot seem to get started again'" (Treglown, 2016, chapter 8, p. 11). By contrast, Patricia Neal devoted herself to her work and continued to appear on the screen: "For Neal, work was both a ready form of escape and a necessary source of income. Acting brought new surroundings, new friends, and a mind other than her own to occupy" (Treglown, 2016, chapter 8, p. 11). Seemingly, both parents were searching for an escape route and trying to deal with their situation in different ways.

Furthermore, they may have both blamed themselves for Olivia's death in various ways: "[...] Patricia wondered whether Olivia's death might not have been a punishment for her abortion, when she was carrying Gary Cooper's child" (Treglown, 2016, chapter 9, p. 1). As for Dahl, in his speeches about measles, he highlighted how fatal the disease could be and how they suddenly lost Olivia: "In an hour, she was unconscious. In twelve hours she was dead [...] and there was nothing the doctors could do to save her."¹¹ The family had not realized that Olivia was so sick, and the illness suddenly became so severe that they could not do anything, for which they may have blamed themselves. This thought can be partially reconstructed in Mrs. and Mr. Wormwood's extreme neglect and disregard of Matilda.

Example 12

"But **don't the parents complain?**" Matilda asked. "Would yours?" Hortensia asked. "I know **mine wouldn't**. She treats the mothers and fathers just the same as the children and **they're all scared** to death of her" (Dahl, 2001b, p. 110).

In this example, the children discuss Trunchbull's behavior and question why the families have done nothing about it. Hortensia does not give a clear answer to Matilda's question and responds by making reference to Matilda's family. Dahl and his fellow students were subjected to violence by teachers in the same way during their childhood, and in general, families did nothing about it:

¹¹ Roald Dahl. <https://www.roalddahl.com/roald-dahl/timeline/1960s/november-1962>, [16.09.2019].

A boy of my own age called Highton was so violently incensed by the whole affair that he said to me before lunch that day, "You don't have a father. I do. I am going to write to my father and tell him what has happened and he'll do something about it." Then and there, little Highton sat down and wrote to the father he admired so much, but of course nothing came of it (Dahl, 2001a, p. 122).

As a child, Dahl was aware of the silence of the families; hence, he did not attempt to talk about the violence he had been exposed to, not even to his own family. Children accepted marginalization in the face of violence and the absence of a solution to these violations. On the one hand, Dahl may have reiterated in *Matilda* the events he had witnessed in his childhood as a means of reacting to the position of families. On the other hand, he seems to have underlined how children were left alone in the face of such a violent educational system.

FROM DEATH TO LIFE: TWO EXTRAORDINARY GIRLS

Notwithstanding the presence of other child characters in the text, such as Matilda's classmates and her brother, the narrator places Matilda firmly in the forefront, and describes the other children as ordinary. Matilda's exceptional talents are repeatedly articulated in the text, and they thus form an isotopy of "extraordinariness."

Example 13

The nice thing about Matilda was that if you had met her casually and talked to her you would have thought she was a perfectly normal five-and-a-half-year-old child. She displayed almost no outward signs of her brilliance and she never showed off. 'This is a **very sensible and quiet little girl**,' you would have said to yourself. And unless for some reason you had started a discussion with her about literature or mathematics, you would never have known the **extent of her brain-power** (Dahl, 2001b, p. 95).

Matilda is much more advanced than her peers and is able to speak more intelligently than the adults. Her appearance does not show any strangeness; however, her extraordinary magical powers come to the fore when her inner world is revealed. An examination of Dahl's life based on this isotopy can suggest that his daughter Olivia had the same traits as Matilda: "Olivia was seven and a half, an imaginative, slightly fey girl who made up rhyming poems in the car and charmed visitors by telling them that she had an invisible imp on each shoulder, one good, one bad" (Treglown, 2016, chapter 8, p. 9). Olivia, like Matilda, was clearly very bright. She created rhyming poems in the car, thereby revealing her interest in, and predisposition to, literature. Matilda is also very interested in literature. An example of this is Matilda's rhyming poem, that she wrote for her teacher, Miss Honey. Although any peculiarity in the appearance of either girl is lacking, some unusual character traits are apparent. In point of fact, Olivia's living with an invisible imp is unusual – she thinks that she has magical realism and possesses something extraordinary. The fact that Matilda can use her magical powers for good or bad may be compared to the idea of Olivia having an angel and a devil on her shoulders. These supernormal traits in the girls seem to unite them under the isotopy of "extraordinariness" and give the impression that Dahl may have revived his daughter Olivia in the character of Matilda.

Example 14

"Tip it" Matilda whispered. "Tip it over!" She saw the glass wobble. It actually tilted backwards a fraction of an inch, then righted itself again. She **kept pushing at it with all those millions of invisible little arms and hands that were reaching out from**

her eyes, feeling the power that was flashing straight from the two little black dots in the very centres of her eyeballs (Dahl, 2001b, p. 159).

"And there it teetered for a few seconds before **finally toppling over and falling with a sharp tinkle** on to the desk-top. The water in it and the squirming **newt splashed out** all over Miss Trunchbull's enormous bosom" (Dahl, 2001b, p. 160).

These excerpts depict how Matilda's magical powers emerge, turning her into an extraordinary person. These powers are triggered by her anger. Matilda's use of her magical powers to move inanimate objects is a turning point in the plot, which initiates the isotopy of "extraordinariness."

GENDER DISCRIMINATION AS A THEME

Signs of gender discrimination, which is the focus of this part, have been examined as embedded under different headings in the previous parts of this study. Although Dahl's language is oftentimes criticized for bearing discriminatory signs, Matilda is portrayed as an independent and extraordinarily intelligent girl and she is supported by Miss Honey who is a single and independent woman. At the end of the book, Miss Honey takes Matilda into her own home, conveying the message that women do not need men to survive, which seems to have played a role in the reception of the book as having a feminist influence. All the same, when we have a look at the depictions of Miss Trunchbull, we see that they are based on patriarchal impositions about what a female body and appearance should (not) be like, and reinforce the related clichés by repetition. In contrast, there is a sarcastic tone about Mrs. Wormwood, Matilda's mother, who cares for her appearance. In both cases, female characters are criticized based on how they look. However, it might be noted that although both women are aggressive and violent, this will not necessarily make them "bad girls" (Tyson, 2006, p. 89) in the eyes of patriarchy, as long as their aggression and violence, specifically directed towards children, does not threaten patriarchal norms.

In addition to the previously analyzed discourses within the framework of other contexts, gender perceptions against little girls are specifically apparent in *Matilda* and they may be a reflection of some experiences from Dahl's life since gender-discriminatory discourses against girls in *Matilda* and against boys in Dahl's life are analogous. First, Matilda's mother and father marginalize her because she is a girl. Matilda's extraordinary intelligence and magical powers are not appreciated by her family, who think that "small girls should be seen and not heard" (Dahl, 2001b, p. 80) and value Michael simply because he is a boy. In addition, Trunchbull's prejudice against, and contempt for, girls illustrate another gendered perspective. On the whole, discrimination against women by men and women is apparent. Mrs. Wormwood does not care for her own daughter even though she is a woman herself. Trunchbull, on the other hand, loathes little girls, ignoring the fact that she herself is a woman. Herewith the isotopy of "gender discrimination" is created, as indicated in the following examples from the text, with exaggerated gender-discriminatory discourses, through which Dahl may be thought to reflect something of his life, although perhaps unintentionally.

Example 15

"Nasty dirty things, little girls are. Glad I never was one [...] I became a woman very quickly" (Dahl, 2001b, p. 80).

With this discourse of contempt, Trunchbull, in fact, denies her own self and childhood. This stance is impossible from a biological perspective, and the statements apparently

convey Trunchbull's overreacting and discriminatory attitude. This discourse represents one of the repeated ideas, through which the isotopy of "gender discrimination" is strengthened.

Example 16

"No one in the world could give the right answer just like that, especially a girl! You're little cheat, madam, that's what you are! A cheat and a liar" (Dahl, 2001b, p. 49)!

Although Mr. Wormwood recognizes that Matilda is smart enough to answer a question quickly and accurately, he rejects Matilda's response and ignores her ability, subsequently accusing her of cheating because her answer is correct. Mr. Wormwood's gender-discriminatory discourses are repeated throughout the text and are illustrative of the isotopy of "gender discrimination." Mr. Wormwood is presumably aware of Matilda's intelligence, but he pretends to be unaware; if he were to acknowledge it, he would have to accept that she is more intelligent than him and also his son Michael, who is to become his heir. As a man who believes that men are superior, he cannot stand Matilda's intelligence and attempts to suppress her by scorning and marginalizing her.

Example 17

"I said you chose books and I chose looks," Mrs. Wormwood said. "And who's finished up the better off? Me, of course. I'm sitting pretty in a nice house with a successful businessman and you're left slaving away teaching a lot of nasty little children the ABC" (Dahl, 2001b, p. 92).

Gender discrimination by a woman against another woman may be considered as a familiar type of marginalization, resulting from gender socialization mechanisms, which can be defined within the framework of patriarchal mindsets as "learning the socially approved attitudes, behaviors, norms, and values associated with a sex, typically through early education, family, media, and peers."¹² Although Mrs. Wormwood is quite unhappy with her husband, she describes him as a "successful businessman" (Dahl, 2001b, p. 92), in an attempt to gain superiority through her marital status over Miss Honey, who is single, successful and does not need a man to complete her. In many contexts in the book, Mrs. Wormwood proves to be a "*patriarchal woman* [...]" who has internalized the norms and values of *patriarchy*" (Tyson, 2006, p. 85).

Gender-discriminatory discourses in the text can be a reflection of the fact that Dahl was underestimated, excluded, and even wrongfully condemned, especially for being a boy, throughout his educational background. Dahl's life conveys several gender-discriminatory discourses on boys, one example of which was uttered by Ms. Pratchett, the owner of the confectionery store that Dahl liked when he was young: "I don't mind girls. I never 'ave no trouble with girls, but boys is 'ideous and 'orrible! I don't 'ave to tell you that, 'Eadmaster, do I" (Dahl, 2001a, p. 44). Another example is the discourse of Captain Hardcastle, one of Dahl's ruthless teachers. For Hardcastle, "[a]ll men are enemies, and small boys are insects that will turn and bite you if you don't get them first and squash them hard" (Dahl, 2001a, p. 109).

Tyson (2006) provides a summary of feminist approaches to literature by offering some questions that may be asked about literary texts within the framework of feminist criticism.

¹² Open Education Sociology Dictionary. <https://sociologydictionary.org/gender-socialization/>, [01.08.2021].

Among these questions are how women are portrayed in the work; how these portrayals relate to gender issues; how the work is gendered and how it defines femininity and masculinity; whether the characters' behaviors always conform to their assigned genders; whether the work seems to accept, question, or reject the traditional view of gender; what the work implies about the possibilities of sisterhood as a mode of resisting patriarchy; what the work suggests about women's creativity. In light of these questions, as the text seems to both reinforce and undermine patriarchal ideology, it might be said to be ideologically conflicted, as it seems to have neither a pure patriarchal nor a feminist agenda (2006, pp. 119-120).

CONCLUSION

Each new reading by different readers may provide a literary text with new dimensions and significance, since receivers of discourse are contributors in the production and shaping of the meaning. *Matilda's* characters are created outside of the norm and portrayed in exaggerated and extreme terms; they are either low-profile or have supernatural abilities. Their distinctive facets seeming to be deliberately and repeatedly emphasized and thereby constantly reminded to the reader, any information that could possibly contribute to their analysis has been taken into consideration in this study, including any details that seem to be outside of the text but might be related to it, such as the life of Dahl, its author. Although "[o]ne of the more striking bits of Dahl's life is his claim to have refrained from incorporating his own life into his children's works"¹³ his life has been taken into consideration as one of the elements surrounding the text in terms of any eventual parallelisms, and the findings obtained came to the fore, turning out to be the main outcome of the study.

Within the framework of the character and discourse analyses and isotopy relationships identified based on thematic reiterations in the text, of the parallelisms that have been put forward between the characters and events in Dahl's life and *Matilda*, the most significant is perhaps the presumptive bringing back to life of his daughter Olivia through the character of Matilda. The fact that the drafts of the book changed many times—especially concerning the character Matilda—may be a sign that Dahl may have established a similarity between Olivia and Matilda. In the first drafts of the book, Matilda was an evil girl who eventually dies while saving her friends from a bus accident, thereby wasting all her power. In the later draft, Matilda becomes a very good-natured girl, despite all the marginalization to which she has been subjected. In the final version of the book, no bus accident occurs and Matilda does not die. Dahl would not portray Olivia as evil; but, if we think of the possibility of partial parallelism, we may consider the likelihood that he may have reconstructed Olivia's death by letting Matilda die in the first draft. Olivia's representation may have been revised in the final draft to keep her alive, as Olivia died too early and still had much to experience. However, her death may be thought to have been indirectly represented in the plot involving the death of Matilda's magical powers.

Matilda's transformation into a well-behaved girl in the last draft, as well as her being modest despite her remarkable intelligence, match with the idea of his daughter Olivia being an innocent and perfect girl in Dahl's eyes. Through her creation in the text, Dahl may have attempted to overcome the sorrow and trauma he had suffered following her death. This may also be a way of reacting to child neglect and gender discrimination.

All in all, the conclusion of this study is that certain events that Dahl experienced in his life, which could be referred to as highly traumatic, may be thought to have prompted him to create characters who reflect individuals of importance to him from his life, in an attempt to relay particular critical perspectives to readers on societies, families, and education systems. At this point, it should be noted that "despite the global appreciation of Dahl as a children's author, [...] [f]or some he was [...] a philanthropist and a profoundly altruistic man. For others he was a bully, a misogynist".¹⁴ Consequently, "[h]is life story as well as his writings evoke compliments, controversy, and contradictory responses from both critics and readers."¹⁵ This shows that reader's judgments' considerably differ, in accordance with their individual perceptions. In line with this, the connections established between the life of the author and the text are based on personal readings carried out within the framework of this study and the signification achieved is an outcome of the perception and judgement of the receiver of discourse rather than the declaration of its producer, who is known to have "denied any direct connection between his fiction and his own life."¹⁶ Finally, when a text is analyzed for translation purposes, knowing about the author's life may help the translator in the choice of words and related translation decisions in better conveying the implicit behind the text.

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¹⁴The Conversation. <https://theconversation.com/the-man-behind-matilda-what-roald-dahl-was-really-like-62810>, [01.08.2021].

¹⁵The Conversation. <https://theconversation.com/the-man-behind-matilda-what-roald-dahl-was-really-like-62810>, [01.08.2021].

¹⁶ Oh, J. <https://www.interviewmagazine.com/culture/roald-dahl-biography>, [24.07.2021].

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