

# Unfolding Layers of Womanhood: Roald Dahl's Matilda

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**SVEUČILIŠTE U ZAGREBU**  
**UČITELJSKI FAKULTET**  
**ODSJEK ZA UČITELJSKE STUDIJE**

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**DIPLOMSKI RAD**

**UNFOLDING LAYERS OF  
WOMANHOOD: ROALD DAHL'S  
MATILDA**

**Zagreb, srpanj 2021.**

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**Ime i prezime pristupnika: Iva Turčin**

**TEMA DIPLOMSKOG RADA: Unfolding Layers of Womanhood:  
Roald Dahl's Matilda**

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*“Nisam li ti zapovjedio: odvaži se i budi hrabar? Ne boj se i ne strahuj, jer kuda god pođeš, s tobom je Jahve, Bog tvoj.” – Jš, 1, 9*

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## **SUMMARY**

In this thesis, the female characters in the children's novel *Matilda*, by Roald Dahl, will be analysed. The thesis is divided into four main parts: a biography of Roald Dahl and a brief overview of his works, the emergence and development of the feminist movement and the development of feminist literary criticism, an overview of patriarchal ideology in society and its impact on literature.

The first part of the thesis presents a brief overview of Dahl's life which was filled with difficult moments and great losses. Tragedies from Dahl's life are often visible in his works.

The second part of the paper presents a historical overview of the feminist movement and its influence on the development of feminist literary criticism.

The third part of the paper analyses the foundations of patriarchal ideology and shows its influence on society and the development of female and male characters in literature.

Finally, the fourth part of the paper will show the influence of patriarchal ideology in *Matilda's* novel. Furthermore, four main female characters will be analysed: Matilda, Miss Honey, Miss Trunchbull and Mrs Wormwood.

**Key words: Roald Dahl, patriarchal ideology, feminist literary criticism, female characters**

## SAŽETAK

U ovome radu, analizirat će se ženski likovi dječjeg romana *Matilda*, autora Roalda Dahla. Rad je podijeljen na četiri glavna dijela: biografija Roalda Dahla i kratki pregled njegovih djela, nastanak i razvoj feminističkog pokreta te razvoj feminističke književne kritike, pregled patrijarhalne ideologije u društvu i njezin utjecaj na književnost te prikaz patrijarhalne ideologije i analiza ženskih likova u romanu *Matilda*.

Prvi dio rada prikazuje kratki pregled Dahlovog života koji je bio ispunjen teškim trenucima i velikim gubitcima. Tragedije iz Dahlovog života često su vidljive u njegovim djelima.

Drugi dio rada prikazuje povijesni pregled feminističkog pokreta te njegov utjecaj na razvoj feminističke književne kritike.

Treći dio rada analizira temelje patrijarhalne ideologije te prikazuje njezin utjecaj na društvo i razvoj ženskih i muških likova u književnosti.

Na posljatku, četvrti dio rada prikazat će utjecaj patrijarhalne ideologije u romanu *Matilda*. Nadalje, analizirat će se četiri glavna ženska lika: Matilda, Gospođica Slatkić (eng. Miss Honey), Gospođica Grozobrad (eng. Miss Trunchbull) i Gospođa Papričić (eng. Mrs Wormwood).

**Ključne riječi:** Roald Dahl, patrijarhalna ideologija, feministička književna kritika, ženski likovi

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Gender and gender roles have always been an interesting and discussion worthy topics. Some people believe that gender and gender roles have been acquired through the expectations of the society. Others disagree, as they believe that biological characteristics are the ones who define the gender. Gender roles, and certain expectations for the female gender, especially in patriarchal societies have brought upon the feminist movement. During the feminist movement, feminist literary criticism emerged. After describing and explaining the motivations and the results of feminist movement, and the characteristic and the influences of patriarchal ideology, the development of female characters in the novel *Matilda* will be analysed. *Matilda* is a children's book written during the feminist movements. As such, it reveals different layers of womanhood. It is an excellent book to analyse, as it presents many issues regarding female gender and stereotypical behaviours which are traditionally expected from women.



## 2. ROALD DAHL

Roald Dahl was a famous English author. He was born in Llandaff, Wales in 1916. His parents, Sofie and Harald, were Norwegian, and he was named after a Norwegian man, Roald Amundsen, who was the first man to reach the South Pole. (Þórðardóttir, 2019) Sofie and Harald met in 1911 in Denmark, they got married shortly after and moved into Harald's house *Villa Maria* in Cardiff. Even though Roald and his siblings spent their lives in England, they were raised according to the Norwegian tradition. They were baptised in a Norwegian church, and they spoke Norwegian language. In 1920 Roald's oldest sister Astri died when she was seven years old, and his father died shortly after her. These unhappy events made Roald's mother Sofie and her five children move back to Llandaff, where three years later Roald would attend a catholic primary school. However, Roald did not spend much time in that school, as he was a bit mischievous child and he put a dead rat in a jar of sweets in a candy store. In 1925 Sofie sent Roald to the St Peter's boarding school in an English town Weston-Super-Mare, where he was put in a group with older boys, and he had trouble keeping up with them. (Sturrock, 2010) Roald finished his education journey in 1933 in Repton, a private school in London. After graduation, in August 1934, Dahl went on an expedition to Newfoundland. This expedition ended in September and Roald went back to England where he started working for Shell Oil Company. One of Dahl's biggest dreams was to travel abroad, which he did in 1938 when he boarded the *SS Mantola* ship and went to Africa. (Hribar, 2020) In 1939 the Second World War began. When the war broke out, Dahl joined the Royal Air Force, and he became a fighter pilot flying Hurricanes all around the Mediterranean. He flew in the Western Desert of Libya, in Greece, in Palestine, in Syria, in Iraq and in Egypt. (Dahl, 1986) While flying in the Mediterranean, Dahl crashed near Alexandria, where he was saved by three brave British soldiers. After a long recovery, Dahl was sent to Greece where he continued to serve the Royal Air Force. Later on, as Dahl had suffered major head injuries and he was no longer capable of flying, he was sent back to England. In 1942 Dahl was sent to Washington D.C. where he became an assistant air attaché. He was not satisfied with his new work position, so he turned to writing. In 1943 he published first children's book *The Gremlins* which was adapted into a movie in 1984. In 1946 he published his first collection of short stories called *Over To You*, and in 1948 his first novel for adults *Some Time Never: A Fable For Supermen*". Over the years Dahl

became more and more popular in England and in the USA. He published many children's books, including *James and the Giant Peach* (1961), *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (1964), *BFG* (1982), *The Witches* (1983), *Matilda* (1988). Apart from children's books he wrote film scripts (*You Only Live Twice*, 1967, *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang*, 1968), short stories for adults (*Switch Bitch*, 1974), novels for adults (*My Uncle Oswald*, 1979) and short stories for teenagers (*The Wonderful Story of Henry Sugar and Six More*, 1977). In 1952 he met his future wife, actress Patricia Neal. They got married in 1953 and had five children. After his wife suffered a stroke, Dahl had an affair with Felicity Crosland. In 1983 Dahl divorced Patricia and married Felicity. He died on 23<sup>rd</sup> November 1990. (Treglown, 1994)

## 2.1. CORELATION BETWEEN DAHL'S LIFE AND WORKS

Roald Dahl's literary works came to life under the influence of many wonderful and many harsh events in his life and in the life of his family. His mother had the biggest impact on his literary creations. She told him traditional Nordic stories, and Dahl took some specific characteristic of those stories and put them in his. Fantastic events, lively illustrations, violence, and outrageous characterization showing that "*the good always wins against the evil*" (Culley, 1991) are frequently found in both Dahl's literary works and they come from Nordic stories. Dahl experienced a lot of great loss in his early childhood and later as an adult and so his characters experience big pain and sorrow, but they overcome everything, and they get their happy ending. (Schultz, 1998) The influence of the Nordic history and myths can be seen in Roald Dahl's *The Witches*. (Treglown, 1994)

Dahl's works were criticized a lot, especially by worried parents. His stories were often filled with violence and punishment, which was not well accepted. Parents thought that their children will lose their innocence or even become rebellious and misbehave. However, in all his works Dahl always used humour to undercut the violence, and he believed that children know that the violence in his stories is not real, just like fairy tales and fantasy worlds are not real. Dahl was often accused of promoting sexism and racism in his books. (Angelidou, 2013) Despite all of the critiques Dahl received, he was and still is one of the most read authors in the world.

Sturrock (2010) mentions the connection between Dahl and Sophie, the main character in Dahl's story *BFG* (1982). She was an orphan, and she did not remember her parents whatsoever. Dahl never met his father and Sophie never met her parents. (Sturrock, 2010) Many authors believe that Sophie was based on Dahl's granddaughter Sophie because they both look similar. Furthermore, Dahl told her granddaughter stories about the big friendly giant even before the book was published. (Hollindale, 2008)

In his autobiography novel *Boy: Tales of Childhood* (1984), Dahl talks about a research which was conducted by a foreign company *Cadbury's*. Almost every boy at Repton got a box full of various chocolate flavours, together with a check list and they had to grade each chocolate flavour. This event is considered to be inspiration for *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (1964). (Treglown, 1994). Moreover, Charlie a poor boy whose father was rarely present in his life finds a fatherly figure in Wonka. This might represent Dahl's wish to have his father in his life, as he lost him at a very young age. (Schultz, 1998) During his stay at Repton, *Cadbury* and *Rowntree* were the leading chocolate companies in England. Dahl's characters Willy Wonka and his "chocolate making rivals" Mr Slugworth, Mr Fickelgruber and Mr Prodnose were inspired by the rivalry of *Cadbury* and *Rowntree*. (Eplett, 2016)

Finally, in the story of *Matilda* there are traces of Dahl's school life. The idea of evil headmaster Miss Trunchbull arises from the Repton's superior headmaster Geoffrey Fisher. Geoffrey Fisher was known for being extremely cruel, he would whip disobedient children. (Royer, 1998) Miss Trunchbull had a similar approach to the punishment, but that will be discussed later on.

### 3. FEMINIST APPROACH TO LITERATURE

Gender has always been a thought-provoking topic, in everyday conversations, in different kinds of debates, and in literature. It has also been an interesting topic for scientists. According to psychologist Diane Halpern (2000), it is normal that there are differences between the genders. For example, men can be more physically aggressive than women, and men are usually taller than women. However, those differences do not imply that 'one sex is better than the other and vice versa' (Halpern, 2000). There are different kinds of theories which discuss the gender. Feminist theorists point out that in sexist societies feminine characteristics are criticized and disapproved, while the masculine features are praised. (Lippa, 2005) Traditional gender roles present men as strong, rational, protective, and decisive, while women are seen as emotional, nurturing, weak and submissive. (Tyson, 2006) There are some obvious biological differences between men and women, and feminists do not deny that fact. Many feminists celebrate those differences and point out that physical size, shape, and body chemistry do not make men automatically a superior gender. (Tyson, 2006) There is a significant difference between terms *sex* and *gender*. The term *sex* refers to the biological constitution as male or female and the term *gender* refers to the cultural programming as feminine and masculine. Furthermore, women are not born feminine, and men are not born masculine. These gender categories and roles are the result of the beliefs and social constructions which are intertwined in the society. (Tyson, 2006) If the social settings changed, so would the perception of gender differences, therefore men and women would be considered equals. (Lippa, 2005)

Because of the oppression women suffered from men, feminist movement began in 1960s. Women wanted a change in all aspects of life, they wanted to fight for their rights and equality. One of the most influential feminists was Mary Wollstonecraft with *A Vindication of The Rights of Woman* (1792). Mary Wollstonecraft argued for social reforms so that women get the same rights as men, and her work influenced many other writers. (Gamble, 2001) Simone Beauvoir followed Mary's example, and resisted the patriarchal ideology in 1949, with her book *The Second Sex*. She did not refer to herself as a feminist, but *The Second Sex* (1949) created "a theoretical basis for material feminists for decades to come" (Tyson, 2006, p. 96) Beauvoir introduced the word *Other* as an implication that a woman is a man's *Other*. She pointed out that in patriarchal society men were the "essential subjects" and women were merely

*"contingent beings"* (Tyson, 2006, p. 96) This meant that men were entitled to live their prosperous lives and make major changes in the world, while women would simply be defined in relation to men. Another imposed belief was that all women want to have children, and that it is in their nature to feel comfortable being mothers. Beauvoir argues that saying that *"One is not born a woman; one becomes one."* (Tyson, 2006, p. 96) This comes to show that patriarchy in its true form tried to sculpt the perfect wife, and it was expected that women would invest themselves completely in the lives of their husbands and sons. (Tyson, 2006) There were many theories conducted in order to analyse such works. Feminist literary criticism is one such example. This theory managed to solve many issues that women in those times faced.

Feminist approach deals with the representation of women in media. Women were presented through patriarchal social relations, and *"increased oppression through negative representation."* (Gamble, 2001, p. 93) It is important to keep in mind, that the readers also have an important role in interpreting texts. The reader should think about the presentation of women, gender stereotypes and gender roles while reading literary work. Feminist approach offers questions to help readers analyse literary works objectively and recognize inequalities. Some of these questions are: *"What does the work reveal about the operations (economically, politically, socially, or psychologically) of patriarchy? How are women portrayed? What does the work suggest about the ways in which race, class, and/or other cultural factors intersect with gender in producing women's experience? How is the work "gendered"? What does work suggest about women's creativity?"* (Tyson, 2006, p. 119-120) Depending on the literary work, which is being analysed, the reader may ask one or any combinations of the given questions. Not all feminists will interpret the same work in the same way, even if they consider the same feminist concepts. The goal is to use feminist theory to understand and critically think about the literary works, especially those which are filled with patriarchal ideology which *"blinds us to our own participation in, or at least complicity with, sexist agendas"* (Tyson, 2006, p. 120)

### 3.1. FEMINISM AND POSTFEMINISM

There are three phases of contemporary feminism. Rampton (2015) mentions that the start of feminism may be found in ancient Greece or in the medieval times. (Rampton,

2015) Writers Olympe de Gouge (d. 1791), Mary Wollstonecraft (d. 1797) and Jane Austen (d. 1817) are seen as ‘foremothers’ of the modern women’s movement because they: “...advocated for the dignity, intelligence, and basic human potential of the female sex.” (Rampton, 2015, para. 3) However, the intense movements began later within the nineteenth century. (Rampton, 2015)

The first wave of feminism officially started at the Seneca Falls Convention in 1848 when: “three hundred men and woman railed to the cause of equality for women.” (Rampton, 2015, para. 4) Women speaking out and fighting for their rights were considered “un-ladylike”, because they were publicly speaking, and demonstrating. In those times women were supposed to be quiet and submissive, and these types of behaviours challenged the “cult of domesticity.” (Rampton, 2015)

The second wave of feminism began in the 1960s and lasted until the 90s. This wave intertwined with anti-war and civil rights movement. Sexuality and reproductive rights were the most important issues in this phase. The phase began with protests against the Miss America pageant in Atlantic City (1968-1969). Feminists believed that pageants were degrading, that it made women into objects, and that their beauty is the only thing that matters. (Rampton, 2015) According to Rampton (2015) the second wave was based on neo-Marxism and psycho-analytical theory and began to criticize patriarchy and the woman’s role as a wife and a mother, as well as normative heterosexuality (Rampton, 2015) The second wave of feminism brought many changes and more freedom for women. In 1961 birth control was introduced, abortions were legalised with the Abortion Act. In 1964 the Equal Pay Act was passed, which provided equal treatment of men and women in the workplace. The Sex Discrimination Act (1975), and The Prohibition of Female Circumcision Act (1985) had a major impact on women’s lives and provided further development of the movement (The National Archives, 1970, as cited in Þórðardóttir, 2019).

Before the third wave of feminism, there was a postfeminism phase. According to *The Concise Oxford Dictionary*, postfeminism is a term related to the ideas, attitudes, etc., which overlook or deny feminist ideas of the 1960’s and subsequent decades. (Concise Oxford Dictionary, as cited in Gamble, 2001) Many people believed that postfeminism will bring back the beliefs of the ‘prefeminist world’ which would be a major step back for women and their rights. The source of misperception is the prefix ‘post’ which

presents something that comes 'after' which is why many feminists assumed that postfeminism is "*a betrayal of a history of feminist struggle, and rejection of all it has gained.*" (Gamble, 2001: 37)

However, the term 'post' can also be seen as a continuance of the beliefs, aims an ideology of the original movement in a different way. (Gamble, 1002) Denfeld (1995) says that the term feminism has become a presentation of extremist beliefs that women are victims of the mighty patriarchal system. This creates a notion that feminism has lost its credibility: "*While women move ahead in their lives- with the tenets of equality entrenched firmly in their hearts- the women's movement itself has stalled. Trapped in a stagnant, alienating ideology, the only thing most of the feminist movement is heading toward is complete irrelevance.*" (Denfeld, 1995, as cited in Gamble, 2001) Another critic of the feminist movement is Naomi Wolf. In her book *Fire With Fire* (1993) she claims that media had a bad impact on the social image of feminism, as there were many lies which did not present the movement in its true form. Nonetheless, she mentions that feminism itself created some negative connotations: "*...the definition of feminism has become ideologically overloaded. Instead of offering a mighty Yes to all women's individual wishes to forge their own definition, it has been disastrously redefined in the popular imagination as a massive No to everything outside a narrow set of endorsements.*" (Wolf, 1993, p. 54-55) In contrast to other postfeminist authors, Wolf does not discuss about the mistakes from the past. She tries to identify the issues which are still present, especially the problems of the marginalized ones who despite the movements still do not have the same rights as everyone else. (Wolf, 1993)

The third wave of feminism took place in the 1990s and it has often been described as an antithesis to the postfeminism. During this period the "grrls" became "*strong and empowered, eschewing victimization and defining feminine beauty for themselves as subjects, not as objects of sexist patriarchy.*" (Rampton, 2015: para 12) In this wave the focus was on embracing tolerance, diversity, and differences. (Siegel, 2007) The third wave programme proposed equality for everyone, regardless of the race, gender, and any other signifiers. There was an ambiguity towards the political as well as the cultural scene. Many third wavers got involved with different cultural forms, such as television, music, computer games, film, and fiction. Courtney Love, lead singer of the Riot Grrrl band Hole and wife of the late Kurt Cobain, was one of the most fervent

public icon of the third wave. According to Heywood and Drake (2004) Love is the definition of the third wave: *“She combines the individualism, combativeness and star power that are the legacy of second wave gains in opportunities for women... Glamorous and grunge, girl and boy, mothering and selfish, put together and taken apart, beautiful and ugly, strong and weak, responsible and rebellious, Love bridges the irreconcilability of individuality and femininity within dominant culture, combining the cultural critique of an earlier generation of feminists with backlash against it by the next generation of women”* (Heywood and Drake, 2004, as cited in Genz & Brabon, 2009, p. 160) According to Rampton (2015), most third wavers did not identify themselves as “feminists” as they did not want to feel labelled. Furthermore, categories of identity, gender, and sexuality came into question. Ethnicity, social class, sexual orientation, etc. were seen as the reason for celebration rather than artificial categories which divide people into “worthy” and “unworthy” (Rampton, 2015)

Feminism as a movement brought a lot of advances in the lives of women. Women are now empowered in most of the societies, and they are able to get a good education, they have more rights in politics and business, they are able to decide for themselves in every aspect of their lives. The movement slowly ‘incubated’ itself in the academic world. There are many universities and colleges which include gender studies, feminist, masculinity, and queer studies. Even though the fourth wave of feminism is not an official movement yet, it seems that it might become one. This time it would not take into account only the struggles of women, it would render an opportunity for each individual. The movement would include the requests of the third movement and expand them. It would represent: *...the importance of inclusion, an acceptance of the sexualized human body as non-threatening, and the role of the internet can play in gender-bending and levelling hierarchies”* (Rampton, 2015: para 20)

### 3.2. FEMINIST LITERARY CRITICISM

Feminism as a critical movement is over. However, its influence is still present in what we read, how we interpret and value what we read. The feminist movement supported the expansion of feminist criticism in the 1970’s and 1980’s. (Paul, 2004) *“Feminist criticism examines the ways in which literature (and other cultural productions)*



*reinforces or undermines the economic, political, social, and psychological oppression of women*” (Tyson, 2006, p. 83). Feminist criticism can be seen in different areas of our culture: *Perhaps the most chilling example...is found in the world of modern medicine, where drugs prescribed for both sexes often have been tested on male subjects only*” (Tyson, 2006, p. 83) It is also concerned with marginalization of women writers in the traditional literary canon: *“...unless the critical or historical point of view is feminist, there is a tendency to under-represent the contribution of women writers*” (Tyson, 2006, p. 82-83) Feminist criticism puts focus on finding the right ways to solve the issues which are present due to long tradition of patriarchal society. Such issues include defining a feminist agenda and aesthetic, gendered representations, setting up an alternative canon for women writers, avoidance of patriarchal literary practice and the binaries of First and Third worlds. (Humm, 1994)

Through the centuries women have been perceived as a ‘weaker gender’ in real life and in literature. The third wave of American feminist movement resulted in development of the Anglo-American feminist criticism. Since the beginning feminist literary criticism had an important goal, and that was to question the acceptance of ‘man and male genius as the norm.’ (Plain, Sellers, 2007) The gender could be constructed through language and is visible in writing style, and style must represent the articulation of ideologies of gender. (Humm, 1994) However, the ideology is our way to understand our experiences and explain it to others. As women come across with more confusing images of themselves than the men do, they are more likely to experience more contradictions. (Humm, 1994) It was believed that there are “sex-related writing strategies”. (Humm, 1994, p. 4) As women were subordinate to men, it was believed that they merely wrote as they were allowed to write. This implication was dismissed by Robin Lakoff (1975), who pointed out that men and women use language in different ways. (Humm, 1994) The final belief of feminist criticism is that *“the tradition of literary criticism uses masculine norms to exclude or undervalue women’s writing and scholarship.”* (Humm, 1994, p. 5) Virginia Wolf made a conclusion that many books that were describing women, were actually written by men. (Humm, 1994)

During the 30’s and the 40’s the literature was dominated by men. There were a few female authors, like C. L. Moore and Leigh Brackett, however they would often hide under male pseudonyms or initials which did not reveal their gender. (Mikulan, 2017)

In the late 1960's, the literary works were considered the standard when 'white male authors describing experience from a white male point of view.' (Tyson, 2006) Feminist literary criticism brought many changes and achievements in the literary world. A major accomplishment was the highlighting of the gender stereotyping and giving reasons for the reproductions of such stereotypes. Then the discovery of lost or ignored women's literature works. (Humm, 1994) The first stage of feminist criticism brought the "*break with the fathers*", and the aim of it was to "*give a material shape to, and revalue, women's culture and writing*" (Humm, 1994, p. 9) It was important to put the emphasis on women's experience rather than just write about women's essential differences from men. A new phase of feminist criticism started in 1970's – gynocriticism. This phase included the study of women writers, which resulted with the first anthology of feminist literary criticism, *Images of Women in Fiction* (1972) by Cornillon. Furthermore, Ellen Moers's *Literary Women* (1977) gave women writers a history, it was a literary celebration of the power of women writers. (Humm, 1994) In order to replace "*masculinist values with a new form of feminist criticism*" Josephine Donovan wrote *Feminist Literary Criticism* (1975). (Humm, 1994, p. 10) With this book, Donovan revolutionised feminist criticism, as she introduced dialogue between Carolyn Heilbrun and Catharine Stimpson. It was important to explore and establish a "*separate, distinctive woman's language*" (Humm, 1994, p. 11)

During the 1970's and 1980's feminists created many feminist institutions. Suddenly, there were feminist bookshops, libraries, theatre groups, book clubs, magazines and newspapers, art centres, local authority women's committees, etc, which provided engagement in intellectual activities and exploration of cultural symbols and motifs This was an opportunity for feminist criticism to become a part of a bigger movement. (Humm, 1994)

Another important term in feminist literary criticism is "*binary opposition*". "*Binary opposition is a key concept in structuralism, a theory of sociology, anthropology and linguistics that states that all elements of human culture can only be understood in relation to one another and how they function within a larger system or the overall environment.*" (Marinero, 2015, para. 2) Examples of binary opposition are hot and cold, dead and alive, or in other words concepts that cannot exist together. The issue of the binary opposition system is that it creates a metaphorical wall between groups of people and leads to discrimination. Binary opposition is a concept used in literature

as well. Authors use it to investigate the differences between groups of individuals (cultural, class, gender differences). (Marinero, 2015) Looking from a feminist perspective, there was always a sense of binary opposition between men and women. According to Anne Cranny-Francis (1992), presentation of male and female characteristics has been deeply rooted in literary works – women are passive, helpless, emotional and nurturing; men are active, competitive, rational and heroes. (Cranny-Francis, 1992, as cited in Mikulan, 2017) It is important to mention the effects of feminist literary criticism on the children’s literature. We can see that binary opposites are present in fairy tales. Let us take the story of “Cinderella” for an example. Cinderella is a fairy tale, and as such it provides the notion that the beautiful princess needs a Prince Charming to save her and make her life complete. According to Tyson (2006), Cinderella imposes patriarchal gender roles on both men and women. It compares femininity with submission, *“encouraging women to tolerate familial abuse, wait patiently to be rescued by a man, and view marriage as the only desirable reward for right conduct.”* (Tyson, 2006, p. 88) Furthermore, men are supposed to be *“wealthy rescuers responsible for making their women happy ever after.”* (Tyson, 2006, p. 88) According to Parsons, what worries the most is the fact that women are divided into good and evil. For example, evil stepmother and ugly stepsisters are the ones who are powerful, and they bully poor and beautiful Cinderella. If a woman is powerful, she has to be evil, and usually ugly, and if a woman is passive and weak, she is beautiful and kind and she is the protagonist of the story. Furthermore, female power equals inhuman characteristics, which creates an image that it is unnatural for women to be powerful (Parsons 2004, as cited in Mikulan 2017) This type of thinking creates an unhealthy image in children’s minds. However, implementing binary opposites while reading a literary work, can help with analysis of the characters. Through the binary opposites we look into passivity/activity of the characters, the possibility/impossibility of making choice, determination, etc. (Mikulan, 2017) According to Cranny-Francis (1992), Woodward (1997), Paechter (1998), Ney & Sciog-Lazarov (2000), and Parsons (2004) male and female traditional characters can be introduced with the table of binary oppositions (Mikulan, 2017):

Binary oppositions	Main male character		Main female character	
Activity/passivity	+			+
Strength/weakness (physical)	+			+
Power/lack of power (social)	+			+
Domination/submissiveness	+			+
Independence/dependence	+			+
Egocentricity/ethics of care		+		+
Intelligence/lack of intelligence	+			+
Reason/instinct	+			+
Decisiveness/indecisiveness	+			+
Control over feelings/sensitivity	+			+
Ability to choose/lack of ability to choose	+			+
Courage/fear	+			+
Formed attitude/lack of attitude	+			+
Leading/following	+			+
Vehicle of change/conformism	+			+

**Table 1:** The representation of main characters through binary oppositions in traditional fantasy and science fiction novel

According to the **table 1**, we can see that main male character has all of the characteristics which are traditionally ascribed to men, except for ethics of care (traditionally a female characteristic). Traditional female characteristics are mostly negative, they present women according to the traditional patriarchal ideas which consider women as submissive and weak. (Mikulan, 2017)

#### 4. PATRIARCHAL IDEOLOGY

*“Patriarchy is a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women”* (Walby, 1991, p. 20). According to Lerner, traditionalists believed that male supremacy was based on biological reasoning. Women were seen through their maternal role, and therefore they were not suited for higher education. Their *“maternal role function is seen as a species necessity, since societies could not have survived into modernity without the majority of women devoting most of their adult lives to child-bearing and child-rearing”* (Lerner, 1987, p. 17) Men, on the other hand were seen as more aggressive because they have higher testosterone levels and greater strength. Because of these characteristics they became *“providers of food”*, hence they were considered the superior gender. Sigmund Freud claimed that male was *“the normal human”* and woman was seen just as a ‘child-bearer’. Men were the ones who compensated for their inability to bear children by sexual dominance over women and by aggression toward other men. (Lerner, 1987, p. 19) Furthermore, Wilson’s sociobiology reinforces such beliefs. According to Darwinian ideas of natural selection to human behaviour, Wilson made a conclusion that human behaviours and traits, such as altruism, loyalty, and maternalism, are *“encoded in the genes”*. (Lerner 1987, p. 19) This suggests that motherhood is not merely socially assigned role, but it fits women’s physical and psychological needs. In such a way, biological determinism has become a political defence of the *“status quo”* in scientific language. (Lerner, 1987)

Feminist anthropologists have brought this theory into question. They have found societies in which the tasks performed by both sexes were important for their survival, which is why both sexes were regarded as equal and complementary. This shows that women can cooperate with men and be their equal, despite the biological differences. (Lerner, 1987) Research findings show that there were some matrilineal societies, in which women were the ones who held the power in many aspects of the group life. However, they are nearly extinct. Furthermore, the results of research point out that even though in matrilineal societies women have most rights and privileges, the decision making is still in the hands of the elder males. There are some exceptions to this rule, for example female rulers and queens. (Lerner, 1987)

Whether it is a biological or psychological need to fulfil their lack of possibility for 'life bearing' or a need to show their physical strength, men are usually dominant in relations with women. This has created a social construct of patriarchy which puts men in the centre of the society. According to Giddens and Griffiths, there are two forms of patriarchy, private patriarchy and public patriarchy. Private patriarchy includes male (usually father's) dominance, within the household of the individual family. Public patriarchy is a mutual form, which means that women are included in politics and the labour market, but are excluded from wealth, power and status. Men dominate the public domain, which can be seen in the gap which exists within the wages and the quantity of workers between the two genders. (Giddens & Griffith, 2006) As a consequence of patriarchal ideology, women were raised to become passive, subordinate and weak individuals, whose only goal was to marry, raise children, respect, and even fear their husbands.

#### 4.1. CHARACTERISTICS OF PATRIARCHAL SYSTEM

According to Jessica McCallister in a patriarchal society, women are oppressed by men. She uses the term *oppression* to explain how women are not allowed to stand up to leaders or make their own choices. Additionally, she mentions that the characteristics of patriarchal system include *male dominance, male identification, male centeredness, and obsession with control*. *Male dominance* is one of the most present characteristics in a patriarchal society. Men are the decision makers both in society and within their family, they hold the power positions and authority, they are the superior ones. *Male identification* – in a patriarchal system, men are supposed to identify themselves as strong, rational, forceful, competitive, and controlling personas with a strong work ethic. *Male centeredness* implies that the centre of action and advancement is on men and what they do to improve the society. Men are the developers of all events and inventions, men are the heroes in every situation and the centre of social events, fun and entertaining. *Obsession with control* shows that men have the desire to have the control over every aspect in their lives, including all social and family situations, and decisions regarding finances and education (McCallister, 2015)

According to Walby, (1991), there are six structures of patriarchy: *patriarchal relations in household, patriarchal relations in paid work, patriarchal relations in state, male violence, patriarchal relations in sexuality, patriarchal relations in culture*. For many years, it was believed that the woman's place was in the house, taking care of her husband's and children's needs. It was traditionally expected for women to get married and become housewives. Due to patriarchal relations in the business world, women had hard time finding a job, and their ultimate goal was to get married: "*Those who marry are not suffering from false consciousness and an ignorance of their real interests, but acting in their own best interests, given restricted options.*" (Walby, 1991, p. 88) Furthermore, women are seen as subordinate category of worker which is why they are usually given worse and less paid jobs. Patriarchal relations in state show that women are diminished in the parliaments, legislatures, the military and other bodies. (Higgins, 2018) The patriarchy system tries to keep women as far away as the resources and the power as it is possible. According to Walby (1991), male violence includes rape, sexual assault, wife beating, workplace sexual harassment and child sexual abuse.

There are three main theoretical approaches which analyse male violence: liberalism, class analysis and radical feminism. Liberal analysis points out that violence is usually conducted by psychologically deranged men. It is suggested that this is the result of problematic childhood. (Walby, 1991) Pizzey (1974) claims that "*men who beat their wives do so as a result of disturbing childhood experiences in which they saw their fathers beat their mothers. Boy children who see this become upset and violent. Again, we have a theme of psychological abnormality as a result of problems during childhood. In this instance the start of the problem is quite specific, and the result is considered to be a repetition by the male when adult.*" (Pizzey, 1974, as cited in Walby, 1991, p. 131) However, male violence against women cannot simply be explained through psychological derangement of a few men, because not all men who had a difficult childhood show violence against their wives or anyone else. (Walby, 1991) Furthermore, discussed from the class analysis point of view, male violence can be seen as a result of the frustrations generated by the workings of the class society. Straus, Gelles and Steinmetz (1980) state that the violence rate between husbands and wives is higher in blue-collar families than in white-collar ones. (Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980, as cited in Walby, 1991) Finally, radical feminism examines social

forces. Some feminists argue that male violence is the result of men's desire to control women. (Walby, 1991) The patriarchal relations towards sexuality provide the notion that heterosexuality should be the norm. There is no opportunity to choose and decide for yourself. Additionally, patriarchal practices are seen in culture as well. The goal of the patriarchal ideology is to keep men and women in their traditional gender roles and maintain male dominance. The traditional ideology which presents men and women according to their "appropriate" roles and behaviours, are introduced to children from the early age. This can be seen when "*babies are dressed in different colours, pink and blue, and encouraged or discouraged from greedy feeding.*" (Belotti, 1975, as cited in Walby, 1991, p. 91)

#### 4.2. PATRIARCHY IN LITERATURE

Due to patriarchal viewpoints gender stereotypes and expectations have been deeply rooted in social life, especially in literature. Women were portrayed as helpless, passive, emotional, and compassionate, and men were active, competitive, rational and heroes (Cranny-Francis, 1992, as cited in Mikulan, 2017)).

Patriarchal ideology in literature can be traced from the childhood, through fairy tales. In fairy tales, women were appreciated for their beauty and passivity. Female characters who were active were almost always the symbol of evil which was shown through their ugly appearance (evil stepmothers, witches, queens). From this types of books, young girls learn that they need to accept their role in society as a passive and submissive towards men, otherwise they get punished (Little Red Riding Hood gets eaten). They also learn that they have to wait for a man to save them as they are helpless and cannot do anything on their own. On the other hand, young boys are taught that women serve as a prize for their accomplishments, and their biggest accomplishment is defeating another man (Cranny-Francis, 1992, as cited in Mikulan, 2017).

Furthermore, female characters in literary works were often sexualised and seen just as a sexual object. Not only were women supposed to be passive and submissive, but it was also completely normal for female characters to experience physical, psychological, sexual and economical abuse. For example, in George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion* (1913), Eliza is the main female character. She is being 'sculpted' into a perfect aristocratic woman by a Higgins. Eliza's own father couldn't care less about



her: *All I ask is my rights as a father; and you're the last man alive to expect me to let her go for nothing; for I can see you're one of the straight sort, Governor. Well, What's a five pound note to you? And what's Eliza to me?*" (Shaw, 2004, p. 36) Eliza is also an example of how it was believed that women liked to be abused, mastered and beaten. It was considered a *foolish romantic tradition*. (Shaw, 2004, p. 86) Even though she was a strong and opinionated character, Eliza had three options: living with Higgins, living with her father or marrying Freddy. Either way, her life would be controlled by a man. Pygmalion is not the only literary work which shows the patriarchal ideology, there are many more, including Matilda.

## 5. MATILDA

### 5.1. SYNOPSIS OF MATILDA

Matilda Wormwood is an extremely smart and kind young girl, you could say that she is a genius. She taught herself how to read by the age of three. Her brother, Michael, on the other hand was a normal young boy without any special abilities. Their parents Mr and Mrs Wormwood were a special kind of parents. Mr Wormwood was a crooked car dealer and Mrs Wormwood cared more about her looks than anything else in life. Even though Matilda was a very special child, they treated her as an annoying pain in the neck, and her brother was treated nicely.

Every day Matilda was left alone at home, even though she was only four years old. Mr Wormwood went to work, Mrs Wormwood went out to play bingo and Michael went to school. One day, Matilda decided to visit the library in the village. In the library she met nice lady, Mrs Phelps. Mrs Phelps was a librarian, and when she first saw Matilda, she was in shock, she had never seen such a young child who knew how to read, let alone a child who walks alone all the way to the library. Matilda realised that the library is her new treasure chest. She read many books, including *Nicholas Nickleby*, *Oliver Twist*, by Charles Dickens, *Jane Eyre*, by Charlotte Bronte, *Pride and Prejudice*, by Jane Austen, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* by Thomas Hardy and many more.

Matilda did not like the behaviour of her parents, especially her father. One day, he came back from work and told Michael all about his tips and tricks in selling faulty cars. Matilda tried to talk to him, but he completely ignored her. Matilda wanted to teach her family a lesson, because she wanted them to change and be better people: "*Matilda longed for her parents to be good and loving and understanding and honourable and intelligent*" (Dahl, 2013: 49). She superglued her father's hat, she brought a parrot and hid it up the chimney and made her family believe that they have a ghost in the house. The final prank she did was the one on her father, after he called her stupid. She put some of her mother's 'platinum blond hair-dye extra' in her father's 'oil of violets hair tonic' and his hair went blond. Despite all of these things that happened her family hadn't changed. Mrs Wormwood still cared only about her looks and bingo, and Mr Wormwood still tried to pretend that Matilda did not exist.

Her parents were so careless that Matilda started school late. When she started school, new troubles were around the corner. Matilda now had to deal with evil Miss Trunchbull, who hated children and wanted to punish them as much as she could (the chokey, throwing children up in the air, pulling on their ears, making a boy eat an entire chocolate cake). For Miss Trunchbull, Matilda was another ‘pest’ that came into school, and by Mr Wormwood’s words probably one of the worst pests you could find. On the other hand, school brought Matilda a loving and caring teacher Miss Honey, who was a complete opposite of Miss Trunchbull. Miss Honey realized that Matilda is a gifted child from the very first lesson and she tried her best to help her improve her skills and knowledge (she even brought her books from the higher grades). Miss Trunchbull came to Miss Honey’s class every Thursday at two o’clock to see if students had learned anything. Miss Trunchbull always expected to get a glass of fresh water when she came. A girl in Matilda’s class, Lavender, decided to put a newt into the jug with water, so when Miss Trunchbull poured the water, the newt would fall into her glass. Miss Trunchbull was extremely mad after this had happened and she was sure that Matilda had done it. Matilda, being mad that she had been accused of something she had not done, started staring at the glass of water. Matilda felt a kind of ‘electricity’ in her eyes, and she whispered, ‘*Tip it*’ and the glass tipped over and the water spilled all over Miss Trunchbull. In that moment, Matilda realised that she had ‘superpowers’ and she showed it to Miss Honey after the class.

Later on, Miss Honey invited Matilda to her small cottage and told her the story about her life. When Miss Honey was young her mother passed away, so her father invited her aunt to look after her. Miss Honey’s aunt was a terrible person and when her father died under suspicious circumstances, her aunt took everything in that was in his belonging, including Miss Honey. When Miss Honey grew up, her aunt told her that she owed her, because she took care of her all of these years and she arranged her salary to go directly into her account. Miss Honey revealed that her aunt was actually Miss Trunchbull, and in that moment, Matilda decided that she needed to save Miss Honey. She practised her telekinetic powers. One day when Miss Trunchbull came to their class, Matilda decided that it was enough. She stared at the chalk and it started to move. She used it to pretend that she was Miss Honey’s late father’s ghost and wrote the following on the blackboard: “*Agatha, this is Magnus. Agatha, give my Jenny back her house. Give my Jenny her wages. Give my Jenny the house. Then get out of here.*”

*If you don't, I will come and get you like you got me. I am watching you, Agatha.*" (Dahl, 2013: 221-223). After that, Miss Honey got everything that belonged to her, her house, her wages, and Miss Trunchbull disappeared. Things were looking up for Matilda too. Her father got caught fixing stolen cars and selling them, so the whole family decided to move to Spain. Well, everyone except for Matilda. She decided to stay with Miss Honey. Mr and Mrs Wormwood were not too sad about the fact that their daughter did not want to go with them. In fact, they were a little relieved, as it was one less child to look after. (Dahl, 2013)

## 5.2. PATRIARCHAL IDEOLOGY AND THE RESISTANCE TO PATRIARCHAL PRACTICES IN MATILDA

As mentioned in chapter four, the private patriarchy is a social construct which represents male dominance within a household. It is usually referred to the father. *Matilda* is the perfect example of such social construct. The character who practices patriarchy is Mr Wormwood. Mr Wormwood was the kind of person who liked being seen, heard and talked about, which is why he always dressed in bright-coloured clothes: *...He liked to wear jackets with large brightly-coloured checks and he sported ties that were usually yellow pale or green.*" (Dahl, 1988, p. 23) Mr Wormwood was also a crooked car dealer, he deceived people to extort more money from them. His personality is seen in his appearance: *"Mr Wormwood was a small ratty-looking man whose front teeth stuck out underneath a thin ratty moustache."* (Dahl, 1988, p. 23) Mr Wormwood loved his son Michael, he was his son and the inheritor of his business. On the other hand, Mr Wormwood could not stand his daughter Matilda, she was always a thorn in his eye: *"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.'"* (Dahl, 1988, p. 50)

Furthermore, we can analyse patriarchal ideology in *Matilda* through McCallister's characteristics of patriarchal system:

### 1. Male dominance

Mr Wormwood was an important figure in his family. His wife and children were always supposed to do as they were told. One such example is when he will not let Matilda eat her dinner at the dining-table, just because he wants to

eat it in front of the television. He makes it sound like it is family time when they bond, but it is not like that: “‘Mummy,’ Matilda said, ‘would you mind if I ate my supper in the dining-room so I could read my book?’ The father glanced up sharply. ‘I would mind!’ he snapped. ‘Supper is a family gathering and no one leaves the table till it’s over!’ ‘But we’re not at the table,’ Matilda said. ‘We never are. We’re always eating off our knees and watching the telly.’ ‘What’s wrong with watching the telly, may I ask?’ the father said. His voice had suddenly become soft and dangerous.” (Dahl, 1988, p. 8) Mr Wormwood sees himself as the smartest individual in his family. Matilda often made him realize that he might not be a genius, and he would get offended: “‘Good strong hair,’ he was fond of saying, ‘means there’s a good strong brain underneath.’ ‘Like Shakespeare,’ Matilda had once said to him. ‘Like who?’ ‘Shakespeare, daddy.’ ‘Was he brainy?’ Very, daddy.’ ‘He had masses of hair, did he?’ He was bald, daddy.’” (Dahl, 1988, p. 57) He would immediately get defensive and answer: “If you can’t talk sense then shut up.” (Dahl, 1998, p. 57) He often tried to belittle everyone, usually by using abusive language: “‘You must be very clever to find a use for something that costs nothing,’ she said. ‘I Wish I could do it.’ ‘You couldn’t,’ the father said. ‘You’re too stupid.’” (Dahl, 1988, p. 22)

## 2. Male identification

As mentioned in the chapter four, according to patriarchal ideology, men identify themselves through control, strength, forcefulness, rationality, strong work ethic and competitiveness. (McCallister, 2015) In Matilda, we notice that her father, Mr Wormwood likes to boast that he is the great man who provides everything for his family: “At this point Mr Wormwood came noisily into the room. He was incapable of entering any room quietly, especially at breakfast time. He always had to make his appearance felt immediately by creating a lot of noise and clatter. One could almost hear him saying, ‘It’s me! Here I come, the great man himself, the master of the house, the wage-earner, the one who makes it possible for all the rest of you to live so well! Notice me and pay your respects!’” (Dahl, 1988, p. 59-60)

## 3. Male centeredness

In patriarchal society men are the centre of attention, they are the ones who make things happen. Mr Wormwood represents such a man. It is expected that

everyone in his family know how he feels, and if he had a 'bad' day at work, everyone was supposed to stay away from him, and give him his peace: *"Then suddenly he struck again. Perhaps he had a bad day at the garage and had not sold enough crummy second-hand cars. There are many things that make a man irritable when he arrives home from work in the evening and a sensible wife will usually notice the storm-signals and will leave him alone until he simmers down."* (Dahl, 1988, p. 38) Another example of male centredness in Wormwood family is the fact that Mrs Wormwood had to make a special breakfast for Mr Wormwood every morning: *"The mother was just out of sight around the corner in the kitchen making Mr Wormwood's breakfast which always had to be two fried eggs on fried bread with three pork sausages and three strips of bacon and some fried tomatoes."* (Dahl, 1988, p. 59) Furthermore, Mr and Mrs Wormwood cared only about their son, and they completely ignored their daughter Matilda: *"They had a son called Michael and a daughter called Matilda, and the parents looked upon Matilda in particular as nothing more than a scab. A scab is something you have to put up with until the time comes when you can pick it off and flick it away. Mr and Mrs Wormwood looked forward enormously to the time when they could pick their little daughter off and flick her away, preferably into the next county or even further than that."* (Dahl, 1988, p. 10) Mr Wormwood especially points that out when he talks about business, and he only refers to his son Michael: *"Sawdust", he would say proudly, "is one of the great secrets of my success. And it costs me nothing. I get it free from the sawmill." "What do you use it for?" Matilda asked him. "Ha!" the father said. "Wouldn't you like to know." "I don't see how sawdust can help you to sell second-hand cars, daddy." "That's because you're an ignorant little twit," the father said. His speech was never very delicate but Matilda was used to it. She also knew that he liked to boast and she would egg him on shamelessly. "You must be very clever to find a use for something that costs nothing," she said. "I wish I could do it." "You couldn't," the father said. "You're too stupid. But I don't mind telling young Mike here about it seeing he'll be joining me in the business one day." Ignoring Matilda, he turned to his son and said, "I'm always glad to buy a car when some fool has been crashing the gears so badly they're all worn out and rattle like mad."* (Dahl, 1988, p. 22)

#### 4. Obsession with control

Men who live according to patriarchal ideology have the desire to control everything (social and family situations, decisions connected to finances and education). Mr Wormwood was the decision maker in his family, and everything had to be done as he said, this was specifically referred to Matilda: *“Being very small and very young, the only power Matilda had over anyone in her family was brainpower. For sheer cleverness she could run rings around them all. But the fact remained that any five-year-old girl in any family was always obliged to do as she was told, however asinine the orders might be. Thus she was always forced to eat her evening meals out of TV-dinner-trays in front of the dreaded box.”* (Dahl, 1988, p. 49) Whenever Matilda tried to express her opinion, she would immediately be told to shut up: *“Matilda, who had been listening closely, said, “But daddy, that’s even more dishonest than the sawdust. It’s disgusting. You’re cheating people who trust you.” “If you don’t like it then don’t eat the food in this house,” the father said. “It’s bought with the profits.” “It’s dirty money,” Matilda said. “I hate it.” Two red spots appeared on the father’s cheeks. “Who the heck do you think you are,” he shouted, “The Archbishop of Canterbury or something, preaching to me about honesty? You’re just an ignorant little squirt who hasn’t the foggiest idea what you’re talking about!” “Quite right, Harry,” the mother said. And to Matilda she said, “You’ve got a nerve talking to your father like that. Now keep your nasty mouth shut so we can all watch this programme in peace.”* (Dahl, 1988, p. 25-26)

Matilda is a perfect example of a character who opposes patriarchal ideologies. She was always told that she was stupid, worthless, and that she would be happy if she eventually married someone. However, she was a brilliant and rational child, and she did not want to be a ‘victim’, so she decided to fight for her rights. She decided to do that by making practical jokes on her parents. She super-glued a hat on her father’s head, she switched his hair lotion with peroxide which resulted in his hair going blond, she put a parrot in a chimney and made her family believe that they had a ghost. Some people might believe that Matilda was just a mischievous child, but she always had the best interests at her heart, and she just wanted her parents to be good people: *“Matilda longed for her parents to be good and loving and understanding and honourable and*

*intelligent. The fact that they were none of these things was something she had to put up with. It was not easy to do so. But the new game she had invented of punishing one or both of them each time they were beastly to her made her life more or less bearable.*" (Dahl, 1988, p. 49) Matilda is a very active character, which is traditionally not expected for a female character, especially a little girl. She is the one who saves Miss Honey from the 'evil' Miss Trunchbull, and finally saves herself from her parents who never even loved her: *"Daddy and mummy!" Matilda burst out, gasping for breath. "I don't want to go with you! I want to stay here and live with Miss Honey and she says that I can but only if you give me permission! Please say yes! Go on, daddy, say yes! Say yes, mummy!"* (Dahl, 1988, p. 238)

### 5.3. DEVELOPMENT OF FEMALE CHARACTERS IN MATILDA

Roald Dahl lived during the period of one the most important social movements in history, feminism. As mentioned before feminism supports the belief that men and women are equal. Feminism had a major impact on society, which resulted in creating a society in which women have more rights than they had before. The first wave of feminism took place in the late nineteenth century. Women came to the political scene and demanded more opportunities for themselves. Social equality, a better education, and equal rights in the workplace were some of the requests. Later, women wanted to acquire more political power, like the right for all women to vote (women's suffrage). The second wave of feminism took place in the later years of Dahl's life. This time, while still fighting for equality in the workplace, one of the dominant issues were reproductive rights. In difference to the first wave of feminism which was led by white women, the second wave included a more diverse group of women (women of colour, other classes and from developing nations) (Rampton, 2015). The second wave of feminism brought many changes and more freedom for women. In 1961 birth control was introduced, abortions were legalised with the Abortion Act. In 1964 the Equal Pay Act was passed, which provided equal treatment of men and women in the workplace. The Sex Discrimination Act (1975), and The Prohibition of Female Circumcision Act (1985) had a major impact on women's lives and provided further development of the movement (The National Archives, 1970, as cited in Þórðardóttir, 2019). Literature affects children's imagination and their perspective of the world. Hence, it is important that they read books which make them think about different themes and topic. This is



especially important for young girls, they should be empowered and taught that anything is possible if they put their mind to, regardless of the gender, looks, race, social status, etc. (Þórðardóttir, 2019) During the time of feminism movement, Dahl had published many books. *Matilda*, *The BFG*, and *The Witches* are examples of how these society changes and the feminism movement can impact not only the social life but the cultural life as well. In these books we have a range of diverse female protagonists, and all of them portray various levels of femininity. The female characters in *Matilda* range from active characters who want to make a change, to passive and meek ones who accept their destiny, regardless of their wishes.

### 5.3.1. MATILDA

Matilda is the protagonist of the book. She is an exceptional child who learns how to read on her own at a very young age. Matilda is raised by the traditional patriarchal belief which considers women, especially young girls as nothing but a nuisance: *“small girls should be seen and not heard”* (Dahl, 2013, p. 11) Her parents were completely neglecting her and would be happy to be freed of her presence: *“...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 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, 2013, p. 10) Matilda is a strong individual, and despite being insulted and abused she does not cry, like it is expected for young girls. She chooses reason and decides to get a revenge on her father after calling her ‘a cheat and a liar’ (Dahl, 2013, p. 55) At this point Matilda was really angry at her father, he was completely oblivious of her extraordinary mind, and she wanted to teach him a lesson. Some might think that Matilda’s heart was at a wrong place for doing so, however, she did not do it just out of spite and anger, she did it in hope to help her father change and be a better person than he is. She decided to pull a prank on him, well, on his hair to be specific: *Matilda unscrewed the cap of her father’s OIL OF VIOLETS and tipped three-quarters of the contents down the drain. Then she filled the bottle up with her mother’s PLATINUM BLONDE HAIR-DYE EXTRA STRONG...* (Dahl, 2013, p. 59) Mr Wormwood did not suspect anything so he did everything the way he usually did. He rubbed what he thought was his oil deeply into his loving hair and due to Matilda’s

prank, it turned platinum blond. Unfortunately, this did not help, her father remained the same character with the same belief, that women are supposed to be submissive and do as they are told.

Since her parents ignored her and were completely unaware of her talent and quick-wittedness, Matilda started school later than other children her age. School presented a new opportunity for Matilda. It was a place where she could show her brilliance. Her teacher Miss Honey recognized that Matilda was a genius and decided to help her thrive school wise. For the first time in her life, Matilda had someone who genuinely cared about her and about her knowledge. Everything seemed perfect, until Matilda got to know the frightening Miss Trunchbull. Matilda found an ally in Miss Honey, however, she found a new much worse enemy in Miss Trunchbull. Without even seeing Matilda, Miss Trunchbull already decided that she was bad news: *“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, 2013: 85)

Matilda takes on a role which is traditionally held as a male role. She does not only befriend Miss Honey, but she also becomes a male figure for her, offering to solve all of her problems. (Fletcher, n.d.) In order to help Miss Honey restore her estate which was unlawfully stolen from her by Miss Trunchbull, Matilda takes the male identity of Miss Honey’s father, Dr. Honey. Matilda simulated the voice of Dr. Honey and scared Miss Trunchbull, which made her give everything back to Miss Honey. This moment *“aligns the power of the child with the power of patriarchy”* (Guest, 2008, as cited in Fletcher, n.d. para 10) According to Guest, *“This connection among patriarchy, power and intellect informs the dynamic between Matilda and Miss Honey insofar as the child’s place as the rescuer, and ultimately as domestic partner, is defined by her intellectual powers”* (Guest, 2008, as cited in Fletcher, n.d. para. 10)

Matilda represents a post-modernistic hero, she is intelligent, powerful, brave, but she is also rebellious and defiant which makes her *“bend the rules”* sometimes. (Pope & Round, 2014, as cited in Hribar, 2020) Matilda’s character serves as a purpose for Dahl’s message that *“women can obtain power through knowledge and self-definition.”* (Vidović, 2018, para. 34)

### 5.3.2. MISS HONEY

Miss Honey is a young teacher: *“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 thousand pieces, like a porcelain figure”* (Dahl, 2013: 66). Even from Miss Honey’s appearance we can see that she is portrayed as is traditionally expected for a woman. She is fragile and lovely. Then we get to see her personality. *“Miss Honey is the embodiment of the patriarchal definition of femininity.”* (Fletcher, n.d. para 4) She is calm, nurturing, quiet and adores children. She is a woman without a man in her life and she believes education is important: *“...If you had a heart attack this minute, and had to call a doctor, that doctor would be a university graduate. If you got sued for selling someone rotten second-hand car, you’d have to get a lawyer and he’d be a university graduate too. Do not despise clever people, Mr Wormwood.”* (Dahl, 2013: 100) When we look at Miss Honey from this perspective, we could say that she opposes patriarchal practices and that she would do anything to make the people believe, in this case Mr and Mrs Wormwood, that it is important to provide a good education for everyone: *“University?” Mr Wormwood shouted, bouncing up in his chair. “Who wants to go to university for heaven's sake! All they learn there is bad habits!” “That is not true,” Miss Honey said. “If you had a heart attack this minute and had to call a doctor, that doctor would be a university graduate. If you got sued for selling someone a rotten second-hand car, you'd have to get a lawyer and he'd be a university graduate, too. Do not despise clever people, Mr Wormwood.”* (Dahl, 1988, p. 100) However, that is not true. Through the story we find out that Miss Honey is *“at the same time passive and meek, a woman with no initiative and a perfect example of what women were until recently supposed to be like.”* (Vidović, 2018, para. 24)

Her parents died when she was a young girl, so her aunt Miss Trunchbull took care of her. Living with her aunt was not easy, because Miss Trunchbull was mean to her from the beginning: *“She was a daemon. As soon as my father was out of the way she became a holy terror. My life was a nightmare.”* (Dahl, 2013: 198) Miss Honey is a passive and submissive character, even though she is miserable, she accepts her fate. She lacks courage completely and she would never stand up to Miss Trunchbull, despite her being a mean woman who took everything from her.

*“Miss Honey’s silence plays a vital role in a feminist criticism of the story”* (Guest, 2008, as cited in Fletcher, n.d. para. 4). If Matilda had not come into her life, she would stay miserable for the rest of her life. However, Matilda gives her hope. She is a little girl, but Miss Honey sees hope in her: *“Up to now”, Miss Honey went on, “I have found it impossible to talk to anyone about my problems. I couldn’t face the embarrassment, and anyway I lack the courage. Any courage I had was knocked out of me when I was young. But now, all of a sudden I have a sort of desperate wish to tell everything to somebody. I know you are a little girl, but there is some kind of magic in you somewhere. I’ve seen it with my own eyes.”* (Dahl, 2013, 195) If this were a fairy tale, Miss Honey would be the ‘damsel in distress’ and Matilda would be her ‘Prince Charming’ who saves her, as she is unable to. Dahl made it seem as though a “beautiful and likeable” woman must be “powerless and weak” (Fletcher, n.d.)

### 5.3.3. MISS TRUNCHBULL

Miss Trunchbull is a *“formidable female”*, very strong, and slightly frightening. *“Looking at her, you got the feeling that it was someone e who could bend iron bars and tear telephone directories in half. Her face, I’m afraid, was neither a thing of beauty nor a joy for ever. She had an obstinate chin, a cruel mouth and small arrogant eyes. And as for her clothes . . . they were, to say the least, extremely odd. She always had on a brown cotton smock which was pinched in around the waist with a wide leather belt. The belt was fastened in front with an enormous silver buckle. The massive thighs which emerged from out of the smock were encased in a pair of extraordinary breeches, bottle-green in colour and made of coarse twill. These breeches reached to just below the knees and from there on down she sported green stockings with turn-up tops, which displayed her calf muscles to perfection. On her feet she wore flat-heeled brown brogues with leather flaps. 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.”* (Dahl, 1988, p. 82-83)

Miss Trunchbull is quite different from Miss Honey. She is an evil individual who hates children and refers to them as “garbage” or “warts”. She uses insulting language such as “slug”, “witless weed”, “empty-headed hamster” and “stupid glob of glue” to prove how much she hates children, and everything related to them. (Kim, 2014) The

Trunchbull is characterized as a “masculine woman”, some children even refer to her as a man, calling her “sir”. (Kim, 2014) To show how much she hates everything that is considered feminine, Trunchbull exhibits hate towards married women, and associates herself with “male-dominated” sports. She wears manly dresses, refuses to sympathize with anyone, and she sexually abuses Miss Honey and illegally inhabits her property. (Shaw & Fard, 2018) It is believed that Miss Trunchbull’s behaviour is a result of the fact that she was deprived of her childhood. When asked about her childhood she says that she became a woman very quickly. The deprivation of her girlhood resulted in her horrible behaviour. According to Judith Rich Harris, during their childhood, children learn to behave the way it is expected from them. They learn to behave according to their traditional gender roles. Since Miss Trunchbull missed out on her childhood, she was not able to learn how to socialize and that is the reason she behaves violently. Miss Trunchbull hates little girls like Matilda and Lavender, because they probably remind her of the stage of life that she skipped and disliked. It is possible that Miss Trunchbull hated the fact that women were taught to please, make themselves objects and forsake their autonomy, which is why she chose to “grow up” early. (Beauvoir, 2010, as cited in Kim, 2014)

#### 5.3.4. MRS WORMWOOD

Mrs Wormwood is a typical patriarchal female, she is a housewife whose only job is to look pretty for her husband. She believes that it is woman’s job to look pretty in order to get married and she neglects Matilda, even though she is a brilliant girl: *“Of course I knew she could read,” the mother said. ‘She spends her life up in her room buried in some silly book.’ ‘But does it not intrigue you”, Miss Honey said, ‘that a little five-year-old child is reading long adult novels by Dickens and Hemingway? Doesn't that make you jump up and down with excitement?’ ‘Not particularly,’ the mother said. ‘I'm not in favour of blue-stocking 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, 1988, p. 97) Her viewpoints are outdated and from the feminist perspective, Mrs Wormwood represents a negative female character. She acts according to the traditional gender roles schema, in which men are the ‘providers of the family’ and women are their loyal servants. Even though Mr Wormwood insults her she still treats him like a god, she makes him his special breakfast every morning:

*“On this occasion he strode in and slapped his son on the back and shouted, ‘Well my boy, your father feels he’s in for another great money-making day today at the garage! I’ve got a few little beauties I’m going to flog to the idiots this morning. Where’s my breakfast?’ ‘It’s coming, treasure,’ Mrs Wormwood called from the kitchen.”* (Dahl, 1988, p. 60) Even though she lives according to patriarchal ideology, Mrs Wormwood is not a loving, caring, and nurturing mother, she is quite the opposite. She neglects her children, especially Matilda. She leaves her alone at home, even though she is four years old. In the end, when they have to leave because of Mr Wormwood crooked car dealership, she feels relieved that Matilda wants to stay with Miss Honey: *“‘Come on, Harry,’ the mother said, pushing a suitcase into the back seat. ‘Why don’t we let her go if that’s what she wants. It’ll be one less to look after.’”* (Dahl, 1988, p. 240)

#### 5.3.5. MISS HONEY VS MISS TRUNCHBULL – BINARY OPPOSITES

As mentioned in chapter 3.2. in literary works the main female and male characters are usually binary opposites. However, in the case of *Matilda* we have two female characters who can be seen as binary opposites. Miss Honey and Miss Trunchbull can be introduced as binary opposites according to Cranny-Francis (1992), Woodward (1997), Paechter (1998), Ney & Sciog-Lazarov (2000), and Parsons (2004) table:

Binary oppositions	Miss Trunchbull		Miss Honey	
Activity/passivity	+			+
Strength/weakness (physical)	+			+
Power/lack of power (social)	+			+
Domination/submissiveness	+			+
Independence/dependence	+			+
Egocentricity/ethics of care	+			+
Intelligence/lack of intelligence	+		+	
Reason/instinct	+			+
Decisiveness/indecisiveness	+			+
Control over feelings/sensitivity	+			+
Ability to choose/lack of ability to choose	+			+
Courage/fear	+			+
Formed attitude/lack of attitude	+			+
Leading/following	+			+
Vehicle of change/conformism	+			+

**Table 2:** The representation of characters through binary oppositions in Matilda

According to the table Miss Trunchbull represents a “typical male character”. She is active, strong (physically), powerful (socially), dominant, independent, egocentric, intelligent, rational, decisive, she controls her feelings, she has the ability to choose, she is courageous, has a formed attitude and she is a leader (she can even be seen as a dictator at the school). Miss Honey is a complete opposite. She is passive, weak both physically and socially, submissive, dependant (Matilda is the one who saves her), she cares about other people. She is intelligent, but that does not come in handy, when she lets her indecisiveness (on one hand she would like to get rid of Miss Trunchbull, and on the other she fears her), fear, sensitivity, and conformism come in the way of her

happiness. In the end Miss Honey is saved by Matilda, and Miss Trunchbull is punished. This makes us wonder if Dahl wanted to make it seem that a woman who is pretty, and submissive (the perfect patriarchal woman) gets a happy ending, whereas a woman who is strong, and independent, is also ugly and evil, ends up punished.



## 6. CONCLUSION

Societies have different perspective when it comes to gender and gender roles. People who come from patriarchal families tend to believe that the woman's place is in the house, preferably in the kitchen, and the ultimate goal of her life is to be pretty, to get a good husband and have many children. However, due to many years of women's suffrage and feminist movement, women have become emancipated. Nowadays, women have more rights than they used to (the right to vote, to work, to get an education...).

The influences of patriarchal ideology and stereotypes which it formed can be seen in literature. Female characters were often portrayed as weak and submissive, while male characters were strong and dominant in all aspects of life. There was also a problem for female writers, as they often had to hide their personas under male pseudonyms, because it was believed that women could not write quality works. Consequently, during the second wave of feminism, feminist literary criticism emerged. Its goal was to analyse and identify the issues in literary works. It often criticised patriarchal ideology and the representation of female characters. Feminist literary criticism also helped uncover some of the literary works written by women which were disregarded in the past. The reader is also important for feminist literary criticism, especially young girls and boys who read the books and create an image of what the world around them is, or what it should be.

Roald Dahl was the author who lived and wrote during the feminist movements. He often used inspiration from his own life to write his novels. Therefore, we can notice the impact of the social movements that took place during his life, especially in the way he portrayed female characters in *The Witches*, *The BFG* and *Matilda*. In the novel *Matilda* we have various female characters. When we put them all together, we can see that each of them represents a lot of issues. Firstly, we have Mrs Wormwood, a mother who cares more about her looks than her children. She represents the perfect patriarchal woman, whose only mission in life is to be pretty and to marry a good man who will provide for her. Then we have Miss Trunchbull and Miss Honey who represent binary opposites. Miss Honey is caring, submissive, weak, willing to stay sad and miserable because she is not strong enough to make a change. Miss Trunchbull, on the other hand, represents all of the traditionally expected male

characteristics. She is strong, and determined, she is a *'formidable woman'*, and everyone is afraid of her because she is evil. These two characters make us question whether women can be happy only if they are pretty and submissive. Finally, we have Matilda, the protagonist, and the only positive female character in the novel. She is a young girl, who is always told to be quiet, because she is just a stupid little girl. Despite all of the belittling, Matilda does not give up and she fights for her rights and for the rights of others. She becomes her own hero and ends up saving Miss Honey.

Lastly, it is important to promote a healthy image of female and male characteristics, and to try to avoid stereotyping. This is something that the novel *Matilda* provides. Even though the female characters show many issues, and some of them are stereotypically portrayed, the novel still presents an opportunity for a deep analysis which can cause the reader to critically think about the message of the novel, and that is the empowerment of a small child Matilda, who took on adults and fought for her rights.

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kojom izjavljujem da sam suglasna da se trajno pohrani i javno objavi moj rad

***Unfolding Layers of Womanhood: Roald Dahl's Matilda***

u javno dostupnom institucijskom repozitoriju

Učiteljskog fakulteta Sveučilišta u Zagrebu

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U Zagrebu, srpanj 2021

Ime i prezime: ***Iva Turčin***

Potpis



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#### IZJAVA O SAMOSTALNOJ IZRADI RADA

Potpisom potvrđujem kako sam ja, Iva Turčin, studentica Učiteljskog fakulteta Sveučilišta u Zagrebu samostalno napisala rad na temu *Unfolding Layers of Womanhood: Roald Dahl's Matilda* pod vodstvom mentora izv. prof. dr. sc. Krunoslava Mikulana i kako se nisam koristila drugim izvorima osim onih navedenih u radu.

U Zagrebu, srpanj 2021

Ime i prezime: ***Iva Turčin***

Potpis

Handwritten signature of Iva Turčin in black ink.