

PATRIARCHAL PRACTICES AND RESISTANCE IN ROALD DAHL'S *MATILDA*

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Abstract

This thesis discusses a novel entitled *Matilda* by Roald Dahl. The aims of the thesis are to explain and to analyse the intrinsic and extrinsic aspects of the story. The analysis will be focused on The Wormwoods where patriarchal practice happens. The result of this thesis describes the meaning of the representation of patriarchal ideology in *Matilda* which is the representation of woman are considered to have lower status than men. The method used in obtaining the data is library research and additional data from the internet. With an analysis of The Wormwoods, it can be concluded that the representation of patriarchal ideology in *Matilda* has different impacts for each family member Wormwood and made Matilda to choose living with her teacher.

Keywords: character, womanhood, patriarchal practice, resistance.

1. INTRODUCTION

Hugh Holman in his book *A Handbook to Literature* describes novel as “to designate any extended fictional prose narrative” and “restricted to narratives” only (1985: 298). Every novel has different meaning and message that the author wants to convey. Some authors use novel as a way to confide and to express their opinion towards matters happen around them, including social matter. In *Matilda*, the writer finds out the depiction of patriarchal theory.

Matilda tells the story of a very small, young girl who is competitive, active, rebellious and brilliant. The novel also appoints patriarchal ideology since Matilda's father mistreats her because she is “only” a little girl. In fact, her father underestimates every woman including his wife. As Todres and Hinginbotham stated in their article,

Roald Dahl's classic children's book *Matilda* confronts the experience of being both a child in an adult-dominated world and a girl in a patriarchal society, the intersection of two different forms of discrimination (2015: 78).

Since his books are for children, Dahl is able to use magic without creating a whole

illogical fantastic world to deal with adult world. According to Sturrock,

In many instances his books are a kind of imaginative survival manual for children about how to deal with the adult world around them. They offer the vision of an existence freed from parental controls, a world full of imagination and pleasure, where everything is possible (2010: 42).

Based on the opinion given, it is interesting to do an analysis on the novel. This thesis will discuss intrinsic aspects such as character, and formula of the story and extrinsic aspects using patriarchal ideology of a novel entitled *Matilda* by Roald Dahl.

1.2. Research Problems

In composing this research, the writer defines three questions related to the topic and to be answered later in the discussion,

1. How patriarchal ideology is presented in *Matilda*?
2. What is the impact of patriarchy on other characters?
3. How does Matilda resist to patriarchal practices in *Matilda*?

1.3. Objectives of the Study

Regarding the research problems above, the writer attempts to recite the problems in this study to utter the answer. This paper analyzes both intrinsic and extrinsic aspects in the novel *Matilda*. The main analyses are to explain the representation of patriarchal ideology, the impact on other characters in and Matilda's resistance to patriarchal practices in *Matilda*.

1.4. Methods of the Study

There are two methods that the writer used in writing this thesis, which are research method and method of approach.

1.4.1. Research Method

The writer uses library research by using close reading to analyze Roald Dahl's *Matilda*. Thus, the writer conducted the research to get the factual data and information by taking the sources from novel, books, magazines, internet, and other related sources and focusing on the specific details of a passage or text in order to get some deeper meaning in it.

1.4.2. Method of Approach

The writer uses two methods in this study, intrinsic and extrinsic approach. For intrinsic aspects, the writer analyzes character and formula of the story, whereas for the extrinsic aspect the writer uses patriarchal approach, which is described as a system in which males have the higher rights authority in the society.

2. BIOGRAPHY OF ROALD DAHL AND SYNOPSIS OF *MATILDA*

2.1. Biography of Roald Dahl

According to Biography.com Editors in The Biography.com websites, Roald Dahl was born on September 13, 1916, in Llandaff, South Wales. In 1953, he published the best-selling story collection *Someone Like You* and married actress Patricia Neil. He published the popular book *James and the Giant Peach* in 1961. In 1964, he released another highly successfully work, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, which was later adapted for two films. Over his decades-long writing career, Dahl wrote 19 children's books. He died on November 23, 1990, in Oxford, England.

Dahl first established himself as a children's writer in 1961, when he published the book *James and the Giant Peach*. The book met with wide critical and commercial acclaim. Three years later, Dahl published another big winner, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*.

Both books were eventually made into popular movies. A film adaptation of *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* was released as *Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory* in 1971, and an originally titled remake of the film, starring Johnny Depp, was released in 2005. The movie version of *James and the Giant Peach* was released in 1996.

2.2. Synopsis of Matilda

Matilda was a little girl who lived with her parents who acted evil and ignore her. It was ironic because Matilda was a super-genius kid. She taught herself to read and always went to a local library every afternoon to read books. Using her intelligence, she decided to play prank on her parents every time they misbehave. She glued her father's hat to his head, disguised neighbor's parrot as a ghost, and dyed her father's hair blond.

Matilda started to go to school. On the first day, her teacher, Miss Honey, soon realized her intelligence. Miss Honey even asked the principal to move Matilda to higher class, but Miss Trunchbull disagreed. Meanwhile, Matilda knew that Miss Trunchbull was often insolent to her students.

Matilda used her ability to give lessons to Miss Trunchbull and causes the woman unconscious. Miss Trunchbull was deterred and escapes out of town. The situation became very well for Miss Honey and Matilda. Matilda was even placed in a higher class, but she lost her telekinetic ability. Matilda visited Miss Honey's house every day and Miss Honey decided to adopt Matilda.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter contains the explanation of the theories used to analyze Roald Dahl's *Matilda*. The theories are divided into two parts which are related to intrinsic and extrinsic elements of literature.

3.1. Intrinsic Elements

Intrinsic elements are the elements that build up the literary works. There are only two intrinsic elements which are character and formula of the story.

3.1.1. Characters

Character is an important element in a novel that can help the development of storyline. According to Barnet in *An Introduction to Literature: Fiction, Poetry, Drama*, character is “a figure in a literary work or the personality of such a figure (1989: 37). Potters also said that character is a fundamental element in a novel by stating “Character is basic element in such imaginative literature and therefore they merit the considerable attention paid to them” (1967: 443). To summarize, character is basic yet important element in a novel and need to be observed in order to understand the main message of the novel.

3.1.2. Formula

Cawelti defines formula as “... a means of generalizing the characteristics of large groups of individual works from certain combinations of cultural materials and archetypal story patterns” (1976: 7). Holmes describes formula as “a hackneyed sequences of events typical of a number of instances in some popular form of writing” (1985: 193). In other word, formula is a pattern which is used by the writer of a story.

Cawelti discerns formula into five types which are adventure, romance, mystery, melodrama and alien beings or states. However, this thesis will only discuss about the formula of adventure type that fits in with the characteristic of the story under discussion.

3.1.2.1 Adventure

The central fantasy of the adventure story is that of the hero—individual or group—conquering obstacles and dangers and solving some important and moral mission. The center of interest in the adventure story is the hero character and the kind of the obstacles he has to cope with. This is the simplest, oldest, and widest in all story types. It can be traced back to the myths and earliest times and has been developed in some form or other by almost every human society. (Cawelti 1976:40).

3.2. Extrinsic Elements

The extrinsic elements contain the explanation of patriarchal ideology and characteristics of patriarchal system.

3.2.1 Patriarchal Ideology

Initially used to describe the power of the father in a family, patriarchy has been expanded to describe a broader system in which men hold control of everything. Adrienne Rich In *Encyclopedia of Women's Autobiography: K-Z* gives more detail about patriarchy by saying “[p]atriarchy is the power of the fathers: a familial social, ideological, political systems in which men-by force, direct pressure, or through ritual, tradition, law and language, customs, etiquette, education, and the division of labor, determine what part women shall or shall not play” (1995: 87). It can be concluded that men dominate women in every aspects in order to control the movements of the women.

3.2.2 Characteristics of Patriarchal System

According to McCallister in her article *Patriarchal System: Definition and Overview*, there are some characteristics of patriarchal system, which are:

1. **Male Dominance** - In a patriarchal system, all decisions in both society and family unit are made by men. They also hold all positions of authority and power, and are considered superior.
2. **Male Identification** - Men care about their identification that includes qualities of control, strength, forcefulness, rationality, strong work ethic, and competitiveness. Those qualities are instrumental to male identification in a patriarchal system. Men want to be identified by all those qualities among others.
3. **Male Centeredness** - In a patriarchal system, men become the center of action and progression. They also become the decision-maker in the society. In patriarchal system, the focus and developer of all events and inventions, the heroes in all situations, and the center of social engagement, fun, and entertainment are all men.

Obsession with Control - Men existing in a patriarchal system or society must hold control at all times. They have an urge to control all social and family situations and to make all decisions pertaining to finances and education.

4. **Analysis**

4.1. **Intrinsic Elements**

In this section, the analysis of intrinsic elements is done by looking at some intrinsic aspects that a novel has. The analysis covers two intrinsic elements: characters and formula of *Matilda*.

4.1.1 **Characters**

Although there are many other characters in the novel, the thesis will only analyze The Wormwoods that is Mr. and Mrs. Wormwood, Matilda, Michael and Miss Honey, Matilda's teacher which are best support the analysis.

4.1.1.1 Feminine character

In *Matilda*, the woman character who supports or subjects to patriarchal ideology is Mrs. Wormwood. She is the mother in *The Wormwoods* and is described as a woman who cares so much about her look. She dyes her hair and wears heavy make-up. Mrs. Wormwood's only interests are watching American soap-operas and playing Bingo every day. She thinks that a woman does not need to be smart. Her argument is "A girl doesn't get a man by being brainy" (Dahl, 1988: 99). The only important thing for a woman to do is to look good and find a rich husband. She is submissive to her husband and like her husband Mrs. Wormwood thinks very little of her daughter's unique abilities and often berates her.

4.1.1.2 Opponent Characters

The characters who oppose patriarchy are Matilda and Miss Jennifer Honey. Matilda is the main character in the novel is Matilda Wormwood. She is four and a half -year old who has intelligence far above her years. Dahl even describes her as a "child-genius and prodigy" (Dahl, 1988: 75). She is also seen as more mature than people in her age. Although Matilda has an extraordinary intelligence, she does not get special treatment from her parents. She seems to be labeled as a bad girl because her intelligence. In fact, her parents treat her like she is worthless, only because she is a girl. Dahl explains that "The parents, instead of applauding her, called her a noisy chatterbox and told her sharply that small girls should be seen and not heard" (Dahl, 1988: 11).

Another character who opposes the patriarchy is Miss Jennifer Honey, Matilda's teacher. She is a teacher at Crunchem Hall Primary School where Matilda studies. She is a young woman with slim and fragile figure. She admires Matilda's intelligence and wants to help Matilda to get proper education with that level of ingenuity. She even goes as far as coming to Matilda's house to talk to her parents about it. At the end of the story, she allows

Matilda to live with her. She is willing to look after Matilda without having anything in return. However she makes sure to get permission from Matilda’s parents.

4.1.1.3 Masculine

The characters who practice patriarchy are Mr. Wormwood and his son, Michael. Mr. Wormwood is the father in *The Wormwoods*. He works as a used car dealer. He is described as a cunning-looking man who likes to wear bright-colored clothes, presumably because he likes it when he stands out. From the beginning of the story, the reader knew that he is a dishonest business man. He deceives his customer by putting sawdust in his customers' cars to make them sound better and runs the cars backward to turn back the mileage counters. He never praises his daughter for being smart and having telekinetic abilities, instead he constantly mocks her. He even rips a book which Matilda borrows from library because he does not like to see Matilda enjoy reading. Her father keeps on cursing at her.

Another masculine character is Michael, Matilda’s older brother. Michael is “a perfectly normal boy” (Dahl, 1988: 11) and although he does not have the same level of intelligence or ability as his sister, he is the favorite in *The Wormwood* family. Mr. Wormwood even has decided that he will become the successor of his business and does not hesitate to share his immoral experience to him. “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: 50). For him, it is only necessary to cheat his customer.

4.1.2 Formula

Here are the formulas related to the patriarchal ideology which contain in *Matilda*.

No.	Formula	Description	Pages
1	Suspense	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Matilda is being ignored by her parents since she was really young, but her brother gets different 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (Dahl, 1988: 10-11, 94)

		treatment. • Matilda is repeatedly mistreated by her parents.	• (Dahl, 1988: 12, 26, 38, 55)
2	Identification	• Matilda teaches herself to read thus becomes smarter. • Matilda revenges in amusing ways	• (Dahl, 1988:12-13) • (Dahl, 1988: 30, 42, 56)
3	The creation of a slightly removed, imaginary world	Matilda's telekinetic ability	(Dahl, 1988: 164-166, 211, 219-223)

Table 1 Formula of *Matilda*

4.1.2.1 Suspense

Matilda is an extraordinary girl with intelligence far above her age. She is the daughter of The Wormwood. Her parents fail to notice her intelligence and do not care about her. They ignore and scorn Matilda in favor of her older brother. They told her that “small girls should be seen and not be heard” (Dahl, 1988: 11). They even often leave her alone in the house.

Her parents could not wait to get rid of her and considerably wait for the time when they finally free from all ties from her. This statement is strengthened by Dahl's statements “Mr. and Mrs. Wormwood looked forward enormously to the time when they could pick their little daughter off and flick away...” (Dahl, 1988: 10). Matilda also has been admitted late to the school because her parents simply forget about it.

4.1.2.2 Identification

Because Matilda's parents do not pay attention to her, she then teaches herself to read. She begins with reading newspaper and magazines when she is just three years old. By the time she is four, she already can read fast. She decides to go to local library to read some more books. In there, she is assisted by the librarian who picks great books for her to read. Reading all those books gives her a view of wonderful life she had never seen. Matilda deplores her parents cognition.

Matilda never cries when her father is mean and curses at her. With her brilliant mind she thinks of how to revenge to her father. She knows that crying or sulking is useless. She does it as an attempt to “help her to tolerate their idiocies and would stop her from going crazy” (Dahl, 1988: 29).

Another effort of revenge conducted by Matilda to her father is when her father rips her book, she avenges by scaring her family off. She borrows her neighbor’s parrot and hides it in the fireplace. Therefore when it speaks, it sounds like a ghost. This tricks works because her family, especially her father is scared to death.

4.1.2.3 The Creation of Slightly Removed, Imaginary World

When Miss. Trunchbull accuses Matilda play prank on her, Matilda begins to develop her telekinetic ability. She brings down Mrs. Trunchbull’s glass from where he sits just by staring at it with full concentration. Matilda then decides to use her telekinetic ability to help Miss Honey. She practices her ability at her home so she could manage it.

4.2 Extrinsic Elements

The extrinsic analysis will be divided into three parts. The first part is analysis on the representation of patriarchal ideology in the novel. The second part is analysis on the impact of the patriarchy to other characters. The third part is analysis on the resistance to patriarchal practices in the novel.

4.2.1 The Representation of Patriarchal Ideology in *Matilda*

Among patriarchy definitions given in chapter III, *Matilda* portrays Adrienne Rich’s definition of patriarchy perfectly. Rich said that “patriarchy is the power of the fathers: a familial social, ideological, political systems in which men-by force, direct pressure, or through ritual, tradition, law and language, customs, etiquette, education, and the division of

labor, determine what part women shall or shall not play” (1995: 87). The characteristics of patriarchal.

1. Male Dominance

In *Matilda*, Mr. Wormwood, Matilda's father, treats his family by imposing his will on his family. One example is when he upholds the dinner habit in front of the television simply because he likes it, although it is not a typical family dinner. He is angry when Matilda wants to eat dinner in another room. He forces a custom although it is not common without considering whether other members of his family like it.

2. Male Identification

Mr. Wormwood thinks that he is the most powerful and smartest person in his family just because he is the one who makes money and supports his family. He often praises himself.

3. Male Centeredness

Mr. Wormwood blurs the line of right and wrong and implements his own laws in his family. He has a business selling used cars and runs it fraudulently. When Matilda tries to tell him that it is not the right thing to do, he is angry and tells her to be quiet. However, he considers that it was part of his genius in running the business.

Since he likes watching television, he forces his family to do the things he enjoys. When Matilda asks his permission to buy books he declines and says that reading is not important. Mr. Wormwood's behavior fits with Rich's statement “the father determines what part women shall or shall not play”.

4. Obsession with Control

Dahl explains that despite of being a brilliant girl, Matilda is still obliged to do what she is told. All of these happen because of the fact that she is just a little girl in her family. Mr. Wormwood and her wife do not care about Matilda at all. Dahl states that he doubts “they

would have noticed had she crawled into the house with a broken house” (Dahl, 1988: 10). Dahl explains that despite of being a brilliant girl, Matilda is still obliged to do what she is told. All of these happen because of the fact that she is just a little girl in her family.

But all this maltreatment does not applicable to her son, Michael. Mr. Wormwood is very fond of him and he even hopes that one day his son would take over his business, although Michael is not as smart as Matilda. He says proudly to Michael "... But I do not mind telling young Mike here about it seeing he'll be joining me in the business one day" (Dahl, 1988: 13).

4.2.2 Impact of the Patriarchy to Other Characters

The following discussions are some impacts of patriarchal practices in The Wormwoods.

4.2.2.1 Rebellion

Matilda and Miss Honey oppose the arbitrarily attitude of Mr. Wormwood. Matilda does not want to be mistreated by his father therefore she does some pranks in return. She does it as a form of giving a lesson to his father. This also results in Matilda getting closer to Miss Honey. Miss Honey defends Matilda in front of her parents and does her best to give Matilda proper education she needs. Being the only adult who is kind to Matilda, Miss Honey becomes her confidant and is trusted to keep Matilda's secret of having telekinetic ability. Matilda also decides to live with Miss Honey instead of her family.

4.2.2.2 Submission

This demeanor is shown by Mrs. Wormwood and Michael. Although she often receives verbal abuse from Mr. Wormwood, Mrs. Wormwood never confronts his husband. She corroborates his husband's verbal abuse to Matilda and she always obeys her

husband. She also loves the idea of “look is more important than books” because according to her, the purpose of a girl’s life is to get a rich husband by making themselves look attractive.

Another character who is submissive to Mr. Wormwood is Michael. He is the eldest son in the family and Mr. Wormwood’s favorite child. This is the reason why he experiences the least impact. Mr. Wormwood always acts decent and never speaks harshly to him. Michael is also promoted as the business successor. Therefore Michael never confronts his father.

4.2.3 The Resistance to Patriarchal Practices in *Matilda*

Matilda and Miss Honey are the ones who resist to arbitrary actions conducted by Mr. Wormwood. This is most likely due to the fact that Matilda is genius so that she can think and act beyond her age and other adults surrounding.

When Matilda finds out her father is cheating in his business, she rebukes him although she gets insults in return. There are many times when Matilda is mistreated by her family especially her parents but she does not remain silent. She revenges in sly and smart yet ridiculous way, something that a four-and-a half-year-old could not think of.

Miss Honey cares so much about Matilda that she decides to have a talk with Matilda’s parents about Matilda’s extraordinary ability which is her intelligence. She explains patiently to them that Matilda needs better education considering her ability rather than be in primary school. However her effort seems useless because Mr. and Mrs. Wormwood are stubborn and clearly do not care about Matilda. Dahl explains that “Mr. and Mrs. Wormwood were both so gormless and so wrapped up in their own silly little lives that they failed to notice anything unusual about their daughter” (Dahl, 1988: 10).

In the last attempt to be free from her family, Matilda prefers to stay with Miss Honey than to join her family moved out of town, while Michael and Mrs. Wormwood always follow Mr. Wormwood and join him moving out of town.

5. CONCLUSION

Based on the discussion on intrinsic and extrinsic aspects, we find out several results. From the characters of the novel, we can conclude that the novel has several stereotypical characters. First, Mrs. Wormwood is the feminine or the one who supports or the subject to patriarchal ideology. Second, Matilda and Miss Honey who oppose the patriarchy. Third, Mr. Wormwood and Michael are the masculine or the ones who practice patriarchy.

From the structure of the novel, we can conclude that the novel has three important events. First, it is a part when the novel tells suspense in the story. Matilda is being ignored since she is really young and repeatedly mistreated by her parents. Second, it is part about the identification of the story. Matilda educates and teaches herself to read thus becomes smarter. Third, it is part about the creation of imaginary world which is Matilda's telekinetic ability.

From the discussion on the extrinsic aspects, we can find out that there are several results. First, Mr. Wormwood, Matilda's father, treats his family by imposing his will on his family. He forces a custom although it is not common without considering whether other members of his family like it. He mistreats Matilda by not paying attention to her and curses.

Second, patriarchal practices done by Mr. Wormwood have different impacts towards other characters. Matilda and Miss Honey oppose the practices. Matilda stands up for herself by doing pranks to her father while Miss Honey makes an attempt to give an understanding to Mr. and Mrs. Wormwood about their prodigy daughter. There are also characters who

comply with the practices which are Mrs. Wormwood and Michael. They never rebel against Mr. Wormwood.

Third, Matilda and Miss Honey resist the patriarchal practices. Matilda avenges by pranking her father every time he mistreats her. Miss Honey wants to help Matilda by trying to talking to her parents about getting Matilda proper education. At the end of the story, Matilda chooses to live with Miss Honey instead of joining her family move out of town.

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