“We Are the Revolting Children”: Rebellion in J. M. Barrie’s *Peter and Wendy* and Roald Dahl’s *Matilda*

Masterscriptie Engelse Taal en Cultuur, Rijksuniversiteit Groningen

Elke Maasbommel

S1872494

Dr. Irene Visser

July 1st 2013

Word Count: 15.382
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter One</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Two</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Three</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Acknowledgements

I sincerely thank Dr Visser, who patiently guided me to my destination.

My thanks also go out to all my dear friends, who supported me on the long journey to it.


Introduction

“Disobedience, in the eyes of any who has read history, is man’s original virtue. It is through disobedience that progress has been made, through disobedience and rebellion.”

- Oscar Wilde

Rebellion, or disobedience, occurs in all scales and gestures, big or small. It is a phenomenon which has been going on since the dawn of humanity. When the world changes, it is probably because a change is needed. There is the sudden realisation that we have been on the same page for too long and need to move on to a next chapter. It is not only in the real world where rebels have the desire to make a change, but also in the world of art and literature. And, more specifically, in the world of children’s literature. Countless books and stories for children feature, in some way or another, the theme of rebellion. Stereotypically, the child hero is abused by his or her evil parents, and he is trying to break free from their influence, in which he almost always succeeds. However, even though this basic plot summary suggests the genre of children’s literature is highly traditional, there have always been authors who have diverged from the clear path and introduced a new idea to the already extensive oeuvre of children’s literature, while also remaining true to some values and ideas which existed before the genre even rose to popularity.

One of the genres to which children’s literature is highly indebted, is the fairy tale. These short stories often included children who overcame trial and tribulation in order to claim their rightful place in society. Several fairy-tale elements, themes and plots return to the genre of children’s literature, which clearly shows that the two genres are connected if not intertwined. However, the main difference between the two genres is not content, but authorship. While fairy tales are often anonymous or have planted their roots so deep into our culture that the author of the texts has long been forgotten, children’s authors always make sure they add a personal twist to the traditional story in order to ensure their unique position within the genre.
Two authors who have succeeded in doing so through their inventive play with the genre are J. M. Barrie and Roald Dahl, who wrote, amongst others, *Peter and Wendy* and *Matilda* respectively. Peter Pan, Barrie’s most celebrated work, has become such a major success since his conception in 1904 that he has been placed among the immortals of children’s literature, while adaptations are still made, in films, series, books and video games. Dahl’s oeuvre is much more substantial; before he took up children’s literature, he was already an accomplished author for adults, and is therefore remembered for his entire collection rather than one famous text. His children’s books were, and still are, acclaimed globally, and he has often been called the World’s Number One Storyteller (the Independent). Although the authors and their works seem to have nothing in common but their contribution to the genre of children’s literature, certain similarities can be drawn.

Firstly, both *Peter and Wendy* and *Matilda* are rebellious books in more than one sense. Both novels deal with the theme of rebellion very clearly; both are about children who try to rise up against evil adults in order to ensure their individuality and happiness. Although both texts include this theme, the outcome is very different, which shows how the authors have incorporated the same theme to a very different effect. Additionally, the authors themselves can be seen as rebellious too, as they incorporated social, contextual and autobiographical elements to their stories. Both novels are evidently based upon traditional stories and fairy tales, but they authors used their craftsmanship to move away from these traditions and create a new and unique story, appreciated by the masses.

Secondly, both authors, because of their influence and importance to the genre of children’s literature, have inspired other artists to adapt their novels. These adaptations, however, like their literary blueprints, need to be analysed within a historical context in order to fully understand why and how some aspects were added or omitted. The most striking aspect of the adaptations is that they are stripped bare from the author’s trademark style, while they return to the more basic and traditional forms of storytelling. Much more than in the novel, fairy tale elements are used in order to convey the message of the story. Both the Walt Disney Company and the Hollywood Film Industry
for both *Peter Pan* and *Matilda* respectively, took some rather harsh liberties to reach an audience as large as possible, even though it meant that the story had to be rewritten substantially.

In my thesis, I will argue that the rebellion in the novels *Peter and Wendy* and *Matilda* does not only take place within the story, but also in the author’s view on the genre of children’s literature. Both Dahl and Barrie have incorporated new ideas and applied them to traditional stories in order to create a new story which is now so well-known that it has in itself become a canonical work which has inspired a new generation of writers. Many adaptations have been made of these two novels, but they never share the exact same sentiment as the original texts. The audience of the adaptations has become increasingly important as they decide whether a film is going to be successful or not. In order to make a successful adaptation, the creators have to take into account the norms and values of the society into which it is going to be placed. This has sometimes been done with such success, that the adaptation had become even more popular than the original source, thus replacing the literary text with a more modern medium. It could then be said that these books were not adapted, but adopted. However, as I will describe in my thesis, the adaptations (or adoptions) are clearly less rebellious in tone, in order to please the aforementioned audience. I will therefore argue that both *Peter and Wendy* and *Matilda*, although they were originally quite rebellious novels, have become part of the canon of children’s literature from which new adaptations will never cease to be created, although they will never reach the same state of rebellion as the original novels.
Chapter One
“Oh, such stories I could tell them!”: Children’s stories in books and their adaptations

From the dawn of humanity, people have been telling stories to each other. These stories often included tales about evil dragons which had to be defeated, or princes who were destined to save a princess from the high tower. Most stories are in essence the same, although a different culture has changed some aspects. Booker claims that there are seven basic plots on which all stories we know now are based. He argues that there are hardly any original stories which diverge from the standard set because there will always be some aspect which can be traced back to one of the seven basic plots he mentions. Although this is a bold statement, he does mention two plots which are highly applicable to my thesis, namely the ones called ‘rags to riches’ and ‘overcoming the monster’ (Booker). As the name already suggests, the first concerns low-born characters who rise up the social ladder. The second narrates the life of one person who is destined to do great things, such as defeating a dragon which has been terrorising a village. Booker states that these basic plots lie at the foundation of humankind, and that is the reason why all stories are, in essence, similar. Fairy tales, in a way, are based upon these basic plots, although some aspects have been added to it: “In psychological terms these [fairy] tales provide as perfect a reflection of the underlying archetypes of storytelling as anything we find in more self-consciously sophisticated forms of literature” (Booker 640).

Fairy tales, like Booker’s seven basic plots, reflect how human values can be projected onto stories. Fairy tales, or rather folk tales, have been spread orally since the beginning of humankind. They often included stories with a similar plot, which were told in order to explain universal morals and standards. Therefore, the stories themselves are not the most important aspect, but rather the principles presented in them have become one of the definitions of fairy tales. Often, these principles are copied in other texts, a process which Zipes defines as follows: “The tales have a great cross-cultural appeal that transcends their particularity: they contain ‘universal’ motifs and experiences
that writers borrow consciously and unconsciously from other cultures in an endeavour to imbue their symbolical stories with very specific commentaries on the mores and manners of their times” (2006: 41-42). Bruno Bettelheim agrees with this: “For those who immerse themselves in what the fairy tale has to communicate, it becomes a deep, quiet pool which at first seems to reflect only our own image; but behind it we soon discover the inner turmoils of our soul – its depth, and ways to gain peace within ourselves and within the world, which is the reward of our struggles” (Bettelheim 309). Even though fairy tales are age-old, they provide universal truths which transcend the boundaries of time. “There is an essential human nature which underlies all changing surface appearances; important human qualities, such as Reason, Love, Honour, Loyalty, Courage etc., are transhistorical; human desires are reasonably constant, and what differs are the social mechanisms evolved to express or contain them” (Stephens 203). Stephens argues that fairy tales form the foundation of stories that are still told today, and although the medium has changed, the essence remains the same.

The essence of fairy tales is that they educate children on how they should be a good person. Stories have always been a very important means to teach children how to behave, which is why they are so often presented with a strong moral. According to Bettelheim, one of the most effective ways to teach a child moral values is by reading them fairy tales as they “confront the child squarely with the basic human predicaments” (Bettelheim 8). When parents are reading to their children, they do not merely recite the text, but also, actively or passively, inform the child on how they should live as the characters presented in fairy tales are, apart from stereotypes, role-models. The main characters are always good, while their enemies are intensely evil. These villains, however, also fulfil a role as they, according to Bettelheim, are attractive in their own way. However, because they always get what they deserve in the end, children are taught that being bad will lead to punishment. “Through their depiction of incidents in which ‘goodness’ is rewarded and ‘evil’ deeds punished, folk and fairy tales function as pedagogical tools that illustrate cultural values, enforce the status quo, and define socially acceptable and unacceptable behaviour” (Hixon 67). Since all characters have a role to fulfil,
fairy tales are an excellent way of educating children while also entertaining them, a process which Lerer calls “docere et delectare” (11). According to Butler, “with most good stories, the reader identifies with the protagonist, at least partially” (110). When the child reader can easily identify him- or herself with the hero, he or she will also be more susceptible to the values the hero represents.

Several fairy tales include the theme of rebellion in order to show children how they could overcome their own problems, thus creating a didactic atmosphere (Bettelheim). Moreover, the protagonists eventually end up as better persons, indicating that they are willing to change for justice. Sometimes, however, children revolted against their parents, thus reversing the didactic values. This idea is used throughout the whole genre of children’s literature, although new aspects are continually added to it. Modern authors often imitate older sources with old themes and motifs in order to create an entirely new genre. Roald Dahl, for instance, continuously used old plots which he applied to and altered in his novels. While his stories seem to be quite formulaic, he always added a new idea, which also shows how much the world, society and the genre has changed. For instance, whereas at first an evil witch would curse children, this role would now be fulfilled by a mean teacher. This implies both the idea that there still is a dire need for a villain and it also strengthens the notion that the fairy tale genre is still tangible in children’s literature. It also hints at children’s dependence on adults, since they teach children moral values, and sometimes are the people against whom the children rebel. The modern setting makes it more interesting for children to read as it makes the entire story more relatable.

Not only the setting reveals an author’s alteration of a traditional story, but also his or her style. The main difference between fairy tales and children’s literature is authorship. Many of the fairy tales we know now are anonymous, or rather, the author is not of any importance. According to Warner this is one of the defining characteristics of fairy tales as they used to be cautionary old-wives’ tales. Shippey, however, notices the increase in contemporary authors who rewrite fairy-tales in order to show their craftsmanship (153). Children’s literature can also be categorised as a genre which both imitates and emulates the fairy-tale predecessors. Both Dahl and Barrie drew from
personal experience and cultural events, while still echoing the fairy-tale sources: “if you seek to trace the path that a child’s story has followed down through the years, if you go back over the course of time trying to find its source, you will often discover that though the story seems new it is very ancient indeed” (Hazard 158). It is only by the author’s voice that those tales and stories will be more original. In that way, the true rebellions in these texts are not the protagonists, but the ones who penned them down; it is the authors who define an original text, the authors who move away from the boundaries that have been laid upon them over the centuries, doing so by creating characters who, in their turn, defy authority. The rebels in the novel, then, are mirroring the authors as their ability to break free symbolises the liberty the author takes to create a new story by using ancient themes.

Hazard claims that fairy tales and children’s literature are connected to their cores. In his *Books, Children and Men*, he spends several chapters on fairy tales in combination with children’s literature. His view, however, is now regarded as outdated as he follows the Romantic idea that all children are innocent (Perrot, Nodelman et. al.). Additionally, not all fairy tales are (or indeed were) written for children, just as not all children’s literature is in essence a retelling of fairy tales. It goes without saying that children’s literature often shares themes with fairy tales, but the difference between them is that the author is more important in children’s literature. Rose states this process as follows:

Writers for children must know who they are. They must know and understand children, otherwise they would not be able to write for them in the first place. But they must also know who they (as adults) are, otherwise that first knowledge might put their identity as writers at risk. (70)

Barrie’s texts all return, in one way or another, to personal events and traumas, especially in *Peter and Wendy*. It has even been said that “all Barrie’s life led up to the creation of Peter Pan” (Lancelyn
Green 34). Hollindale phrases this as follows: “there really is an exceptionally close and visible interaction between Barrie’s life and his work” (viii). There are several events in the 1904 play Peter Pan, and more specifically Peter and Wendy, which clearly echo Barrie’s own experiences. One of the most important events of his life was the death of his older brother David, who was his mother’s favourite child. This planted the idea of everlasting youth in his head, which Barrie phrased thus: “When I became a man, he was still a boy of thirteen” (Barrie 1896: 15). Even though he tried to be like his late brother, he never succeeded in doing so, and this is one of the reasons why the passing of time plays such a key role in Barrie’s work. Several plays by Barrie incorporate this theme, including, amongst others, Tommy and Grizel. None of his plays, however, have become as famous as Peter Pan, but it is striking that many of his plays used the same themes, which show that the theme of growing up certainly was a major influence on his work. Another important element in Barrie’s life which inspired his authorship was his mother, since he always tried to emulate his late brother’s memory, in which, however, he never succeeded. Another important influence for Barrie’s texts was the time in which he lived. This traces back to the idea that children’s literature should be educational, although Barrie parodies schools rather than echo their desire to teach children.

Peter Pan is often regarded as a typical Victorian creation. Not only was the obsession with eternal youth at its peak; many authors included the theme in their novels and pondered the possible positive and negative effects of this. Peter Pan, then, is the ultimate form of this idea, as he is the only person who will always be a boy. Additionally, the Romantic idea of childhood clearly resounds in Peter Pan, an idea which Wullschläger phrases as follows: “The symbolic association between childhood, innocence and regeneration is age-old (...) but the nineteenth century, taking on the Romantic interpretation of Blake and Wordsworth and the focus on nature, transformed the image by relating it specifically to contemporary society and morality” (18). Peter Pan is a true example of this description as it blends all notions, traditions and forms into one entity; combining the eternal youth with nature, who is battling against the civilised Hook. It seems as though Barrie merely combined several factors without really adding new aspects. Could it then be said that Peter
Pan is now an outdated character, as the idea, the notion of Peter Pan is so common? One must, however, take into consideration that at the time the story was written, Barrie was acclaimed for having written a unique character: “So much of Peter Pan seems obvious now: so little of it was then” (Darton 309).

The world of children’s literature obviously has changed considerably since Barrie created Peter Pan. The world has become more ‘grim’, after the First and Second World Wars. Lochhead claims that because of these two wars, “evil had almost won” (154), causing an increase in escapism in children’s literature and a bloom in fantasy fiction such as Tolkien’s The Hobbit and C. S. Lewis’ The Chronicles of Narnia. It was only decades later that this notion changed. According to Catherine Butler, from the 1960s onwards the trend was to present a more realistic view in children’s literature: “There was a distinct preference for real-world settings, usually rural or suburban, inner cities being generally the preserve of realist writers” (224). Another aspect of more realistic children’s literature pertains to the importance of school and education. During the 1980s, school was accessible to everyone, rather than merely the middle- and upper-class children during the Edwardian Age. This notion visibly returns to Dahl’s novel Matilda as well.

Like Barrie, Dahl included the theme of education in several of his novels, including Matilda. Dahl was influenced very much by the schools he attended. When he was young, he was sent to Repton, a school famous for its beating. According to Sturrock, “the images of isolation and misery are relentless” (Sturrock 85) and it is clear that Dahl was influenced by the upbringing at this school. From 1960 onwards, many children’s books include the image of school as a dreadful place. Hildebrand phrases the relationship between society and the books written in this period it as follows:

Like all children’s books, furthermore, this generation’s ‘best’ ones mirror, consciously or not, cultural attitudes in the society that produced them. And what these books mirror, with the
candor that marks the ‘new realism’, is the attitude that school is, more often than not, conspicuously restrictive, boring, irrelevant, unimaginative, rigid, petty, and dismal. (82)

The school ethos of the books written in this era are often quite realistic (i.e. take place in the real world with real-world issues). Schools mirror the state of a country, and it also shows how an author can be influenced by his own education and how this upbringing returns to their texts. The clearest example of this can be found in the novel Charlie and the Chocolate Factory, which shows how children should not become, but it also returns in Matilda as it illustrates how a school should not be run.

Dahl’s novels always clearly fulfil an educating role as they include various ‘bad’ stereotypes that are punished in the end. According to the Penguin edition of Matilda, which features an appendix on Dahl’s work, “in Roald’s books, bullies get their just desserts – see what happens to the aunts in James and the Giant Peach, the horrid giants in The BFG and Miss Trunchbull in Matilda” (Matilda 234). All these characters are called ‘bullies’, and in doing so the fairy-tale stereotype of the villain has been replaced by its modern equivalent, namely ‘bully’. Matilda, Dahl’s final novel, was altered substantially since the first version, as the premier draft included a Matilda who was “born wicked” (Sturrock 230) and died in the end. The publishers were not satisfied with this plot and demanded Dahl to write a new version. The version he wrote down is the one we now all know, a more traditional children’s story. The original version would have provided an anti-hero, which contradicts all traditions of children’s literature. There are, however, some texts which provide an insight on Dahl’s ability to change a genre, for example in his collection Revolting Rhymes, described as “fairy tales with a twist” (RR 5). In this collection six fairy tales are told, but with a new ending. The introduction states that the fairy tales we all know were too “phony” and “made to sound all soft and sappy/Just to keep the children happy” (Dahl 5). Dahl often incorporated an extravagant style in order to make his message clear.
Dahl’s love for the grotesque is not only used in his style, but also the way in which the characters are described. His novels often narrated the story from the point of view of the child, and therefore many adults are described as grotesque. According to Dahl, “children are inclined, at least subconsciously, to regard grown-ups as the enemy. I see this as natural, and I often work it into my children’s books. That’s why the grown-ups in my books are sometimes silly or grotesque” (Dahl qtd. in West 74-75). This grotesqueness illustrate that Dahl, although he was inspired by real-life events and people, created a unique style which provides standard stories “with a twist”, similar to Revolting Rhymes. Dahl often used both real-life events and old traditions in his texts, but blew them up in order to create the trademark Dahl atmosphere.

Some elements which Dahl borrowed from real life are political values and the rise of feminism. Guest claims that Matilda is, in essence, a feminist novel. Written during the 1980s, the cultural and political environment in England certainly influenced Dahl’s novel. One of the most compelling arguments is the rise of feminism, with Margaret Thatcher as its main example as she was the first Prime Minister of the United Kingdom. Women liberated themselves from the age-old idea that they are inferior to men and would therefore not be able to act individually. This idea returns to literature as well, although more one-sided and according to the principle of ‘good’ and ‘bad’, which “recapitulates patterns of gender associated with fairy tales, in which female characters are constructed as passive/unconscious or active/narcissistic—good or evil” (Guest 247). It is striking that Guest mentions the fairy-tale principle as it illustrates how much fairy tales have become part of our culture. As a result of the second wave of feminism, women were much more allowed, if not encouraged, to rise up against men. Guest claims that Matilda is about exactly this: Matilda is breaking free from her parents, who symbolise the culture in which women are unable to do what they want. Although she does make some rather far-fetched claims, she certainly proves that Dahl was indeed influenced by political events while writing his novel.

Although political values are added to both Barrie and Dahl’s novels, the majority of these ideas and comments on society has been left out by the various adaptations that have been made of
the novels *Peter and Wendy* and *Matilda*. Due to the rise of modern media, films have become increasingly popular and important. Of course, there are still children who will be told fairy tales and other stories by their parents, but many of these stories have also been adapted to the screen. Film and television have become more prominent in everyday life, which forced storytellers to adapt to this shift too. Schindel phrases this process as follows: “Storytelling, a tradition that may be as old as humanity, has slowly evolved from an oral art into a primarily visual one” (93). Some of the adaptations of children’s books or fairy tales have even replaced the original source. This process is especially clear in the Disney films, although adaptations often changed the plot to a great extent in order to make it more relatable to the audience, which unquestionably altered considerably.

The film industry is bound to several rules which significantly influence the way in which a specific plot can be adapted into a successful film. There are several aspects which have to be taken into account when adapting a novel to the screen, one of which is the audience. The culture in which a film adaptation will be released very much defines the final product. A film, much more than literature, involves a great deal of escapism. This term is “defined very narrowly by the motion picture producers as content which requires no effort on the part of the spectator except passive acceptance of preponderantly pleasant and unchallenging ideas” (Asheim 335). Filmmakers must always bear this in mind, but it leads to a simplification of the message conveyed in the original source. In addition, sometimes the tone of the adaptation varies from the original source as to make it more relatable to the audience.

Children’s literature has changed drastically over the years as it has become more directed to the mass-media. “Children are now configured within the culture industry of the civilising process to consume products indiscriminately” (Zipes 2009: 3). This quotation explains what has been happening over the years, an idea which was also applicable to the films created by the Walt Disney Company. According to Zipes, there are a few key elements regarding Disney adaptations. Firstly, “the classical tale was reshaped to suit the basic format of the musical and the adventure tale” (71). This means that although the plot was not changed beyond recognition, alterations were made in
order to make the plot more straight-forward. This is exactly what happens in *Peter and Wendy*, which I will discuss more elaborately in the next chapter. Often this makes the adaptations more one-sided, but this is not very surprising as most Disney adaptations are created solely for children who might not pick up on the darker side of the original sources. In addition, Disney always opted to choose the stories he wanted to adapt in order to “impress the public with his artistic techniques and technological inventions, [thus] he had to find stories that were widely acceptable to audiences, not only in America but throughout the world” (Zipes 82). In short, fairy tales worked because the stories are relevant in all cultures, which is why Disney could explore the possibilities of his film-making.

Adaptation involves more than merely changing the medium of a story. “The act of adaptation always involves both (re-) interpretation and then (re-)creation” (Hutcheon and Flynn 8). For instance, the fairy tales adapted by Disney, such as *Snow White, Beauty and the Beast* and *Sleeping Beauty*, were written a long time ago in a very different society, and their adaptations clearly show Disney’s interpretation on the stories. In an article Disney wrote after the release of *Peter Pan* in 1953, Disney explains why this story was so important to him. He starts by saying that he had always loved fairy tales. He starts the article by saying that he always loved the fairy tales by Andersen and Grimm, but he loved Peter Pan most of all, especially because of Neverland and the make-belief on the island. This make-belief is also reflected in the filmmaking itself, as he tried to recapture the magic of the original play for a new audience. For him the essence of the story is about the celebration of youth: “What Barrie wished to do and what we had to do in bringing his play to the screen was to recreate the children’s world, but a children’s world in which adults could find a place” (Disney). He also states that in doing so, Disney would create “a fairy tale for children and adults”, and because animation is much more effective than the theatre, “in some ways, we have come closer to his original concept than anyone else has” (Disney). Apart from explaining why he regarded *Peter Pan* as his favourite story, it also shows how, for him, *Peter Pan* is a fairy tale rather than a children’s books. This explains why there are so many fairy-tale elements in the adaption, which I will discuss in the following chapter.
Literary adaptations have been the subject of debate for a considerable amount of time. Disney, for instance, “doesn’t merely adapt a narrative – he virtually steals it, making it his story, much to the disparagement of those who seek to preserve and revere the literary original” (Cartmell 171). This can be said of both *Peter Pan* and *Matilda*, and therefore it could then be argued that all adaptations become a film in its own right rather than an adaptation. However, it must be said that all adaptations return to certain basic rules more so than the texts upon which they were based. Warner gives the following explanation for this process:

Theme parks and popular entertainment quarry the tradition of the fairy tale (...); they rely not only on the characters and stories, but on the idea that adults enjoy being children again, that a public can include different generations and classes, who will lose themselves in the make-believe in a different way, united by the pleasures of enchantment. (Warner 415)

In the following chapters, I will explore whether the fairy-tale traditions have been applied more extensively in the film adaptations than in the original stories. I will argue that the adaptations of *Peter Pan* and *Matilda*, although they were inspired by a literary text rather than a fairy tale, return to a genre which is older and more traditional than children’s books. An interesting shift has taken place, then: films have taken elements of fairy tales and implemented them in their adaptations in order to make them more ‘universal’. The shift that has taken place, as can be seen in the adaptations of *Peter and Wendy* and *Matilda*, is that they have taken the plot of an original children’s story but implemented fairy-tale values to it in order to feed the audience’ desire to return to their childhood, thus creating a strong sense of make-believe.
Chapter Two
“All in good time”: Rebellion, childhood, and the passing of time in J. M. Barrie’s Peter and Wendy

Peter Pan is one of the immortals in children’s literature. Apart from being the portrayal of eternal youth and thus literally immortal he is also a character who has established himself alongside the other classic characters of the genre. The story was written during the Golden Age of children’s literature, the period between 1850 until the early twentieth century during which many of the ‘classic’ children’s books were written. The story of Peter Pan, written by J. M. Barrie in his classic Peter and Wendy, published in 1911, is still enjoyed by children as well as adults. Peter Pan first appeared in the novel The Little White Bird from 1902, followed by the 1904 stage version of what was later to become the novel Peter and Wendy. When quoting, I will refer to this 1911 novel. The main reason for Peter Pan’s success can be found in the defiant nature of Peter Pan, since he did not only rebel against pirates, but also against time itself. As discussed in the previous chapter, the context in which this novel was written is important in order to understand why Peter and Wendy was so successful. The obsession with eternal youth was at its peak and many novels concerning this subject were written in that time (Wullschläger, Stephens, and others). However, this is not Barrie’s only source of inspiration as he also clearly made use of fairy-tale elements; most notably the recurring theme of rebellion which is present in many fairy tales as well as children’s books. Throughout the novel, other instances are found which imply Barrie’s debt to fairy tales. Since so many fairy-tale elements were used, the story of Peter Pan is in itself almost a fairy tale: “Barrie has taken bits and pieces out of Grimm, Mother Goose, and Andersen and animated them” (Lerer 260). Peter Pan, then, is a mix between a fairy tale and children’s literature as some characters in the novel bear a close resemblance to fairy-tale archetypes.

Many adaptations have been made of Peter and Wendy, and the blend between children’s literature and fairy tales has been kept intact, if not applied more extensively. One of the most
famous adaptations of *Peter and Wendy* is the Walt Disney Company film *Peter Pan*, released in 1953. The film, despite staying true to the main plot of the novel, illustrates the cultural development of the importance of family, which is highlighted in the film but was not the main focus in the novel. The theme of rebellion, however, still plays a key role in both the novel and its adaptation, which demonstrates the importance of the theme in the narrative. This chapter will explore how the theme of rebellion is utilised in both the novel *Peter and Wendy* and its Disney adaptation, thereby drawing attention to some changes that have been made in order to appeal to the ever-changing audience. In doing so, I will call attention to the many fairy-tale elements Barrie used in his novel, as well as analysing the moral presented in both the novel as the 1953 film. This demonstrates how the combination of several of these aspects leads to the creation of a new interpretation, which in itself has also become a popular fairy tale which continues to be adapted for various media.

The first line of the novel *Peter and Wendy* already suggests a tale of rebellion, combined with a fairy-tale aspect: ‘All children, except one, grow up’ (Barrie 90). This first sentence raises the audience’s expectations of the protagonist, and the reader recognises the unique position of this boy who defies time itself. Peter must be a magical being, since only these creatures have powers to resist the process of aging. Peter’s rebellion against time is presented very clearly in the novel, but the characters fail to agree on whether or not this is a good quality. Peter certainly enjoys this and continuously boasts about this, but Wendy ‘felt at once that she was in the presence of a tragedy.’ (Barrie 90) It is interesting that Wendy regards Peter as a tragic person, even though he thinks very highly of himself. Peter, as described by Carpenter, is “at the same time a child himself and a child’s dream-figure, the archetypical hero both of magical fairy-tale and adventure story (...) He seems not just the invention of one writer, but a character from mythology” (Carpenter 180). This quotation illustrates how much *Peter and Wendy* has become part of the core texts of children’s literature. Some characters, although closely modelled on fairy-tale archetypes, are clearly invented by Barrie himself. According to Wullschläger, “it contains the archetypes of the fairy story – the children-
heroes (Peter and Wendy) and the villain (Hook). And the fantasy setting (...) is an enchanted, other world or dream reality as heady and attractive as any in children’s literature” (127). At first Peter is presented as a perfect character. However, later on he is described as ‘cocky’, which shows Peter does possess bad qualities. By creating a flawed character, Barrie made changes to the idea that the hero should always be a role model. Barrie enjoyed parodying fairy-tale traditions, and this playfulness is repeated throughout the text.

Tinkerbell fulfils the role of the Fairy Godmother, although she is presented with many flaws such as vanity and jealousy. In many fairy tales, for example Cinderella, the protagonist is aided by a woman who allows her to follow her dreams. Since Tinkerbell is the person who enables the children to fly away to Neverland and break free from their parents’ influence, she fulfils the role of the Fairy Godmother. In the novel, she is continuously jealous of all the other girls, since she wants to be Peter’s only woman, although her flaws are described in a slightly mocking way. During their trip to Neverland, Tinkerbell knowingly puts Wendy in danger, illustrating even the foul nature of Fairy Godmothers. Thus Barrie cleverly changes the expectations of the audience by slightly altering the personalities of the stereotypes. Zipes claims that Barrie played with the audience’s expectations, as the novel is “about the resistance to conformity and convention, indicating just how important the fairy tale had become for adult and young readers and spectators” (Why Fairy Tales Stick: 33). By altering stereotypes, Barrie triggers the awareness of fairy-tale traditions, making the differences he makes even more striking.

Peter and Wendy presents the traditional idea of an adult trying to educate a child, although Barrie parodies this by creating a pitiful villain. Captain Hook’s hatred for Peter lies in the boy’s inability to adapt to social rules, which indicate that he is determined to improve Peter. In the novel, he is introduced as Captain Jas. Hook: “the abbreviated Christian name gives the pirate a touch of comic mock-bourgeois respectability” (Hollindale 220). This Christian name gives him a history, a quality owned by few villains. On several occasions, Barrie asks the reader to even pity him, because he has been through traumatic events himself, or he has some lighter sides to his character. In the
novel there is one scene which describes this rather strikingly, though in a comedic way: ‘not wholly evil; he loved flowers and sweet music (he was himself no mean performer of the harpsichord); and let it be frankly admitted, the idyllic nature of the scene stirred him profoundly’ (Barrie 181). By writing about the villain in such a manner, Barrie plays with the idea of the stereotypical villains usually presented in fairy tales and children’s literature, which, in a way, is some kind of literary rebellion. Moreover, Captain Hook was a former Eton-student and is still clearly obsessed by the school’s standards. Hook’s cause for hating Peter is his inability to show ‘good form’, as well as being arrogant instead of being a good boy according to Etonian standards. ‘Good form’ is a phrase which is repeated throughout the novel, and this is all Hook demands of him, since Peter is a cocky and vain boy, two qualities which are not tolerated at Eton. Therefore, Hook plays both the part of the villain, as well as the adult who is trying to teach Peter how to behave. Unfortunately, Peter will never change, and thus it comes as no surprise that when Hook finally dies, his last words are ‘bad form’, which means that Peter, who due to his lack of parents still has not learnt a single thing. He will always be a rebellious character, even though Hook kept trying to change him. Since Peter will never learn, this could be the only form of rebellion he actually succeeds in: he will always be a boy without parents and will therefore never learn how to behave properly.

Neverland, although created by J. M. Barrie, is clearly inspired by fairy tales. Many fairy tales and other folktales feature a so-called ‘other world’, a magical place accessible to few people, like forests or Lewis Carroll’s Wonderland. A trip to one of those worlds always changes the character. Neverland, which is described as a “map of a person’s mind” (Barrie 73) is an island where the imagination of children comes true, whereas adults can no longer visit the place. This implies that adults forgot about Neverland, which shows that visiting Neverland has no lasting effect on someone’s happiness.

Neverland is not only the objectification of rebellion, but also forms a sharp contrast with the real world, or more specifically London. The 1911 London Barrie describes is a place where children do not have any input. By following Peter to Neverland, they escape from their parents’ troubles and
travel to the place where problems do not exist. In Neverland, they have become the most important people, and they decide what they want to do. The island, then, has become the ideal place for children to rebel against their parents. However, since the parents can no longer visit Neverland, the children’s rebellion will always be unsuccessful as the moment they return to London they will continue their process of growing up. Peter Pan is the only person who will not grow up; even the lost boys join Wendy and her brothers when they went back to London. This city is the symbol of ordinariness, especially after the children have returned from their adventure in Neverland. Whereas on the island the children were adventurers who fought pirates and even were able to fly and indulge in their fantasies, London meant reality. It is also the place where children grow up and lose their magic powers.

Growing up means growing normal. This shows that the lost boys, led by Peter, had been rebelling for a reason; for not being boring and forgotten since they only meant something as long as they were children. Barrie phrases this as follows:

Before they had attended school a week they saw what goats they had been not to remain on the island; but it was too late now, and soon they settled down to being as ordinary as you or me or Jenkins minor. (128)

The ultimate rebellion in the novel *Peter and Wendy* is against time and growing up, and Peter is an ideal rebel because he will always be a child. Peter’s rebellion will never truly be successful, however, as he will never remember his deeds. He will also never be able to leave Neverland, which means that he is very limited in his rebellion. His only victory is when the crocodile finally catches up with Hook. However, he is likely to forget about this too, although it is not stated as such in the novel. On one occasion, the process of experiencing unfairness is described, and also how Peter escaped from this process:
Not the pain of this but its unfairness was what dazed Peter. It made him quite helpless. He could only stare, horrified. Every child is affected thus the first time he is treated unfairly. All he thinks he has a right to when he comes to you to be yours is fairness. After you have been unfair to him he will love you again, but he will never afterwards be quite the same boy. No one ever gets over the first unfairness; no one except Peter. He often met it, but he always forgot it. I suppose that was the real difference between him and all the rest. (150)

The real difference, as Barrie phrases it, is that he will never be able to truly change; every day will be the same, and even though he is treated badly, he will forget on the next occasion. A real child, according to the narrator, should learn during its childhood in order to be able to change. Peter, as he does not age, will never change. Thus, he will also never change anything or anyone else. Later on in the novel, the Darling children, as well as the lost boys, appear to have forgotten Neverland, and they hardly ever think about it again. Ultimately, the rebellion in the novel is an unsuccessful one, even though Peter thinks otherwise.

Even the name Neverland proves that Peter’s rebellion will be futile in the end. It has an atmosphere of never-happened, because when the children return from the island, they return to their normal, everyday lives. When the children are on Neverland, they like to play games, which Peter calls make-believe. This pretending plays a very important part in the book, for the most adventures are grounded on a sense of pretence. This could hint to the fact that the entire adventure on Neverland was made up: “Make-believe is the power of the mind to create its own psychologically insulated place (...) in which one can act out, symbolically and therefore recklessly the desires which the real world denies him” (Griffith 35). The rebellion that takes place on the island can then be regarded as a game the children played, without any desire to actually rise up against adults. The final chapter, When Wendy Grew Up, shines a new light on the possible (for a real one is not presented clearly in the novel) moral of the story, which could be an instruction on mothers who should always tell stories to their children in order to stimulate their imagination. Barrie insinuates
that the stories parents tell their children are of educational value, which is also made clear in the beginning of the book when Wendy is looking forward to going to Neverland in order to tell stories to the Lost Boys: “I know such lots of stories” and “Oh, the stories I could tell to the boys!” (Barrie 96). She wants to tell them stories because they have never been told any, which she thinks is tragic. According to Bettelheim, the telling of stories to which we can relate is one of the key reasons why fairy tales are told, as it stimulates the fantasy of children (Bettelheim 1975).

The importance of fantasy and playing games returns to the text several times, which strengthens the notion that Neverland was all pretence. For instance, when Tiger Lilly is trapped in the cave, Peter changes his voice with the purpose of confusing Hook. He is pretending to be someone else, upon which Hook tries to find out what he is by asking him questions in the style of the game ‘animal, vegetable, mineral’. Apart from it being a link to pretence, Peter also shows Hook that he is very hard to define, and only fits in the description of “wonderful boy” (Barrie 148). Hook’s inability, even though he was educated at Eton, to define the boy, infers that Peter eludes all definitions. This can be said about the entire novel as well. According to Lerer, the aforementioned dialogue “has a curiously Shakespearean feel” (261), which proves that Barrie did not aim his novel solely at a children’s audience. Irony is also used in the language he uses. At one point Barrie writes the sentence, “had she haughtily unhanded him (and we should have loved to write it of her)” (178), which, according to Hollindale is “a good example of Barrie’s authorial comedy and love of stylistic games” (237). There are several instances where the descriptions Barrie gives are a tongue-in-cheek reference to other authors who used this type of language. Barrie did not only vary between audiences, however; also the atmosphere and even characters undergo changes. The tone of the novel is at times happy, but it often changes into melancholic or vengeful within the margins of one page. This shows that Barrie played a game with the audience as much as Peter did with Hook; he is continuously pretending to be something else, whether it is a play, a children’s book or a fairy tale. Consequently, it is as hard to define the genre of Peter and Wendy as Barrie combines various elements from different genres.
The 1953 Disney Corporation film adaptation Peter Pan, although it closely resembles the plot of the novel, drastically altered the tone of the film in order to make it more relatable to the American audience. The audience of the 1953 film is very different to the audience of the original novel, which is why certain adjustments had to be made. Even though Disney often picked widely known fairy tales for his film adaptations, he made changes regarding the plot. Zipes mentions this with regard to the film Pinocchio, in which he ‘Americanised’ the main character, a process which is repeated in Peter Pan. The audience regards Peter as their hero, who, in contrast to the Darling children who speak with an English accent, has an American accent. The evil Captain is also displayed as being more stupid than his literary counterpart: “By visually satirizing cultural signifiers, Disney films reverse the high and low culture trajectory, insinuating that low culture is better than high” (Cartwell 171). Even though the ‘good form’ which is repeated throughout the novel is mentioned once or twice, Hook’s Etonian background is much more ridiculed in the film. An example of this can be found in the song ‘Never Smile at a Crocodile’, which includes the following lyrics: “You may very well be well bred/Lots of etiquette in your head/But there’s always some special case, time or place/To forget etiquette” (Peter Pan). These lyrics, clearly mocking the original text, implies that education is not needed in order to be successful as Peter triumphs over the sophisticated Hook. In this view the American dream is echoed, which means that everyone has the opportunity to be successful.

Women are also given a voice in the film, much more so than in the novel. In the novel many of the women are jealous of Wendy because Peter gives her more attention than the others, but in the film they openly admit that they are jealous and are “only trying to drown her”. As in the novel, Tinkerbell tried to kill Wendy by making the lost boys shoot at her, but in the film she actually admits this to Peter. This creates a more feminist atmosphere, which is added to the film as it did not appear in the novel. Wendy is much more able to defend herself, for instance at the Indian camp when a squaw orders Wendy to get firewood, but which she refuses to do. These, and several other elements show that the film adaptation of Peter Pan added another type of rebellion to the film,
namely feminism. This, however, is not presented as such in the film and might not be picked up by the youngest viewers, but it certainly shows how a changing culture can also change the view on a story.

The Disney film, being a product of the American culture of the 1950s, provides a clear moral where the original source does not. The novel, in essence, is melancholic rather than positive regarding aging, whereas in the Disney adaptation the moral shows that adults should remember they were young once in order to be happy. The American culture was in need of an escape from their everyday lives (Zipes 84), and therefore the fairy tales with a happy ending appealed to the audience more than a sad story. This could also be a reason why the Disney heroes and villains are so one-sided and only highlight the goodness of the protagonists. “The disequilibrium between good and evil in these [Disney] films has influenced contemporary perception of fairy tale, as a form where sinister and gruesome forces are magnified and prevail throughout – until the very last moment, where, ex machine, right and goodness overcome them” (Warner 207). The view on good and evil is changed in the Disney adaptation of Peter Pan, as there is not even the slightest sign of Hook having any good sides. The one striking similarity between Peter and Hook is that they were both chased by time. This idea is portrayed more clearly in the film, as the visual aid shows that Peter is able to simply fly away from time’s grasp. Also striking is the children’s ability to fly, mentioned in the novel and also applied in the film. Wendy is having more difficulty in flying because she is closer to reaching adulthood, which puts a weight on her while Peter is free from this. Hook, on the other hand, is continuously chased by the crocodile who has consumed time in the form of a clock. When the crocodile approaches, a tune is played and the viewer automatically knows that time is gaining on him. At the end of the film the alarm goes off, which means that Hook’s time is up. This idea is utilised more straightforwardly in the film, and it shows how all adults will be out of time eventually, while Peter and Neverland will be there for all eternity. The film ends with a shot of London, including the bell tower of the Big Ben, with its large clock, which implies the passing of time for those who live in the real world. The Big Ben appears earlier on as well, when the Darling children
follow Peter to Neverland, only to stop on the hands of the clock which they turn back a few hours.

This is another visual example of Peter being stronger than time.

The aspect that has been changed most evidently is the importance of Mr Darling. He plays a more important part in the adaptation than in the book, which illustrates the cultural change that has taken place. At one point in the beginning of the film he angrily shouts at Wendy that she has grown up and will spend her last night at the nursery. The children and Mrs Darling, as well as Nana, are very shocked and Wendy starts crying, even though minutes before her greatest wish was to be a grownup herself. This, again, shows how much the world has changed; the father has become the most important figure in a household and is the one who makes decisions. Also striking is the fact that losing one’s childhood seems to be regrettable, whereas the novel deals with this more carefully. In the end of the film, however, when the Mr and Mrs Darling return from their dinner and the children have come back from Neverland, Mr Darling says he has changed his mind and tells his wife that she will grow up “all in good time”. Then, at the end of the film, it is Mr Darling, rather than his wife in the novel, who remembers going to Neverland himself: “I have the strangest feeling that I’ve seen that ship before, a long time ago...” after which the shot zooms out, leaving with a view on London, implying that everyone has been to Neverland when they were young. This strengthens the point Disney makes about the importance of family, as it brings everyone together. Although the film is quite faithful to the novel, the message focuses on the happiness of everlasting youth portrayed by Peter while omitting the negative aspects of this. According to Street, this is a very typical ending, as “these films epitomize the "Disney touch": they were technical masterworks but travesties of their literary sources” (Street 14). The story of Peter Pan is not merely adapted by Disney, but is also adopted by the American society because the story was applied to a culture which had moved away from Victorian England to such an extent that the entire plot was rewritten to fit the American desires.
In conclusion, rebellion plays a very important part in both the novel *Peter and Wendy* as in the 1953 film adaptation. This rebellion occurs both in the novel itself and also regarding the genre of children’s literature. There are several fairy-tale elements which hint to Barrie’s debt to the genre, although he changed the role they played. There are also various references to other texts, like the adventure-filled stories of Robert Louis Stevenson or Shakespeare’s plays, which he mixed with personal events. “There was little throughout that a well-read person could feel sure he had never read, seen, or heard before – by itself. The change – a transformation scene, in the theatre sense – wrought by Barrie was in uniting all the particular gleams of memory into one universal radiance” (Darnton 310). The film adaptation returned to the fairy-tale plot as it eliminates all intertextuality incorporated in Barrie’s text. It made the film more simplistic and provided a clear moral. *Peter and Wendy* was very much inspired by fairy-tale elements as well as drawn on Barrie’s personal experiences, but the way in which Peter is presented in the film is highly dissimilar, because of cultural shifts that have taken place since the original story was written. Some of the fairy-tale elements have been changed in order to create the story that has become Peter Pan, which adds to the popularity of the novel. Most of the aspects of rebellion are echoed in the film, although some elements have been omitted or added. In addition, the Disney version has become more straightforward; there was more room for visual comedy and the statements made in the film were done so in a very elaborate way as to convey the message more clearly. The novel does not really present a message; rather, it is a text about the futility of rebellion as all Wendy and her brothers have been through only took place in their own minds, like the fairy tales Wendy was planning to tell Peter and the Lost Boys. They never really happened, but only served an educational purpose, one which they later were unable to remember. Still, Peter Pan will always and eternally be known as the one boy who will never grow up, while he waits for new children to arrive at Neverland. And there will always be children who know about Peter, whether they read the original novel, or watch the Disney film adaptation.
Chapter Three
“The Anger Went Boiling Inside Her Head”: Rebellion Against Authority in Roald Dahl’s Matilda

Sometimes even the smallest children can rise up against those in power. Matilda, Roald Dahl’s final children’s book, published in 1988, tells the story of the exceptionally bright child Matilda, who rebels against her abusing parents and evil school teacher in order to live happily ever after. This girl, however, is unable to do so on her own, and therefore her teacher Miss Honey helps her develop the magic powers she possesses. Although the novel itself does present some original ideas, Dahl often alludes to other sources such as fairy tales and Victorian literature. In addition, several alterations have been made since Dahl handed in the first draft during the 1980s. Although the story of Matilda is set in modern-day Britain, it belongs to the fairy-tale genre. This is not only due to the recurring theme of rebellion which often occurs in that genre, but also because of the plot and the many characters which have clearly been based upon fairy-tale archetypes. The rebellion in Matilda does not limit itself to the novel, but also occurs on a metanarrative level as Dahl implicitly comments on the genre of children’s literature. In 1996, eight years after the book Matilda was published, a film adaptation was made. Although the script stays rather truthful to the original story, some alterations have been made, especially regarding the overall message that rebellion against adults is allowed if it helps the child. The film has become more straightforward, and also the fairy tale elements have been used more elaborately in the film than in the novel. Thus, like in Peter Pan, creators often return to a more basic plot and structure than in the original novel, which suggests that the film is more like a fairy tale rather than based upon a children’s book.

Matilda is a young girl who, above all else, wants justice. This is reminiscent of the fight for justice in the fairy tale as this little girl notices the dishonourable behaviour of her father, a figure of authority as an adult and her parent. Matilda is also a girl who, when not raised the way she knows children should be treated, rises up against those who mistreat her. An emotionally abused child, Matilda is
forced to rebel quite often, especially against her parents and teacher. Her rebellion changes her character, and in the end she is rewarded for it. Dahl’s novels are often structured like this, and Donald Sturrock made the following observation regarding adults in Dahl’s novels: “Sometimes, the enemy is parents themselves (…) but more often they feature as a negative force that the child must learn to endure, evade or subvert” (Sturrock 53). The Wormwoods are very ignorant of their daughter’s intellect and hate her for it. The only way for Matilda to escape from her parents is by rebelling against them. The moment where she decides this for herself can be found in the following quotation:

The anger inside her went on boiling and boiling, and as she lay in bed that night she made a decision. She decided that every time her father or her mother was beastly to her, she would get her own back in some way or another. A small victory or two would help her to tolerate their idiocies and would stop her from going crazy. (Dahl 22)

This quotation shows Matilda’s determination to be treated fairly, and also her willingness to take revenge on the people who are doing her wrong. Matilda, although portrayed as the heroine of the story, is also doing some things that would normally be considered bad (for example when she superglues her father’s hat to his head). Still, she does his in the name of justice and her rebellion prevents her from turning into an evil person herself, even though she is driven by anger rather than the desire to do good. In the end of the novel her powers disappear, the reason for this being, as Miss Honey explains it: “your brain is for the first time having to struggle and strive and keep really busy, which is great” (Dahl 223-4). Because her rebellion has been successful and she has been placed into a higher class, she needs all her brain power to keep up with her homework. It can therefore be said that the entire reason for Matilda having magic powers is to rebel against her enemies in order to break free from their influence, which makes this story sound rather like a fairy tale.
Matilda does not only rebel against her parents, but also against the ideas they represent. Her parents stand for the idea of grown-ups repressing children as well as indoctrinating them with what they think is right. Moreover, they continuously say that they chose beauty over brains, and therefore only have one (cook)book. This means that Matilda is the perfect rebel because she is able to fight these ideas. Matilda breaks free from them and is victorious in the end as Miss Honey, by adopting her, gives her a good family. This is the essence of a children’s book, and also of various fairy tales as it concerns the triumph of good over evil.

The novel Matilda, when placed within Dahl’s entire oeuvre, touches upon some recurring ideas which are used in several of his children’s novels, for instance the didactic tone regarding bad habits like watching too much television. The Wormwoods are ignorant because they watch television all the time, which makes them as stupid as the programmes they are watching. There are, however, some more subtle links to Dahl’s hatred towards modern media. The conclusion shows us how Matilda is hugged by Miss Wormwood, to illustrate they have acquired their happy ending. However, it could also be seen as “a satire inspired by television dramas and detective series” (Perrot 211). Dahl’s aversion against films and television is made clear here, it shows that “despite deriding television fans, it is based on the technical devices of the favourite medium of the children of our times” (idem). Matilda would not have been the same if there would not have been modern media; the novel is clearly a product of its age as it touches upon several current ideas.

Dahl was clearly inspired by fairy tales when he wrote Matilda, as can be seen from the various fairy-tale elements he borrowed from the genre. Not only are the characters based upon several archetypes within that genre, but also the names and descriptions recall fairy-tale traditions. Sometimes Dahl only implies fairy-tale references, but there are occasions where he explicitly mentions them:

It seemed so unreal and remote and fantastic and so totally away from this earth. It was like an illustration in Grimm or Hans Andersen. It was the house where the poor woodcutter lived
with Hansel and Gretel and where Red Riding Hood’s grandmother lived and it was also the house of The Seven Dwarfs and The Three Bears and all the rest of them. It was straight out of a fairy-tale. (Dahl 180)

By describing the cottage as such, Dahl comments on the genre of fairy tales as well as placing himself within it. Although it took Matilda a long time to realise that she had entered a fairy tale-like environment, Dahl’s creation clearly mirrors the old fairy-tale tradition by weaving a story around archetypes and basic plots. Booker’s plots ‘Overcoming the Monster’ and ‘Rags to Riches’ can both be applied to the text as Matilda fulfils the role of the character who is successful in the end. Additionally, Miss Honey can be regarded as such as well, since she literally lived in rags until Matilda drove out Miss Trunchbull, which enabled Miss Honey to live in the house her father left her in his will. Miss Honey is an orphan, another acknowledgement to fairy-tale traditions. Although the Wormwoods are her biological parents, Matilda feels like she is an orphan as well because her parents do not love her like a daughter, and she wants to break free from her parents.

The Wormwoods and Miss Trunchbull mirror the fairy-tale archetypes of the evil (god)parents and the villain. The narrator explains that Trunchbull is a truly evil woman and describing her is very difficult and creates a strong sense of the grotesque: “this woman, in all her eccentricities and in her appearance, is almost impossible to describe, but I shall make some attempt to do so a little later on” (Dahl 61). The Trunchbull does not only fulfil an archetype, but is also a symbol of feminism: Although the Trunchbull plays the stereotypical role of the villain, she also symbolises the rise of feminism as she is a highly authorative figure due to her position at the school (Guest 254). Additionally, she is an Olympic athlete, which would otherwise be treated with much respect. However, Dahl changed this idea and utilised it to strengthen the absolute iniquity of this woman. (A clear example of this can be found when Matilda hears gossip about the Trunchbull practising her hammer-throw skills by throwing boys out of windows. By not actually witnessing this, but only hearing about it only fortifies the almost mythical stature of this woman). Matilda, but
especially Miss Honey, stand for the weak persons in society, and the Bulltrunch symbolises everything that is strong and powerful. The opposite is true of Miss Honey, who is described quite extensively: “She had a lovely pale oval Madonna face with blue eyes and her hair was light-brown. Her body was so slim and fragile one got the feeling that if she fell over she would smash into a thousand pieces, like a porcelain figure” (Dahl 60). By describing Miss Honey as a very frail character, the difference between her and her aunt is demonstrated even more strikingly. In addition, it also shows how fragile, good characters are in a world dominated by strong creatures like Miss Trunchbull and the Wormwoods, which demonstrates that “the problem of authority and control is a central one to democracy and in the lives of children” (Burke Epstein 70). Miss Honey shows that now all adults are evil, and thus fulfils an a-typical role. Guest claims that Miss Honey is the actual child; she is weak and needs a strong person to help her fight her evil aunt: “Miss Honey may be as questionable a role model as Mrs Wormwood insofar as she appears to support progressive ideas while silently affirming conservative values” (Guest 253). Miss Honey confirms all stereotypical ideals of what a woman should be like according to the traditional norms: frail, passive and afraid of her superiors. Without Matilda’s help, she would never have mastered the strength to fight for her rights, and it is only because of Matilda that she was able to escape from the iron grasp of her aunt. This makes the moral in Matilda very straightforward, and is clearly based upon the morals presented in fairy tales, namely that children, or indeed adults, will not achieve justice unless they fight for their own rights. Matilda is very much able to do so because of her intellect and magic powers, and in doing so she enables others to do so as well.

The relationship between children and adults is significant in Dahl’s texts. Sturrock states this as follows: “in each case, the love Dahl celebrates is not the traditional one between parent and child, but a close friendship established by the child, on its own terms, and in an unfamiliar context” (54). A child should not be told what to do, but rather find out its own path in life, and this message comes across very clearly. Matilda echoes Booker’s ‘rags to riches’ plot, because she raised in an ignorant family, but she turns out to be the heroine. She has the power to rise against her enemies in
order to acquire what she deserves. For instance, Matilda’s parents are ignorant, while Matilda is very bright. Her mother keeps telling her daughter that she should always choose for looks, rather than books. Other types of rebellions are big against small and strong versus weak. Although the Wormwoords and the Trunchbull are big and strong, Matilda and Miss Honey are able to resist them and gain power themselves, while the villains are punished. This black-and-white view is repeated all throughout the novel, which shows that there is considerably less ambiguity than in *Peter and Wendy*. While Barrie’s novel consists of several ideas and often switches in tone, *Matilda* is highly consistent and only presents one point of view, which simplifies the moral presented in the novel.

Reading is not only important in *Matilda* because it provides escapism in hard times, but it also inspires her with the spirit of rebellion she needs in order to break free from her parents as she liberates herself to travel to new places by indulging herself in the worlds created by others. Matilda’s first act of rebellion is being different from her family as she is the only one who enjoys reading. She is forbidden to read, but does so anyway. To Matilda, literature is what enables her to break free from her parents’ domination. Rather than only drawing from fairy tales, Dahl also makes use of other literature, mostly children’s literature but also novels for adults. In doing so, he echoes Bettelheim’s claim on reading fairy tales:

> To enrich his [the child’s] life, it must stimulate his imagination; help him to develop his intellect and to clarify his emotions; be attuned to his anxieties and aspirations; give full recognition to his difficulties, while at the same time suggesting solutions to the problems which perturb him.” (Bettelheim 5)

Unlike Bettelheim, Dahl expresses his debt to modern adult stories rather than fairy tales. Because Matilda reads those novels, she shows her full intellect, which shows that she is highly mature. Also, the texts mentioned in this novel all deal with rebellion in one way or another. This makes Matilda’s rebellion even more striking as she identifies herself with the protagonists and
mirrors her behaviour to them. The books she reads are mostly children’s books, but there are also some adult books, most notably books by Charles Dickens. As Guest argues, the choice Matilda makes for reading her books is very interesting as it shows that the problems she is facing and the issues the protagonists in the books are dealing with are highly dissimilar; not only does the story take place over a 100 years ago, but the heroes she adores are all men (Guest). Her role models are active men, thus regarding herself as an equal. Would she have read fairy tales, she would have found out that most women are passive. Matilda is a modern and active heroine, resembling the feminists in the real world. She is not only able to revolt against her parents and Miss Trunchbull, but is also able to do so without raising a hand: “she acts through the very strength of her eyes” (Perrot 210). In doing so, she does not only prove that children are able to rise up against their parents, but also that they can do so by displaying their intellectual capabilities.

*Matilda* rebels against the entire genre of children’s literature. It is not only Trunchbull and her parents against whom Matilda is rising up, but also the themes discussed in the novel which demand special attention. Some serious issues are discussed in a playful way, like child abuse and neglect. Before the 1980s these themes were regarded as being too serious and would therefore not be used in children’s literature. In the beginning of the twentieth century, children’s books were more focused on fairy tale-like stories, for example *Peter Pan* and *The Secret Garden*, in which magic played a major part, and real, serious troubles were not mentioned very often. However, this idea has changed over the years and books became progressively more realistic (Butler). *Matilda*, an example par excellence of this notion, is set in modern-day England. Still, she possesses magic powers, but the problems she is facing are quite realistic, even though they are dealt with in a humoristic and absurdist manner. One of the key elements of Dahl’s writing style is that even the harshest events are treated with a great sense of humour. This was done in order to make children understand that there is always a glimmer of hope, even though the situation seems dark. This idea is mentioned in the text as well, when Matilda comments on the books she has read:
‘I liked The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe,’ Matilda said. ‘I think Mr C. S. Lewis is a very good writer. But it has one failing. There are no funny bits in his books.

‘You are right there,’ Miss Honey said.

‘There aren’t many funny bits in Mr Tolkien either,’ Matilda said.

‘Do you think that all children’s books ought to have funny bits in them?’ Miss Honey asked.

‘I do,’ Matilda said. ‘Children are not so serious as grown-ups and they love to laugh.’ (Dahl 74-5)

This comment could be regarded as not only Matilda’s opinion, but also the way Roald Dahl thought about children’s literature; his novels are always full of humour and it has become one of his trademarks to use a comic effect to soften the impact of the events he is describing. This makes Dahl a rebel, too, as he opposes the traditions of the genre of children’s literature. Dahl’s rebellion against the genre is also evident in the language he uses. An example of this can be found when Miss Trunchbull is raging against the boy who ate her cake: “this clot, this black-head, this foul carbuncle, this poisonous pustule that you see before you is none other than a disgusting criminal, a denizen of the underworld, a member of the Mafia!” (Dahl 114). These are all quite harsh words, but since this description is so grotesque, this tirade only becomes humoristic and cannot be taken seriously anymore. However, by including words like these, and others (for example Miss Trunchbull who tells the students several times that she would love a school with no children in it at all), Dahl teaches children some new words, however foul they are.

Dahl is certainly part of this tradition, as can be seen from his novels including Charlie and the Chocolate Factory, which take place in a town in England. Another important change in children’s literature is the role of adults, both within the novel as the film, where adults are “no longer bastions of authority to the same extent as in previous generations” (Butler 225). The previous chapter discusses how adults were still regarded as powers who should be respected and obeyed. In Peter and Wendy and its 1953 adaptation, this is certainly the case. This changed over the years, and Dahl’s
books express the idea that children are able to take care of themselves, which is the ultimate form of rebellion. Tim Burton, for instance, praises Dahl’s books with the following words: “I responded to *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* because it respected the fact that children can be adults” (Woods 177). This quotation shows that children do not necessarily have to be inferior to their parents. Another example can be found in the following quotation in the text itself, when Miss Honey tells Matilda: “Although you look like a child, you are not really a child at all because your mind and your powers of reasoning seem to be fully grown-up. So I suppose we might call you a grown-up child” (Dahl 195). One of the main differences between Barrie and Dahl is their depiction of childhood. Whereas Barrie created a great divide between child- and adulthood, Dahl created a story where this boundary is broken down. Miss Honey regards Matilda as an equal. Dahl states that it is not age, but intellect which defines the maturity of a child. It is a clear moral which states that adults should regard their children are equals, not as inferior.

The notion of inferiority and equality is dealt with more elaborately in the 1996 film adaptation of *Matilda*. Although released only eight years after the book was published, the film is very different from the story. The most important reason for this is that the audience has changed from British to American. The film is significantly more straightforward than the novel. In the movie, it becomes clear from the beginning that at Matilda is able to revolt against her parents. Mr Wormwood, played by Danny Devito, who also directed the movie, tells Matilda that she is “being a smart Alec”, of which he does not approve. He then says, “when a person is bad, that person is to be taught a lesson” (*Matilda*). Then the difference between ‘person’ and ‘child’ is made clear, and the voice-over states that therefore, “children can punish their parents” (*Matilda*). This already raises the suggestion that the main theme of the movie will be children rebelling against their parents, rather than Matilda being able to form her own opinion and getting the rewards she fought for.

Rebellion is strengthened when others are stimulating it. An example of this can be found when Bruce Bogtrotter is forced to eat the Trunchbull’s cake. He only succeeds in doing so because Matilda cheers for him, after which the others join in, and these cheers empower him which enables
him to finish the cake. This is another type of rebellion, one which was taken from the book but which is made more important in the film, because it shows how one individual can change everything. At one point, Miss Honey tells Matilda, “it’s wonderful you feel so powerful. Many people don’t feel powerful at all” (*Matilda*). This quotation shows that Matilda really is a special girl, but also that she feels empowered even though she is only an individual, which is all that is needed in order to rebel against adults. She then enables the others to do so as well, for example when she is having her climactic battle with the Bulltrunch and the others join in. Individuality is a central point in the film. In the beginning, when we see a shot at the hospital in which Matilda is born, the voice-over states that whatever the environment in which a child is raised, they are all individuals and “make their own luck”. This could be a hint to the fairy-tale elements in the story, because it shows that children, even though they are born in a lower-class family, are still able to rise on the social ladder and become heroes in the end, thus echoing Booker’s ‘Rags to Riches’ plot.

The story of *Matilda* has not been altered significantly, although the message has become more profound, Matilda, who has learned that bad persons should be punished, also finds out that good children should be rewarded. This idea is much more focused on in the film than in the book, and this might be because it is an American film, adapted from a British novel. As pointed out in the previous chapters, movies tend to be more positive as it is aimed for a younger and broader audience. The book includes some dark scenes which have been altered slightly in order to make it less shocking. The focus of the film has changed to the idea that the adults are under the impression that they are better than children. The line “I am big and you are small. I am right and you are wrong” is repeated several times, and after the grownups utter these words, Matilda uses her powers. These words, along with the sense of injustice that Matilda hates so much, are the trigger for Matilda’s powers, which is the same as in the novel. The ending of the movie is different, since it also shows how Matilda and Miss Honey live their happily ever after, creating an even more fairy tale-like atmosphere. Even though there are several morals presented in the novel which are closely modelled upon fairy-tale truths, Dahl also provides a hint of realism, unlike the film. This sentence shows that
bad people will remain bad, which contradicts fairy-tale ideas. In the film this scene was rewritten substantially: the narrator even explains us that the parents were “doing perhaps the first decent thing for their daughter” (*Matilda*), thus elaborating on their apparent goodness. By changing this final scene, and also the fact that in the film her mother does wave back, the creators rotate the moral. They show that the Wormwoods, despite their aversion against their daughter, imply they have some residual love for her as they do want her to be happy. This relates to the notion that the importance of family has become increasingly popular over the years, as can also be found in the Disney adaptation of *Peter Pan*. In the novel this idea is less important, so adaptation to a different culture added values they deemed important. In addition, in the end, when Matilda asks her parents to sign the adoption papers, her mother shows her one act of kindness and even waves to her daughter, whereas in the novel the parents “didn’t even look back” (Dahl 232). By subtly changing the ending, the director implies that the reason for Matilda’s parents bullying is their inability to understand her. The director could have opted for this ending to make it more politically correct, a word much uttered in Hollywood (Perrot). One could then argue that the movie *Matilda* is even more of a fairy tale than the book, because the narrator continuously comments on the events, as well as ensuring the audience that everyone has a happy ending.

Another noteworthy *Matilda* adaptation is the 2012 musical *Matilda*, written by Tim Minchin, which focuses even more on the theme of rebellion than the film. In the musical, there are several clear references to rebellion: “We are revolting children/Living in revolting times/We sing revolting songs/Using revolting rhymes”. The theme of rebellion has become even more apparent than in the novel and the film adaptation, which implies that a shift has taken place. The message of the play is that all children, even though they might be slightly weird or they might not have many friends, should unite so they can be victorious in the end. Their act of rebellion might, then, not be directed to others, for example the teachers or parents, but to themselves; they unite in order to be victorious. The message of this adaptation then becomes ‘it is fine to be weird, or smarter than
someone else’, which is a very modern message and resembles the spirit of the age. This shows that adaptations are always altered slightly in order to make it more suitable to a modern audience.

In conclusion, *Matilda* is beset with references to fairy tales, although these are mixed with allusions to other novels and modern society. The message, in the book as well as in its adaptations is very clear: children are worth just as much as adults and perhaps even more, and they are certainly allowed to rise up against them in order to reach their just goals. *Matilda* is a highly opinionated novel as Dahl’s own values are presented clearly. “Dahl brings in his own view of the modern frail but daring child of his own desires” (Perrot 211). Dahl created a new character, rebellious, feminist and not entirely politically correct as she sought after revenge rather than justice. Additionally, he stressed the importance of reading over watching television, implying that children only learn when they read books. Therefore, Dahl himself was rebelling as well, as he commented on the genre of children’s literature and its preferable role in society. Over the years, the rebellious message of the text has become more outspoken since the adaptations are written for a more liberal audience; children do not only see *Matilda* as a great book, but might become as inspired by reading her adventures as the girl itself was by reading Dickens’ stories.
Conclusion

Rebellion is a very important theme in children’s literature, and can be found in J. M. Barrie’s *Peter and Wendy* and *Matilda* by Roald Dahl, as well as their adaptations. The way in which the theme is incorporated in the text is significantly different, however. Whereas Barrie deals with the rebellion against time, cast in the shape of an adventure story, Dahl is much more straightforward as the heroine’s only wish is to rise up against her parents in order to be happy. I have demonstrated how fairy tales and the traditions of storytelling form the blueprint of *Peter and Wendy* and *Matilda*, although both authors provided a twist to these traditions by incorporating irony and intertextuality in their texts. From this I conclude that they changed these aspects in order to move away from the genre of children’s literature, while the film adaptations reversed the authors’ rebellion and returned to fairy-tale traditions.

Barrie created a highly a-typical story. By implementing numerous sources like fairy tales and other authors, as well as parodying his contemporaries, he changed the traditional story of a boy who is fighting a pirate. Apart from being highly inspired by his own childhood, other stories including fairy tales and plays by Shakespeare also influenced him. Peter Pan, the hero of the story, is a flawed protagonist, while Captain Hook is presented with admirable qualities. Although there are some characters which fulfil fairy-tale stereotypes, Barrie adds human characteristics to them, for instance Fairy Godmother Tinkerbell who is very jealous and vain. Barrie’s most striking act of rebellion, however, is creating a hero who will not succeed in his goals. He did kill Captain Hook in the end, but he forgot about it afterwards, just as the Darling children would not be able to remember their adventures in Neverland. Peter, then, truly is a tragic character because he will never change. Barrie’s reluctance to provide the story with a clear moral is reflected in the importance of make-believe. Nothing really happened, and therefore nothing will ever change. Since nothing will ever change, there is also no need for a moral in the novel, which is not presented clearly. There are
hints as to what could be the message of the story, but a real moral is not given. Barrie breaks away from the “educate and entertain” idea of fairy tales by writing a story which is only entertaining.

The 1953 Disney film adaptation provides a strikingly different view on the story of Peter Pan. Unlike the novel, the trip to Neverland was a successful act of rebellion as it caused Mr Darling to change his mind. He states that growing up should be “in good time”. The role of Mr Darling has become more important in the film, which shows a cultural switch in which the father-figure was the one in charge. Mr Darling is the one who changes eventually; upon seeing the Jolly Roger sail away on the clouds, he realises that he has seen it before, thus realising that he was a child too, once. Disney has been criticised on the basis of simplifying plots and ridiculing aspects of the original text, which is certainly the case in Peter Pan. The Disney film clearly returned to a more basic story as Hook is depicted as an evil, highly educated villain whose only role is to provide an enemy for Peter Pan. Disney used the character flaws presented in the novel to a comic effect, in order to illustrate their own skills in animation.

Unlike Barrie in Peter and Wendy, Roald Dahl’s Matilda follows a simple, straightforward plot, about a girl who successfully rises up against her abusive parents and ends up with a proper family. This closely resembles Booker’s ‘rags to riches’ plot as Miss Honey’s adoption makes her an emotionally richer person. Miss Honey follows the same process, as she is restored to her rightful share of her father’s will. Dahl explicitly comments on fairy tales and classics of children’s literature and states that they should include humour. Because Dahl is known for his sense of humour in his novels, he implies that he is a good writer. The use of Dahl’s humour makes Matilda different from other books with a comparable plot since he changes the way in which it is written. He ridicules the stereotypes presented in his novel to such an extent that they become caricatures of the original sources. “English children’s books in the 1980s and 90s have continued to take their themes and images and structure from their nineteenth and early twentieth-century precursors, but, perhaps, to overcome this, they offer a new twist” (Wullscläger 209). The twist Dahl adds to the text is the notion that some things will never change, for instance the Wormwoods’ lack of interest in their
daughter. It gives the novel a hint of realism, but it never becomes too shocking because Dahl presented his villains with an absolute evilness: although the Wormwoods and Miss Trunchbull are real people, they are blown up to the size of monsters, almost unrecognisable as humans.

The twist Dahl offers in his novel is echoed only partly in the 1996 film adaptation; the main characters are depicted in the same way as in the novel, but Dahl’s criticism on the genre of children’s literature is omitted, as is Dahl’s comment on the importance of reading over watching television. This is the same in the 2012 musical adaptation of *Matilda*, where the importance of rebellion is stressed. Both adaptations follow the same procedure as Disney: although the plot is closely modelled on the original text, it can be viewed independently as it becomes adopted by the culture in which it has been placed. The film returns to the fairy-tale traditions more explicitly than in the book, most notably in the form of the narrator. During the film, the narrator explains what is happening and how Matilda deals with the situations, but the way in which this is done reflects the clear moral that is given in fairy tales. The ending of the film also relates to a fairy-tale ending as it shows how Matilda and Miss Honey end up, while the novel ends with the parents driving away without telling how the rest of her life will be.

Looking at two ideas of childhood, I illustrated that children’s literature and the cultural idea of childhood has changed considerably in the course of the twentieth and into the 21st century. Children are more liberal in their actions and are regarded almost as equals, rather than as small, innocent human beings, and because of this notion they are more able to rebel against adults. Children’s literature has moved away from the genre of the fairy tale; no longer are the stories we read filled with universal values, but they delve deeper into the political and social issues that return to adult literature as well. While Barrie created an entirely new character which combined several Victorian and Edwardian values, as well as fairy-tale traditions and autobiographical elements, he also implied that the rebellion which he presented in his novel is only superficial; Neverland is an isolated place and will not have any lasting impact on a child as they will grow up anyway. Dahl, on the other hand,
did not create a new world, but placed it in England, and Matilda’s rebellion is certainly successful. She ended up happily ever after, because she, like Peter Pan, and the Lost Boys indulged herself in make-believe and escapism. The only difference is that she applied it to her own life, thus ‘making her own luck’, to quote the movie. It is, therefore, by the power of books, by copying our heroes, that we are able to change our lives. Unfortunately this notion does not return to the film adaptations, but it does show that apparently Oscar Wilde was right, then: disobedience is necessary. But we must always be aware of our predecessors, and not all disobedience makes a forward motion as the films return to other, older, and more straightforward sources.
Bibliography


*Peter Pan*. Dir. Clyde Geronimi, Wilfred Jackson, Hamilton Luske. Disney Corporation, 1953. Film.


Hazard.

Hildebrand.


“Once upon a time, there was a man who liked to make up stories ...” *The Independent.* Sunday, 12 December 2010. Web. 15 August 2013.

Perrot.


