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The Evolution of Fairy Tale Motifs in *A Little Princess* and *Matilda*

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ABSTRACT

Traditional western fairy tales have a significant impact on the perpetuation of patriarchal ideology throughout the ages. This study argues that two selected children's novels revolving around female protagonists, Frances Hodgson Burnett's *The Little Princess* (1905) and Roald Dahl's *Matilda* (1988), draw on the fairy tale framework. However, it also asserts that they use fairy tale elements in different ways, depending on the socio-cultural changes that have developed over the years. Therefore, the study discusses to what extent these novels continue or subvert the classical fairy tale tradition through the identification of character traits, motifs and plot. For this purpose, a feminist approach, particularly intersectional feminism, is employed to study the novels. The term "intersectionality," coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) proposes the notion that gender roles, accompanied by many other factors such as race, sexuality and socio-economic status result in the subordination of women. The intersectional feminist approach to the selected novels reveals that character formation, motifs and the use of plot differ in children's novels, breaking the classical western fairy tale tradition because of the alteration in power dynamics in the British society in time, influencing the female protagonists' social identities within an integrative perspective. In this context, this study intends to contribute to the literature by revealing the changes in approaches to gender issues and the evolution of fairy tale motifs over time through a comparative intersectional feminist reading of Burnett's *The Little Princess* and Dahl's *Matilda*.

Keywords: Children's Novels, Fairy Tales, Patriarchal Ideology, *A Little Princess, Matilda*.

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***Küçük Prenses* ve *Matilda* Romanlarında Peri Masalı Motiflerinin Evrimi**

ÖZ

Geleneksel batı masalları, çağlar boyunca ataerkil ideolojinin devam etmesinde önemli bir etkiye sahiptir. Bu çalışma, kadın başkahramanlar etrafında dönen iki seçilmiş çocuk romanı olan, Frances Hodgson Burnett'in *Küçük Prenses* (1905) ve Roald Dahl'ın *Matilda* (1988) adlı eserlerinin, peri masalı çerçevesinden yararlandığını savunmaktadır. Ancak, yıllar içinde gelişen sosyo-kültürel değişikliklere bağlı olarak masal öğelerini farklı şekillerde kullandıklarını da savunmaktadır. Bu nedenle, çalışma bu romanların karakter özellikleri, motifler ve olay örgüsünün belirlenmesi yoluyla klasik masal geleneğini ne ölçüde sürdürdüğünü veya bozduğunu tartışmaktadır. Bu amaçla, romanları incelemek için feminist bir yaklaşım, özellikle kesişimsel feminizm kullanılmıştır. Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) tarafından ortaya atılan "kesişimsellik" terimi; ırk, cinsellik ve sosyoekonomik statü gibi birçok başka faktörlerin beraberinde cinsiyet rollerinin kadınların ikincil konuma itilmesine yol açtığı fikrini ileri sürmektedir. Seçilen romanlara yönelik kesişimsel feminist yaklaşım; karakter oluşumunun, motiflerin ve olay örgüsünün kullanımının çocuk romanlarında farklılaştığını, İngiliz toplumundaki zaman içinde güç dinamiklerindeki değişim nedeniyle klasik batı masal geleneğini bozduğunu ve kadın

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kahramanların toplumsal kimliklerini bütünleştirici bir bakış açısıyla etkilediğini ortaya koymaktadır. Bu bağlamda, bu çalışma, Burnett'in *Küçük Prenses* ve Dahl'ın *Matilda* romanlarının karşılaştırmalı bir kesişimsel feminist okuması aracılığıyla toplumsal cinsiyet meselelerine yönelik yaklaşımlardaki değişimleri ve zaman içinde masal motiflerinin evrimini ortaya koyarak literatüre katkıda bulunmayı amaçlamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Çocuk Romanları, Peri Masalları, Ataerkil İdeoloji, *Küçük Prenses*, *Matilda*.

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INTRODUCTION

Gender is one of the issues in patriarchal societies dating back centuries. The preindustrial revolution witnessed gender roles confining women to domestic space to care about household activities and bringing up their children and concerning men with economic activities such as going hunting, gathering and farming. Such a gender-specific lifestyle survived centuries, constructing the learnings of the next generation through the same ideology. It is patriarchy that "promotes the belief in the inferiority of women to men innately" (Tyson 2006: 85). Such a belief creates patriarchal women who abide by patriarchal norms. Patriarchal society presents a limited setting for women to enjoy "the freedom that man has willingly given to them" (Monagan 2010: 161). The gender roles attributed to men and women both justify and strengthen inequality between men and women, weakening and pacifying women but strengthening and activating men more and more. This ideological force the women who disobey the patriarchal norms, to identify them with negative adjectives such as bad-tempered, aggressive, mad, witch-like and monstrous. On the other hand, obedient women are identified as good-tempered, angel-like, self-sacrificing, modest and nurturing. Thus, the patriarchal women are labelled, in Gilbert and Gubar's term (1979), as "the angel in the house" (17), whereas the others are characterised as "the madwoman in the attic" (xxxvi). Thus, gender is an ideological abuse of sexual differences between men and women within social and cultural contexts (Lindsey 2011: 4).

The culture is built on the constructed distinction and this is "the way of how *anthropos* societies originally evolve" (Baysal 2021: 173). Girls follow their mothers, whereas boys accompany their fathers, thus maintaining the continuation of patriarchal ideology for centuries because, as Lindley (2011) elucidates, the primary socialisation, which is acquired within the family, is followed by continuing socialisation in the community, attributing different roles to people in a variety of contexts, including gender roles and the socio-cultural codes of masculinity and femininity associated with male and female sexes (54-55) through the influence of environment, mass media and experience. Mass communication tools also have an essential

role in conveying patriarchal norms and in teaching children what behaviour is acceptable or unacceptable based on gender. In addition to the environment and experience, modelling provides children with opportunities to learn through observation, action and reaction. Thus, children acquire a gender schema that includes codes of the roles to have and not to have.

Penned by adults, children's literary works are indispensable products of their authors' prevailing ideologies. As the children's literature critic, Hollindale argues, books for children cannot be considered "innocent of some ideological freight" (1992: 18). In this regard, works for children are products of ideologies having influence in moulding their minds directly or indirectly in accordance with or against the prevalent norms (Reynolds 2011: 97). Therefore, books for children are also influential tools in the socialisation process of children in terms of gender to fulfil societal expectations beginning at an early age (Uttley & Roberts 2011: 111-112; Crisp and Hiller 2011: 197). The representation of male and female characters' gender roles in children's books facilitates children's adoption of their own gender roles, stimulating acceptable norms and behaviours (McKenzie & Guittar 2016: 1). Children, who grow up with nursery rhymes and fairy tales, adopt stereotypical roles of the characters as acceptable or unacceptable norms to obtain their own gender roles. In this aspect, children's books justify and perpetuate patriarchal ideology through mis/underrepresentation of female characters (McCabe et al. 2011: 198). More concretely, conduct books for boys and girls were effective tools for children to conform to the gender norms of society. John Barnand's "A Present for an Apprentice; or, A Sure Guide to Gain Both Esteem and an Estate by a Late Mayor of London" (1740) and Philip Dormer Stanhope's "Lord Chesterfield's Advice to His Son" (1820) are among the guidebooks teaching boys how to become a "proper" man, money maker and husband, whereas Minna Thomas Antrim's "Don't's for Girls: A Manual of Mistakes" (1833) and Dora Langlois's "The Child: A Mother's Advice to Her Daughters" (1896) tell girls about the ways of becoming "proper" wives and mothers. Despite differences in their production years, even centuries, conduct books have served well in constructing and maintaining gender roles since young ages.

Fairy tales can be regarded as fictional versions of conduct books for children and young adults. Passing down through generations, fairy tales have had an enormous impact on reinforcing gender stereotyping, thus patriarchal ideology for centuries, even though they were intended for adults to convey "the conventions of a discourse on manners" (Zipes 2005: 177) to them. Portraying beautiful women as obedient, submissive, passive and naïve, but ugly women as disobedient and cruel; on the other hand, handsome men as active, intelligent, brave

and saving figures, fairytales have promoted stereotypical gender roles in the gender process of children. Such stories adversely affect children by restricting their career development and limiting their future parental roles (Hamilton et al. 2006: 757).

It was in the nineteenth century when children's literature witnessed its golden age with a great number of literary works for children, particularly Charles Perrault, the Grimm Brothers and Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tales, composed in revised versions for child readers in accordance with the Victorian patriarchal mindset, values and wishes. Not only fairy tales but also children's novels included both representations and misrepresentations of femininity and masculinity in society. Women were still treated like "caged birds, imprisoned in wifehood and motherhood" in the early twentieth century (Silindir 2011: 76). Frances Hodgson Burnett's *A Little Princess*, which is one of the selected books to be examined in this article, displays women's stereotypes in the 19th-century British patriarchal society. The protagonist, Sara Crewe, refers to the little princess in the title as an embodiment of the ideal standards set for a woman in patriarchal society, maintaining the role of stereotypical princess characters in the Grimm brothers and Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tales such as Snow White, Sleeping Beauty and Rapunzel.

Intersectional Feminism as a Methodological Framework

The feminist activists' voice was heard first in the second half of the nineteenth century with The First Wave (1848-1920), followed by The Second Wave (1960-1980) and then The Third Wave in the 1990s, resulting in many changes in women's socio-cultural lives, challenging any attitudes and discourse subordinating women in society. Since then, women have taken part in many fields of life more actively. In accordance with these socio-cultural changes in gender issues, the portrayal of female characters has changed in modern literature over the years. Female characters in the 1990s' young adult literature coincide with the changes in women's roles and feminist movements (Brown & St. Clair 2002: 25). They are portrayed as more active, ambitious and intelligent. Marriage is no longer identified as something awarded to patriarchally-obedient women. More concretely, in Jack Zipes's *Don't Bet on the Prince*, which was published in 1993, "[i]n none of these tales is marriage a necessity or a goal for young women" (16). Similarly, contemporary children's books such as *The Tough Princess* (2002) by Martin Waddell and *Princess Smarty Pants* (2005) by Jon Cowley exemplify how the stereotypical characterisation of female figures is parodied and the spell over gender stereotyping has been broken. Roald Dahl, as a male author, contributes to the reaction against gender stereotyping by creating patriarchally "unproper" female characters in his works, and

Matilda (1988), which is the other work to be examined in this study, is one of them. It indicates that despite the early feminist movements in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, the late-twentieth century British children's literature witnessed a subversion of gender stereotyping and the decline of patriarchal ideology. The reason behind that is the swift alteration in the approach to gender issues in accordance with the social and cultural changes in the second half of the twentieth-century Britain. To explore the sociological changes resulting in the differences in the portrayals of the female characters in time in the same century, Frances Hodgson Burnett's *A Little Princess* (1905) and Roald Dahl's *Matilda* (1988) are scrutinised in terms of gender stereotyping within the framework of intersectional feminist criticism, which, in Davis's thinking, aids in deconstructing binary oppositions (2008: 71).

Intersectionality is a key term encompassing multiple factors including gender, class, race, nationality, citizenship, ethnicity, age, generation, immigration status, marital status, socioeconomic status and sexuality are all interconnected and interwoven, forming our relationships with the others (Gopaldas 2013: 91). Although it was coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989, it dates back to the nineteenth century, to the discussions and struggles, initiated by activists for black women such as African American women's rights activist Sojourner Truth, black feminists Anna J. Cooper and Ida B. Wells in America (Gines 2014: 14). The political and theoretical struggle for women of colour has been extended to cover all women, who are subject to various forms pf subordination in life. Thus, despite its long past, Crenshaw's concept of "intersectionality" intersectionality has been elaborated on and it has gained significance and popularity in feminist theory in the 2000s (Bilge 2013: 410; Davis 2008: 68-69) and followed up by intersectional feminists (Chang & Culp 2002: 485).

Drawing analogy on an intersection, having four directions at the same time in the traffic (Crenshaw 1989: 14), Crenshaw defines the term "intersectionality" in her interview to *Time* as "a prism for seeing the way in which various forms of inequality often operate together and exacerbate each other" (Steinmetz 2020). She argues that a woman's social identity, composed by her race and class besides her gender. In the intersectional feminist context, inequality is multidimensional and based on one's gender, class, immigrant status and sexuality. Thus, racism, sexism and classism intersect with each other, extending the level of inequities across generations. The only way out the oppression is considered to be solidarity and questioning power structures and standing against inequalities to rebuild a society where everybody is equal (Yuval-Davis 2006: 200).

A Little Princess (1905) and *Matilda* (1988) are two children's novels telling about the school lives of two girls. Although both of them belong to the twentieth century in terms of their publication dates, they differ a lot in their patriarchal representation of female protagonists. Therefore, the study argues that these differences results from the impact of social and cultural changes on the approach to the gender issue in time of about eighty years starting from the early twentieth century till the end of the same century. In time, the tropes of traditional fairy tales are left in children's novels, the protagonists of which are female, towards the late twentieth century due to the socio-cultural changes in society. Thus, drawing a lot of allusion between the two novels from different years, *A Little Princess* from 1905 and *Matilda* from 1988, the study aims at exploring distinct approaches to gender issues in the selected children's novels in terms of characterisation, motifs and plot despite the common sides of the novels by discussing them within the framework of feminist criticism. More precisely, this paper intends to discuss to what extent the classical fairy tale stereotypes are broken in *A Little Princess* and *Matilda*, which were published at an eighty-year interval.

Looking at the novels *A Little Princess* and *Matilda* through an intersectional feminist lens, the paper reveals how the constituent elements of identity such as class, gender and race are interconnected and affect the protagonists' lives and choices in the power dynamics within an integrative perspective. Thus, Crenshaw's conception of intersectionality is employed as an effective tool to explore the complexities of the female protagonists' social identities within various social structures in the novels in relation to the evolution of fairy tale motifs in the works in time.

A Little Princess: Sustainment of Fairy Tale Conventions

Frances Hodgson Burnett was a Victorian-period author known for her children's books, *A Little Princess* and *The Secret Garden* (1911). It was a period of training children to be future adults. Therefore, the materials targeted at child readers were under inspection. While obscenity was regarded as something to be avoided in children's literature in this conservative patriarchal culture, fairy tales and conduct books were considered necessary for children of both sexes and young adults (Resler 2007: 14). Considering the fact that Burnett's novels, including *A Little Princess*, were among the best-selling works of the Victorian period (Bixler 1984: 54), it may be inferred that the novel served the prevailing ideology of the period well. As argued by Resler (2007), "[t]he fairy tale was always a part of reality in Burnett's writings" (16). In this aspect, *A Little Princess* is also expected to perpetuate the patriarchal teachings in classical fairy tales.

Reimer (2008) asserts that a princess is a gendered figure in an imperialist context for child readers because "to be princess means to be in control of self" (112-113).

A Little Princess revolves around a little girl named Sara Crewe who is taken to a boarding school for girls when her father leaves for India. She enjoys her time at school as she is respected due to her father's wealth until her father's death. She is mistreated, particularly by Miss Minchin, the owner and manager of the school. She is sent to the attic, living in dirt with mice like the fairy tale character Cinderella, who is mistreated by her stepmother and stepsisters when her father is away. Like Cinderella, who is assigned duties such as cleaning and cooking that make her forget about her beauty and marriage and even dream of going to the ball, Sara takes care of younger students, teaching them French, thus forgetting about her own childhood and education even though she is only eleven years old. Similar to Snow White, who takes care of the seven dwarfs by cooking and doing the laundry for them, Sara also becomes "an adopted mother" (Burnett 1917: 44) to the motherless young girl Lottie in the boarding school; "[s]he worked like a drudge; she trumped through the wet streets, carrying parcels and baskets, she laboured with the childish inattention of the little ones' French lessons; as she became shabbier and more forlorn-looking, she was told that she had better take her meals downstairs" (Burnett 1917: 102). She restores her princess life when her father's friend, Mr. Carrisford, lets him know about the inheritance left by her father. Sara's case indicates that the novel perpetuates the fairy tale portrayal of the princess, whose life depends on patriarchy and men's presence. It also confirms Güven's intersectional feminist point that although women suffer from oppression not only because of gender discrimination universally, but also many other socio-cultural impacts on social identities (2024: 136). Sara's boarding school represents the Victorian society which, as Gökçek (2024) argues, conditions women to obey whatever they are ordered (128). Furthermore, her orphanhood makes her life turn upside down, from being a little princess to an errand girl with her worn-out clothes living with rats in the attic like Snow White and Cinderella. *A Little Princess* follows the stereotypical plot organisation with the beautiful little girl left by her father to a boarding school. The motherless Sara is mistreated by her peers and the headmistress of the school when she hears the news that her father has died in India, where he has gone for colonial purposes.

Simon De Beauvoir, a representative figure of the second wave of feminism, states that "[o]ne is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" in her canonical work in feminist studies, *The Second Sex* (1949) (1997: 295). To be a woman is to adopt all the patriarchal norms and roles ascribed to women. Daily chores such as cleaning, cooking and childcare are regarded as

women's duties, confining them to domestic space in patriarchal society. Women keep the weak and negative sides of the binary oppositions in contrast to men, to whom positive adjectives are attributed. Women's inevitable reliance on men throughout their lives in patriarchal societies obstructs them from making progress in the community by improving themselves and standing out with their own agency. Although human history witnesses the fact that women are still in the struggle for equality with men, the changes in the approach to gender issues between the early twentieth century and the period after the World Wars are reflected in *A Little Princess* and *Matilda*.

A Little Princess traces back to the Victorian period, which takes its name from Queen Victoria and marks significant progress in various areas including the economy, education, transportation, science and medicine. It is characterised as an era of contradictions and dilemmas in gender, class and race issues. As argued by Davis, these issues have undeniable impact on women's identities, experiences, and even struggles for empowerment (2008: 71). There was a huge gap between man and woman, rich and poor, white and black, in this period. Queen Victoria's gender representation reinforced patriarchal norms as the superiority of men to women in British society; thus, men and women became the inhabitants of two contrastive worlds of life: men belonging to the public sphere and women as the local people of the domestic sphere. Accordingly, such a kind of life in Britain resulted in two different types of gender representation: the ones that perpetuate the patriarchal ideology, such as Sarah Stickney Ellis's series of conduct books for girls telling them about how to be a "good" daughter, wife and mother, and the ones who rebel against stereotypical roles of women with the emergence of first-wave feminism, identified with the movements for women's suffrage in the late nineteenth century. Considering the fact that *A Little Princess* appeared as an expanded version of the short story entitled "Sara Crewe: or, What Happened at Miss Minchin's Boarding School" (1888) in the early years of the twentieth century, 1905, it may be asserted that it represents the Victorian conception of womanhood. In this regard, intersectionality stands out as "a welcome helpmeet" in deconstructing the binary oppositions (Davis 2008: 71).

Protagonists are identified with their "ideal" feminine beauty and passivity in fairy tales (Baker-Sperry & Grauerholz 2003: 711), such as in Charles Perrault's "Cinderella," the Grimm Brothers' "Snow White," and "Little Red Riding Hood." The emphasis is on the physical appearance in classical fairy tales rather than character because beauty is associated with a good temper, while ugliness indicates the ill-temper of the villain in classical fairy tales (Lieberman 1987: 188). The female protagonist is expected to be in the foreground with her beauty, not her

reason or intelligence. Stepmothers and stepsisters, who are envious of the female protagonist's beauty and regarded as a huge asset for her to be bargained with for an "ideal" marriage to a rich husband, are portrayed as ugly and evil women. The stepmother and stepsisters in fairy tales are replaced by the headmistress and female peers of the protagonist. Thus, the novel perpetuates characterisation and plot structure of the classical fairy tales.

Sara, the protagonist of *A Little Princess*, is an embodiment of Victorian values. She is characterised as an "archetypal Cinderella" (Bixler 1984: 87). She says to herself, "A princess must be polite" (Burnett 1917: 147), asserting that she has internalised the Victorian image of an "ideal" woman and acts in the way that is expected of her. Her father tells her that "[s]he is a sensible little thing, and she never wants anything it isn't safe to give her" (Burnett 1917: 14), asserting her obedient nature and objectifying her as a "thing" rather than a subject. She is described as a girl who is "always dreaming and thinking odd things" (1905: 3). She seems to live in her own imaginative world rather than in reality. Her life seems to be controlled by her father behind the walls of their estate, with no life outside. The father-daughter relationship in the Victorian period is represented by Captain Crewe and Sara, who cannot realise her autonomous agency, as asserted by Gubar (2009), as many daughters cannot in that period (159). Her father is a Victorian coloniser working in diamond mines in India. He leaves Sara in England, the motherland to which she belongs as a girl, when he sets out for colonial duty in India as an adventurous, capitalist and masculine power. His colonial agency and patriarchal role operate as a limiting and moulding force over Sara by "[d]ragging her away from her books when she reads too much" (Burnett 1917: 10), even though reading is a domestic hobby, which is regarded as appropriate for Victorian girls. Although she is eager to read her father's books in different languages and contents, including "history and biography and poets, and all sorts of things" (Burnett 1917: 10), she is disallowed by her father to claim her agency, thus oscillating his patriarchal authority over her. Her father thinks that "[s]he ought to play more with dolls" (Burnett 1917: 10) to adopt her gender role as babycarer of the future. This exemplifies how the patriarchal system functions by providing women with "the freedom that man has willingly given to them" (Monagan 2010: 161). Therefore, the evaluation of Sara's case, affected by her father's duty and economic status, in the intersectional feminist framework requires considering "systemic disparities in social location" (Bilge 2013: 419).

Villains as antagonists are also indispensable characters in children's books. Some of them are inevitably women when they disobey patriarchal norms. Not all female characters suffer from oppression on the same level. In *A Little Princess*, Miss Minchin represents a

villain. Her hypocrisy in accordance with the presence of money as a capitalist principle appears in her welcoming her wealthy father with flattering words at the beginning of the novel, as follows: "It will be a great privilege to have charge of such a beautiful and promising child" (Burnett 1917: 8). Her evil face becomes apparent when she is informed that Sara's father has died, leaving nothing for her. Like Cinderella's stepmother, she keeps Sara in the attic, making her the servant of the boarding school. Despite her maltreatment of Sara, she remains submissive and obedient. She only rejects returning to her boarding school when she learns that she has been inherited by her father. Miss Minchin seems to feed on capitalist forces, the deprivation of which makes her more villain. The intersection of Miss Minchin's oppression on Sara results from not only because of her gender, but her poverty, indicating the simultaneity of intersectionality, which refers to, in Carastathis's words, "the concurrent oppressions in different aspects" (2014: 308-309).

Besides characterisation, motifs and plot also differ in the selected two novels. Magic is an indispensable motif of the fantasy genre, particularly fairy tales. It is through the stepmother Queen's black magic that Snow White gets into trouble, and a fairy helps Cinderella go to the ball. Magic seems to be used in the selected novels in different aspects. In *A Little Princess*, Sara associates happy events with magic in her imagination, not as a result of her actions. She thinks about magic, the first letter of which is capitalised: "what does anything matter when one's Magic has just proved itself one's friend?" (Burnett 1917: 220). She sees herself as a fairy that can turn things into anything else (Burnett 1917: 220). That her father's business partner, Mr. Carrisford, becomes her neighbour and then her adopted father, replacing Captain Crewe, is also a magical coincidence. Her savior is a man, as in the hunter in "The Little Red Riding Hood," the prince in "Rapunzel," and the dwarfs in "Snow White," indicating how the plot perpetuates the patriarchal ideology that her princess's life is restored by a man again.

Considering the plot organisation, it may be argued that *A Little Princess* maintains the fairy tale style. The fairy tales end with a huntsman's rescuing the protagonist as in "The Little Red Riding Hood" and a prince's saving her life with a kiss as in "Snow White" and courage enough to climb a long tower as in "Rapunzel" and the female protagonist's marriage to a rich man, like a prince and a foreshadowing of their unending love in peace together, thus the celebration of heterosexual marriage as expected in patriarchal society. Sara in *A Little Princess* is not old enough to get married, but she is also rescued by a male character, as all protagonists are in classical fairy tales. Although "living happily ever after" is a possible ending through an advantageous heterosexual marriage in classical fairy tales, *A Little Princess* perpetuates this

plotline through Sara's getting her wealthy life back again. Mysteriously, her father's business partner, Mr. Carrisford, restores Sara to her earlier status and lets her know about the inheritance left by her father for herself. Thus, her fate changes, and she enjoys a wealthy life due to her father's help from a male rescuer, her father's close friend again. Indeed, Sara's kindness, virtue and diligence are awarded with a happy ending as in classical fairy tales. Thus, the classical plot organisation is perpetuated in the novel. Sara's happy ending indicates the recovery of her case through the socio-economic status which she restores, but the other students cannot in the boarding school. Thus, in comparison to the oppression, which the other female students still suffer in Miss Minchin's boarding school, her case confirms Crenshaw's concern that "all inequality is not created equal" and experienced by women differently (1989: 71).

Matilda: Subversion of Fairy Tale Conventions

The author of the other selected novel, *Matilda*, Roald Dahl is one of the most prominent British authors of the twentieth-century children's literature. His words in a BBC documentary about his life that "I do not like conformists, people who conform" (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qTnn5RLxEQo) indicate his rebellious stance against any kinds of authority in society. He is known best for his children's fantasy novel *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (1964), filmed as a production of Warner Bros Pictures in 2005; however, his *Matilda*, as a school and family fantasy novel, is noteworthy in subverting the stereotypical gender roles attributed both to male and female in classical fairy tales, thus providing a humorous criticism of patriarchy. The novel presents a modern reinterpretation of gender roles through the representation of male and female characters.

Dahl's children's fantasy novel *Matilda* is a product of a period coinciding with the Second Wave feminist movements for the legal and social independence of women in the post-World War II era. As stated by Davis, "[r]ace/class/gender became the new mantra within women's studies" in the second half of the twentieth century (2008: 73). Such a period results in questioning gender stereotypes and their representations in earlier literary products. *Matilda* is Dahl's novel that subverts the conventions of classical fairy tales in a parodic style. The protagonist, Matilda, is "child-genius and prodigy" (Dahl 1988: 75) who is engaged in exploration and learning new things despite her superficial and uncaring parents and the traditional and strict principles of her school. Matilda is an independent character who does not rely on any male characters in the novel, including her father, who represents authority in patriarchal societies.

The protagonist of Dahl's *Matilda* also loves reading books. Unlike Sara, who is indulged in the fantasy world to escape the bitter realities of her life and to compensate for her loneliness, Matilda educates herself about life, compensating her neglectful parents, who ignore Matilda and her development. Therefore, reading is more than a leisure activity, helping her improve her self-agency. However, similar to Sara's father, Matilda's father, Mr. Wormwood, also disallows Matilda to read books by tearing up her library book and suggests watching their "lovely telly with a twelve-inch screen" (Dahl 1988: 4). Matilda misrepresents the patriarchal conception of ideal beauty by challenging it through her self-confident features and standing out with her intelligence. Her strategy, challenging subordinating practices of her parents, aligns with Crenshaw's intersectional feminist call for women to question power structures and all types of subordinating discourses (1989: 112-113).

Matilda's mother, Mrs. Wormwood, is engaged in card games, making up, watching soap operas and going shopping rather than gendered housework for women, such as cooking, cleaning and caring about her children. Her gender identity is away from the assertion of self-agency and argues that "[a] girl doesn't get a man by being brainy" (Dahl 1998: 99) and that "[l]ooks is more important than books" (Dahl 1988: 97). Although she is exactly neither "an angel in the house" nor "the madwoman in the attic" in Victorian terms, she is a submissive woman who serves patriarchy indirectly. She is a twentieth-century capitalist woman who cares only about her appearance. She acts out a silly blonde doll with her "dyed platinum blonde" hair (Dahl 1988: 27). She draws contrast with Matilda's teacher, Miss Honey, who has achieved standing on her own feet. Her patriarchal mind is revealed when she says to Miss Honey that she is better than her as she is married to a rich businessman, whereas Miss Honey is tackling with many nasty students at school (Dahl 1988: 98). In this context, Mrs. Wormwood represents the fairy male princess model who has married to a wealthy man and been living happily ever after, while Miss Honey prefers claiming her self-agency and enjoying living in peace as a single teacher. The attitudes of two different women to the subordination are different from each other even though they both live in different equalities in comparision to men. Mrs. Wormhood's marital and socio-economic status makes her happy, while Miss Honey finds peace in singlehood and working. From Crenshaw's perspective, inequality is not something universal and all inequalities are not treated in the same way (1989: 71).

Inequalities, distinguishing between men and women, are multidimensional, creating intersectionality in relation to the impact on their social identities through disparate gender roles and jobs. Thus, it has greater influence than "the sum of racism and sexism" (Crenshaw 1989:

40). Gender representation is subverted through male characters who challenge male stereotypes and gender roles attributed to men in patriarchal societies. Men have been subject to the construction of masculinity as women have been subject to the construction of femininity since antiquity. "Ideal" masculinity is identified with being handsome, strong, brave, moral and possessing a well-built body. Thus, men have been assigned to some gender roles. Hunting men, knights and warriors were replaced with middle-class men who took on duties such as money-making, going shopping, raising a family and managing factories due to social and economic changes through industrialism. Accordingly, manhood was redefined as "manliness" in commerce and technology in the Victorian period (Mcknight 2015: 52). Therefore, masculinity and masculinised gender roles were emphasised as much as femininity and gender roles prescribed to women in the Victorian-period works. Sara in *A Little Princess* is rescued from the oppression in her boarding school indirectly through her father's wealth. Thus, she restores her position as a highly-esteemed little princess due to her father. On the other hand, the strict division between masculinity and femininity is blurred through modern way of life in time (Çetiner 2021: 648). Matilda's father is depicted as a false representation of masculinity who is far from an ideal male figure as a breadwinner, a heroic rescuer, a protector lover, father, husband or handsome gentleman. Matilda's father is not one of the positive male stereotypes in classical tales. He is portrayed as a dishonest used-car dealer who deceives his customers. However, as a patriarchal father, he favours his son Michael, thinking that he is "a perfectly normal boy" (Dahl 1988: 11) and himself as "the great man" and "the master of the house, the wage earner" (Dahl 1988: 40), while insulting Matilda as "an ignorant little squirt" (Dahl 1988: 26), despite her extraordinary intelligence and thinking that "small girls should be seen and not be heard" (Dahl 1988: 11). When she calculates the function that he tries to do, he humiliates Matilda as a "cheat and a liar," thinking that no one, particularly a girl, can give the right answer so fast (Dahl 1988: 55). Considering the feminist critic Adrienne Rich's concept of patriarchy that "patriarchy is the power of the fathers...determin[ing] what part women shall or shall not play" (1995: 87), both Captain Crewe in *A Little Princess* and Mr. Wormwood in *Matilda* are representative patriarchal fathers.

Besides characterisation, the use of magic as a motif also differs in *Matilda*. Unlike *A Little Princess*, *Matilda* depicts magic as a way of self-expression rather than escapism. Matilda has a telekinetic power, the ability to move things around herself through her mind, which she uses as a rebellious reaction to her parents' insults and the principle's unfair discipline. Although the novel includes no fairies, Miss Honey plays a fairy role for Matilda, whom she

helps to use her intelligence and unusual power of imagination to realise her own agency. She is a young, single, beautiful lady with "a lovely pale oval Modanna face", blue eyes, light-brown hair (Dahl 1988: 66). Her body is described as "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 1988: 66). Through Miss Honey's role in Matilda's life, the fairy tale plot is perpetuated with the use of a fairy-like feminine figure, but it subverts the happily ever after ending through a marriage with a journey of self-improvement and agency at the end of the novel. From the intersectional feminist perspective, the relationship between Miss Honey and Matilda evolves into solidarity against oppression. Their solidarity works as, in Crenshaw's approach, a political strategy challenging practices, subordinating them (1989: 112-113). They achieve building self-agency through their intersectional feminist attitude to all types of oppression, they simultaneously suffer from, due to their gender, classes and socio-economic status.

Unlike Sara, Matilda resists the evil doings of the characters around her who insult or mistreat her, such as her father and her school's principal, Miss Trunchbull. More concretely, she glues her father's hat to his head, dyes his hair blond, pushes over Miss Trunchbull's glass and writes threatening sentences on the board with her telekinetic power to make her think that a ghost is bothering her and making her escape from the town. Matilda rebels and copes with people who oppress her agency. It indicates that Matilda is active, self-confident and non-patriarchal, unlike Sara. Matilda's teacher, Miss Honey, and the headmistress, Miss Trunchbull, who turns out to be Miss Honey's aunt, represent the binary oppositions set in classical fairy tales, the virgin teacher with her ideal feminine beauty and innocent, patient, caregiving, motherly attitudes towards her students, in contrast to the principal, who is depicted as ugly, fat, impatient and masculine in attitudes and dressing.

The mistreatment of step sisters and stepmothers is replaced not only by mistreatment of the school headmistresses in both novels but also by the protagonist's own parents in *Matilda*. Although Matilda's parents do not perform violence on the protagonist and her brother, they ignore them, thus indirectly abusing their children and misrepresenting parenthood. Thus, the holiness of motherhood is subverted through Matilda's mother. Furthermore, the brutality of the stepmother in classical fairy tales is replaced by the principals and her own aunt for Miss Honey.

In relation to the plot organisation, while *A Little Princess* maintains the fairy tale style, *Matilda* subverts it to a greater extent. *Matilda* comes to an end with the protagonist's family's leaving her with her teacher for another country and Matilda's happiness and successful school

life afterwards. Matilda prefers her education and individuality to those of her family, in contrast to any classical fairy tale that emphasises the importance of familial ties for a daughter and the dangers outside in patriarchal societies. Considering Bradford's following definition: "To be able to act—to have *agency*—also means being able to answer for our actions, to be responsible" (2008: 33), it can be argued that Matilda makes her own choice, acts and takes the responsibility of her actions as an indication of her "autonomy, self-expression, and self-awareness" (Trites 1997: 8). Trites (1997) argues that "[t]he feminist character's recognition of her agency and her voice invariably leads to some sort of transcendence, usually taking the form of a triumph over whatever system or stricture was repressing her" (7). Accordingly, Matilda, as a female child protagonist, transgresses suppression over herself by asserting her agency. Thus, she overcomes her neglectful parents and oppressive school principal, thus the patriarchal system. In contrast to *A Little Princess*, which sustains the fantasy ending through the princess's marriage to the prince, *Matilda* reverses the living "happily ever after" tradition through the female protagonist's improving herself through education. She rejects adopting a female identity similar to either her mother or the school principal of her boarding school. She prefers staying with her teacher, Miss Honey, who claims her own agency as an educationalist and a single lady. In this regard, late twentieth-century children's and young adult fiction activate once-pacified female protagonists. The intersection of the inequalities, perpetuated through women's stereotypes in classical fairy tales, is resolved through the titular character's feminist struggle in Dahl's twentieth-century novel, *Matilda*. Thus, Matilda represents the intersectional feminist voice of the new young women, who become acting agents of their lives, rather than the generation in classical fairy tales. It can be concluded that the themes of marriage, passivity, domesticity and motherhood are replaced with the significance of education, self-improvement, imagination and pure love in *Matilda*, which enables the reader to question the patriarchal ideology perpetuated in classical fairy tales.

CONCLUSION

The comparative intersectional reading of Frances Hodgson Burnett's *A Little Princess* and Roald Dahl's *Matilda* draws contrast in relation to women's stereotypes in classical fairy tales. Intersectional feminism offers an analytical lens, enabling us to explore the status of the female protagonists in the selected novels, based on the simultaneous and interwoven relations in social identities. The study reveals that the interaction between the complexity of social identities and experiences of subordination results in intersectionality for women and that the inequalities in various aspects can be crossed over by the titular character of Dahl's novel, creating a feminist

success story. The protagonist in *A Little Princess*, Sara Crewe, refers to the little princess in the title as an embodiment of the ideal standards set for a woman in patriarchal society, maintaining the role of stereotypical princess characters in the Grimm brothers and Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tales such as Snow White, Sleeping Beauty and Rapunzel. On the other hand, Dahl's children's fantasy novel *Matilda* is a product of a period coinciding with the Second Wave feminist movements for the legal and social independence of women in the post-World War II era. Such a period results in questioning gender stereotypes and their representations in earlier literary products. *Matilda* subverts the conventions of classical fairy tales in a parodic style. Matilda is an independent character who does not rely on any male characters in the novel, including her father, who represents authority in patriarchal societies. Furthermore, the mistreatment of stepsisters and stepmothers is replaced not only by cruelty of the school headmistresses in both novels but also by the protagonist's own parents in *Matilda*. Magic is an indispensable motif of the fantasy genre, particularly fairy tales. It is through the stepmother Queen's black magic that Snow White gets into trouble, and a fairy helps Cinderella go to the ball. Magic seems to be used in the selected novels in different aspects. In *A Little Princess*, Sara preserves her patience against the ordeal she comes across in the boarding school through magical power, which she pretends to have in her imagination. Thus, it provides her with escapism from realities. However, the title character of *Matilda* makes use of magic as a way of resistance against any insults and unfairness towards herself and the beloved around her. Furthermore, although the novel includes no fairies, Miss Honey plays a fairy role for Matilda, whom she helps to use her intelligence and unusual power of imagination to realise her own agency. Through Miss Honey's role in Matilda's life, the fairy tale plot is perpetuated with the use of a fairy-like feminine figure, but it subverts the happily ever after ending through a marriage with a journey of self-improvement and agency at the end of the novel. Although "living happily ever after" is a possible ending through an advantageous heterosexual marriage in classical fairy tales, *A Little Princess* perpetuates this plotline through Sara's getting her wealthy life back again. On the other hand, *Matilda* comes to an end with the protagonist's family's leaving her with her teacher for another country and Matilda's happiness and successful school life afterwards. Matilda prefers her education and individuality to those of her family, in contrast to classical fairy tales that emphasise the importance of familial ties for a daughter and the dangers outside in patriarchal societies. The study concludes that the classical fairy tale stereotypes are broken in *A Little Princess* and *Matilda* an eighty-year interval as indicated in their differences in the characterisation of female protagonists, the use of motifs and plot Thus, the intersectional feminist approach to *A Little Princess* and *Matilda*

reveals that social identities are versatile and interwoven with many factors in societies. The analysis indicates that the changes in the British society in the twentieth century have impact on social identities within the intersection of race, gender and class. While *A Little Princess* remains substantially within the framework of classical fairy tale tropes maintaining gender roles, *Matilda* represents women's struggle for empowerment through its titular character, who crosses the limits of gender stereotypes creating her own story as different from classical fairy tales.

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