

THE UNIQUE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE MAIN CHARACTERS IN “CHARLIE
AND THE CHOCOLATE FACTORY” AND “MATILDA”

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Abstract: This article analyzes the unique qualities and character traits of the main protagonists in Roald Dahl’s works “Charlie and the Chocolate Factory” and “Matilda”, the influence of the environment in which they were raised on their psychology and behavior, as well as the educational and artistic significance of these works.

Keywords: Grotesque imagination, stinginess, envy, greed, modesty, respect, compassion.

Roald Dahl, one of Britain’s most brilliant and imaginative writers and a master of unusual, twist-ending stories, is widely regarded as a favorite author among children across the world. His works reflect the innocence of childhood, the struggle for justice, the boundless power of imagination, and the triumph of good over evil. In “*Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*” and “*Matilda*”, Dahl’s characteristic grotesque imagination, dark humor, and playful irony are especially vivid. Many critics note that such an unconventional approach may echo the hardships R.Dahl experienced in his own youth. [2,45] Both texts have become beloved classics among young readers, both in book form and through their film adaptations. In these works, R.Dahl delves deeply into human psychology, portraying societal flaws through fairy-tale imagery and unusual humor while showing how the protagonists’ positive worldview helps them overcome numerous challenges. Though comic novels primarily aim to entertain, Dahl’s works clearly carry a strong moral and educational dimension. [8,106]

In “Charlie and the Chocolate Factory”, Willy Wonka uses his magical chocolate factory to test the character and moral qualities of five children in his search for an heir. R.Dahl presents Wonka as a vivid, complex, and multifaceted protagonist. His personality balances magic and truth, combining childlike sincerity and sharp intuition with mature wisdom. Wonka’s boundless imagination and creativity captivate the reader, yet he also stands out as a mysterious figure devoted to strict rules. At the same time, his search for an heir reveals his inner loneliness and his longing for the family warmth that inspires his extraordinary inventions. Although sometimes strict, Wonka remains a pure-hearted figure embodying R. Dahl’s moral and fantastical ideals.

Roald Dahl portrays human flaws — greed, envy, ignorance, and arrogance — through the characteristics of the young contestants. The Chocolate Factory becomes a symbolic space of moral testing, where each child reveals their true nature by following their desires. [4,10] Only after depicting the four flawed children does R. Dahl turn to the positive hero, *Charlie Bucket*, revealing his pure heart and strong upbringing.

The four children who win golden tickets are introduced with exaggerated traits and humor, emphasizing their vices through the literary technique of “*telling names*”— names that



metaphorically reveal the personality or moral flaws of the characters. This technique, rich in wordplay, irony, and symbolic meaning, has long been widely used in literature. It helps create vivid, memorable characters whose names themselves communicate key facets of their identity. [7,89]

The first child introduced is *August Gloop*. According to the Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary, "gloop" means "a thick, sticky liquid," symbolizing gluttony and greed. The connotation of "thick" further suggests heaviness or sluggishness. [3,107] R.Dahl exaggerates this flaw by describing the boy as overweight and awkward.

Next comes *Verruca Salt*. The name "Verruca" refers to a painful wart found on the foot — small but irritating and persistent. R.Dahl uses this metaphor to portray her spoiled and unpleasant nature. Her last name, "Salt," adds another symbolic layer: just as too much salt can spoil a dish, a child spoiled by excessive indulgence becomes unbearable.

The third child is *Violet Beauregard*. Known for her obsessive gum-chewing, she represents impertinence and lack of restraint. Her name "Violet" foreshadows her transformation when she swells into a giant purple sphere after ignoring Wonka's warnings and trying an experimental gum. The scene humorously condemns arrogance and overconfidence. Her last name, derived from French *un beau regard* ("a beautiful gaze"), is used ironically, hinting at the contrast between her name and her actual manners.

Mike Teavee follows. His name resembles the word "TV," symbolizing his obsession with television and the negative effects of excessive screen time. [1,104]

Finally, R.Dahl presents *Charlie Bucket*, whose name is widespread in Britain. The name "Charlie" traces back to *Karl*, meaning "man," symbolizing maturity and integrity despite his young age. [5,166] His last name "Bucket," besides referring to a common household object, evokes the idiom "a drop in a bucket," suggesting disproportion or contrast and alluding to Charlie's modest background. [6,238]

Despite growing up in poverty, Charlie never loses his kindness, patience, and generosity. He shares his favorite treat—chocolate—with his family and remains calm even during hardship. His care for his grandparents reflects his deep affection. Unlike the other contestants, Charlie resists temptation, obeys the rules of the factory, and never seeks personal gain. He proves to Wonka that he values family happiness above material wealth. His character stands in stark contrast to modern issues such as selfishness, excessive comfort, and addiction to technology. Through humor and exaggeration, R.Dahl encourages young readers to reflect on the moral lessons embodied by these characters.

In "Matilda", the protagonist is a young girl with extraordinary abilities whose parents and brother neither understand nor care about her. Her parents hinder her intellectual growth, and R.Dahl criticizes their behavior through humor and grotesque exaggeration.

In the opening chapter, Matilda is introduced as a child whose abilities are dismissed by her parents, *Mr. and Mrs. Wormwood*, who refer to her as "a scab"—something worthless. In contrast, R.Dahl describes Matilda using epithets such as "extra-ordinary," "sensitive," and "brilliant." [6,7] He further highlights her intelligence through the inversion "half-witted parents," sharpening the contrast between the girl and her family. Parallel structures like "so nimble, so quick" emphasize her remarkable intellectual agility. While most three-year-olds are preoccupied with play, Matilda teaches herself to read. Neglected by her family, she nevertheless pursues learning with determination and independence, overcoming injustices at home and school.

Matilda's father, *Harry Wormwood*, is portrayed as an irritable, arrogant, and money-driven man who deceives customers to achieve his goals. Believing himself the head of the family, he views



children as servants. He dismisses Matilda's intelligence and sees books as useless, symbolizing ignorance.

Matilda's mother, *Zinnia Wormwood*, is depicted as an emotional, ill-mannered woman who neglects her parental duties and spends her time watching television and gambling. Roald Dahl criticizes her shallow values, as she prioritizes appearance over knowledge and proper upbringing.

Among the positive figures is *Jennifer Honey*, Matilda's teacher and the niece of the school principal. Gentle and just, she supports Matilda wholeheartedly. Though timid and fearful due to her past, Miss Honey remains kind and sincere. Her name, "*Honey*," literally meaning "*sweet*," symbolizes her gentle nature. Despite her young age, *Matilda* empathizes with *Miss Honey* and helps her overcome her difficulties, demonstrating emotional maturity.

As we see, Roald Dahl uses different techniques to portray the protagonists of *Matilda* and *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, but both stories critique greed, arrogance, ignorance, and rudeness in adults and children alike. Mike Teavee and August Gloop are clear examples of such flaws.

At the same time, R.Dahl highlights the virtues of the positive characters—humility, patience, compassion, generosity, a desire for knowledge, and loyalty to family. Through humor and engaging storytelling, he encourages young readers to develop these qualities within themselves.

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