

Jane Eyre and Matilda



A discussion of intersectionality, class and gender

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Jane Eyre and Matilda; a discussion of intersectionality, class and gender

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Abstract

This thesis looks at the intersection of class and gender in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) and Roald Dahl's *Matilda* (1988). It consists of one chapter with background information on class and gender in the nineteenth century and the late 1980s, one chapter that discusses class discourse in both novels, and one chapter that looks at gender in *Jane Eyre* and *Matilda*. This thesis uses the concept of intersectionality to show that it is not possible to discuss gender in *Jane Eyre* without taking class into account and that *Matilda* has a classist undertone because it is written from the point of view of a young girl with class prejudice. Furthermore, it demonstrates that a lot of the ideas surrounding gender present in both novels originate from class values and that the novels share a rebellious spirit in breaking down gender expectations and girls helping each other through injustice.

Keywords: *Jane Eyre*; *Matilda*; class; gender; nineteenth century; (late) 1980s; intersectionality

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Introduction

“Unjust! Unjust!”¹, and “Oh, the rottenness of it all! The unfairness!”². Both *Jane Eyre* and *Matilda Wormwood* have been criticised for being angry and temperamental. They share a similar spirit and both want to fight against injustice. *Jane Eyre* (1847) by Charlotte Brontë and *Matilda* (1988) by Roald Dahl were written in two very different time periods when it comes to the position of women in society. The former was written during the early stages of the first wave of feminism and the latter during the second wave of feminism. However, the two novels share a lot of similarities. They have similar characters and power dynamics in their stories and the two protagonists encounter similar types of injustices.³

The place of women in society in the nineteenth century was complicated. There are two parts to the history. On the one hand, there was a patriarchal structure that assigned power and privilege to men. The organisational systems of society were made by men for men.⁴ Additionally, there was a paradigm that came from the eighteenth century that culminated in the early nineteenth century, saying that women were the angel of the house.⁵ The stereotypes and gender roles that came with this paradigm strictly confined women and led to them being defined by their relationships to the men in their lives; they were a daughter, a wife, a mother, a widow, a virgin or a whore.⁶ On the other hand, there was a gradual process of women fighting for their rights. The nineteenth century was the time of first wave feminism which focused on political rights. In 1870, the first bill wanting to give equal voting rights to women was introduced: it was then called the Women's Disabilities Removal Bill.⁷ In 1882 the Married Women's Property Act was created to give women the absolute right to

¹ C. Brontë, *Jane Eyre* (London: Penguin English Library, 2012), 11.

² R. Dahl, *Matilda* (London: Penguin Random House UK, 2016), 158.

³ L.A. Maynard, “The True Heir of Jane Eyre: Roald Dahl's *Matilda Wormwood*”, *CEA Critic* 81, no. 1 (March 2019): 42.

⁴ M. Poovey, *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), Preface, x.

⁵ *Ibid.*, ix.

⁶ *Ibid.*, x.

⁷ E. Sylvia Pankhurst, *Suffragette: The History of the Women's Militant Suffrage Movement, 1905-1910* (New York: Sturgis & Walton, 1911), 4.

their own property.⁸ The nineteenth century was also the time professional women authors started to become more important. Professional women authors had existed since the seventeenth century, but the nineteenth century is when there is a surge in the number of female authors, as Virginia Woolf remarked in her essay *A Room of One's Own*: “Here then, one had reached the early nineteenth century. And here, for the first time, I found several shelves given up entirely to the works of women.”⁹ She describes that before the nineteenth century a lot of books about women and the female experience were written by male authors, even though women never wrote about men.¹⁰ By the nineteenth century, women were able to write about their own experiences as women, and their own values. These, according to Woolf, “differ very often from the values which have been made by the other sex”¹¹. Women were still able to publish their books without the help of a patron of the male sex and without explicitly stating their own sex¹²; *Jane Eyre* was initially published under a pseudonym with Charlotte Brontë pretending to be a male writer.

During the nineteenth century, traditional gender divisions were changed and influenced by a developing market economy. This change in economy created a class society.¹³ Leonore Davidoff uses a body metaphor to explain the social hierarchy of that time. The middle-class (or aristocratic) man represented the governing group and was considered to be the head of the social political system as well as the head of the household. The middle-class woman of the house was representative of the heart or the soul.¹⁴ A household was seen as society in miniature. Because of the influence of class on gender discourse, there existed a dual view on women; women were not simply women but also ladies. This difference was just as much a social and economic difference as a gender difference.¹⁵

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ V. Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 2012), 74.

¹⁰ Ibid., 47.

¹¹ Ibid., 80.

¹² Poovey, 36.

¹³ L. Davidoff, “Class and Gender in Victorian England: The Diaries of Arthur J. Munby and Hannah Cullwick”, *Feminist Studies* 5, no. 1 (Spring 1979): 88.

¹⁴ Ibid., 97.

¹⁵ Ibid., 91.

This social and economic difference remained important throughout the second wave of feminism, during which *Matilda* was written. This wave focused on providing safe and accessible abortions and defying the gender roles that dominated the domestic, political and economic spheres and relations.¹⁶ During the second wave of feminism, women brought attention to shared experiences and came together to demand changes. They started to realise that as a minority, they needed to fight together in order to create change because isolated shouts from individuals are not as powerful as protesting and fighting in a large group.¹⁷ Kimberlé Crenshaw criticises this image that is often painted; according to her, the shared experiences that a lot of women talked about were in fact not the same for all women. Crenshaw described that second wave feminism for a lot of communities was also about recognizing that there is more than just sex that comes into discrimination and a woman's experience and that a lot of women had unique experiences with discrimination.¹⁸ She felt that it was not possible to consider all women to be one class, as some second wave feminists were claiming.¹⁹ She coined the term intersectionality. Intersectionality is the concept that multiple parts of someone's identity, like race, gender and class, often intersect and that you cannot separate them.²⁰ They all have an influence on each other and on how you are treated and what the discrimination you face might look like. According to Crenshaw, this intersection is often ignored when talking about equality and emancipation of certain minorities.²¹

Matilda and *Jane Eyre* also face struggles beyond being a woman, which means that intersectionality is a useful concept for analysing both novels. A lot of research has been done into both novels, but not a lot has been done in terms of an intersectional approach. Gender and class in *Jane Eyre* have been discussed extensively, and though *Matilda* is a much more

¹⁶ B. Thompson, "Multiracial Feminism: Recasting the Chronology of Second Wave Feminism", *Feminist Studies* 28, no. 2 (Summer, 2002): 338.

¹⁷ K. Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color", *Stanford Law Review* 43, no. 6 (Jul., 1991): 1241.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid., 1242.

²¹ Ibid.

recent novel, both class and gender have been discussed in relation to the story. However, for neither of the novels has the interaction between class and gender received a lot of academic attention. When reading *Matilda*, it is almost impossible to miss the messages on gender it contains, but its takes on class have often been overlooked. Clémentine Beauvais has stated that the dynamics of class prejudice in *Matilda* remain “a problematic blind spot in the critical literature on the novel.”²² She explains that statement by saying that Matilda’s parents are only portrayed as two-dimensional archetypal villains which is problematic since they represent part of the British class system. This thesis will expand on the statement by Beauvais and research to what extent *Matilda* portrays a classist society. The same thing will be done for *Jane Eyre*, since it is not possible to research gender structures in *Jane Eyre* without also looking at class, as Esther Godfrey has explained: “masculine and feminine constructions in *Jane Eyre* ultimately cannot be separated from the larger gender anxieties raised by Jane's class position.”²³ Since the corpus of secondary material on *Matilda* remains small, despite it having become a modern classic, using the large corpus that exists on *Jane Eyre* to say something about *Matilda* might help researchers and readers understand the novel better. The only research that has made a comparison between *Jane Eyre* and *Matilda* was by Lee Anna Maynard. She called Matilda Wormwood the true heir of Jane Eyre. In her article she describes how Matilda and Jane encounter similar types of injustices and she describes how the two heroines differ in the way they deal with the situations they are put in. Jane Eyre never stops fighting for what she believes in but she is timider in the way she responds to people. Matilda’s rebellion against injustice manifest “more frequently and more concretely”²⁴. Whereas Jane mostly shows her opposition to injustice with words, deeply felt emotions and moving speeches, Matilda takes a more active approach by punishing people in her life with actions. *Jane Eyre* and *Matilda* share important themes and comparing both novels can provide insight into the differences and similarities between gender, class and intersectionality in the nineteenth century and the late 1980s. This thesis will bring together sexism and classism in the two novels and see how the two influence each other. This thesis

²² C. Beauvais, “Child Giftedness as Class Weaponry: The Case of Roald Dahl’s *Matilda*”, *Children’s Literature Association Quarterly* 40, no. 3. (Fall 2015): 278.

²³ E. Godfrey, ““Jane Eyre”, from *Governess to Girl Bride*”, *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 45, no. 4 (Autumn, 2005): 853.

²⁴ Maynard, 42.

will aim to answer the question: “To what extent do *Jane Eyre* and *Matilda* portray patriarchal and classist societies, and how do class and gender interact in the two novels?”.

This question will be divided into two sections, and the thesis as a whole into three chapters. Chapter one will be an explanation of the theoretical framework of this thesis and will describe the concepts used throughout the other chapters as well as provide socio-historical context for both the Victorian period and the late 1980s. Chapter two will look into class in *Jane Eyre* and *Matilda* and strive to answer the questions which characters in *Jane Eyre* show class prejudice and which characters are hindered in what they can do because of the class that they belong to. It will also look at class in *Matilda* and analyse what class *Matilda* and her family belong to, if there are any more classes present in the novel and how class is portrayed. By consulting primary sources to gain an understanding of class in the nineteenth century and latter twentieth century and then putting passages of both novels and certain characters within that context, this chapter aims to provide a thorough understanding of class in *Jane Eyre* and *Matilda*. Chapter three will be a discussion of gender in *Jane Eyre* and *Matilda*. It will look at moments in both novels that show how characters of both novels look at gender and where those values come from. Special attention will be paid to gender and emotion – *Jane* and *Matilda* have both been criticised for the way they express their emotions. They have both been called angry and temperamental. By analysing passages of the novels and using secondary sources on gender in *Jane Eyre* and *Matilda*, this chapter outlines the societies that the novels present. Both chapters will take into consideration the intersection of class and gender by analysing when certain moments or actions of characters can be explained by ideas having to do with both class and gender, rather than just one of the two.

Chapter 1 – Class and gender in the nineteenth century and the 1980s

Matilda Wormwood is accused of being “a little cheat! A cheat and a liar!”²⁵ by her father after answering a maths question correctly, and Jane Eyre is called a “rat!”²⁶ by her cousin when he catches her reading and tells her that that it is not appropriate for her to do. Both of the girls are very young when this happens and it sets an example for a lot of other experiences they will have to endure in their lives. The protagonists have to fight against stereotypes, gender roles and class divisions. Jane and Matilda are judged for their intelligence, which can be related back to both their social status and the fact that they are female. Class and gender are important parts of society and especially so in the time periods *Matilda* and *Jane Eyre* take place. *Jane Eyre* was written during the Victorian era which was a time where a class society first started to appear which also greatly influenced gender roles and gender discourse.²⁷ *Matilda* was written in the 1980’s during the second wave of feminism, which was a time where intersectionality started to become very important.²⁸ Moreover, *Matilda* takes place in Britain which to this day has a very prevalent class system.²⁹ This chapter will give an overview of views on class and gender in both time periods and make a comparison. It will introduce the concept intersectionality and talk about the theoretical framework this thesis will use to analyse *Jane Eyre* and *Matilda*.

The nineteenth century was the time that the middle class first started to arise. Chris Vanden Bossche argues that this should not be regarded as a historical event, but rather as a part of the history of the nineteenth century and as part of its discourse.³⁰ The nineteenth century was according to him not driven by class interest but class was one of the discursive formations through which debates were conducted and society tried to make sense of and deal with certain social and political situations.³¹ This is visible in the fact that the idea of a middle

²⁵ Dahl, 49.

²⁶ Brontë, 6.

²⁷ Davidoff, 88.

²⁸ Crenshaw 1991, 1242.

²⁹ Beauvais, 279.

³⁰ C. Vanden Bossche, “What Did “Jane Eyre” Do? Ideology, Agency, Class and the Novel”, *Narrative* 13, no. 1 (Jan., 2005): 50.

³¹ *Ibid.*

class only started to emerge with the passing of the Reform Bill in 1832, when its proponents linked it to the rising of a new political entity that required representation.³² The emergence of class ideology made it possible for groups of people to align their ideas and needs, but this sort of behaviour did not always occur. The arising middle class was not a group that always acted with common economic interests at heart. People from the middle class often voted in alignment with their own political or religious values which did not always coincide with their economic needs.³³ The middle class did not act as a collective agent. The concept of the middle class is an important one when discussing *Jane Eyre* because Jane is surrounded by people who are part of the middle class and its ideology surrounding gender is present in the novel and will be discussed in relation to the character of Mr Brocklehurst.

The nineteenth century is when the rapid development of a market economy and a class society started to affect all traditional societal boundaries. Class and gender influenced each other during the nineteenth century as well. Class divisions and class values became influenced by gender ideals and what society's expectations were for a man or a woman became partly dependent on their class and financial situation.³⁴ About halfway through the century, the increasing effects of industrialism and capitalism both undermined and underscored the existing gender roles and gender divisions. Due to the rise of factory work, home industry declined which created a division between feminine and masculine work spheres.³⁵ However, this was tied with class economics. The middle class might have witnessed a rise of masculine workplaces and feminine domesticity, but the working class saw the complete opposite effect. Working class labourers experienced a blurring of gender division and differences.³⁶ Both men and women were needed in industry. When working in mines, men and women would also be put in the same clothes for example. This ambiguity scandalised the middle class and led them to strengthen their own gender divisions. Middle-class Victorians pushed their own feminine and masculine spheres of influence and power the furthest they could.³⁷ In light of this ambiguity, a dual view on women arose. Most of the

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Davidoff. 88.

³⁵ Godfrey, 854.

³⁶ Ibid., 855.

³⁷ Ibid.

dichotomies, ideas and values that ran through Victorian society were laid down in childhood. Women were not just women but also ladies, and the middle class gained an obsession with keeping young girls pure and innocent.³⁸ This was based on a paradox, because on the one hand, girls were believed to be born innocent yet on the other hand, society saw a lot of need for protecting them and keeping them away for distractions and temptations which they believed girls to be very sensitive to.³⁹ In *Jane Eyre* this division between working class androgyny and middle class femininity and masculinity is visible as well; this division will be used to discuss the practices at Lowood and its headmaster Mr Brocklehurst, as well as its influence on the relationship between Jane and Mr Rochester.

Because work was a vital part of Victorian society, they looked at the working class as the hands of society, doing work that requires little to no mental energy but rather takes a lot of physical strength. The middle-class man represented the head or the brain and did the brain work. The middle class woman was the heart of society and represented the emotions, the kindness and the seat of morality.⁴⁰ This body metaphor as described in Leonore Davidoff's article about class and gender in the Victorian age shows that class becomes just as important in regards to social status as gender; a middle class woman was regarded higher than a working class man. However, it is important to note that femaleness was still associated with the body, whereas maleness was associated with spirit, and women thus were still expected to subject to men the way the body is supposedly subjected to the brain.⁴¹

Class was important in England during the Victorian age, but to this day Britain remains one of the most unequal countries in the Western world, with only Portugal and the United States heading them.⁴² Income inequality severely widened in the 1980s, because of changes in taxes and welfare regimes.⁴³ An important reason for this is that Britain's economy is capitalist, and capitalism is known to cause much wider financial inequalities than other

³⁸ Davidoff. 93.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 89.

⁴¹ Ibid., 91.

⁴² K. Roberts, *Class in Contemporary Britain* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 1.

⁴³ Ibid.

types of modern economy.⁴⁴ In 1994, 95 percent of the population not only agreed that the society they were a part of consisted of classes, but on top of that were able to locate themselves within one of those classes.⁴⁵ At the time *Matilda* was published, the late 1980s, 73 percent of British citizens were of the opinion that class was a crucial and inevitable part of society. They considered it a large part of their identity and voiced the fact that they used class to make sense of themselves and their position in society.⁴⁶ It is a complicated system to someone living outside of it, but the characteristics of these groups are reinforced in many ways, such as through newspapers, television shows, advertisement campaigns and political campaigns.⁴⁷

The concept of a social class is difficult to define. There are a lot of indicators like wealth, income, occupation, lifestyle, education and political views, but there is no definite way of categorizing class. According to Clementine Beauvais' article on class in *Matilda*, in the late 1980s Britons were divided into the following five occupational categories during an official census: professional occupations (such as doctors, lawyers, or university teachers); intermediate and lower professional occupations (schoolteachers, nurses, or police officers); non-manual and then manual skilled occupations (secretaries, electricians); semi-skilled occupations (postal workers); and unskilled occupations (garbage collectors).⁴⁸ The more professional your occupation was, the higher it was held in regard.

Another social class that Beauvais mentions in her article is the petty bourgeoisie. In economic power this social group is equal or superior to the middle class but they are dissimilar in lifestyle and values since they are a lot more conservative than the middle class.⁴⁹ Together with the upper class, they are the most conservative of the British class system. They are also more individualistic and prouder of themselves and their own achievements. They value the traditional family, consider making capital to be extremely important and often maintain a very practical approach to training and education. The petty

⁴⁴ Ibid., 2.

⁴⁵ Beauvais, 279.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

bourgeoisie consists mostly of small-business owners and self-employed workers. They fall almost out of the British class system because they combine manual work, which is associated with lower classes, with ownership, which is often considered to be part of the higher classes. The petty bourgeoisie is important to mention when discussing class in *Matilda* because this class had been in decline in the 1970s, but the 1980s witnessed its sharp revival, which is the decade *Matilda* was written.⁵⁰ The petty bourgeoisie will be used to analyse the Wormwood family and their ideas and values. Mr Wormwood belongs to the petty bourgeoisie. He is a used-car dealer, so he is self-employed and makes enough money to own a comfortable home and make it possible for his wife to be a housewife who spends most afternoons going to a bingo club.

When discussing the late 1980s, it is important to mention the changes that were going on in gender emancipation. Second wave feminism was just past its height. This wave focussed on the social rights of women, such as equal pay, the access to safe abortions, and the breaking with traditional stereotypes and gender roles⁵¹, but certain strands of feminism and racial liberation movements had the individuality of women's experiences as a key point.⁵² Implicit in their activism was the point that "the social power in delineating difference need not be the power of domination; it can instead be the source of social empowerment and reconstruction."⁵³ Kimberlé Crenshaw introduced the term intersectionality to talk about discrimination. This term explains the way different parts of one's identity come together to create an individual experience with discrimination and social exclusion. It is used to explain how "many of our social justice problems like racism and sexism are often overlapping, creating multiple levels of social injustice"⁵⁴. Many feminists consider intersectionality to be the most important and meaningful theoretical and methodological contribution to gender studies since the beginning of the discipline.⁵⁵ Intersectionality indicates a manner of thinking

⁵⁰ Ibid., 280.

⁵¹ Thompson, 338.

⁵² Crenshaw 1991, 1242.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ K. Crenshaw, "The Urgency of Intersectionality." *TED* (YouTube. Dec. 6, 2016), 4:55.

⁵⁵ G. Wekker, "The Arena of Borders: Gloria Anzaldúa, Intersectionality, and Interdisciplinarity." In *Doing Gender in Media, Art and Culture*, edited by Buikema, Plate, and Thiele (New York: Routledge, 2018), 73.

within gender studies that was predominantly developed by North-African feminists of colour. Within the intersectional approach, gender is always investigated in conjunction with aspects such as age, race and class.⁵⁶ This approach is an important one for this thesis, since it aims to investigate the conjunction of gender and class in *Matilda* and *Jane Eyre*. In this thesis, the concept of intersectionality will be used to discuss how certain characters' views regarding gender actually stem from their class position and its influence on the relationship between Jane and Mr Rochester will be mentioned.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

Chapter 2 – Class in *Jane Eyre* and *Matilda*

“If only they would read a little Dickens or Kipling they would soon discover there was more to life than cheating people and watching television.”⁵⁷

When you read this statement and you do not know where it is from, one would not immediately guess it is a quote from a children’s novel and that this statement was made by a five-year-old. This chapter will explain that this quote is an example of classist ideas in *Matilda* and go into other ideas and values about class as represented in *Matilda* and *Jane Eyre*. It will show that *Matilda* and *Jane Eyre* portray societies with both social mobility and classist ideas, as the novels show characters moving up and down the social ladder and gaining or losing respect from the people around them as they do so, but also contain characters that are prejudiced and biased towards the lower classes and characters being limited in their agency due to their financial or social status. This chapter will talk about how both Jane and Matilda need to fight against restrictions in their life due to their class, because they both grow up in an environment that criticises them for their love of reading. It will also discuss the characters in the two novels that have class prejudice, such as Mr Brocklehurst, who believes that middle-class girls do not deserve femininity or luxury of any kind, Mrs Reed, who does not treat Jane equally to her own children based on the fact that she comes from a different class, and Jane and Matilda themselves who look down on the lower classes. Ultimately, the chapter will argue that *Matilda* is fundamentally a classist novel because the novel is told from Matilda’s subjective point of view and that *Jane Eyre* is ambiguous in its portrayal of class because Jane fights against societal expectations but in the end does not wish to truly overturn the societal order.

Even though there are a lot of differences between class discourse in the nineteenth century and the late 1980s, what they have in common is that class was inescapable. The class that you belonged to determined for a large part what opportunities were open to you in society and in life. Both *Jane Eyre* and *Matilda* show their protagonists fighting against the limitations imposed on them by their class. Jane was raised by her aunt, who belongs to the middle class, but Jane herself comes from a working-class family. The first time Jane is told that she is inferior to others because of her social status, especially her economic position, is when her cousin John tells her she “ought to beg, and not live here with gentlemen’s children

⁵⁷ Dahl, 22.

like us, and eat the same meals we do, and wear clothes at our mamma's expense."⁵⁸ The fact that Jane faces discrimination for her class position already becomes clear on page five of the novel, meaning that the reader is informed from the start of Jane's social situation. Jane's character becomes immediately obvious as well; after this remark from her cousin she hits him. It is immediately shown that Jane will not stand by passively and let herself be treated unjustly.

Matilda Wormwood does not belong to a different class than her parents do, but, as Clementine Beauvais claims in her article on class in *Matilda*, "Matilda was born into the wrong family."⁵⁹ She has the opposite problem to the one that Jane faces; the activities that she enjoys are characteristic of a higher class than the one she was born into. There are parallels between Jane and Matilda's situation, however. Both main characters face judgement for reading that comes from ideas and values surrounding class. Matilda's father ruins her library books and thinks she is spoiled for wanting to read when the television, which he considers to be a better and more expensive form of entertainment, is available to her. When Matilda asks him for a book to read he responds by saying: "What d'you want a flaming book for? ... What's wrong with the telly for heaven's sake? We've got a lovely telly with a twelve-inch screen and now you come asking for a book! You're getting spoiled, my girl!"⁶⁰ In the case of Jane, her family, especially her cousin John, deem books inappropriate for her since they are expensive symbols of a class that she does not belong to.⁶¹ Both situations occur early on in the story and both John Reed and Mr Wormwood are immediately shown to be antagonistic and unsympathetic characters, which they continue to be throughout the novels.

Even though it is not possible to ignore the implications of class in either the nineteenth century or the late 1980s, social mobility is an important theme in both *Jane Eyre* and *Matilda*. The stories contain characters becoming part of higher classes than they start in, but also characters moving down the social ladder. Chris Vanden Bossche describes in his

⁵⁸ Brontë, 5.

⁵⁹ Beauvais, 277.

⁶⁰ Dahl, 6.

⁶¹ L.A. Maynard, 42.

article how *Jane Eyre* shifts positions within class discourse multiple times over the course of the novel.⁶² The first time Jane moves on the social ladder is when she leaves the middle-class Reed family to go to boarding school. At Lowood we see the working-class shedding of traditional gender traits. The girls of the school have to have their hair cut short and are not allowed to wear fancy clothes or jewellery. Jane no longer dresses in the feminine and luxurious manner that she did at her aunt's home. When she is with the Reed family at Gateshead she wears frocks with elaborate "knots and strings"⁶³ but when she is at Lowood she observes that all students are "uniformly dressed in brown stuff frocks of quaint fashion, and long holland pinafores"⁶⁴. Jane moves back to the middle class, however, when she leaves for Thornfield to be a governess. Jane herself realises that this is a big step and that making that transition would improve her social status considerably.⁶⁵ Esther Godfrey writes in her article "*Jane Eyre: Governess to Girl Bride*" that "as governess, Jane bridges the gap between the dangerous androgyny of working-class homogeneity and the fragile stability of middle-class separate spheres"⁶⁶. A governess is a working woman, but she lives with a middle-class family, meaning that there are certain rules she is expected to adhere to other working-class workers do not, yet she is not middle class. Godfrey explains it by saying that governesses are a "hole in the invisible wall between working-class and middle-class gender identities."⁶⁷ That was a balance governesses needed to find, and thus Jane as well. However, this is not without obstacles. When she enters the middle class, Jane has trouble fitting in and her working-class background clashes at times with middle class expectations. The power dynamics between Mr Rochester and Jane are influenced just as much, if not more, by their age difference and their class than by their genders. When Jane is invited to meet Mr Rochester, he does not respond to her the way a middle-class man would be expected to respond to a middle-class woman, namely with the masculine gaze on a feminized object.⁶⁸ He does not pay her much attention.

⁶² Vanden Bossche, 47.

⁶³ Brontë, 27.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 46.

⁶⁵ E. Godfrey, "'Jane Eyre', from *Governess to Girl Bride*", *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 45, no. 4 (Autumn, 2005): 858.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 857.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

Jane is happy about this, for, she expresses, she would not have known how to appropriately respond if he had shown the expected kindness: “A reception of finished politeness would probably have confused me: I could not have returned or repaid it by answering elegance and praise on my part.”⁶⁹ The social mobility that is portrayed through the character of Jane is also part of what makes the novel ambiguous in its depiction of class. Jane fights for her freedom, for example when she leaves Lowood to become a governess, or when she runs away from Thornfield after finding out that Mr Rochester is already married and keeps his wife in the attic, but she comes back to Mr Rochester in the end and still ends up in a position that is deemed acceptable by society.

In the novel *Matilda* one of the characters that portrays social mobility is Miss Honey. She is the niece of Miss Trunchbull, who lives in a mansion, but Miss Honey herself lives in what she describes as a “farm-labourers cottage”⁷⁰. Upon seeing the cottage, Matilda thinks to herself that it looks more like “a doll’s house than a human dwelling”⁷¹. Miss Honey lost the mansion that she grew up in to her aunt, which left her poor and caused her to live in the conditions that she does. Poverty is sentimentalized; Matilda is completely undignified that her beloved teacher has to live like that and Miss Honey says that she has never talked to anybody about her financial situation because she is ashamed. Matilda actually helps her get back to her former social class using her powers. Miss Honey and Miss Trunchbull are part of the upper class, but both portray very different personality traits. Miss Trunchbull, as Clementine Beauvais mentions in her article, does show some caricatured traits of the upper class.⁷² She is portrayed as a large, masculine and temperamental figure who lives in a mansion and is very protective of her wealth and her possessions. The contrast between Miss Trunchbull and the fragile, kind and caring Miss Honey is one that shows nuance within class categories, where most other depictions of class in the novel are rather black and white. The relationship between Miss Honey and her aunt also mirrors the relationship between Jane and her aunt. Both Jane and Miss Honey do not have any money and had to make a descend down the social ladder when they become orphans. Both of their fathers made their aunts promise to

⁶⁹ Brontë, 142.

⁷⁰ Dahl, 177.

⁷¹ Ibid., 178.

⁷² Beauvais, 279.

take care of their daughter when they died, and both of the aunts then proceeded to treat them with inferiority and cruelty.

Miss Trunchbull and Aunt Reed are not the only characters that look down upon poverty and the lower classes. In both *Jane Eyre* and *Matilda*, the way characters look at class varies. Some characters really value the hierarchal order that is often associated with class, while others are able to look past the social and financial situation of others. One character of the former category is Mr Brocklehurst of Lowood. He very strongly believes in the hierarchal power of class. Godfrey describes in her article that he sees “femininity as a construct afforded by middle-class luxury”⁷³. The girls at the school have to accept their fate as being working class. The androgyny that comes with it, is, according to Mr Brocklehurst, a necessary part of the social hierarchy. He believes that by creating a very clear distinction between the androgynous working class and the middle class, androgyny can be “isolated, exploited, and controlled for middle-class advantages.”⁷⁴ By forcing androgyny on the working class, the middle class is able to enjoy luxury and a very clear distinction between feminine and masculine roles within society. One of the characters that shows mixed signals when it comes to class is Mr Rochester. When Jane first enters his household, he does not treat her with the kindness that he would an equal, but once he gets to know her a little bit and they become more comfortable with each other he has a conversation with Jane about how they should treat each other and what kind of relationship they have. He feels he is entitled to a bit of superiority only “as must result from twenty years’ difference in age and a century’s advantage in experience.”⁷⁵ He does not mention the fact that he is male and she is female, and their class difference is not mentioned either; he even forgets that he is actually paying Jane and therefore does not need to ask if he can exercise power over her. Jane really likes that he thinks this way and says she will accept his superiority, exactly because he takes her feelings into consideration when he does not have to.

What makes discussing class in *Jane Eyre* and *Matilda* interesting as well is that both of the main characters show class prejudice themselves. Jane Eyre is the victim of bullying due to her class position from a very young age, but this does not stop her from forming her own prejudices and stereotypes towards the lower class. These prejudices can be argued to

⁷³ Godfrey, 857.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Brontë, 158.

have formed when she lived in an aristocratic household when her father was still alive. When talking about poverty, Jane directly relates it to rude manners and idleness and she looks down on poor people: “poverty for me was synonymous with degradation.”⁷⁶ Jane changes her opinion when she meets Helen Burns. Helen is just as poor as she is, but, according to Jane, she is a good Christian and has a good character. This makes her realise that judging people’s character based on their class or financial situation is wrong. Throughout the novel, Jane often thinks of Helen. She becomes the vision that Jane holds of Christianity and she uses Helen’s virtues to keep up her morale when going through obstacles in her life and facing discrimination.

Where Jane’s preconceived notions surrounding class are made very clear and are discussed in the novel, Matilda’s class prejudice is often overlooked. Clementine de Beauvais argues that this is partly due to the audience of the novel, who are most likely middle class children and their parents, teachers or caregivers.⁷⁷ Einat Palkovich expands on this in her article by saying that “one particularly fascinating aspect of Dahl’s moral spectrum is how closely it appears to mimic the moral values of his target audience.”⁷⁸ This leads to the fact that the entire novel can be seen as biased towards people of middle to upper class. That the novel is likely to present the same ideas and values its readers hold, can create the effect that the audience never realises that they are reading a story full of bias, making it a subjective reading experience. One example where the implied reader could lead to missing the prejudice on class present in the novel is when Matilda gets denied a book by her father because they own a perfectly fine TV.⁷⁹ The audience of the novel, who are reading a book themselves after all, will immediately side with Matilda here and be of the opinion that what Mr Wormwood is doing makes no sense. As Beauvais explains: “Mr Wormwood’s reaction is presented as unreasonable solely on the basis of the implicit assumption that books are indeed intrinsically better than television—a transparently middle-class value.”⁸⁰ This shows that Matilda is portrayed as having middle class values and characteristics. She looks down on her

⁷⁶ Ibid., 22.

⁷⁷ Beauvais, 278.

⁷⁸ E.N. Palkovich, “‘Put it Right’: Matilda as Author in *Matilda the Musical*”, *Children’s Literature in Education* 50 (2019): 214.

⁷⁹ Dahl, 6.

⁸⁰ Beauvais, 282.

parents for not having these values and not being able to enjoy books the way that she does. It again seems Matilda should belong to another family than the one she was born into. She also tells herself that her parent's anger towards her reading comes from jealousy – because they are simply not capable of doing what she does: “how dare she, he seemed to be saying with each rip of a page, how dare she enjoy reading books when he couldn't?”⁸¹ This can be linked to the quote that started the chapter; Matilda believes her parents are wrong and that they would understand that and that they would agree with her if they only read more novels and gave literature a chance. The implied reader here almost mocks Mr and Mrs Wormwood for not being as intelligent as their daughter and not being as imaginative.⁸² One of the reasons Matilda's class prejudice might not be resolved at the end of the novel could be that we follow Matilda for only a few months of her life when she is just a young girl, whereas we follow Jane from childhood to adulthood, giving her a lot more time to recognize her faults and flaws.

Another scene in *Matilda* that brings to light its underlying ideas on class is when Miss Honey visits Matilda's parents. In that scene, Mrs Wormwood is portrayed as a “plain plump person with [a] smug suet-pudding face”⁸³. Mrs Wormwood criticises Miss Honey for her lifestyle choices but really the scene is written in a way that makes Matilda's parents look inferior to Miss Honey and Matilda. Matilda's parents say that going to university is not necessary and that reading books has no use but Miss Honey tells them not to “despise clever people”⁸⁴ and she lists a lot of scenarios where the Wormwoods would need a university graduate to help them. It leads the reader to think of Matilda's family as naïve and ignorant. The scene does not talk about the times a university graduate might need someone like Mr Wormwood - a member of the petty bourgeoisie who takes a more practical approach to education - when earlier in the novel Miss Trunchbull, who is part of the upper class, needs a car from Matilda's father, what can be used as an example to illustrate that both the upper class and the petty bourgeoisie have equal value and need each other.

⁸¹ Dahl, 35.

⁸² Palkovich, 214.

⁸³ Dahl, 92.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 94

Taking everything into account, it becomes clear that both *Matilda* and *Jane Eyre* are ambiguous in their depiction of class. They show social mobility as characters can change position within society and enjoy the privileges of higher classes than the one they were born into. Yet at the same time, the novels portray classist traits with both protagonists and other characters in the stories showing biases towards lower classes and looking up to people higher on the social ladder. Especially *Matilda* is highly subjective in the way it portrays class. The story is about a young girl who loves to read and does not understand how other people prefer watching television or going to bingo. *Matilda* criticises her parents for their values and interests, and so do other characters in the novel such as Ms Honey. Furthermore, the Wormwoods are depicted in an almost stereotypical manner and the novel never goes into their side of the argument and does not show how they are valuable for society. *Jane Eyre*'s depiction of class is ambiguous because Jane continuously moves up and down the social ladder⁸⁵, works hard to find her voice and her agency when she runs away from Thornfield after finding out that Mr Rochester is already married to a woman in the attic, yet in the end does not seek to overthrow the expectations of society.⁸⁶ The next chapter of this thesis will look into gender in *Jane Eyre* and *Matilda* and discuss to what extent these societies can be considered sexist. That chapter will also link the arguments and ideas regarding class from this chapter to the gender discourse in both novels, since the two are often correlated and have an influence on each other.

⁸⁵ Vanden Bossche, 47.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

Chapter 3 – Gender in *Jane Eyre* and *Matilda*

One adjective that can be used to describe both *Jane Eyre* and *Matilda* is ‘rebellious’. Matilda Wormwood takes an active stand against injustice and rebels against the authority figures in her life. Jane Eyre does not listen to the standards and customs of the Victorian age as she tries to find independence and her voice. Matilda is a protagonist young girls can find inspiration in, but people have also criticized the story for putting the wrong ideas into children’s heads.⁸⁷ *Jane Eyre* also generated irritation and frustration by its contemporary audience due to what Gilbert and Gubar describe as its “rebellious feminism”.⁸⁸ This chapter will go into detail about how gender is depicted in both novels. It will talk about Miss Trunchbull’s gender identity and expression and explain how she almost seems to want to distance herself from her identity as female. The chapter will also discuss the contrast between her and Miss Honey and show that the stereotypes that they convey are nuanced by the character of *Matilda*. It will look into the way different characters in the novels look at gender and the sexist views of Mr Wormwood, Mr Brocklehurst and Miss Trunchbull, who each consider girls to be less smart and less valuable than boys. Those gender ideals will then be related back to those characters’ class position. The main claim this chapter will put forward is that *Jane Eyre* and *Matilda* share the message that women should be allowed to show emotion and that women are strong and capable of helping each other.

Both Matilda and Jane are young girls who are trapped in a patriarchal home setting. Jane has to fight against her male cousin John, who has power over both Jane and over his two sisters. When he provokes Jane and it leads to Jane hitting him, Jane’s aunt immediately listens to John and punishes Jane rather than listening to the full story. As soon as the fight between John and Jane really starts, John’s sisters Georgiana and Eliza find Mrs Reed and when she enters the room the first thing she says is: “Dear! Dear! What a fury to fly at Master John!”⁸⁹ after which she immediately sends Jane away to the red-room. Matilda has to fight against her father who believes her to be too stupid to do maths, which he bases largely on the fact that she is a girl; when he is asking Matilda’s brother to do a difficult maths equation and

⁸⁷ J. Pope and J. Round, “Children’s Responses to Heroism in Roald Dahl’s *Matilda*”, *Children’s Literature in Education* 46 (2015): 260.

⁸⁸ S. Gilbert and S. Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2000), 338.

⁸⁹ Brontë, 6.

Matilda is able to give the answer immediately, Matilda's father gets angry and shouts: "nobody could give the right answer just like that, especially a girl!"⁹⁰. Gilbert and Gubar describe Jane Eyre's story as one where she "struggles from the imprisonment of her childhood toward an almost unthinkable goal of mature freedom."⁹¹ They also argue that her problems are "symptomatic of difficulties every woman in a patriarchal society must meet and overcome."⁹² This is a statement that, even though we do not follow Matilda all the way to her adulthood the way we do Jane, can still be applied to *Matilda* since its protagonist is very much fighting for freedom and understanding from the adults in her life.

What both protagonists share in common as well is a love for learning and a desire to leave their family to receive an education.⁹³ Matilda goes to Crunchem Hall Elementary School, and Jane goes to Lowood. Both protagonists are excited to spend time with other children who want to learn, and hopefully find a refuge from their home situations. However, for neither of the girls does arriving at school mean that the discrimination and injustice stops. Both of them leave one patriarchal environment for another. The protagonists have to quickly adjust their expectations of what going to school will be like due to practices at their schools, and the attitudes of its supervisors.⁹⁴ Matilda's school is run by Miss Trunchbull, who treats her students very unkindly and especially dislikes girls. Jane's school Lowood is run by Mr Brocklehurst who is very strict and has very clear ideas on what is proper behaviour for his working-class pupils. Einat Palkovich explains in her article that the moral spectrum of *Matilda* is set up with the Wormwoods and Miss Trunchbull placed decisively at the negative end. These are the characters that portray a lot of characteristics that Dahl condemns during the story: ignorance, dishonesty, hypocrisy, and abuse of authority. Miss Trunchbull exposes children to punishments completely unjustified, just because she can: "when she doesn't know who the culprit is, she makes a guess at it."⁹⁵ Matilda's father tricks his clients by putting sawdust in the gear-boxes of the cars he sells. He is of the opinion that "customers are there to

⁹⁰ Dahl, 49.

⁹¹ Gilbert & Gubar, 339.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Maynard, 42.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Dahl, 102.

be diddled.”⁹⁶ Matilda sits at the other end of the spectrum and represents characteristics such as intelligence, open-mindedness, kindness, decency and selflessness.⁹⁷ Matilda is extremely precocious, as she can do complicated multiplications at the age of five, like “two times four hundred and eighty-seven”⁹⁸, but she is also humble and does not always seem to realise just how unique her intelligence actually is. When Miss Honey is trying to explain to Matilda that she is a precocious child and what that means, Matilda wonders if that term really applies to her and Miss Honey marvels at Matilda’s “lack of conceit and self-consciousness”⁹⁹. The characters on the negative end of the spectrum are also the characters that hold prejudice towards females. The same spectrum can be put in place for *Jane Eyre*, with Mr Brocklehurst and Aunt Reed standing on the negative end, and Jane herself on the positive end.

The character of Miss Trunchbull is one that has not received a lot of academic attention, but the way Dahl portrays her contains a lot of messages on gender, making her an important character to talk about when discussing gender in *Matilda*. The first thing to note is that she is the only female character of the story that holds any power¹⁰⁰, yet she is described as being very masculine. It almost seems like she wants to distance herself from her gender. The children of the school address her saying “well thrown, sir!”¹⁰¹ and when discussing the children of the school Miss Trunchbull says: “Nasty dirty things, little girls are. Glad I never was one.”¹⁰² An additional point in this discussion on Miss Trunchbull’s character is that in *Matilda: The Musical* she is actually played by a male actor. This actor is then dressed in what Judith Butler would call ‘drag’.¹⁰³ Whereas in the movie she was played by a masculine

⁹⁶ Ibid., 17.

⁹⁷ Palkovich, 214.

⁹⁸ Dahl, 66.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 174.

¹⁰⁰ E. Vidović and S. Vidović, “Gender Issues in Roald Dahl’s Novel *Matilda*” in *Engendering Difference: Sexism, Power and Politics*, edited by Michelle Gadpaille. (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2018), 223.

¹⁰¹ Dahl, 110.

¹⁰² Ibid., 80.

¹⁰³ J. Kim, ““A Fierce Tyrannical Monster” in Roald Dahl’s *Matilda*: A Reading of Miss Trunchbull”, *The 21st Century Association Of English Language And Literature* 28, no. 2 (June 2015): 385.

actress, the creators of the movie decided to actually create a distinction between the gender of the actor and the gender of the character. One of the motives for this choice is that it makes the audience aware of the imitative and performative nature of all genders and gender expressions.¹⁰⁴ Miss Trunchbull serves as a contrast to both Miss Honey and Matilda, which has been discussed by both Vidović & Vidović and Kim. Where Miss Trunchbull is ugly, mean, cruel and hypocritical, Miss Honey is beautiful, kind, good and gentle. Through these characterisations, Dahl makes the reader think about gender stereotypes. Vidović & Vidović explain that this shows young children that women can either choose to be powerful, but they would have to lose their femininity the way Miss Trunchbull did, or they need to accept their fate and be submissive like Miss Honey.¹⁰⁵ The theatrical version of Miss Trunchbull can be seen as a punishment of Miss Trunchbull's masculinity and a celebration of Miss Honey's femininity, almost leading to a conservative message that it is wrong to stray from traditional gender roles. However, even if Miss Trunchbull is a caricature made ridiculous by exaggeration, the portrayal of her gender ironically makes the reader question the very concept of gender identity.¹⁰⁶ Aside from that, the gloomy message is given nuance by the character of Matilda. Her character shows the opposite of that mindset and those ideas; Matilda takes on the classical role of Prince Charming and helps Miss Honey fight against the injustice of her situation. Even though the contrast between Miss Honey and Miss Trunchbull is very large and seems to be promoting patriarchal structures, through giving Matilda the power to rescue someone of her own sex and doing it without the help of either an adult or a man, Dahl goes against those stereotypes and inverts traditional gender roles. Through Matilda and her antagonists, the story offers more than just one version of gender roles and gender identity.¹⁰⁷

In *Jane Eyre* and *Matilda* alike, we see the same ability of women to help other women who need it, but in a psychological way. Jane is helped immensely by both Helen Burns and Ms Temple, and Matilda is aided by Miss Honey. They are not able to get the two

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Vidović & Vidović, 224.

¹⁰⁶ Kim, 386.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

protagonists out of the situations that they are in, but rather they guide them and support them. When Jane is at Lowood and has to deal with the cruel punishments of Mr Brocklehurst, Helen and Ms Temple balance his injustice with calm and kindness. Helen Burns is able to calm her when she is angry and sad after Mr Brocklehurst has punished her unjustly by saying that “if all the world hated you, and believed you wicked, while your own conscience approved of you, and absolved you from guilt, you would not be without friends.”¹⁰⁸ After talking to Helen, Jane thinks to herself: “Helen had calmed me.”¹⁰⁹ Ms Temple also calms her by inviting her up to her room during her first night to provide her with a little extra food and to give her the chance to explain herself after being punished by Mr Brocklehurst. When Jane is done, she feels respected and believed by Ms Temple: “I felt as I went on that Ms Temple fully believed me.”¹¹⁰ According to Gilbert and Gubar, Ms Temple is “a beautiful set of marble columns designed to balance that bad pillar Mr. Brocklehurst”¹¹¹. Miss Honey has the same effect on Matilda; Miss Honey understands Matilda’s love for literature (they even read the same Charles Dickens novels) and is able to provide a listening ear when nobody in her family is willing to hear her out. Matilda is constantly told by her parents that she is too young to understand certain issues and Mr Wormwood constantly tell her things like “you’re just an ignorant little squirt who hasn’t the foggiest idea what you’re talking about.”¹¹² When Matilda first discovers her supernatural abilities and wants to tell somebody about them, she really quickly decides that her parents “wouldn’t be of any use at all” and that “the one person she would like to confide in [is] Miss Honey.”¹¹³ Her teacher does end up listening to her entire story and taking it seriously. She is also determined to help Matilda, even if she does not know how: “I don’t know what it will be, but I shall find a way to help her in the end.”¹¹⁴ In

¹⁰⁸ Brontë, 78

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 79.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 81.

¹¹¹ Gilbert & Gubar, 345.

¹¹² Dahl, 19.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 164.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 83.

the case of *Matilda*, Miss Trunchbull is the bad pillar, and Miss Honey the marble columns that provide the balance for Matilda.

One reason why *Jane Eyre* and *Matilda* have often been criticised, both as novels and as protagonists, is because they are girls who do not just listen to what the authority figures around them tell them, but they fight for their own agency and voice their anger and discomfort at certain expectations. According to contemporary views, women in the 1980's were expected to be timid and quiet and they were not supposed to attract too much attention.¹¹⁵ Mr and Mrs Wormwood tell Matilda that “small girls should be seen and not heard”¹¹⁶. During the Victoria era, women were not supposed to show emotions or disagree with the authority figures in their life, they were supposed to be passive.¹¹⁷ Jane does something scandalous when she not only recognises this but actually judges it and speaks up about it. She asks Mr Rochester “do you think I am an automaton? – a machine without feelings?”¹¹⁸. Both *Matilda* and *Jane Eyre* have a spirit of rebelliousness flowing through them, which stand out because of the gender of the main characters, and also add a layer to the stories which make them more prone to criticism.

When discussing characters' views on gender in both *Jane Eyre* and *Matilda*, it is important to consider that often, those views might originate from the class they are a part of. The sexist views of Matilda's parents have to do with their class background. They belong to the petty bourgeoisie, which is the most conservative class aside from the upper class.¹¹⁹ They have very distinct values. They prefer traditional nuclear families and believe in the conservative gender roles and divisions. The Wormwoods are a nuclear family as well, consisting of a father, mother, son and daughter. Mr Wormwood acts on traditional gender roles when he only teaches his son the tips and tricks of running his business. He values his son more than his daughter.¹²⁰ He praises his son even though he does not show any

¹¹⁵ Vidović & Vidović, 229

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 5.

¹¹⁷ Poovey, Preface, x.

¹¹⁸ Brontë, 303.

¹¹⁹ Beauvais, 279.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 280.

remarkable talent or intelligence, and is completely oblivious to his daughter's precociousness. Matilda's mother Mrs Wormwood goes along with her husband's ideas regarding gender roles; she is a house wife who does not work but spends her days going to a bingo club. When Matilda's teacher visits the Wormwoods, she even judges Miss Honey for her life choices when she tells her: "You chose books and I chose looks. ... And who's finished up the better off? Me of course."¹²¹ Mr Brocklehurst also derives his ideas on gender from nineteenth century class discourse. At Lowood, he treats the working-class pupils according to the idea that they should not be allowed any luxuries or extravagancies. Those were to be kept for the middle class only. He believed that working-class androgyny was a necessary part of the social hierarchy and did not believe the working-class girls worthy of femininity. When he hears that pupils are given more than one of a piece of clothing he becomes irritated and says: "She is not, on any account, to give out more than one at a time to each pupil – if they have more, they are apt to be careless and lose them."¹²² Mr Rochester also has ideas of femininity and womanhood that come from him being middle class. When Jane and Mr Rochester get engaged, he wants to spoil Jane with jewels and beautiful and intricate clothes. He believes in the middle-class values of femininity being important and something beautiful. Jane's response shows her working-class background; she refuses all luxuries to the astonishment of her fiancée. She does not believe herself worthy of them: "Never mind jewels! I don't like to hear them spoken of. Jewels for Jane Eyre sounds unnatural and strange: I would rather not have them."¹²³ All of the characters discussed in this section show what Kimberlé Crenshaw means by intersectionality; class always carries gender significance.¹²⁴

All in all, this chapter has shown that gender discourse is at the heart of both novels. Jane and Matilda are both part of a patriarchal society and that brings them disadvantages in life. Jane is confronted in just the second chapter of the novel that she is not on equal footing to her male cousin and Matilda is considered to be of less value than her other brother from the day she was born. Both girls go to a school where the supervisor is negatively biased towards girls; and both the opinions of those two headmasters as well as a few other

¹²¹ Dahl, 92

¹²² Brontë, 69.

¹²³ Ibid., 310.

¹²⁴ Wekker, 73.

characters originate in their class position and class values. Jane and Matilda both have a rebellious spirit and fight against the notion that girls cannot feel emotions and should always be calm and collected. They also show that girls are strong and capable of getting each other through difficult times and discriminatory situations.

Conclusion

This thesis has demonstrated that *Jane Eyre* and *Matilda* lend themselves well to a discussion on intersectionality. In both novels, gender and class intersect and influence each other. The novels were published in very different time periods, but they nonetheless make for an interesting comparison. Because the implications of class on *Matilda* have not received a lot of academic attention yet and scholars have argued this to be a blind spot in the corpus of secondary literature on the novel¹²⁵, it was relevant to research how class was represented in the novel and how it influences the messages on gender it contains. Because *Jane Eyre* has been thoroughly researched and dissected by academics, but not a lot of attention has been brought to the intersection of class and gender in the novel, the intersectional approach of this thesis fills that gap. This thesis has demonstrated that *Jane Eyre* and *Matilda* show classist and sexist societies and that both novels have a similar theme of feminist rebellion. Both heroines are dealing with gender-based discrimination and have women around them that help them through that. Where Ms Temple helps Jane Eyre through hard times, Miss Honey provides that same comfort for Matilda. *Jane Eyre* and *Matilda* are full of social commentary on gender and class and are similar in the way they showcase the workings and implications of intersectionality. The novels have a lot of ideas and themes in common, even if they were written more than a century apart from each other.

The first chapter of this thesis showed that both *Jane Eyre* and *Matilda* are ambiguous in the messages they send on class. The novels portray societies in which it is possible to move both up and down the social ladder, meaning there is social mobility, but at the same time there are characters that are biased towards people of lower classes than their own, showing that the societies can be considered classist. In the case of *Matilda*, the entire book has a classist undertone because it is written from the point of view of a little girl with class prejudice who, most likely due to her age, does not change her views over the course of the story the way Jane Eyre does. *Jane Eyre* is ambiguous when it comes to class because Jane fights for her own freedom and wants her own voice, yet she also shows prejudice towards the lower classes and ultimately ends up in a position that conforms to societal norms.

The discussion on gender in this thesis demonstrated that both of the protagonists share a similar rebellious spirit when it comes to breaking down gender stereotypes and

¹²⁵ Beauvais, 278.

gender roles. This rebellious spirit is what has led both heroines to be judged for being too angry and temperamental. The chapter also showed that both *Jane Eyre* and *Matilda* show girls standing up for each other and helping each other through discriminatory behaviour and injustices. In *Matilda*, the character of Miss Trunchbull is used to provide a lot of commentary on gender roles and gender expectations. Miss Trunchbull stands in contrast with both Miss Honey and Matilda. This contrast is used to go against gender stereotypes and provide multiple views on gender identity and gender expression. This same contrast is found in *Jane Eyre* with the characters Mr Brocklehurst and Ms Temple. For most of the characters that show sexist behaviour in both novels it is possible to trace their ideas back to class position.

Taking both of these chapters together, it can be concluded that class and gender cannot be completely separated in either novel. The intersection of class and gender is crucial in placing Matilda and Jane within the societies they grow up in. In both novels the protagonists' relationships with the men in their lives would not be the way they are if you take away class implications because a lot of gender ideas originate from class values. Jane Eyre might not have received the bad treatment she did at Lowood if Mr Brocklehurst did not believe so strongly in the contemporary class hierarchy and its ideas surrounding femininity for the middle class, and Matilda might not have been neglected by her parents in the same way she has if their class position as part of the petty bourgeoisie had not influenced their gender values. In the Victorian age, class started to become important and your class position started to have an impact on gender expectations and gender roles.¹²⁶ In the late 1980s, this phenomenon had been given a name; intersectionality.

The intersectional discussion on *Jane Eyre* and *Matilda* provided by this thesis shows that intersectionality was as relevant in the Victorian Age as it was in the late 1980s after the term had been coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw. This thesis has argued that Esther Godfrey was right in saying that class and gender cannot be separated in *Jane Eyre*.¹²⁷ It has also expanded on the claims put forward by Clémentine Beauvais about class in *Matilda* by arguing that *Matilda* has an implied reader that creates a subjective reading experience. The novel only shows Matilda's side; her parents are portrayed as naïve and as always being in the wrong. Because the target audience of the novel consists of people who are in the same societal position as Matilda herself, it becomes easy to go along with the classist ideas of the story

¹²⁶ Davidoff, 88.

¹²⁷ Godfrey, 853.

instead of challenging them. The comparison between *Jane Eyre* and *Matilda* shows that intersectionality operated in similar ways in the Victorian age and the 1980s, but further research might compare more novels from those periods to see if the same will be found. Further research might also look into Mr Rochester and Jane Eyre's relationship more, since there are a lot of factors at play in their relationship but there was no room within the scope of this thesis to discuss it further.

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