**UNIVERSIDAD COMPLUTENSE DE MADRID**
FACULTAD DE FILOLOGÍA




# TESIS DOCTORAL

# Representaciones de la Infancia y la Juventud en la Obra de Roald Dahl y J.D. Salinger: un Análisis Comparativo

# Representations of Childhood and Youth in the Works of Roald Dahl and J.D. Salinger: A Comparative Analysis

MEMORIA PARA OPTAR AL GRADO DE DOCTOR

PRESENTADA POR

**María Augusta Albuja Aguilar**

Directora

**María Porras Sánchez**

Madrid

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**PROGRAMA DE DOCTORADO EN ESTUDIOS LITERARIOS**





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**Acknowledgements**

I have always believed that books come to me whenever I need them the most. I am happy to have come across *The Catcher in the Rye* at the right moment. Holden Caulfield resonated with a twenty-something Ecuadorian girl who had recently graduated from university and was feeling somehow lost about what was about to come. Even though I did not take a linear path, from then on Salinger never left my side, and his novel became the starting point of my thesis. As for Dahl, his short stories and novels have appeared to me at different moments of my life, from childhood to adulthood, a crossover for this reader who was always in awe of his versatility and the amazing possibilities that his universe offers; I have not grown tired of constantly discovering something new. Suffice it to say that my favorite character is the amazing Matilda, the smart bookish girl who fights injustice. These personal interests have opened my eyes to the amazing, powerful, and magical world of what is considered Children's Literature and YA. I am glad to contribute to a field that deserves more recognition in academia.

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This is dedicated to PhD students from the Global South who have migrated for their education. I know it can be challenging. Do not give up! The world needs our underrepresented voices, and our perspectives matter to foster more diverse and inclusive research.

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**Abstract**

The British writer Roald Dahl (1916-1990) and the North American author J.D. Salinger (1919-2010) lived, wrote, and published during World War II, the postwar and the Cold War, a period that witnessed youth revolt and social movements, as well as cultural changes that led to a generational gap. In this context, it is not surprising that their books are filled with children and young heroes and antiheroes and that they became rapidly associated with children's literature and Young Adult (YA) fiction, earning both a place in popular culture and readings lists, without ceasing to be targets of adult censorship. Considering that age is a factor of social difference, and drawing from the framework of Childism that encourages child-centered research and literary critical theories like aetonormativity, concerning adult normativity in children's literature and YA, this interdisciplinary study offers a comparative analysis of representations of childhood and youth in the works of Roald Dahl and J.D. Salinger.

For these purposes, this study delves into historical constructions of childhood and youth, with a particular focus on how these views and perceptions influence literature and culture, especially considering the socio-political and cultural context of the authors. Therefore, this work offers an exploration of Dahl and Salinger's connections to children's literature, YA, and intergenerational crossovers, focusing on the impact of these associations on the reception of their oeuvre. Considering this theoretic framework, the primary aim is to scrutinize the representation of young characters, life stages, coming-of-age, and intergenerational power dynamics within the selected corpus through two main themes, the journey and the return home. While the journey is often equated to the process of coming-of-age or rites of passage, it also signifies independence for young characters, while the return home or to the community could corroborate authority, but also offer the space for intergenerational solidarity. Therefore, this comparative analysis of Dahl and Salinger's portrayals of childhood and youth aims to discern whether age is depicted as a factor of social difference and whether their works subvert and challenge conventional adult norms.

The results point to how both authors are influenced by childhood notions from romanticism, however, they also tend to challenge age-related stereotypes in their characterizations, depicting young individuals with complexity, empowerment, and agency. In their novels and short stories, they consistently confront adultcentrism, exposing the power imbalance and oppression from grown characters to young ones. Dahl's works, in particular, subvert traditional power structures, empowering children to resist adultism and make

independent decisions, deviating from conventional moralizing motifs in children's literature. Similarly, Salinger scrutinizes established life stage boundaries, stressing the consequences for adults who deviate from age-related societal expectations. Both authors employ parody, humor, and critique to challenge unfair power structures, highlighting age as a factor of social difference, along with other identity marks of intersectionality. Despite depicting conflict through power dynamics, their works also reveal the potential for intergenerational solidarity and question arbitrary age-related norms, offering alternative bonds that transcend age barriers and resonate across generations.

Furthermore, this research establishes unprecedented connections between these two authors, emphasizing that the exploration of childhood and youth should expand beyond the field of children's literature, as other literary works can offer insightful depictions of age-related themes and life stages too. The study reveals ambivalence in categorizing works for age specific audiences, considering evolving social constructions that dictate moral and didactic expectations for these genres, as well as grounds for censorship, stressing the complexity surrounding children's literature and YA. Simultaneously, a child-centered analysis unveils literature's role in endorsing, examining, and challenging societal constructions and power structures related to age. In this regard, I aim to provide an interdisciplinary framework that establishes networks between age-related studies in different fields—for instance, Childhood and Youth Studies, reception studies and children's and YA literary criticism—which might bridge gaps, facilitating future research on similar themes.

**Resumen**

El escritor británico Roald Dahl (1916-1990) y el autor estadounidense J.D. Salinger (1919-2010) vivieron, escribieron y publicaron durante la Segunda Guerra Mundial, la posguerra y la Guerra Fría, un período que fue testigo de movimientos sociales y rebelión juvenil, así como cambios culturales que conducen a una brecha generacional. En este contexto, no sorprende que sus libros estén llenos de héroes y antihéroes infantiles y juveniles y que, por esta razón, sus obras hayan sido rápidamente catalogados como literatura infantil o juvenil, otorgándoles un lugar tanto en la cultura popular, como en el syllabus escolar, sin dejar de ser objetos de censura frecuente. Partiendo del marco del *Childism*, que promueve investigaciones menos adultocentristas, y más enfocadas en los niños y jóvenes, y considerando teorías desde la crítica

literaria infantil como la *aetonormativity* (similar a la normatividad adulta), este estudio interdisciplinar ofrece un análisis comparativo de la representación de la niñez y la juventud en la obra de Dahl y Salinger.

Es así que este estudio se enfoca en construcciones históricas sobre la infancia y la juventud y como estas ideas y percepciones influencian la literatura y la cultura, tomando en cuenta el contexto sociopolítico y cultural de los autores. En consecuencia, este trabajo ofrece una exploración de las conexiones de Dahl y Salinger con la literatura infantil, juvenil y para todas las edades, enfocándose en el impacto que han tenido estas asociaciones en la recepción de su obra. El objetivo principal es examinar la representación de personajes jóvenes, como se conciben las etapas de la vida, el proceso de *coming-of-age* y dinámicas de poder intergeneracional dentro del corpus seleccionado, en base a dos temas principales, el viaje y el regreso al hogar. Si bien el viaje a menudo se equipara con el paso a la adultez o se establece como un rito de paso, también ofrece una oportunidad de independencia para los personajes jóvenes, mientras que el regreso a casa o a la comunidad significa su retorno al control de la autoridad, pero también genera un espacio para la solidaridad intergeneracional. Por lo tanto, esta investigación pretende realizar un análisis comparativo de las representaciones de la infancia y la juventud en la obra de Roald Dahl y J.D. Salinger, con el objetivo de discernir si la edad se representa como un factor de diferenciación social y si sus obras tienen a ser subversivas y a desafiar la normatividad adulta.

Los resultados apuntan a cómo ambos autores se encuentran influenciados por nociones de la infancia heredados del romanticismo; sin embargo, también tienden a desafiar los estereotipos relacionados con la edad en su caracterización de personajes jóvenes, retratándolos con complejidad, empoderamiento y agencia. En sus novelas y cuentos se enfrentan constantemente al adultocentrismo, exponiendo el desequilibrio de poder y la opresión ejercida por los personajes adultos sobre los jóvenes. Las obras de Dahl, en particular, presentan una subversión de las estructuras de poder tradicionales, empoderando a los niños para resistir el adultismo y tomar decisiones de forma independiente, desviándose así de motivos moralizantes habituales en la literatura infantil. De manera similar, Salinger critica los límites establecidos entre etapas de la vida, enfatizando las consecuencias para los adultos que se desvían de las expectativas sociales relacionadas con la edad. Ambos autores emplean la parodia, el humor y la crítica para desafiar las estructuras de poder injustas, destacando la edad como un factor de diferencia social, junto con otras marcas de identidad e interseccionalidad. A pesar de

representar el conflicto a través de dinámicas de poder, sus obras también revelan el potencial para la solidaridad intergeneracional y cuestionan las normas arbitrarias relacionadas con la edad, ofreciendo vínculos alternativos que trascienden las barreras de la edad y resuenan entre distintas generaciones.

Esta investigación establece conexiones sin precedentes entre Roald Dahl y J.D. Salinger, enfatizando que los análisis dedicados a la infancia y la juventud debe expandirse más allá del campo de la literatura infantil, ya que otras obras literarias también pueden ofrecer representaciones relacionadas con la edad y etapas de la vida. El estudio revela la ambivalencia en la categorización de obras destinadas a audiencias específicas según la edad ya que dependen de construcciones sociales que establecen expectativas morales y didácticas en estos géneros, así como parámetros para su censura, lo que demuestra la complejidad alrededor de la literatura infantil y juvenil. Al mismo tiempo, un análisis centrado en la niñez revela el papel de la literatura a la hora de respaldar, examinar, o desafiar las construcciones sociales y las estructuras de poder relacionadas con la edad. En este sentido, se pretende proporcionar un marco teórico interdisciplinar entre estudios relacionados con la edad en diferentes campos (por ejemplo, estudios de infancia y juventud, estudios de recepción y crítica literaria infantil y juvenil), con el objetivo de reducir la brecha y facilitar futuras investigaciones sobre temas similares.

## Introduction

The British writer Roald Dahl (1916-1990) and the US author J.D. Salinger (1919-2010) lived, wrote, and published during World War II, the postwar, and the Cold War, a period marked by youth revolt and cultural shifts that led to a generational gap. Like many of their contemporaries, they found themselves amid a war in which young lives were sacrificed. This era also witnessed the emergence of student and youth movements, perceived as a threat to the system. These rebellious teenagers gave rise to a cultural gap with the previous generations, making a profound impact on the market that captured a new age-based audience. In this context, Salinger wrote *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951), with an adult audience in mind, but it became a foundational book of the emerging Young Adult (YA) Literature in the United States. The same country where Dahl's works were better received considering that in the UK, the gap between high and popular culture was still significant. Roald Dahl first authored short stories for adults, mostly in the horror genre, then addressed both adult and child audiences through different types of works and later switched completely to writing children's novels.

Dahl and Salinger swiftly became synonymous with children's literature and YA, and due to the didactic expectations in these genres, their books were integrated into reading lists in schools, while remaining subjects of adult censorship for encouraging disobedience in young people and employing disrespectful language; and, in short, for paradoxically being considered inappropriate for the intended audience. These associations with children's literature and YA also have implications on the status of the authors themselves and their readers, sometimes deemed immature for breaking age barriers. Moreover, they confronted ongoing debates surrounding their place in popular culture, leading to a complex relationship with the academic world. Despite this common ground, the similarities between both authors are often overlooked in studies dedicated to children's literature and YA, even if they include them or mention their works.

As both Dahl and Salinger navigated a world in flux, it is not surprising that their books are replete with child and young protagonists and that they challenge conventional norms associated with age. Age is not merely a biological factor; it is significantly influenced by social constructions. Concepts of childhood, adolescence, adulthood, and old age are not only stages of development we pass through as human beings, but also products of political, philosophical,

and educational ideologies that vary depending on the cultural context. These ideologies are reflected in cultural products, and reproduced in literature; thus, when talking about children, people often draw upon prevailing historical tropes and stereotypes. For instance, they are commonly characterized as embodying qualities of goodness, purity, and innocence, and standing for hope for the future. Conversely, children can also be portrayed as disobedient, uncivilized, and undisciplined. These perceptions extend into adolescence, which is viewed as a stage of rebellion that requires adult guidance for successful socialization. Furthermore, teenagers are often seen as emerging adults, gradually transitioning into adulthood until they align with the normative and mature ideal.

These perspectives come from adultcentrism, which establishes adulthood as a superior state, and adultism, which is any form of age discrimination from adults to children and teenagers (Pease 2021). Therefore, it is important to consider the field of Childhood Studies that has become not only interested in studying children and childhood, and including children in its research, but also in dismantling and examining age-related social constructs and power structures. This comparative study, innovatively rooted in Childism, which encourages child-centered research (J. Wall 2013, 2019), and critical theories like aetonormativity—adult normativity in children's literature and YA (Nikolajeva 2009, 2010)—explores representations of childhood, youth, coming-of-age, and intergenerational relationships in the works of Roald Dahl and J.D. Salinger.

I focus on how the different stages of life are represented, especially childhood and adolescence, compared to adulthood, and how young and grownup characters are portrayed in their works. Therefore, I study if young characters are empowered and exhibit agency in their narratives or if the authors replicate social constructions and age-related stereotypes. Moreover, the analysis delves into how growth, development and coming-of-age are depicted in their works. For instance, I examine if transitions are presented linear and if adulthood is established as an ideal or normative stage, or if in these narratives, this stage involves change and evolution as well. Considering that age is a factor of social difference and the existence of asymmetrical power relations between adults and young people, this analysis focuses on how power dynamics between young and grown characters are characterized and if there are instances of intergenerational solidarity in these relationships.

This work attempts to address research on historical constructions of childhood and youth, especially in the authors' socio-political and cultural context. As mentioned, labeling

works as children's literature and YA also responds to beliefs of what is considered most appropriate according to age-related constructions, constantly evolving throughout time. Hence, I intend to examine Dahl and Salinger's associations with children's literature, YA, and intergenerational crossovers, due to Dahl's cross-writing and Salinger's cross-reading audience, and how these influenced the historical reception of their works in the UK and the US, within a context in which the notion of youth was undergoing important changes. Considering these factors from a child-centered approach grounded on an interdisciplinary framework, I aim to carry out a comparative analysis of the representation of young characters, life stages, coming-of-age, and intergenerational power dynamics within the corpus to discern if age is consistently depicted as a social differentiator and if their works subversively challenge prevailing adult normativity, adultcentrism and adultism.

**State of the art: bridging the gap between age-related studies and literature**

Dahl and Salinger's context, historical reception and associations with literature for the young, as well as the characterization, motifs and themes found in their narratives are linked to the concept of age as a social differentiator, which is my intention to dissect over this work. Thus, the following paragraphs are dedicated to establishing connections between the existing literature from the fields of Childhood and Youth Studies, and literary theory since these interdisciplinary intersections have informed and set the ground for my research.

*Undoing Privilege* (2021) by Pease, a book dedicated to analyzing distinct categories of privilege and oppression, was updated to include a chapter dedicated to adultcentrism in its second edition. According to this analysis, age is a factor of social difference and there are asymmetrical power relations between adults and young people due to adultcentrism and adultism. In this regard, Alanen (2016) suggested the inclusion of generation and intergenerationality in studies about childhood and intersectionality. Likewise, in the field of children's literature, Wadsworth (2015) argued that literary studies should consider generation and life stages as categories of differentiation to engage with the objectives of Childism from Childhood Studies. In 1997, Flynn published an article titled "The Intersection of children's literature and Childhood Studies" in which he already referred to points of connection between both fields, for instance, the study of the representation of children and childhood in literature and culture (144). The same year, Hollindale proposed different questions related to the study

of age and life stages in literature in *Signs of Childness* (1997).

The objective of Childism, as proposed by John Wall (2013, 2019), is to deconstruct adultist structures in research and society at large and promote more age-inclusive and cooperative intergenerational relationships. Nikolajeva (2009, 2010) coined the term aetonormativity to address the fact that adult normativity is usually corroborated in children's literature and YA, but there can also be subversion of power structures. For these reasons, Joosen (2022) points out that childhood studies, age studies, and children's literature studies could benefit from one another as these are all concerned with how society constructs age. Alluding to the common space between approaches by John Wall and literary theories like Nikolajeva's, Joosen suggests that there should be more dialogue between fields to promote intergenerationality which is my intention through this work as well. In this sense, her studies (2015, 2018) are focused on how adulthood and old age, as well, as intergenerational solidarity and ageism are portrayed in children's literature, signaling that there are fewer studies dedicated to the representation of adulthood in these genres, which is another topic I intend to cover through this comparative analysis, especially in chapter five.

While I agree with the importance of the interdisciplinary approach proposed by Joosen, this work also includes Youth Studies which are concerned with life transitions, generations, and intergenerationality, as well as how young people influence culture. In this sense, there are interdisciplinary studies that combine essays on *Childhood and Youth Studies* like Zwozdiak-Myers' edited book (2007). Reynolds dedicates a chapter to refer to the nexus between youth culture and children's literature in *Radical children's literature: Future Visions and Aesthetic Transformations in Juvenile Fiction* (2007), mentioning that youth culture could also encompass tweens—usually employed to refer to the group aged between eight and twelve, and could even appeal to the generation of the mid-twenties to mid-thirties who are often associated with the terms 'kidults' and 'adultesence' (76-77). Some handbooks unify studies on children's literature and YA like the Routledge's *Handbook of Research on Children's and Young Adult Literature* edited by Wolf et al. (2011), and others like *Keywords for children's literature* (2011), edited by Nel and Paul, include sections dedicated to YA. Moreover, through *Elusive Childhood* (2004), Honeyman studies how childhood is depicted in adult and YA books. Consequently, it is clear that scholars from different fields have tried to create connections between Childhood, Youth and age studies, as well as literary studies, especially concerning Children's Literature and YA, due to their common ground and goals, stressing the

need of building a bridge between these theoretic intersections.

At the same time, literary Criticism on children's literature and YA has taken two main roads. Some studies focus on the adult vs child dichotomy, grounded in Rose's seminal work *The Case of Peter Pan, Or The Impossibility of Children's Fiction* (1984) and Lesnik-Oberstein's *Children's Literature: Criticism and the Fictional Child* (1994), both describing children and childhood mainly as a social construct in literature and literary criticism, respectively. Nikolajeva and Trites (2000, 2014) study power dynamics represented in children's literature and YA through discourse and institutions, while Beauvais (2015) perceives this otherness as existentialist differences, where the power of the child resides in the future, and the adult's authority is grounded in the past. However, theoretical approaches have also shifted to intergenerationality, for instance, stressing agency through Rudd's constructive child (2005) and Gubar's kinship model (2013, 2016), as well, as studies about intergenerational solidarity (Deszcz-Tryhubczak and Jaques 2021, Deszcz-Tryhubczak Kalla 2021, Deszcz-Tryhubczak and García-González 2022), and Joosen's works.

Throughout this work, I integrate both types of studies because I believe that examining power dynamics and intergenerational solidarity should not be mutually exclusive. In line with intergenerational studies, it is evident that understanding childhood, adolescence, and youth is inseparable from examining adulthood and old age. This integrated approach is crucial for comprehending how society is shaped by considering generations, as well as the dynamics of solidarity and conflict among them both at micro-level relationships, such as within families, and macro-level dynamics, as highlighted by scholars like Scabini and Marta (2006), Bengtson et al. (1971, 2010), and Leonard (2016).

Moreover, for Nodelman (2008), there is the inevitable presence of hidden adults as part of the process of children's literature as most authors, publishers, editors, teachers, and parents are grownups, and hence, this type of literature has an implicit or explicit double or dual audience. This phenomenon and how these associations affect how authors address readers, their status, and how this literature is perceived has been studied since the last decades of the twentieth century by scholars like Chambers (1978), Shavit (1986) and Barbara Wall (1991). Shavit, as well as Clark (2011) and Hunt (2011), discuss how children's literature has been classified due to its associations with education and popular culture, leading to an inferior status granted by the academia, except for some texts that have been considered classics, while Garcia (2013) explains similar aspects in YA literature. All these researchers point out how

interests and perceptions have just started to change and become more favorable during the twentieth century. According to Wadsworth, out of 549 journal articles indexed under the keywords 'children's literature' and published between 1974 and 1994, 80% were found in education, librarianship, or children's literature journals and only 20% were published in journals with a broader disciplinary focus (331).

In this regard, Viñas Valle alludes to the fact that even with Dahl's commercial success, there are only three full book-length studies on his works: Warren's *Roald Dahl: From the Gremlins to the Chocolate Factory* (1988), West's *Roald Dahl* (1992) and the collection of essays *Roald Dahl* (2012) edited by Butler and Alston (2). I would also add to this list another collection of essays: Held's *Roald Dahl and Philosophy*: *A Little Nonsense Now and Then* (2014), as well as Viñas Valle's *De-constructing Dahl* (2016). There have been more works dedicated entirely to Salinger, including Bloom's books and edited collections of essays (2005, 2007, 2009, 2011), as well as Graham (2007) and Benson's analysis (2018) both dedicated to *The Catcher in the Rye*. Locke dedicates a chapter to the study of this novel in his book *Critical Children: The Use of Childhood in Ten Great Novels* (2011), and Kidd titles a chapter of his *Freud in Oz* (2011), "'A Case History of Us All': The Adolescent Novel before and after Salinger." In this sense, *The Catcher* is frequently labeled as a foundational text in studies dedicated to YA literature (Reynolds 2007; Hilton and Nikolajeva 2016), and an important influence in the next generation of writers.

Even if some studies dedicated to children's literature, YA, and similar topics mention both Dahl and Salinger or their most celebrated works, the common ground between both authors is usually overlooked. For instance, they share a similar context and personal history since they were born and raised in immigrant middle-class families, attended boarding schools, and served in World War II. They both have a life-long controversial reputation and their works have been challenged and censored until the past decade, whilst remaining on reading lists at schools and public libraries. They both became popular figures which can be noticed through biographies and books compiling their interviews and letters. In this sense, according to Beckett, Dahl is considered one of the most successful children's writers of the twentieth century (*Crossover Fiction,* 12-13), and was voted the most popular children's author in British surveys during the nineties and the 2000s (Maynard and McKnight 153-154). Hunt (2012) even suggests that he changed the culture of the commodification of fantasy in a postmodern context, which can also be appreciated through the continuous adaptations of his works to film, theater,

and other media. Even with the author's reclusiveness and short published bibliography,[1] Salinger and *The Catcher* became part of popular culture too, as this novel is considered the forerunner that alerted publishers of the huge commercial success of YA (Ciocia 202). Moreover, their books feature several children and teenage characters, even if Salinger's books are more on the realist side and considered for an older audience, while Dahl wrote both adult and children's fiction and thus, both authors have appealed to intergenerational readers.

In this regard, Beckett (2009, 2011) studies crossovers, explaining that literature was not always divided into narrower categories regarding age and that there has always been age-inclusive literature. While children were the first to trespass age-related barriers, reading adult books, especially the classics, this scholar also alludes to more contemporary trends like adults reading YA literature, like what is argued in Falconer's *The Crossover Novel: Contemporary Children's Fiction and Its Adult Readership* (2009). Literary criticism has followed a similar path. Although they refer to children's literature mainly, scholars like Nikolajeva and Beauvais include books like *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884), the *Harry Potter* saga, and *The Little Prince* (1943), which could be considered for young adult audiences, in their analysis, whereas Trites referring to adolescent literature, incorporates Pixar films to her study that could be considered for children, implying that the cross-generational appeal is unavoidable. I consider these aspects and compare two authors that have been ambivalently categorized and have broken age-barriers, attempting to provide a similar argument.

In examining the interconnections among various disciplines, theories, genres, and these two authors, my argument revolves around the notion that, if age and life stages are social constructs, our understanding of childhood, adolescence, adulthood, and old age is likewise shaped by evolving concepts about benchmarks and transitions. The dynamic nature of these perspectives influences the criteria for categorizing literature according to age. Additionally, this comparative analysis serves the purpose of illustrating how genres, often overlooked or challenged due to age-related stereotypes and expectations, deserve a better research approach. I aim to address not only the dichotomy between child and adult perspectives, but also explore intergenerational dynamics in Dahl and Salinger's works. For these purposes, I provide interdisciplinary networks that could bridge existing gaps between fields, paving the way for further child-centered studies on similar themes.

[1] Matt Salinger, J.D. Salinger's son and the executor of his state, along with Salinger's widow, has shared with the press during the past years that he is preparing a publication of the remaining unpublished works by his father.

Studies on age become imperative in an era marked by a surge in studies focused on feminism, ecocriticism, and postcolonialism, and where generational unfairness is more apparent as benchmarks to adulthood are harder to reach for younger generations. Children and teenagers, despite being among the most vulnerable populations exposed to violence, wars, famine, climate change, and unjust immigration policies, also emerge as actively engaged, technologically creative, and capable of confronting the complexities of the contemporary world. My work addresses age as a factor of social difference and seeks to emphasize that its representation is not solely confined to children's literature; rather, age-related constructions are present in literature at large. The incorporation of contemporary theories on Childism, age discrimination, and intergenerational power dynamics allows this study to engage with ongoing debates surrounding childhood and youth. This relevance enhances the significance of the research and its potential contributions to both academic and societal discussions. My intention is to open doors to other similar child-centered and age-related readings, paving the way for even more intersectional and contemporary analyses in the future.

**Methods, resources and corpus**

I have employed an interdisciplinary framework that provides intersections between Childhood and Youth Studies with theories from Literary Criticism particularly dedicated to the study of children's literature and YA. The main theories that have informed my research are Childism as this approach from Childhood Studies aims to review and dismantle adultist and adultcentrist structures and promote cooperative intergenerational relationships through research. In literary studies, the concept of aetonormativity addresses the fact that adult normativity is usually corroborated in Children's Literature and YA due to asymmetrical power structures between the author, as an adult, and the young characters and readers. Connecting the two perspectives from Childhood Studies and literary theory, I argue that writers can always subvert power structures, examine and scrutinize age-related stereotypes and constructions, and even promote intergenerational solidarity as other aforementioned studies suggest.

The secondary sources or books, articles, essays and chapters employed for the interdisciplinary theoretical framework have been found in databases. For information regarding the authors and their context, I have researched history books, biographies, and interviews. Furthermore, for evidence about the historical reception of their works, and

associations with children's literature and YA, I have retrieved the volumes of the *Children's Literature Review*[2] that gather reviews, critical pieces, essays, chapters, articles, and mentions of both authors especially during the twentieth century, but also have been able to find more contemporary pieces through other materials online. These materials are used to contextualize the oeuvres and understand Dahl and Salinger's associations with age-related genres; however, I do not intend to study their reception through reader-response empirical analysis, as this goes beyond the scope of my research. I have also accessed different editions of Dahl and Salinger's books thanks to the International Youth Library (IYL) in Munich to examine and compare the peritexts throughout time. I have employed film adaptations, documentaries, and other media, like comic adaptations, as well as similar novels of the same period for establishing comparisons and providing context.

Since I am interested in studying Dahl since the moment when he became associated with Children's Literature and considering that his oeuvre is extensive, the chosen corpus is only centered on his children's books featuring young characters—leaving aside picturebooks, anthologized poetry, and horror short stories' compilations catalogued for an older audience. As for Salinger, I work with the four books published during his lifetime, including *Nine Stories* (1953)—which serves as a sample of the short stories he published in different magazines, especially at the beginning of his writing career. I am particularly interested in studying this author once he published *The Catcher in the Rye* which was labeled as YA fiction. In this regard and to contextualize the time were YA emerged as a genre and understand how concepts on childhood and youth have evolved, I option for a brief historic analysis that is later connected to my theoretical framework.

Therefore, I combine contextual information and reception history on these authors to frame them in their socio-political and historical context and to understand the influence of age-related social constructions in their works. Methodologically, an interdisciplinary approach allows for a nuanced examination of the representations of childhood and youth in literature, considering both the textual elements and the broader socio-cultural contexts in which they are situated. From this perspective, this study can uncover underlying power

[2] A multi-volume reference journal that compiles noteworthy excerpts from published critiques, reviews and essays of both contemporary and classic children's works. This extensive work covers a range of entries dedicated to individual titles and subjects within children's and young adult literature, encompassing picture books, folklore, and graphic novels. Released annually and cross-referenced with *Something About the Author*, it features articles on individual children's authors, works frequently studied in high schools, and general topics of relevance to teachers, librarians, and scholars in children's literature from English-language sources.

dynamics, age-related stereotypes, and cultural constructions of childhood and youth that may not be fully evident. Hence, by bridging theoretical insights from Childhood and Youth Studies and literary theory with historical analysis, this works contributes to a deeper understanding of how literature reflects and shapes societal perceptions of age, life stages and generations.

Considering this framework, for the practical analysis I examine and deconstruct age-related aspects through a close reading of the corpus of study. The authors introduce several young characters and intergenerational relationships and power dynamics between adults and children; thus, my main interest lies in reviewing these aspects through an analysis of motifs, characterization and themes in their novels and short stories. The comparative analysis of the corpus adheres to a recurring narrative pattern frequently observed in children's literature and YA due to the influence of the Bildungsroman in these genres—the theme of journeys and the subsequent return home (McCulloch 2018, Nodelman 2008). The first part of the analysis is dedicated to the journey, a motif prominently featured in the works of both authors. This theme is often associated with development, growth, and coming-of-age (Trites 2014), signifying not only physical displacement, but also independence in children's literature and YA (Nikolajeva 2009, 2010). Subsequently, following the pattern of the hero's return, the second part of the analysis focuses on power dynamics and intergenerational solidarity within the family, school, and society.

To build a representative sample, I have carefully selected works featuring young characters—children, teenagers, and young adults. Subsequently, I identified instances where these young characters embark on journeys, dividing this theme into local explorations and journeys overseas or to other worlds, and for the second part of the analysis, I categorized types of intergenerational relationships within their works. For both themes, I have sought parallels between both authors; hence, while some short stories and novels undergo detailed analysis, with in-depth exploration in both chapters, others are mentioned briefly to serve as illustrative examples. This approach ensures a balanced and representative corpus that effectively captures the essence of both authors' contributions.

In this regard, journeys are depicted in Dahl's *James and the Giant Peach* (1961), *Charlie and the Great Glass Elevator* (1972), *The BFG* (1982), *Billy and the Minpins* (1991), as well as in Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951), "Franny" (1955), "Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters" (1955), "The Laughing Man," "A Perfect Day for Bananafish" and "For Esmé—with Love and Squalor" anthologized in *Nine Stories*. Regarding intergenerational

relationships, most of Salinger's works are featured by the Caulfields and the Glass siblings (extended *in Franny and Zooey* and "Seymour, an Introduction"), and mothers and children in *Nine Stories'* "Uncle Wiggily in Connecticut" and "Down at the Dinghy." In Dahl's works, it is common to find relationships between grandparents and grandchildren as in the *Charlie* saga, *George's Marvellous Medicine* (1981), and *The Witches* (1983) as well as, adult-child duets as Wonka and Charlie and Miss Honey and Matilda in the eponymous novel (1988), which also depicts conflict with villainous adult characters like the Trunchbull. Novels like *The Catcher in the Rye* and *The Witches* are explored in both chapters, while some aspects of novels like *Danny, the Champion of the World* (1975) are discussed regarding different themes. The following part will address how this information has been organized.

**A brief synopsis**

Given that the time when Dahl and Salinger published was marked by the sacrifice of young lives in armed conflicts and the simultaneous influence of young people on significant socio-political movements and popular culture—as teenagers became a key market demographic, the initial chapter provides an introduction to the authors' brief biographies along with the socio-political and cultural backdrop. The second and third chapters set the theoretical bases for the dissertation, hence, chapter two introduces Childism, as an approach analogous to concepts like feminism and postcolonialism, which has emerged from the field of Childhood Studies. I also include Youth Studies and research on life transitions and theories on generations and intergenerationally. Therefore, this part addresses the main social constructions about childhood and youth that have influenced British and US literature and culture, especially Children's fiction and YA.

The third chapter addresses the relationship between the adult author and young reader in children's literature and YA, which either endorses aetonormativity or subverts power structures between adults and children. An important section is dedicated to the fluid definitions of children's literature and YA which have relied on the historical context and changing views about childhood and adolescence, as well as on educational policies, and market tendencies that so often depend on adults. This part is dedicated to analyzing perspectives on Crossover Literature, including cross-writing or authors that write for young and adult audiences and cross-reading or readers trespassing age barriers. In this section, I study

Roald Dahl and J.D. Salinger's reception by critics, reviewers and readers, employing biographies, academic papers, critical pieces, reviews, and reader-response studies, especially during the time they were first published. My goal is to understand how their associations with children's literature and YA have influenced their status as authors, and how their works have been received.

The fourth chapter is dedicated to studying a selection of works in which young characters undertake journeys as this motif is frequently associated with rites of passage, but also represents an opportunity for freedom, where at least for a while, young characters can act independently of adult supervision. Hence, the analysis is divided into different themes like journeys abroad and into other worlds, where young characters are usually empowered and have agency, and psychogeographical journeys, which are more local and involve mental displacement through memories and places. I seek to identify how growth, development, and the construction of identity, related to the process of coming-of-age, are symbolized in these works, and how change can happen at any stage of life, as transitions are not fixed and linear.

The last part of the analysis in chapter five is dedicated to examining the representation of power dynamics and intergenerational solidarity between young and adult characters at home and within the community. Here I analyze short stories and novels that depict intergenerational dynamics in family relationships, at school, and through adult-child friendships. This analysis highlights the existence of unfair power dynamics between adults and young people. However, it also explores instances of less hierarchical and more horizontal relationships, such as those between siblings of varying ages. Additionally, the analysis delves into the idea that children and adults can form bonds through shared vulnerability, particularly with female, elderly, and childlike adults who deviate from the idealized normative adult standards.

Therefore, the chapters offer a contextualization of the authors' works (chapter 1), a theoretical framework (chapter 2), a comparison of their historical reception (chapter 3), and the analysis of the corpus concerning the representation of childhood and youth through journeys (chapter 4) and intergenerational relationships at home (chapter 5). Finally, the conclusions aim to show the connection between the authors' context and associations with children's literature, YA, and intergenerational crossovers with the contents of their works featuring many young characters and a variety of intergenerational relations to see whether these narratives depict age as a factor of social difference, are subversive and examine

adultcentric views or if they reproduce age-related constructions and adult normativity.

In this regard, this work attempts to discern whether their books challenge or endorse adult normativity, and whether they are moralizing or if there is a subversion of power between adults and children. Therefore, we will see how while young characters may possess agency and empowerment, allowing them to challenge societal norms and age-related stereotypes, there may be instances where authors inadvertently reinforce such social constructions. On the other hand, the portrayal of growth and coming-of-age may not strictly follow a linear progression, and adulthood may be depicted as a stage involving transformation, potentially deviating from a strictly normative or idealized representation. Power dynamics between adults and young characters may fluctuate, featuring moments of both conflict and solidarity in intergenerational relationships, reflecting both authority and collaboration.

## Chapter I

## Salinger and Dahl: The authors and their times

*The Catcher in the Rye* is often credited as a foundational novel in the modern YA literary canon. This acknowledgment stems from its introduction of a crucial teenage voice that provided a fresh perspective. In a 1953 interview with J.D. Salinger conducted by Shirlie Blaney for her high school paper, it was revealed that approximately "75 percent of his stories are about people under 21, and 40 percent of those about youngsters under twelve" (11). This observation predates the publication of Salinger's final two books during his lifetime, which added significant young characters to his body of work. While many of Salinger's child and teen characters might be perceived as precocious or wise, aligning with a romanticized construction of childhood, those on the verge of adulthood, or already grownup, usually struggle with conforming to ideas of maturity and adult normativity. Consequently, Salinger offers a critique on age-related standards, ideals, and expectations; hence it is not surprising that reviewers and critics have described both the author and his works as immature and childish.

Likewise, Dahl, who started writing horror stories for adults, and shifted to children's literature, introduced several renowned child characters in the vast majority of his children's books and a few of his short stories for young adults. As mentioned, his works have been considered subversive for taking a child-centered perspective and depicting most adults as the villains, while positive adult figures throughout his works could be considered childlike, as the eccentric Willy Wonka. In an interview with Mark West in 1988, Dahl explains that children are different from adults and have a darker sense of humor, enjoying vulgarity and cruelty more (5). He also mentions that adults intend to discipline and civilize them, so it is normal that children perceive grownups as the enemy; hence, his intention is to take the young person's side because most adults forget what is to be a child (5). Therefore, Dahl bases his child characters in Rousseau's idea of the noble savage,[3] again following romantic constructions

[3] Term employed to refer to the innate goodness on an idealized uncivilized person, who once socialized, is corrupted by the process and forces of civilization.

about otherness and the process of civilization, while also taking a critical side about the adult world.

In this sense, Dahl challenges the moralizing notion of children's literature to teach young readers to obey adults depicted as morally superior figures, similarly to Salinger who represents a corrupted postwar society in his works for young adults and adult readers. Both authors portray intergenerational conflict and solidarity in a time where literature after a political tragedy of the magnitude of WWII could no longer reflect a secure world to the new generations that were leading social movements and creating their own culture while the West and the East were fighting for global hegemony. Roald Dahl and J.D. Salinger lived, wrote, and published during this unpredictably mutable period and it is in this context that popular culture and readers of all ages welcomed their works. They were born and raised in middle-class migrant families, attended boarding schools while growing up and came of age serving in the military during World War II. To fully grasp the perspectives and themes in the works of Dahl and Salinger, it is essential to revisit the postwar and Cold War period in the UK and the US, though first, I offer a short biographical introduction. This approach allows for a deep exploration of the socio-cultural contexts in which the authors wrote and how these contexts influenced their portrayals of young characters.

### 1.1 An introduction to Roald Dahl and J.D. Salinger's lives

Roald Dahl was the son of Norwegian immigrants and since his father died when he was a young child, Dahl and his siblings were raised by their mother in Cardiff, Wales. Although the family usually spent the summers in her country of origin, a setting which inspired the Nordic folklore imprint in Dahl's works for children. Following his late father's wish that his children had a British education, Dahl was sent to traditional boarding schools as a child and teenager. He recalls his experiences missing home, playing pranks, and suffering physical abuse in these institutions throughout his autobiographical fictionalized stories in *Boy*, *Tales of Childhood* (1984). According to Sturrock, in the nineteen-thirties, the cane or the strap was an assumed part of growing up as these "were part of a culture of toughening children up that would survive in England well into the 1950s and 1960s" (71), clearly an unfair situation that left an imprint on Dahl which is reprised in several of his stories depicting schools.

Unfortunately, his exposure to violence did not end there. Dahl had been working for the Oil Shell Company in London and then in Dar es Salaam[4] in East Africa when he received the news that World War II had started. Soon after, he joined the British Royal Air Force (RAF). He survived a terrible battle in Greece, but a past landing accident in the desert of Libya left him in a bad health condition and he was declared unfit to fly. Dahl was then relocated as an assistant air attaché at the British Embassy in Washington DC, where he mingled with the high society. He felt that one day he was on the front lines seeing young people get killed, and the next, he was attending cocktail parties where the war was a distant reality (Sturrock 167-173). At the same time, that opportunity gave him the chance to write, and his first stories are about his war experiences as a pilot.

He also experienced life in post-war New York, where he met his future wife, Hollywood actress Patricia Neal, with whom he had his five children, but eventually returned to the UK to live in the countryside in Buckinghamshire. The couple experienced many tragedies: their son Theo's accident and hydrocephaly,[5] the death of their daughter Olivia at seven from measles; besides, Neal's stroke and long recovery. Although Dahl dedicatedly took care of her, overseeing and directly helping with her physical therapy, while taking over the household on his own, he had an affair with Liccy (née Felicity Crosland), who eventually become his second wife and who shared with him his last years.

New York was also the city where Jerome David Salinger was born in the aftermath of the first World War and lived with his father, a second-generation Lithuanian-Jew, his mother and his older sister in the Upper West Side, a location that inspired his most important works and where he spent most of his childhood and adolescence. Salinger attended a military school and after obtaining his high school diploma, he enrolled in NYU, but dropped out, similarly to his celebrated antihero Holden Caulfield. Then he enrolled for a semester in Ursinus College and later took writing classes at Columbia University, where he started to work on his first short stories. During that time, he also mingled with socialites[6] and, between schools, he went

[4] Located in current Tanzania, at the time it was part of Tanganyika, a colonial territory of the former British Empire.
[5] For this reason, Dahl, along with a pediatrician and a metallurgist, invented a valve that helped other children suffering from similar illnesses too (Sturrock 375).
[6] For example, Salinger briefly dated Oona O'Neal, daughter of playwright Eugene O'Neal, before she married Charles Chaplin.

to Austria and Poland to work for his father's cheese and meat import business, but went back home when the Nazis started to occupy these territories.

He later returned to Europe and served in World War II, fighting in Normandy on D-Day, where according to Slawenski, "Salinger did not fight to liberate France or to preserve democracy. Like all soldiers of his regiment, he fought with the purest sense of devotion, not for the army, but for the boy next to him" (95-96). Salinger, as well as Dahl, was part of a generation that started to change their views about armed conflicts, as sacrifices rather than victories, which both express in their books. When the allied forces regained control of Nazi German territories, Salinger's division was assigned to liberate concentration camps and then, he stayed to work for the Counter Intelligence Corps at interrogation centers, questioning former war criminals and Gestapo members, as well as displaced persons, former war prisoners, and victims (Slawenski 143). All this must have impacted him, especially as a Jew, making him suffer from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)[7]. According to Benson, it is interesting that Salinger wrote a part of *The Catcher* before the war, and the other part after it because these experiences exposed him to his conditional and probatory whiteness as a Jew, making him disillusioned about his privileged environment and prone to identify with outsiders (1-6).

Therefore, the inhumanity of the war, as well as the discontent with the values of the postwar suburban middle-class society inspired most of Salinger's works. However, like many young people and fellow artists at the time, he was also influenced by eastern spiritual philosophies and not only in his writing, but also in his eventual secluded lifestyle in Cornish, New Hampshire. After a brief marriage with a German woman right after the war, Salinger remarried. This time, to Claire Douglas with whom he had two children, Matthew and Margaret, but eventually divorced too. This led to a series of relationships with much younger women including his last wife, Colleen O'Neill, forty years his junior, with whom he stayed until his death.

J.D. Salinger and Roald Dahl's immigrant backgrounds and traditional schooling have undoubtedly influenced their works; besides, their involvement in World War II has added layers to their perspectives and themes. These firsthand experiences intersect with the complex

[7] The experiences of soldiers in WWI and WWII, known as battle or combat fatigue and shell shock, established the first connections between traumatic events and its resulting behavior, but it was not until the seventies, with the Vietnam War, that the term PTSD entered the scope of mental health studies (Edsall et al. 275).

sociopolitical and cultural context in which Dahl and Salinger lived. For instance, both belonged to a similar social class and shared parallels in their biographies in two different contexts, that of the UK and the US, at a given moment in which there is a paradigm shift in the capitalist model and in the configuration of classes.

By considering the socio-political and cultural factors of the time alongside literary analysis, this work can offer insights into the complexities of age-related constructions and power dynamics. The upcoming sections will briefly explore the pivotal events that contributed to the emergence of a generational and cultural gap during the postwar and Cold War era in both countries. Despite the differences in both contexts, there are important historical parallelisms throughout the twentieth century. In this regard, this exploration aims to shed light on the literary context in which these authors wrote and published their works, providing a clearer understanding of their creative landscape, considering the shift from modernism to postmodernism that was occurring, and the influence of the new generations on popular culture. To grasp the essence of their writings and their representation of childhood and youth, it is fundamental to delve into their historical background, to see the role of young people in that context as they were leading sociopolitical movements, and how this influenced their themes and reception of their works, which is studied in further detail in chapter three.

### 1.2 A generational gap: Salinger and Dahl's sociopolitical and cultural context

The victory marked the beginning of the postwar period for the United States and the United Kingdom, yet the celebration sentiment did not last long as the population was in a despaired and anxious state due to the invention of the bomb and the possibility of a nuclear conflict. To some degree, World War II embraced patriotism, heroism, and bravery, but on the other hand, it exposed the cruelty and brutality of militarism, dehumanization, and political dogmatism to the world. Maybe for the first time in Anglo-American history, and especially through literature, traditional perspectives concerning armed conflicts changed as the lens of honor and bravery were removed to see the slaughter and carnage. The misery that surrounded postwar societies was significant and triggered questions and potential solutions amongst politicians and economists, but the possible way-outs were not always the more assertive and generated discontent among the electorate whose social demands were repressed in a Cold War authoritarian environment.

The United States entered World War II after struggling financially through the nineteen-thirties as the Great Depression not only led to nationwide poverty and unemployment but also to question the structure of the whole society (Bondi 40), a sentiment that increased during the following decades due to the US role in the War, especially with the inhumane bombings in Japan and the possible threat of nuclear conflict during the Cold War. In this aftermath, Churchill referred to the iron curtain and recommended defense procedures and common citizenship with the US (Sinfield 110). The friction that generated the American Revolution seemed forgotten, while two centuries of shared language and traditions, plus war victories and the joint effort to contain communist ambitions intensified affinities between the postwar US and UK (Harrison 10). Moreover, the victory endorsed political institutions and an apparent social cohesion providing the perfect pattern for the Welfare State in the UK, since the war years had shown how state intervention and popular cooperation to organize production for the common purpose of never returning to scarcity could work as the right formula (Sinfield 32-33). On the other hand, the fear that the end of the war would reinstate the economic depression and the possibility of a nuclear-armed conflict transformed the US—made up of a large working class before the war—into an apparent white middle-class capitalist society (Bondi x), and the nuclear family living in the suburbs seemed to be the social ideal that could strengthen the country for future demands.

Suburban life as an idea of a homogeneous middle class made up of white Christian families living outside the city, "the standard against which other groups—Beats, African-Americans, Jewish-Americans—were viewed as marginal" is a theme of the postwar period that holds paradoxes not only in the US but also in the UK (Quinn et. al 264). The expansion of the suburbs, altering the countryside, blurred the definition of urban and rural and both dystopias and positive narrative representations of urbanization appeared during that period (Head 10). These stories aimed to find diversity beneath uniformity and uncover the repression and violence hidden in an apparent civilized reality (Head 218). In this context, Salinger's first short stories are set in suburban spaces, like *Uncle Wiggily in Connecticut* (1948), and critical of the middle-class values of the time; besides in his novelettes, the urban landscape occupies the spotlight and, as Hilton and Nikolajeva mention regarding YA, the city comes to represent the dangers and temptations of adult life (9), as it will be analyzed in *The Catcher in the Rye*.

Suburban and capitalist lifestyles were praised and idealized as acts of patriotism against any possible political, economic, or social threat during the postwar years. Middle-class

white men were expected to serve in government and corporate bureaucracies located in the urban center, while their wives were committed to staying at home devoted to raising their children (Foertsch 28). Although women had been part of the workforce since the industrial revolution, and especially during World War II taking over the vacancies left by enlisted men, the postwar American woman was portrayed only as a housewife and a mother, and the nuclear family represented traditional values as a refuge to the demands of modernity and the quest to conquer global hegemony (Bondi x). Similarly in the UK, politics related to gender equality continued to be conservative, and "the concept of the male breadwinner earning a 'living wage' sufficient to support wife and children was still powerful" (Harrison 26). Infertility, birth control, abortion, homosexuality, and divorce were causes of moral and social disapproval and could even damage a career; if women wanted to be considered respectable, they had to stay at home dedicated to activities such as childbearing, child-rearing, and housekeeping as a tacit class and gender compromise (Harrison 26-32). There was some progress regarding childhood policy, although, legislation against child abuse, only reduced parental and teacher's disciplinary powers, but did not amplify children's rights (Harrison 34).

With George VI on the throne, the English monarchy had survived, but its role was rather symbolic, so while the upper classes were struggling to persist, the postwar middle classes that still looked up to them, were growing and strengthening thanks to political participation and organized trade unionism (Harrison 20-21). Furthermore, the working class attempted social scaling through meritocracy since professions became a source of status thanks to educational institutions offering certified admission requirements and training; hence, the proletariat was becoming more bourgeois each time because they began to move to clerical and white-collar occupations that assured them with more stable conditions (Harrison 21-24). For the UK, this period marked a transition to the Welfare State and a consequential redefinition of social structures and paradoxically, although austerity was a wartime legacy, this postwar class-scaling led to mass consumerism.

In this context, the so-called Movement overlapped with the emergence of the School of the Angry Young Men and both promoted the rebirth of the working-class realist fiction concerned with the contradictions of class transformation. Even if Dahl did not partake in such writing movements, he also portrayed social differences in his first children's novels like *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (1964) and later, criticized the consolidated middle-class in *Matilda* (1988). In the US, the discomfort with middle-class values and lack of authenticity

was also portrayed through rootless, restless, and entrapped rebels and antiheroes searching for genuine experiences (Halliwell 60-61), like Salinger's Holden Caulfield. Rock & roll musicians, Beat writers, bebop composers, expressionist painters, and other young dissidents were seeking to portray new ideas opposed to the commercial and ideological capitalist pressures (Layman 26; Halliwell 10). These views had an enormous repercussion in the arts and from the fifties, Black culture and Beat ideas coming from the US, influenced British intellectuals who misunderstood, combined and appropriated them (Sinfield 169).

In the US, working-class social movements decreased after the Pearl Harbor bombing, so the common effort against the Nazis that characterized the war years was replaced by individualism once it ended; artists were not the exception, turning away from political themes to individual expression influenced by existentialism and modernism coming from Europe (Bondi 40). French existentialism gained influence on postwar British writers as well, although, with a conservative interpretation and unable to influence any political engagement (Sinfield 108). In both countries, writers became less socially engaged and more focused on abstraction and subjectivity.

At the same time, North American culture was exported through soldiers and sailors, and reinforced by communications, media, and publishing companies (Bondi viii-ix). An important shift caused by the war regarding publishing and distribution is the fact that nonfiction and genre fiction outsold canonical literature and consequently, memoirs, portable Westerns, mysteries and humoristic books gained popularity among soldiers paving the way for the widespread acceptance of the paperback in the upcoming decades (Foertsch 45). For instance, science fiction upgraded from magazines to novels since the nuclear, technological and space race contributed to making the genre respectable and authors wrote about the anxieties regarding the bomb, possible life on other planets, mass consumerism and emotional desolation (Quinn et al. 243). For instance, Dahl's first novel is a post-apocalyptic story titled *Some Time Never*: *A Fable for Supermen* (1948)—which has gone out of print but is a fictional dystopia about the nuclear war published in the aftermath of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings. And later, during the Cold War, he published *Charlie and the Great Glass Elevator* (1972), the sequel to the *Chocolate Factory*, a science fantasy novel with space opera overtones that depicts caricatures of the president of the US, as well as the Chinese and Russian leaders.

During the postwar period, New York City was becoming the center of cosmopolitan tastes and the home to abstract expressionism, film noir, modern dance, jazz composition

experiments, and international styles in architecture (Bondi viii-ix). Similarly, London after nineteen-fifteen became one of the world's major venues for musical and theatrical performances and the home of some avant-garde architects (Hobsbawm 504), and consequently, metropolitan culture and ways of speech were perceived as superior to provincial (Harrison 61). Even with the fall of the British hegemony, London was still considered the cultural center of the Empire. However, younger intellectuals reacted against any imperialist attitude such as the Suez invasion, the nuclear race, hostility towards immigrants, and any other artistic tendencies that were traditionally related to the higher classes (Sinfield 188).

In this context, the Welfare State aimed to provide universal access to what previously was only available and enjoyed by the upper classes, meaning that this legacy was regarded as the high or good culture. On the other hand, what came from mass culture and popular tastes and influenced by the United States was labeled as low culture. In this context, artists and writers still avoided to look for popularity, as the fraction between high and low culture was still remarkable (Harrison 56). Thus, culture became a state's responsibility, on one hand, through educational policies such as the extension of secondary education through the Butler Act of 1944 (Sinfield 71-72). Thanks to this act, writers had access to grammar schools and universities and hence, the academic setting began to appear in postwar British novels. Its success relies on the fact that even if the academic world was mostly accessible to a privileged middle-class, education was constricted by outside forces such as political decisions, social values, sexuality views, and violence, offering a representative sample of the English Postwar society's desires and contradictions (Connor 69-73). At the same time, the state interfered through the creation of institutions to influence people to think along the right lines; for example, it was forbidden to publish any report or statement likely to cause alarm or discontent and news were censored, while newspapers were threatened and closed (Sinfield 71-72).

Likewise in the US, while the fifties started with another war in Korea—which was the first of successive interventions of the US in foreign countries to deter the spread of communism, inside the country, Senator McCarthy promoted a witch-hunting policy to punish suspected communist sympathizers by expanding the reach of the CIA and the secret service. This censorship encouraged to feign conformity due to fears that differing views would arouse punishment; as a result, the Cold War US was not only defined by the nuclear and space race, but also by an anticommunist hysteria. Suburbia life and the growth of the entertainment business through TV, paperback publishing and popular music reinforced this apparent

consensus of the majority (Halliwell 14). Therefore, climate of censorship and communist persecution discouraged writers to be openly political and defend social causes as in the thirties, but still, national and international events had become too significant to be ignored (Halliwell 52). According to Mickenberg:

> The fact that children's books were viewed outside the literary establishment—beneath it, actually—did much to explain how the field did much to inconspicuously "harbor" significant left-wingers through the McCarthy era, despite concurrent concerns about the "seduction" of "innocent" youth by violent comics, rock and roll, television and "un-American" schoolteachers. (14-15)

Furthermore, narratives concerning the war culture itself and its consequences explored war and the postwar society like J.D. Salinger's short stories "A Perfect Day for Bananafish" (1948) and "For Esmé—with Love and Squalor" (1950), both portraying veterans who are dealing with PTSD and find difficulties in integrating the postwar civilization, recalling the writer's experiences. In fact, during the war, Salinger was already writing stories with young protagonists in combat to show the inhumanity of this business—the most featured characters were Vincent Caulfield, Holden's older brother, and his friend John "Babe" Gladwaller whose relationship with his younger sister Mattie could be a predecessor of Holden's relationship with Phoebe Caulfield (Slawenski 71-74).

Salinger's coming-of-age short novels break from the genteel tradition of the early nineteen-forties and the classic self-development tale, as it reflects the writing techniques that characterized postwar fiction such as confession, criticism, and the inner confusion of the protagonist, as well as midway between popular and complex forms (Halliwell 65-68). During the Cold War, while the gap between high and low literature became less and less significant in the US, prominent protagonists like Holden Caulfield and the use of a first-person confessional style, captured new social moods and appealed to popular tastes (Head 6). Graham argues that "Holden voices feelings of dissatisfaction shared by many Americans" (17), thus, expressing anti-war sentiments and making ironic comments about the atomic bomb, as well as on hegemonic masculinity at the time. In "Seymour an Introduction" (1959), Salinger satirizes the postwar panorama too, as follows:

> [T]he middle-aged hot-rodders who insist on zooming us to the moon, the Dharma Bums, the makers of cigarette filters for thinking men, the Beat, and the Sloppy and the Petulant, the chosen cultists, all the lofty experts who know so well what we should or shouldn't do with our poor little sex organs, all the bearded, proud, unlettered young men and unskilled guitarists and Zen-killers and incorporated aesthetic Teddy boys who look down their thoroughly unenlightened noses at this splendid planet…(*Raise High* 79)

Salinger was parodying the space race, the rise of psychoanalysis, popular music and fashion trends at the time. In this context, the American counterculture of the fifties, mainly represented by the Beat generation, made a new emphasis on individualism and transcendentalism in the tradition of Emerson and Thoreau, but also Zen Buddhism (Quinn et al. 261-262). Even if he satirizes these newfound interests, Salinger was also captivated by similar eastern philosophies, which influenced a big part of his late writing and lifestyle. Due to the Beat writers' transgression of sexual mores and critical position on American middle-class lifestyle and state politics, their books were perceived as a threat to the establishment (Quinn et al. 261-264), and suggested that the "underlying unease of the decade was close to breaking out into full-scale rebellion" (Halliwell 78). Nevertheless, women, racial minorities and the lower classes were often excluded, even from bohemian circles; in fact, gender and class standardization were promoted through advertising campaigns and it was not until the following decade that these rigid roles were questioned (Halliwell 40-46). Furthermore, "while the campaign for the racial desegregation of schools was given legal power by the 'Brown v. Board of Education' decision (1954), progress towards equality for African Americans was often undermined by propaganda that associated a desire for civil rights with the 'evil' of Communism" (Graham 12).

Although, the sixties started optimistically with the presidential election of Kennedy, the weaknesses of the militaristic foreign policy did not take long to be noticed, especially with the Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba in 1961 and the indiscriminate escalade of the Vietnam War throughout the decade and the beginning of the seventies (Lipsitz 160). Mannheim's theory stresses the fact that traumatic events, especially warfare, could influence the creation of a generational consciousness that challenges the status quo offering new political and cultural possibilities (Edmunds and Turner 560-561). As a result, the expertise of the elites to control power and public policy was challenged and even rejected, leading to the creation of radical activist groups that consolidated a counterculture. In reaction and rebellion to Cold War tensions, censorship, middle-class conformity, and mass culture, artists became the voice of a generation declaring their independence (Layman 26).

According to Harrison, "young people from the mid–1950s were being drawn together as never before by shared grievances (against adults, with their institutions, rules, and regulations) and by shared tastes (in recreation, clothes, and other goods readily)" (474). People who due to their gender, age, race or sexual orientation had stood far from formal power, became politically engaged, even opposing the main formal ideologies of the Cold War. Young

people were at the center of these movements challenging conservative ideas from the past and thus, they became associated with the counterculture and regarded as a disruptive force by the establishment (Reynolds 84). According to Lipsitz:

> Political activism by college students on and off campus, the popularity of youth-generated styles of dress, grooming, speech, and music, and perceptions of a "generation gap" denoting a difference in values between people born after World War II and those born before it all contributed to the idea that age might become as important an indicator of social identity as race, class, or gender. (158)

In this regard, the sixties witnessed the emergence of a new political and cultural identity in the US; the sexual revolution and access to drugs, plus the popularity of psychedelic acid rock and folk as a way of protesting influenced what it meant to be young, and the open and pacifist hippie communities represented a significant alternative to the patriarchal violent society and the middle-class suburbs. Contraception generated a sexual revolution that challenged dispraised personal decisions as to the unmarried state, childlessness, and homosexuality; and drugs became accessible during that period and promoted hedonistic values and short-term enjoyment (Harrison 510-515).

Consequently, the British postwar youth viewed cultural Americanization as a mode of resistance; they wanted to challenge traditions and what they perceived as a hypocritical adult world and substitute it with informality and what was regarded as a lack of manners. Thanks to musicians and athletes, "there was a growing tendency among the middle–class young to seek their exemplars lower down rather than higher up" (Harrison 495). Young people in the UK, mainly from affluent backgrounds, decided to live in these hippie communities as well, opposing ambition, the nuclear family, patriotism, cleanliness, and respectability which was criticized even by the working class who shared similar conservative values as the middle and upper classes (Harrison 514). They felt guilty because of their privilege and adopted what they thought was working-class vocabulary and accents, and also, wear long hair, untidy clothes, and guitars (Harrison 495).

Furthermore, the selection and examining processes signified failure for most students since just a few were able to cope with its pressures, so rock culture appeared as a defense against the school, like trade unions to the factory system (Sinfield 164). According to Sinfield:

> At first, in the 1950s, scholarship boys and girls deferred to the syllabus: they thought the lower-class cultures they were abandoning to be narrow, and that they were moving into 'good' culture. From the early 1960s, the syllabus was, for many, an academic study, one of the rival subcultures they inhabited. (276)

For the young intellectuals who identified with a left-liberal ideology, jazz and folk became their musical preference as the first genre implied appreciation and the second one, political commitment. The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) that unified youth protest and left-wing views, a political reaction towards wartime austerity and puritanism emerged suggesting a cultural revolt through informal dress and manners (Harrison 483). The student protest was characterized by radicalism, but also by participation and debate; especially at the University of Warwick, which held a controversy when some files were made public that evidenced that the authorities were concerned about the students' political affiliations and intended to tackle them, and at Cambridge, where protests focused on racial and international issues, while other institutions were concerned with environmentalist activism (Harrison 492).

Students were dissatisfied with the English traditional canon and the conflict between academic and nonacademic principles was addressed during the upcoming decades in literature. In this context, Dahl's novels *Danny, the Champion of the World* (1975) and *Matilda* offer opposing views on education; while the former puts more emphasis on manual work, play and a direct interaction with nature, the latter gives value to reading and learning at institutions like school and the public library, as well as developing the intellect as an empowering tool for children. The consolidation of a youth identity in the US made more evident that there were literature and artistic trends that appealed better to the new generation's social and cultural demands; for example, J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit* (1937) and *Lord of the Rings* (1954) were embraced by hippie counterculture for his anti-war, anti-materialistic and socio-environmental sentiment.

Moreover, the outcast and the theme of not belonging were especially echoed in YA literature during the late fifties and sixties which could be attributed to the rise of social and artistic movements—starting with the Beat Generation and the hippie counterculture of the postwar period which was filled with alienated figures. These outsiders were especially appealing to young readers because, as Mickenberg argues, "young people of Holden's generation grew up very aware of adults' hypocrisy" (276). For instance, *The Catcher in the Rye* became popular on campuses with Holden Caulfield as the spokesman of a generation trying to resist the phoniness, hypocrisy, and corruption brought upon by adulthood (Layman 29, 63) Alienated youth in search of self-identification is also portrayed through the intelligent and precocious children of the Glass Family and especially, in Salinger's short story "Franny"

(1955), where this college student criticizes the academic world and expresses how becoming bohemian leads to conforming as well.

Therefore, during the Cold War, coming-of-age was happening in a variety of contexts; young people from the US were serving in a war in a foreign country, some were entering the workforce at a time of civil rights demands concerning employment and segregation, while others were living in hippie communities in the countryside (Lipsitz 158). However, these communities only brought to the victimized and poor populations of the inner cities and rural slums higher rents and more oppressive police surveillance (Lipsitz 170). Therefore, the hippie counterculture gradually lost adepts, a dissolution that started in 1969 after the Hell's Angels Motorcycle club beat to death a black spectator during a Rolling Stones' performance at a music festival in Altamont, California (Lipsitz 160); and later, with the murders committed by the Manson Family cult.

On the other hand, concerning the civil rights' movements in the US, a powerful coalition led by young people came together in the late sixties that demanded equal employment opportunities and financial concessions for African-Americans and women. These collectivities were not only questioning the expansion and intrusion of the government outside the country, but also began to raise demands concerning issues that needed to be addressed politically, like traditional roles and relationships, and included them in the public agenda (Farber 10-11). Therefore, activists formed alternative institutions such as political parties and assemblies, media, schools and universities, and health centers (Echols 124). They managed to lobby officials and that way made the federal court establish special programs to remedy past discrimination for the first time in history (Colburn and Pozzetta 102). However, racial minorities not only looked for civil rights reform; through their demonstrations and campaigns, African-American movements, like the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, expressed frustration with an identity constructed upon slavery and dissatisfaction with concepts promoted by white elites, such as assimilation and integration (Colburn and Pozzetta 96-97). As a consequence, during the decade, their militancy suffered the murders of two of their main leaders, Malcolm X, and Martin Luther King, as well as, a great deal of repression from the federal government to tackle riots organized by the Harlem ghettos and attempts to stop the Black Panther Party's activities.

Feminists did not only challenge the division of labor at home, employment discrimination—even with a growing number of women graduating from college—and the

absence of childcare facilities; they also raised issues concerning beauty standards, normalized physical, sexual and mental violence against women, heterosexuality, contraception as only women's responsibility and the health hazards associated with the birth control pill (Echols 118-123). Therefore, the Women's Liberation Movement pursued a gender revolution agenda against the domesticated idea of family and marriage promoted during the postwar years.

The late sixties also signified a political crisis for the UK and as a result, the viability of social-democratic institutions became unreliable for citizens that saw a return to unemployment, poverty, social injustices, and coercion from the government (Sinfield 34, 272), especially during demonstrations and other protesting mechanisms. The Labour's Party failure was also a result of its inability to commit to other issues raised by the New Left regarding class, race, gender identity and sexual orientation (Sinfield 264). In this regard, Harrison explains how issues like sex, abortion, and homosexuality emerged in the late sixties when feminists were challenging the delimitation of roles and questioning the traditional family structure (527-529); however, it was not until the eighties and nineties that problematics such as rape and child abuse were addressed. In the early seventies, they added an important demand, the right to a self-defined sexuality and during the eighties and nineties, self-identified gay writers in the US and the UK were not only addressing identity and sexual exploration, but also the AIDS crisis. These writers started to talk about the redefinition of the traditional nuclear family too, which coincided with the emergence of the queer critical theory.

Moreover, writers exposed strong statements concerning imperialism outside the country and traditional lifestyles on the inside and important forward-looking approaches came from the second-wave feminists, lower-class students and the African-American movement which translated not only into the sociopolitical scope but into the academy through the diversification of literary studies into American Studies, Women's Studies, Black Studies, and Cultural and Media Studies (Sinfield 277). Since women made up the larger part of English literature students in the UK, they tackled the sexism and discrimination against female writers that characterized the canon (Sinfield 277). However, "the introduction of identity politics to the literary curriculum failed to bring attention to the factor of age" so, expanding and restructuring the canon in the nineteen-seventies and eighties to include texts by women and nonwhite writers did not necessarily mean the inclusion of texts for children (Honeyman 7-8), thus children's literature and YA was still excluded from academic circles.

The mistakes in the official decisions, the economic weakening and the aforementioned studies contributed to shaping multiculturalism from another perspective different from assimilation—viewed as an imposition of the dominant culture—towards an idea of rewriting American history and culture as shaped by race and ethnicity (Quinn et al. 292). For instance, J.D. Salinger refers to postwar antisemitism in his short story "Down at the Dinghy" (1949) and other stories portray the Glass Family as having a Jewish background as the writer himself, even if he does not discuss this identity in further detail. In the UK, national movements, returning exiles, migration and other post-nationalist views were echoed though fiction too (Connor 86).

In this time, Beatlemania, underground poetry, graffiti, advertisements, happenings, and independent theater challenged traditional notions of cultural authority (Sinfield 273-274), and Pop Art broke the separation between art and commerce. Pop culture merged the arts with political work, for example, its collage techniques were used in political pamphlets (Sinfield 275), and mass media and underground magazines helped to promote festivals that shaped a youth identity (Harrison 484), and underground comix emerged as a reaction against the censorship in mainstream comics during the decades before. In an era where television, radio and magazines where featuring cultural trends, Roald Dahl's horror short stories for adults were popularized through TV shows, while the author himself was adapting Ian Fleming's novels to scripts; a few of his short stories also appeared in *Playboy Magazine*.

Youth identity was consolidated through the seventies thanks to new music trends such as punk, disco, hip hop, glam, and glitter rock which partly emerged as a critique of what had been left out in the previous decade—for instance, working-class anger, androgyny and the demands of the gay liberation movement (Lipsitz 176). However, significant social changes occurred because of the economic crisis and new policies were implemented to overcome them. According to Lipsitz:

> Declining economic opportunities brought fundamental changes in work, gender roles, family relations, education, and welfare policies, as automation and capital flight overseas promoted deindustrialization at home. Increases in male unemployment and the necessity for more women to work transformed family relations, while tax breaks for property owners worked to curtail the growth in education and welfare spending that had characterized the sixties. (176)

The seventies' economic stagnation and deindustrialization restructured the idea of abundance and spending that characterized the previous decades and had an important repercussion on gender roles. In the UK due to the recession, the workforce was expected to reduce its social

scaling and job expectations; as people below the poverty line were indefinitely receiving payments that were supposed to be assigned only for emergencies, then an underclass return was necessary and at the same time, the upper classes could no longer benefit from tax-cuts, thus, taxation became an important strategy (Sinfield 282). These policies became attractive to the electorate as they were accompanied by an ideology of law and order, family, individualism, nationalism and race, everything that the punk subculture opposed (Sinfield 282).

The Conservative Party realized that they could attack the movements and counterculture of the previous decade and use it as a political strategy; as a result, they started to blame the permissive society that had generated a turn towards violence (Harrison 525), an argument that was legitimated by the fact that Northern Irish paramilitary movements were campaigning through shootings and bombings. Prime Minister Thatcher blamed universities for starting the idea of breaking the rules and instead, promoted politeness, tidiness, and neighborliness, while parents mobilized against progressive methods in education (Harrison 525). The UK ended this period experiencing a growth of the underclass in the eighties and nineties which led to new levels of inequality and the accentuation of social disjunction and differences.

In the US, changes and disappointments were not only socioeconomic but political with the publication of the Pentagon Papers and the Watergate scandals leading to the ceasefire of the Vietnam War. At the international level, the seventies ended with the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, but during the following decade, the Soviet Union began to implement liberal-leaning reforms, which led to the collapse of the communist regime and the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. Still, the end of the Cold War represented a triumph of Western democracy and a cultural shift to the conservative right in the US too, especially during the Reagan administration. In both countries, the Thatcher–Reagan era stirred a wave of political dystopias and narratives concerning the environment, the ethics of some technological developments and globalization (Reynolds 15).

Douglas states that "the Cold War administration had decided the personal was the political long before postmodernists made the discovery" (82); in fact, the State labeled personal beliefs—such as communism and homosexuality—as criminal behaviors and identified anyone who could threaten national security as a way to embody a real conflict between the ones that supported North American values and the ones that did not (Douglas 81-

82). In this context, youth protests were a meaningful act hoping for a revolution and artists looked for resistance and self-expression and believed that new political and artistic forms were possible; however, the end of the Cold War denote a loss of innocence, a search for authenticity and certainly, optimism (Douglas 84).

Therefore, this period ended with a new attitude toward artistic possibilities and production with artists finding an alternative in postmodern contradictions. Belgrad affirms that "the centralization of power is a defining characteristic of modernity" (59), a concentration identified as a threat to democracy, especially among intellectuals and artists and hence, the idea that decentralized structures were more desirable persisted in the cultural scope and can be linked to the origins of postmodernism (Belgrad 60-62). Jameson argued that postmodernism appeared as a reaction against high modernism and thanks to the separation between high and popular culture which led to the mass consumerism of artistic commodities and a new social order of late capitalism ("The Politics of Theory" 64-65, "Postmodernism and Consumer Society" 111-125). While Lyotard claimed that postmodernism assumes a cultural break between earlier forms of capitalism that required grand narratives, but these metanarratives have lost their legitimacy due to a new technological context since the postwar period (37-38). According to Huyssen:

> Postmodernism is dismissed outright as a fraud and modernism held up as the universal truth, a view which reflects the thinking of the 1950s. Or modernism is condemned as elitist and postmodernism praised as populist, a view which reflects the thinking of the 1960s. Or there is the truly 1970s proposition that "anything goes," which its consumer capitalism's cynical version of "nothing works," but which at least recognizes that the older dichotomies have lost much of their meaning. (202-203)

This scholar explains how early postmodernism was not anti-modernist per se, as it was mainly a refusal of the modernism imposed during the fifties to support conservative politics and the fight against communism (Huyssen 188-190); hence, postmodernism is political and even the struggles between high culture and popular culture are struggles between classes. Therefore, Huyssen recognizes that an alternative form of postmodernism has emerged thanks to the inclusion of other cultural perspectives into the public awareness; gender and racial minorities—that have lived for long at the margins of the dominant culture—refuse to be limited to traditional canonizations and consequently, have recuperated suppressed and forgotten cultural manifestations (198).

Although it seemed that during the early postwar period English literature was moving towards realism, it did not take one single direction and new forms of experimentation like

pastiche, moral allegory and parody, metafiction, as well as genres like fantasy and gothic were evolving. A period where no movement or genre dominated emerged not only in the UK, but worldwide, thanks to the multiplicity of heritages and influences (Bradbury 281). This description could be applied to Dahl's process as a writer who first published horror and grotesque stories for adults, and during the sixties, started to write children's books with Dickensian and Gothic influence and at the same time based on Norwegian and Walsh folklore. Furthermore, thanks to verbal-visual writing, performance art, graffiti, self-publishing, fanzines, outsider galleries, and other disruptive means, artists intended to kick cultural oppressive and repressive prescriptive roles and constructs, the silence of institutions and the normalization of violence (Taylor 385-387). They aimed to "undermine from within the traditional structures of artistic media and the culture that had grown up around them," rather than overthrow them, to understand how those discourses predetermine and shape our being (Taylor 386).

### 1.3 Closing remarks

I have examined how the postwar period was marked by a quest to rebuild the US and the UK after World War II and to recover a national identity. The United States government decided to accomplish this goal through a Cold War with the URSS to pursue hegemony; and in this context, the UK, no longer an Empire, but still a world power, decided to be an ally in the fight against communism to preserve supremacy in Europe. Capitalism seemed to be the answer to economic growth, so the US promoted mass consumerism, while for the UK, with a background of unions, a Welfare State formula seemed more suitable. Still, in both countries, citizens looked for social scaling, and working-class families became the suburban middle-class; former working-class women were expected to be only homemakers and mothers, while men were supposed to provide for their households thanks to white-collar jobs. The nuclear family was portrayed as the right pattern to follow to support the national interests, and anyone and anything that did not want to conform to that model was considered a dissident and a criminal.

In the Postwar and Cold War context, the older generations attempted to go back to traditions while young people advocated for change. The nuclear family was praised in both countries, while the new generations began to challenge these ideas. Class frictions, women,

queer and racial minorities' movements, the influence of eastern religions and protest for peace inspired musicians, writers, artists and popular culture. Civil rights movements, hippies and the Green Movement, agitated and, in some respects, even changed the social structures in both countries. In the US, the activities, struggles, and achievements of the African American Movement were significant, while the Women and the Gay Liberation movements questioned gender roles and sexuality in both countries. Students in the UK challenged class privilege and the nuclear race, and, in the US, the hippie counterculture appeared as a reaction to the recruitment of young men for the Vietnam War. Music and drugs accompanied these movements and shaped a youth identity in both countries and jazz, rock, and folk became the anthems of a generation seeking individuation and to distance themselves from the past.

The postwar economic boom, the extension of education, full employment and career prospects and the welfare policies granted opportunities to the baby boomer generation for the emergence of movements that promoted human rights (Edmunds and Turner 561-562). At the same time, having a cause in common which was the Vietnam War protest along with the nuclear and warfare state, encouraged solidarity even across national borders which became possible thanks to the development of communications and international mobility and created the social conditions for this generation to speak out without the fear of risking their future (Edmunds and Turner 562-567). Future generations would have fewer socioeconomic opportunities even if they had reasons to protest, for example, environmentalism during the seventies and the AIDS global crisis in the eighties and nineties, leading to political disbelief (Edmunds and Turner 567-574). This period ended with a loss of optimism and new social differences since the eighties gave way to conservative governments in both countries blaming the youth of the previous decades for their rebellion and disorder.

As this section has demonstrated, to understand the roles that young people were acquiring, it is important to address the context in which Dahl and Salinger lived and published, and what was inspiring and moving writers and artists of the twentieth century, marked by the rise of a cultural gap. These innovative ideas had an impact on the arts and the bridge between what was considered high and low culture narrowed in a postmodern context; artists and writers struggled between authenticity and popularity, and children and adolescents became an important audience. Teenagers were targeted by the market, not only because they began to have purchasing power and due to the extension of education and the fact that views towards childhood, adolescence and youth were evolving, but also, since they proved to have their own

taste and differing views with the older generations. This led to associate youth culture with popular culture, more accepted in the US than the UK, and even the counterculture.

In this context, and even if Dahl and Salinger first intended to write for adults, it is the young generation that appropriated and identified with their works and for this reason, and associations with popular culture, critics and other intellectuals considered these authors childish at first. These writers spoke to children, teenagers and young adults that whilst depending on their parents and authorities, wanted to find an identity different to the violent culture that originated from the business of war, traditional institutions and power structures, the nuclear family and middle-class suburban values, as well as class differences. Young characters in their works are sort of outsiders that intend to question the traditional British and American postwar society, but because of their young age are expected to conform due to adultcentric and adultist structures. Struggling between dissenting and obeying, their young protagonists are set to find an identity through self-discovery journeys and via their interactions with desperate, materialistic, and phony adults, reproducing the generational gap that was becoming more evident at the time.

After offering insights into the lives and works of Dahl and Salinger within the broader sociopolitical and literary context, intricately woven into the complex power dynamics between generations, the next step involves examining the notion of age as a social construction and a factor of social differentiation. This phenomenon is frequently mirrored in literature, particularly in children's fiction and YA—which emerged and consolidated in this context as it will be discussed in further detail over the next chapters. For these purposes, I will introduce theories from the interdisciplinary fields of Childhood and Youth Studies, coupled with insights from literary studies. The next chapter aims to elucidate crucial concepts such as childism, adultism, adulcentrism, ageism, life transitions, generations, and intergenerational relationships. Establishing this theoretical groundwork will pave the way for the forthcoming comparative analysis of the corpus.

## Chapter II

## A Theoretical Approach to Constructions of Childhood and Youth

This chapter serves as an introduction to the theoretical framework of Childhood Studies and Youth Studies, laying the foundation for the analysis of the representation of childhood and youth in the works of Roald Dahl and J.D. Salinger. In the initial section, I examine the concept of Childism, proposed by John Wall as an approach analogous to concepts like feminism and postcolonialism, but in the field of Childhood Studies, which aims to scrutinize and challenge adultcentric perspectives and practices in research ("From Childhood Studies" 1). Therefore, this chapter addresses the main concepts that have informed this work such as adultism. Additionally, I explore Youth Studies, focusing on transitions, cultures, generations, and intergenerational dynamics. The following section delves into the historical constructions of children and childhood, which have been mirrored by art and literature. Common categorizations such as the angelic and devilish child, along with the portrayal of adolescents as emerging adults, have significantly impacted ethics, politics, education, child-rearing practices, and intergenerational relations. The concluding section brings us to how perceptions on children and teenagers have influenced children's literature and YA.

### 2.1 Adultism and Childism

Childhood and adulthood are usually perceived as mere biological stages of life. However, age is a factor of social difference, the same way that gender, sex, race, ethnicity, and other aspects of identity cannot solely be regarded as biological traits because they are indeed socially constructed. Even life stages could be considered performative through cultural rite-of-passages, social benchmarks, developmental standards, discourses and rhetoric employed to categorize people according to age. In this regard, Honey argues that:

> [W]e essentialize children temporally—as if individual development proceeds in a universally consistent, chronologically determined and measurable manner. We have learned to recognize that biology is not destiny—sex does not necessarily determine gender or orientation, nor do fictitious absolutes like blood ratios measure ethnocultural identity—yet we still overlook the equally variable factor of age in constructing and sometimes limiting identity. We must recognize and constantly remind ourselves that young identities are too complex and individual to categorize by biology or chronological age. (12)

For instance, "between biological essentialism and a cultural determinism […] the child is necessarily both constructed and constructive" (Rudd, "Theorizing and Theories" 25) because children can also influence and shape their own identities. Drawing from Foucault's concept of power as inherent in all discursive practices, Rudd argues that "while children can be construed as the powerless objects of adult discourse, they also have subject positions available to them that resist such a move" ("Theorizing and Theories" 17). In this regard, Hollindale introduces the term childness, explaining that for children, childness is the knowledge of being a child, and hence, a sense of self in interaction with the images of childhood offered by the world (49). For adults, childness implies the adult's memories of childhood which offer us continuity between infancy and adulthood; besides, a sense of what is expected and suitable for a particular age and thus, an awareness of the fact that we are no longer children (Hollindale 49).

Beauvais argues that children and adults share an existential relationship because there is a "temporal otherness, that is to say the fact that child and adult are symbolically set apart by their belonging to different temporalities—and that this difference modulates the distribution of 'powers' between the two categories" (4). Although the adult is authoritative in the present, this does not necessarily rend them all-powerful because they do not have control over young people's futures, which makes the child mighty as Beauvais calls it (3-4). This existential predicament makes age more complex than other categories of social difference because all adults have been children once, and old people have been young, and at the same time, they intend to achieve symbolic immortality, but do not have control over the future.

Still, if we refer to the present, adulthood is regarded as the norm, and childhood and youth are usually constructed as categories of otherness. Natov establishes this difference addressing Beauvais' theory but arguing that his analysis focuses on the present where children can be constricted by authorities and institutions (108), leading to age-based discrimination. Although "broader ageism is any form of discrimination against a person because of their age," ageism is usually employed to describe discrimination against old people (Pease 207), and even if child abuse and violence are frequently studied from a variety of fields, they are usually overlooked as forms of age-based discrimination and related to systemic oppression from adults to children (Pease 208-209). For the purposes of this analysis, I will sometimes combine children, teenagers and young people, or use the terms interchangeably considering that age groupings are also grounded on social constructions that influence institutions, policies and

practices and which are constantly changing (Pease 211), as Pease does in his book in order "to interrogate the binary between children and adults which create the subordinate status of children in relation to adults" (209).

According to Pease, "this subordinate status is a result of adult supremacy where adult attitudes, beliefs and practices frame adults as superior to children and young people. Such a premise legitimates the authority of adults to make decisions that affects the lives of young people" (208). UNICEF describes adultcentrism as the asymmetrical relationship between adults and young people that privileges adulthood which is established as an ideal, superior, and normative stage which creates an unfair situation of oppression and domination (18). Due to this imbalance of power, adultism can be defined as the systemic mistreatment, discrimination, marginalization, and disrespect towards young people expressed through attitudes, behaviors, language, etc. as they are considered inferior and subordinated to adults who are farther respected by society (UNICEF 19, Pease 213-214).

Adultism can be either internalized through beliefs, assumptions and feelings that make people of all ages accept this unbalance of power as normative (Pease 214), and replicate it, even amongst young people aged differently. Cultural adultism refers to the "shared beliefs, attitudes and costumes that promote the view that adults are superior to young people" (Pease 214), like the sociocultural constructions mentioned throughout this chapter which are so often reproduced in art and literature. Structural adultism is executed through exclusionary policies, institutions and legislation that disadvantage minors (Pease 214-215). This does not mean that children should be treated like adults or have the same exact rights, since making them assume adult responsibilities at the cost of their needs is another form of adultism, but they do deserve to be equally respected, while their biological and cognitive differences should not be used to legitimate adult privilege (Pease 216-218).

Therefore, when studying oppression and privilege it is important to include age as another mark of inequality and social difference (Pease 210). In this sense, adultcentrism is analogous to ethnocentrism and patriarchy, while adultism is employed similarly to concepts like racism and sexism respectively. On the other hand, Childism from the field of Childhood Studies aims to have a similar application to feminism and decolonialism, but with the aim of dismantling age exclusionary systems and build a more age-inclusive society.

### 2.1.1 Childhood Studies and Childism

During the first decades of the twentieth century, the predominant paradigm concerned with the study of children's breeding, rearing and education was the field of developmental psychology (Woodhead 18). However, over time, there was a growing interest among other social sciences, especially sociology and anthropology, on researching childhood, youth, generations, and related topics. By the seventies, researchers could not overlook perspectives from other areas about this subject and the borders between the social sciences and the humanities became blurrier, leading to a childhood-centered interdisciplinary umbrella that gave rise to what in the eighties and nineties started to be known as Childhood Studies. According to John Wall:

> The original impetus arose in the 1980s, primarily among sociologists, anthropologists, and historians, as a new paradigm for the study of children and youth beyond the (then and still) dominant paradigm of developmental psychology. According to the model of childhood studies (or new sociology of childhood), children should be studied, not as developing adults, but in their own right as socially constructed agents. ("From Childhood Studies" 258)

Even with the undeniable contributions of the field of developmental psychology to research on children and youth as a period of biological transition, scholars were seeking an alternative more updated approach. The new paradigm of Childhood Studies was groundbreaking in the sense that it challenged the rooted Western idea that children and teenagers are adults in the making, while in fact, they have always been active creators of their own lives, and consequently influence their societies, contributing to the history-making process (J. Wall, "Childism" 70). These new perspectives influenced the inclusion of children as subjects of law and inspired the United Nations' 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child which not only considered minors' protection rights, but also, guaranteed them freedoms and access to political, socio-economic, and cultural participation (J. Wall, "From Childhood Studies" 258). However, as Pease implies, the UNCRC is influenced by Western standards (216); thus, another input of Childhood Studies has been to contest a globalized notion of the child and the construction of childhood as universal (J. Wall, "From Childhood Studies" 258), as it became clear that experiences can diverge depending on the time and context, and other socio-cultural factors such as social class, sexual orientation and gender identity, race and ethnicity, among other categories of social differentiation.

Even with such progress, adult agendas still led research on childhood and youth, which started to change when scholars began to consider children and teenagers not only as research

objects, but to include them as subjects and participants (Woodhead 23). The intention was to empower children so they could "help formulate research questions, contribute to academic and policy conferences, and take part in larger social and political processes" (J. Wall, "Childism" 70). Therefore, Childhood Studies aims to challenge, reformulate, and alter adultcentric norms and social practices through a better understanding of young people's often relegated ideas and experiences. On that note, Woodhead explains how:

> Children develop largely through their relationships with adults; they become adults and their status as children is defined in part by reference to largely adult-defined cultural expectations of maturity and immaturity. Adulthood as a status to be attained at the end of childhood—and the binary between childhood and adulthood—is itself socially constructed. Incorporating adulthood within the study of childhood helps puncture the myths surrounding maturity. (24)

In fact, there have always been social constructions towards the stage of childhood, youth, middle-adulthood and old age throughout history, shaped accordingly to the most dominant ideas and discourses of the time. In this sense, John Wall proposes the application and use of the term Childism as a concept analogous to recent forms of feminism, postcolonialism, environmentalism, etc., as it "offers the needed critical lens for deconstructing adultism across research and societies and reconstructing more age-inclusive scholarly and social imaginations" ("From Childhood Studies" 257).

The term has already been employed and especially popularized, first by literary theorist Peter Hunt who during the eighties recommended Childist Criticism to read and interpret children's literature leaving aside adult biases about children's preferences ("Childist Criticism" 44-46), which according to Deszcz-Tryhubczak and García-González has usually been misunderstood as the idea of reading as a child, when in fact, it suggests participatory and empirical research to include child readers (3). And later, psychoanalyst Elisabeth Young-Bruehl suggested a negative use of childism that equates it to concepts like racism, sexism, and classism, to study prejudice against children.[8] Researchers from different fields have used either meaning, however, the term as defined by John Wall[9] goes beyond emphasizing the oppressive structures and hegemonic discourses that marginalize young people, as Young-

[8] See *Childism: Confronting Prejudice Against Children* by Young-Bruehl (2012).

[9] Wall and other scholars have founded The Childism Institute which is a global network of researchers, scholars, and advocates with an institutional base at Rutgers University. They are interested in developing childism theory and research, organizing conferences, workshops, and other events, offering consulting services to organizations, and catalyzing social change by including children and youth in their initiatives. For more information visit https://www.childism.org/

Bruehl's approach suggests in a similar way that developmental psychology portrayed children as passive agents, when they can also be empowered ("From Childhood Studies" 263-264).

Childism seeks to enhance Childhood Studies by bringing innovation to research in social studies and the humanities. This perspective goes beyond simply including young subjects in the research process to comprehend their experiences; it also emphasizes the necessity of scrutinizing and challenging deeply ingrained sociohistorical assumptions and imaginaries (J. Wall, "From Childhood Studies" 260-261). These assumptions often preconstruct childhood and adolescence from an adult-normative standpoint, where adulthood is regarded as an immutable and stable life stage. (J. Wall, "From Childhood Studies" 260-261). This approach offers a systemic treatment to a problem that cannot be faced only through a structuralist approach that sets children as active agents and meaning-makers of their social environment, and neither a poststructuralist method that encourages a deconstruction of exclusionary structures, especially by those that experience it, because children, particularly at younger ages, cannot exercise this kind of activism for themselves; and while it is important to give them a voice, Childism encourages a reconstruction of social intergenerational relationships in general (J. Wall, "From Childhood Studies" 264-268).

Therefore, Alanen argues that "*generation*—or (inter)generationality[3]—should be for the social study of childhood, the equivalent of gender in feminist studies and class in class studies" and thus, another category in intersectionality[10] ("Intersectionality" 159). Wadsworth also suggests that literary studies should consider generation and stage of life as categories of social difference that define us all (340). While for Joosen, "the three domains of childhood studies, age studies, and children's literature studies are concerned with age and agency, and they highlight the importance of societal norms and cultural products in constructing age, often challenging biological and developmentalist paradigms" ("Connecting" 3), hence, "interdisciplinary crossfertilization" could be useful to promote intergenerational dialogues ("Connecting" 16). Although age studies, a field that gained visibility during the eighties, has been more concerned with the study of old age and dismantling ageism, according to Joosen,

[10] Term coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw through the article "Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A Black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics" published in the *University of Chicago Legal Forum* in 1989. Intersectionality is often employed to refer to the overlapping, or intersecting, political and social identities a person can have which become sources of subordination and privilege procuring them social advantages or disadvantages accordingly.

it has expanded from gerontology to include life course and age-related theories and has been trying to establish dialogues with childhood studies ("Connecting" 3).

While I agree with these intersections amongst theories from different fields that can enrich each other, I argue that the concept of youth should enter the discussion because it is a bridge between childhood and adulthood (Hollindale 116), or the years when "child and adult are actively alive together in the individual," lasting longer than the period often labeled as adolescence because it is a process than can go well into our twenties or until we fully enter into adult life (Hollindale 60), thus, overlaps with childhood, adolescence and adulthood. Therefore, I believe that adding Youth Studies to this interdisciplinary approach is fundamental to understand intergenerational dynamics.

### 2.1.2 Youth Studies: transitions, cultures, and generations

Youth Studies, much like Childhood Studies, are considered an interdisciplinary umbrella that developed from sociology to include other fields, and its key debates can be traced to the nineteen-seventies (Woodman and Bennett 1-3). In general terms, youth research has acquired two main poles, one that focuses on transitions and the other dedicated to the study of youth cultures. The first approach studies the transition to adulthood including factors such as education, employment, and household and family formation. In a strict sense, we could relate this approach to constructions of youth as a developmental stage and views related to adult normativity, for instance, reaching certain events that show apparent progress in one's life course. At the same time, this perspective must continually negotiate with the fact that the variables that determine when a young person reaches adulthood are constantly changing and could also differ geographically and culturally; for instance, it could seem that young people nowadays are delaying adulthood, due to socioeconomic conditions and changes in lifestyles in comparison to their parent's generation (Woodman and Bennett 5).

In this sense, Arnett has proposed another life stage and labeled it "emergent adulthood" to refer to the period between adolescence and adulthood, and other scholars have argued that arrested transitions are becoming common and there are studies promoting the view that transitions are non-linear (Woodman and Bennett 3). There have been other negative approaches that perceive challenges to reach adulthood as young people's way of avoiding responsibilities and referring to them as kidults. These views certainly have origins in adultcentric constructions that perceive this type of behavior as infantile and immature

conceived as negative characteristics. At the same time, these perspectives blame young individuals, and not the institutions that create precarious conditions for most, leaving the materialization of this idealized adulthood to a few privileged (Wyn and White 35-36; Woodman and Leccardi 58). In this regard, Scabini and Marta refer to generational unfairness which means that social institutions have favored older generations, but are not able to offer the same advantages for the new generations when they are transitioning into adulthood, for example, the Welfare State in southern European countries which is now unable to provide the same conditions for the contemporary youth (92).

Therefore, Woodman and Bennett argue that "it seems that the association of adulthood with stability and a 'completed' set of transitions may characterize fewer and fewer lives" (6). Consequently, adulthood as socially constructed can be scrutinized as its boundaries with youth get blurrier and earlier understandings of adulthood become obsolete and structurally impossible (Woodman and Bennett 5). Wyn and White argue that youth is not only a biological phase of life, but a social relationship that depends not only on individual transitions, but also on social transformations and identity formation—which relies on young people's sense of belonging to institutions and communities (28-33). It is undeniable that "biographies are shaped by sociohistorical conditions" that shift power dynamics and as a result, "the meaning of both youth and adulthood is given through prevailing social and economic relations of society" (Wyn and White 36). This means that throughout history our understanding of childhood, youth and adulthood and what we associate with age-groupings and life stages is constantly evolving because these are not fixed categories.

On the other hand, studies on cultures are more focused on how young people use creativity to resist the status quo, or adult culture, through music, fashion styles, and other experiences and events (Woodman and Bennett 1-2). In fact, "much adolescent creativity has traditionally been rejected by adult/official culture on the grounds that it is variously puerile, offensive, self-indulgent, and/or bathetic" (Reynolds 69). For example, the subculture approach that was born in the Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) at the University of Birmingham studied how young people, especially during the seventies and eighties, created a symbolic resistance to the class system and dominant social institutions, like the police, by grouping in urban tribes, employing stylistic resources, and appropriating certain scenes (Woodman and Bennett 3-4). According to Woodman and Bennett:

> Youth cultures was already a central topic of social science research, with functionalists arguing that postwar youth culture was a side effect of economic prosperity and the institutionalization of compulsory schooling, which together created the conditions for a separate adolescent culture to emerge that was in opposition in many of its values to adult culture. (3)

The socioeconomic changes and technological developments, and the fact that young people acquired a consumer capacity impacted how culture was shaped from then on as products—especially music, fashion, literature, and film—were targeted for that section of the population (A. Bennett 43). For these reasons, since the fifties, young people have been perceived as key agents in the culture-making process which influenced the sixties social movements (A. Bennett 47), and in this regard, youth is also a period of transition "for society as institutions and cultural beliefs are either reproduced or remade" (Woodman and Leccardi 56). In this regard, Scabini and Marta refer to the fact that intergenerational transmission is when the legacy of the old generation is inherited and at the same time continued and changed during one life's course, which leads to generational transformation (81); therefore, the generational approach links youth and life's course with social changes (Woodman 27).

In this sense, Woodman and Leccardi address three temporalities that interact in shaping people's lives; first, our daily life schedules and routines; second, one's biography including the transitions between life stages, and finally, the generation to which we belong "which captures the temporal horizons in which people make sense of their own lives in terms of their changing society" (61). According to Scabini and Marta, studies on generations offer four definitions for the word. First, the demographic definition or "generation understood as a cohort" which denotes "the average interval between the birth of an individual and the subsequent birth of his or her own child" (82); for instance, what is often labeled as generations X, Y and Z. Second, there is the economic definition that focuses on consumption styles, tastes, and interactions with the means of production according to age; in this sense, generations are usually generalized as young people, adults and the elderly (Scabini and Marta 82). The third one is the genealogical definition in which a generation is defined according to categories in family relationships of kinship, regardless of age specificities (Scabini and Marta 82), for instance, grandparents, parents, children, grandchildren. And finally, the historicist definition which depends on shared sociohistorical experiences (Scabini and Marta 82), which could be related to Mannheim's theory.

Studies on generations became an important part of research on youth which was emerging during the early twentieth century, especially since the appearance of the Lost

Generation after the first World War. Karl Mannheim's theories were one of the most widely spread, especially after they were translated from German to English during the fifties, which addressed the factors that influence the emergence of a generation. According to this theoretical analysis, there should be a site or location which constitutes the context and the social conditions where a generation could arise; it is not only about sharing a common date of birth, but also about certain experiences and challenges (Mannheim 288-291; Woodman 20-21). In this sense, "a new generational location emerges when the ways of life pursued by the previous generation in the same culture are not valued or no longer realistic" (Woodman 21). As mentioned before, certain life expectations change from generation to generation due to young people contesting and challenging these lifestyles, and also, depending on the socioeconomic factors and political climate that have an impact on such transitions.

For Mannheim, the location will determine the possible beliefs, feelings, expressions, and actions (291), which could foster the rise of social movements that influence "generational change within a culture" (Woodman 21). This does not mean that all young people in a determined place and time share the same ideas and values, as there can also be polarized opinions and actions, and these clashes actually influence the birth of a new political, social, and cultural generations (Mannheim 304; Woodman 21). A generation could be established locally, like the underground cultural phenomenon La Movida, in the late nineteen-seventies and eighties in Spain. It could also expand globally like the sixties' baby boomers since during that time, social movements in a part of the world influenced protests in other countries. A generation could also be perceived transnationally, for example, nowadays with social networks, millennials and Generation Z are easily connected and movements like #MeToo and Black Lives Matter, as well as climate change causes are addressed on a fluid interconnected space.

Therefore, "Mannheim's theory emphasizes the inevitability of differences due to different locations in developmental and historical time: each cohort must deal anew with issues of identity, intimacy, values and appropriate behaviours as it moves into adulthood" (Scabini and Marta 85). Mannheim's and similar approaches were displaced during the next decades while Youth Studies' two main branches, transitions, and cultures, consolidated. However, contemporarily there has been more interest in this field to find a more holistic approach that intertwines transitions and youth cultures as there are important intersections among these areas (Woodman and Bennett 5). As for recent studies on generations, as

mentioned before, the tendency is to include age and generation as another category across race, gender, class, etc. to provide a critical intersectional approach (Woodman 23).

Since the late twentieth century, the studies on intergenerationality have increased as well and several studies by Bengtson with other scholars refer to "the coexistence of elements of continuity with elements of discontinuity between the generations" (Scabini and Marta 82). Therefore, there could be intergenerational conflict in families and micro-level interactions, and generational clashes in society and macro-level dynamics (84), but also intergenerational solidarity or "social cohesion between generations" in both instances (Bengtson and Oyama 35). Like Beauvais' existential theory about the mighty child in children's literature, Bengtson and Kuypers argue that as people age, they fear their existence will be lost and there will be no sociocultural continuity, and so they transmit values and traditions to the future generations, who in turn see these attempts as limitations for asserting their own identities and individuation, which leads to what we know as a generational gap (258-259). Hence, there is a constant tension between solidarity and socialization because the intergenerational transmission is a dynamic reciprocal process where values and traditions are continually negotiated and redefined, and both parties, young and old, have active roles (Scabini and Marta 86).

Drawing from Erikson's concept of generativity,[11] Scabini and Marta argue that instead of controlling the next generation in the identity formation process, there can be intergenerational support and creativity from the older generations, thus, "generativity allows for both continuity and change between generations and the relationships between generations are converted from controlling to caring" (89). There could also be intergenerational solidarity because adults have also experienced childhood, different generations can learn from each other (Woodman 24), and besides, there are certain cultural affiliations that do not end with youth (Woodman and Bennett 6).

In conclusion, for McEvoy-Levy, the transitions approach tends more toward the development of youth into adulthood which includes the paradox between nurture and control that is also replicated in children's literature, and in this view, minors are molded and their role is more passive (40-42), when as human beings we are constantly evolving and change and development can happen at any age. On the other hand, the cultures' perspective recognizes

[11] Psychoanalyst Erik Erikson introduced this concept in his book *Childhood and Society* in 1950 in which he describes eight developmental stages from childhood to adulthood. According to this theory, middle-age is a moment of caring, guiding and helping the new generations, which offers the person a sense of fulfillment, as opposed to stagnation (231).

youth agency in interpreting and influencing popular culture and the process of identity-making, as well as their resistance through creative responses (McEvoy-Levy 42-43). In this regard, Flynn points out how if even children are not free from the influence of adults and institutions as they do not normally have autonomy, they do have agency—or the ability to act—and are not only passive recipients of culture, and as intergenerational theories have suggested, adults do not only impose culture on the new generations, instead there can be intergenerational collaborations to build, negotiate and transform what is inherited from the previous generations ("Agency" 256-257). In this sense, the generation's approach sees youth as drivers of social change as a collective (McEvoy-Levy 43-44), consumers with their own tastes, and recognizes their agency in the intergenerational transmission at the micro and macro levels.

I have argued that age is not only a biological trait, but a social construction and even a factor of social difference, due to adultcentrism that sets adulthood as a superior state, and adultism which is any form of discrimination from adults to children, which can also be internalized even by young people. Moreover, life stages are not fixed concepts as they are continuously evolving and the meanings of childhood, adolescence, adulthood and old age are constantly negotiated socially. Besides, youth may overlap with different life-stages becoming a fluid concept, which is why Youth Studies are concerned with changes on life transitions, generational gaps and intergenerationality. At the same time, generations could be considered at the micro and macro levels and there could be both solidarity and conflict within these complex dynamics due to generational transmission, generational unfairness, cultural individuation, and socio-political events as explored in the first chapter. Considering that this work intends to offer a child-centered analysis grounded on Childism, and the reviewed concepts, the next part will address how social constructions of childhood and youth influence literature and culture.

### 2.2 Social constructions of childhood and youth

Children and teenagers have been othered by adults through constructions and discourses depending on historical and geographical factors, the most pervasive religious and political ideologies, social norms and institutions, and cultural context. These constructions have had a major ideological impact on how societies treat, raise, and educate children which can vary due

to gender, social class, race, etc., but also in the ways childhood is represented in different forms of art, especially literature. In fact, in the nineteen-sixties, Philippe Ariès argued that childhood is a modern Western invention and although he has been refuted for his argument that during the Middle Ages children lives were undifferentiated from adults, his premise that childhood is a social construction that responded to cultural needs—such as the privatizing of the family throughout the seventeen and eighteen century—rather than biological fact, has been respected in different fields (Honeyman 5, Sánchez-Eppler 38). According to Sánchez-Eppler:

> Childhood may be widely recognized as a life stage that stretches from birth until the taking on of adult competence and responsibility, but its contours and meanings are deeply circumstantial, formed by the particulars of each historical and social situation, and the stories we tell about them. Perhaps it is because childhood simultaneously roots itself in both biological and ideological ground that it proves so potent a means of naturalizing cultural formations. (36)

According to John Wall, there have been three main perspectives towards children that have dominated ethics and consequently, other fields. The first view is rooted in the idea that children are pure and preserve the human capacity of goodness, as opposed to adult corrupted societies; an assumption that not only reduces moral complexity but also romanticizes young people's struggles (J. Wall, "Childism" 73). The second view is sort of contrary to the first one as it sets childhood as an unruly, uncivilized, and ignorant stage that must be surpassed through rationality, discipline, and education, which means that, from this perspective, children are incapable of agency and in constant need of adult training (J. Wall, "Childism" 74). Finally, the third view describes childhood as a morally blank and developmental stage, seeing it as incomplete since it is defined from what it lacks compared to adulthood (J. Wall, "Childism" 74-75). Christianity, as well as Western philosophers from Plato to Rousseau, have encouraged the view of children as innocent, vulnerable, and hence, in need of adult protection, and at the same time, as uncivilized and unable to control desires, so grownups are supposed to oversee their moral instruction (J. Wall, "Childism" 73-75). Thinkers from Aristotle to Locke have placed childhood as a blank state and children's minds as a *tabula rasa* ready to be molded (J. Wall, "Childism" 73-75).

All three perspectives have served as valid excuses for control, surveillance, censorship, and other oppressive attitudes from adults towards young people. For instance, even if children do need protection and nurture, sometimes this is confused with keeping them in a state of ignorance and repression about certain topics selected by adults—especially, sexuality, violence, and death (Mills 12-13). In name of preserving their innocence, young people are not supposed to be exposed to certain situations, which remain taboo or secret until the adult

decides that they are ready to learn and grow up, leaving the infantile state behind (Mills 12-13). For instance, from the Victorian era and on, there are examples of female characters that are depicted dying young and chaste before they could be corrupted (Mills 14).

Romantic artists and poets contributed to establishing childhood as another category different from adulthood, and children as having their own nature (McEvoy-Levy 87). In this context, children are represented as wise, agents of redemption and spiritual guides for adults since they are uncorrupted and pure (Mills 17-19). The Apollonian representation of children has encouraged the notion that they stand for what is good in the world and hope for the future (Mills 17-19). These views have encouraged political and mediatic discourses about assuring a better future for children and actions to protect vulnerable infants, which is usually accentuated when representing the global south (Mills 24-25); for instance, governments, the media, and NGOs portray children from so-called developing countries in miserable situations to encourage pity in adults, especially from the first world (Mills 24-25; Canella and Viruru 67). This used to happen in the past too, for example, when portraying nineteenth century England and children labor during the industrial revolution (Mills 25).

On the other hand, there is the Dionysian view that confuses socialization with civilization assuming children are irrational and behave almost like animals (Mills 26)—and even drawing from evolutionary theory that regards growth in a similar way to the development of species (McEvoy-Levy 88). Physical punishment was justified in the past as part of these ideas and although nowadays, it is considered a violation of human rights, education and discipline could also share the same purpose of molding the deviant minor according to adult norms and social expectations. Therefore, education is typically hierarchical, and children are supposed to acquire knowledge and make social progress, while growing physically and getting older, which means the cultural transmission is adultcentric at its core (Mills 20).

Canella and Viruru compare adult power over children to colonialism in the sense that a group exercises control over another one that is considered primitive, ignorant, and underdeveloped; as knowledgeable and advanced beings, adults are the ones in charge of educating young people and showing them how to evolve, control their emotions and behave rationally following Western values like reason, logic, and progress (63-74). According to Honeyman, “the modern concept of childhood evolved with and in contrast to the Enlightenment ideal of rational adulthood, in response to a chain of events that followed the advent of printing: increased literacy, public education, and the defining of developmental

stages toward a goal of maturity" (3). What is considered normal for early life stages—infancy, puberty, adolescence—depends on achieving certain academic, social, and psychological goals (Canella and Viruru 77-79), that are usually "disconnected from social and material circumstances of children lives" as they are usually based on a model of a white Western male and middle-class child (Pease 212). Ideological State Apparatuses[12] such as politics, religion and education tend to favor Western child-rearing practices over others, as well as hetero-patriarchal family values and to promote the belief that a specific type of family will assure a normal childhood (Canella and Viruru 77-79). This ideology encourages a conception of childhood as universal, erasing all the individual and diverse experiences a child could have, and sets it as a category opposed to adulthood.

According to McEvoy-Levy, "the phased maturity model of children's and youth development are ideologically paralleled in IR [International Relations']'s division of the world into developed (adult), developing (youth), and undeveloped states (children)" (40). The adult/child dichotomy legitimizes the physical occupation and colonization of children's bodies and territories, and also institutionalizes the right of a group to make decisions and transfer knowledge to the other (Canella and Viruru 83). Hence, adolescence is established as a transitory stage of development to finally attain maturity and the sinful child is replaced by the troubled teenager who needs to be indoctrinated and disciplined to become a good citizen (McEvoy-Levy 97). McEvoy-Levy explains that:

> Popular culture, politics, policy, and images of youth are complexly co-constitutive. Literary depictions of youth and 'children's literature' have historically been employed in defining and disciplining (literally and figuratively) young people within the wider social and political contexts of their lives. (84)

In this sense, Coster suggests that the angel-devil dichotomy has been associated with ideas regarding childhood since the medieval times and provides a few interesting examples of novels portraying young male characters; for instance, in the nineteenth century, Dickens' Oliver Twist and Artful Dodger, as well as Twain's Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn could represent both poles of this characterization (9). At the beginning of the twentieth century, a pastoral childhood was idealized through oeuvres like *Peter Pan* (1902) and *Winnie the Pooh*

[12] Philosopher Louis Althusser introduced this concept through the essay "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" (1970) to refer to social and cultural institutions that are employed to influence the dominant ideology in societies, as opposed to Repressive State Apparatuses (government, police, armed forces) that employ violence and force to ensure coercion; however, both eventually serve similar purposes as ISA are employed for indoctrination.

(1926), while during the postwar period, novels like *Lord of the Flies* (1954) portrayed the opposite view of the savage child (Coster 9).

These views could also be related to the terms 'childish' and 'childlike,' because while childish is often employed to refer to someone at any age who is irrational, immature, selfish and superficial (Hollindale 51), childlike is used in a positive sense, but often employed condescendingly to denote innocence (Hollindale 45), as well as characteristics often associated with childhood like imagination, purity, playfulness, hopefulness. Whether it has been the sanctified Apollonian perspective or the Dionysian devilish child, or the adolescent as an emergent adult, it is undeniable that these categories have influenced representations of childhood and youth in Anglo-American literature and culture. The following section offers a brief historical and cultural analysis in this regard, singling out the most prevalent and even contradictory views and ideas associated to children and young people that influenced cultural artifacts pertaining to the period following the industrial revolution until the late twenty-first century.

### 2.2.1 Views on childhood and youth in literature

During the industrial revolution, adolescents in the UK and the US were forced to grow quickly into adulthood to comply with class and gender expectations. Boys from lower classes were expected to rapidly take part in the workforce, and even if young men from wealthier classes were sent to college at fifteen, it was so they could have a profession a couple of years later. However, the argument that children needed protection, and extended education became widely spread, and by the mid-1800, the working child was no longer the norm; in fact, Victorian writers like Charles Dickens, who denounced child labor, also influenced fields like psychology, pediatrics, and teaching (McEvoy-Levy 89-90). Due to these changes, in the industrial society, more than ever, the concept of generation acquired a crucial meaning as children and adults' spheres became separated, and childhood and adulthood were associated to different social status (Alanen, "Generational Order" 159). Therefore, the moralizing children's books of the eighteenth century reflected the development of industrial capitalism that was preparing young people to join the workforce, while the flourishing of imaginative children's literature in the mid-nineteenth century is a sign of the rising middle class, that allowed childhood to be more a site for fantasy and play, and less a period of preparation for adult life (Sánchez-Eppler 40). Since play and learning were encouraged, books and toys came to be marketed as products for children different from adult commodities (McEvoy-Levy 90).

Stories of street urchins making their way in the world appealed to both the middle and working classes and promoted the idea of social scaling and opportunity (Hunt, "Children's Literature" 60). During the nineteenth century, dime novels which were pulps "or adventure stories with their tales of rebellious and mischievous youth" became popular, but still presented an adult perspective (Hamilton 60). Likewise, domestic novels—that were mainly written for a young female audience—promoted conservative and religious morals; however, adolescence was portrayed in a less restricted way in US literature and girl protagonists were allowed more freedoms and independence than in British literature (Hunt, "Children's Literature" 60). However, gender was not the only category to divide books into adventure or domestic stories, even a century before schools grouped children by age, the publishing industry structured the conception of childhood and the market through such classification. Age groupings in classrooms would become standard in the mid-nineteenth century education, and later, reinforced by the benchmarks promoted by developmental psychology in the twentieth century, establishing chronological age as a mark of identity (Sánchez-Eppler 38). Even if during the nineteenth and early twentieth century children's literature portrayed idyllic and secret childhood places—like Wonderland, Neverland, Oz, Narnia, where adults were intruders (Sampson 62; Sánchez-Eppler 41), most books were didactic and continued to focus on traditional expectations about family and career.

However, according to Reynolds, "it is not accidental that at decisive moments in social history children have been at the centre of ideological activity or that writing for children has been put into the service of those who are trying to disseminate new world views, values, and social models" (2). Therefore, "children's books at midcentury used America itself as a complex metaphor for the progressive notion of social inclusion" of immigrants from the nineteen-thirties and on, as well as minorities, especially, as they assumed new roles during the war years, and during the postwar years, an understanding of the country as part of the global community led to a new notion of democracy that involved the child (Schmidth xxviii). Moreover, thanks to social changes at the end of the nineteenth century and during the twentieth century such as compulsory education, child labor laws, urban growth, and the increase in human longevity "contributed to the 'invention' of a period of extended development known as adolescence" (Hamilton 58).

Childhood became a sacred space, while adolescence was considered a time of emotional trouble and social dysfunction, so organizations like the Boy Scouts and parental

manuals proliferated and, in this context, Christian institutions associated teenage problems with rock & roll and comic books (McEvoy-Levy 97-98). At the same time, they became a new audience targeted by the market and "clothes, records, cinema, eating out and magazines were all important aspects of teenage culture, which was rapidly commodified" (Graham 15). The image of moody and rebellious adolescence originated at that time and was promoted through films and books featuring young characters and addressed to a teenage audience (Graham 15). Social studies conceived teenagers as delinquents who skipped school, promoted sex outside of marriage, under-age drinking and were against the family and society's respectable values representing a threat in the post-war period and the fight against Communism (Graham 15). Hence, discipline and even physical abuse in schools was pervasive.

Therefore, since the nineteenth century, youthhood acquired political and intellectual connotations because of student activism and youth revolt which were perceived as possible threats to national identity, democracy, and governance stability (McEvoy-Levy 93). As a consequence, citizenship and loyalty to the state were promoted among young people through parental metaphors about nation-building like Mother Britain and the Founding Fathers (McEvoy-Levy 95). During the Cold War, through international travel and exchanges, young people were used as a tool of foreign policy between the URSS and the West, and anxiety was projected through discourses about how young minds, especially white males, were susceptible to communist penetration (McEvoy-Levy 100), and thus, perpetuating the ambivalent view of teenagers as innocent, as well, as disruptive.

Moreover, World War I and II and subsequent Cold War conflicts like the Vietnam War, forced a lot of young men to take part in the slaughter. As a result, sales of toy guns rocketed during the postwar period and literature represented young people, especially boy fighters, as both victims and heroes, but there was a smaller amount of antiwar literature too (McEvoy-Levy 96). Due to the influence of developmental psychology at the time, YA literature portrayed heroic teenagers that were experiencing identity crises (Reynolds 70). In this regard the classic YA novels emerged when the writers who experienced the war confronted the sentimental tradition introducing young characters that shared their thoughts and views, and this influenced a literary turn towards interiority (Hilton and Nikolajeva 6). According to Hilton and Nikolajeva:

> It was in the context of these new freedoms for youth that J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*, of 1951, founded the Young Adult canon, re-invoking the old relationship of Mark

> Twain's Huckleberry to "sivilisation," between the subversive adolescent and a critique of wider society, and dazzlingly provided the genre with new psychological depth. (7)

These scholars argue how in the war aftermath, the teenage character seems prone to a nervous breakdown as the society itself to conflict; in this context, the accomplishment of Salinger's first and most popular novel is that it provided the metaphorical link between the emotionally troubled interior of a young character and the injustices of a bleak world around (Hilton and Nikolajeva 7-8). Furthermore, with authors writing in the shadow of a holocaust and the threat of a nuclear war, there was a tendency in fantastic stories, to make young characters the heroes assuming leadership roles that were traditionally granted to adults—like kings in an Arthurian fashion or protagonists with godlike Hercules' features, while adult characters held limited power and the fate of the world rested in the hands of the younger generation (Sampson 66). Children's books intended to provide an optimistic outlook about the future and show how young people could assume pioneering roles to improve society towards social justice, freedom and positive uses of technology in an era of anxiety about violence, control, changing norms, and influence of foreign and even extraterrestrial forces (Reynolds 16).

Therefore, during the sixties and the seventies, children's literature portrayed young characters as resourceful individuals, and hence, no longer as angelic or sinful (Hunt, "Children's Literature" 51). "In the late twenty-century, children are increasingly endowed with the responsibility of questioning absolute authority" (Sampson 67) because adults are no longer reliable or competent since the society that they have created is no longer safe or respectable (Hunt, "Children's Literature" 65). In this sense, Samson provides the example of Dahl's books which have disturbed adults as they offer a subversive children's angle (67). However, in general terms, whilst the first half of the twentieth century celebrates an idyllic protected childhood through literature because of an escapist reaction to a social unsettling context after World War I (Hunt, "Children's Literature" 63), the second part of the century seem to focus on teaching children how to grow up (Sampson 68). This is due to the fact young people's growth usually serves as a metaphor for much needed societal improvement, hence, literature directed at children and teenagers often reflects the most prevalent sociopolitical anxieties (Hilton and Nikolajeva 1-2).

To sum up, childhood in literature could be sentimentalized, depict trauma, or contain social warnings; writers could either empower children or protect their innocence, so the construction of the young reader as a consumer is also linked to these common images (Hunt "Children's Literature and Childhood" 51, 68). According to Sánchez-Eppler, "the idea of the

child is repeatedly made and remade in the stories told to children" (35), and these views have influenced the production, selection, and censorship of what has been considered appropriate material reading and its didactic or entertaining purposes (39). Hunt points out how:

> Childhood shown in children's books is likely to be a model of how adults think it should be, or wish it was; or a demonstration of what it should not be (with more or less direct instructions to the parents as well as the child); or a picture of how adults wish it had been or remember it to have been. ("Children's Literature" 51)

In this regard, literary criticism has shifted from the analysis of the binary between adult and children founded in Rose's seminal argument about the construction of childhood in children's literature (Deszcz-Tryhubczak and García-González 2). Rose argued that the intention of children's literature is to portray the myth of eternal youth and innocence with the objective of glorifying and securing the child in a pure or primitive state in relation to language, sexuality and the state, and hence, this literature is impossible as it presents an image solely created by adults (1-11). This and other similar works have been criticized for creating alterity or otherness between childhood and adulthood and fostering other studies that also perceive young people only as victims of adultism (Flynn "Agency," 255). Therefore, scholarship has moved towards studies oriented to intergenerationality which align better with the objectives of Childism, acknowledging agency in young and old, and also, considering the full dynamics of the age spectrum, without disregarding that there are dominant constructions associated to age and life stages that could be reproduced through cultural artifacts.

Considering Flynn's argument that "childhood studies seek to encourage criticism that […] examines the representation of children and childhood throughout literature and culture" ("Intersections" 144), through this study, I aim to analyze Roald Dahl and J.D. Salinger's works to understand how childhood and youth, coming-of-age and intergenerational relationships are represented in their stories. The following chapter will expand into the reception of their works and associations to children's literature, YA and intergenerational crossovers, especially during the period that has been examined in the first chapter.

## Chapter III

## Writers and Readers: Children's Literature, YA and Crossovers

Considering that most authors of children's literature and Young Adult (YA) fiction are adults, but their intended audience is usually children and teenagers, this chapter is dedicated to exploring the relationship between writer and reader. As mentioned in the previous chapter, this could be influenced by constructions of childhood and youth that are so often reproduced in literature, especially since these genres have been regarded as tools for education and socialization, created and selected by adults. However, "writers often utilize childhood as a ludic space through which to criticize the adult world. In doing so, they mimic social constructions of childhood, exposing the very constructedness of such representations, decentering the adult discourse that created them" (Honeyman 5-6). Honeyman argues that even authors of adult literature and YA can propose alternatives to traditional childhood constructions, and therefore, such "reconstructions reflect adult desires for resistance" (6). Writers have the capacity to empower both their young characters and readers by scrutinizing adultcentric values, examining adultist behaviors, and challenging adult normativity through their narratives. Simultaneously, young readers can offer their own subversive interpretations of discourses, images, and ideologies in literature meant for them. Moreover, a young audience may read and appropriate a work originally intended for another demographic, thereby trespassing age-barriers. This dynamic is sometimes overlooked in analyses that focus solely on the author's privileged position or the narrator's ideological dominance, possibly influenced by prevailing notions that portray children as inherently innocent and lacking agency and critical thinking.

For these reasons, I first examine aetonormativity, which involves a power imbalance based on age difference commonly reproduced in children's literature and YA. I also explore the subversive techniques that writers can use to empower younger audiences. Following this, I focus on the evolving perspectives on literature categorized for adults, children's literature, and YA, which is fundamental as the selected corpus is frequently linked to these genres. As noted in the initial chapter, Salinger's most renowned works are often labeled as YA, with some even considering *The Catcher* as the genre's founding text. In contrast, Dahl authored distinct pieces for adults and children, which have been adapted into horror TV shows, family movies, plays, and musicals. In this context, the concept of crossover becomes pertinent for a

more comprehensive understanding of these authors' works, given that their books have received appreciation from audiences from different generations.

Connecting these concepts with the author's historical reception can bring fresh insights, particularly in the context of literature aimed at a specific age group. Therefore, the second part of this chapter is dedicated to examining the significance of reception within the context of the emergence and readership of a literary work. This involves an exploration of what reviewers and critics have expressed about Dahl and Salinger in comparison to the reactions of readers, both in the US and the UK. Additionally, the fact that some of their works have faced censorship and frequent challenges while simultaneously remaining on school reading lists and achieving best-seller status in popular culture are noteworthy aspects to consider. The concluding sections of this chapter delve into the study of these contradictions, often rooted in adultcentric constructions, regarding the reception of their works.

### 3.1 Children's Literature, YA and Crossovers

There is an inherent imbalance of power between the adult as the author and predominant narrative voice, and the young person as both the focalizing character and intended audience (Nikolajeva, "Aetonormativity" 13). Drawing from Queer theory that refers to heteronormativity, Nikolajeva has coined this kind of age-based asymmetry as aetonormativity[13] arguing that in most stories for young readers, adult normativity is usually endorsed and privileged over childhood and adolescence which are considered deviant stages ("Aetonormativity" 16). In a similar way that feminist and postcolonial theories have made us aware of "heterology, or discourse on the Other" through critical readings ("Aetonormativity" 16), Nikolajeva suggests employing this approach to analyze literary works, especially considering the didactic and socialization function that children's literature and YA has had historically ("Aetonormativity" 13). Aetonormativity aligns with Childism's larger scope, principles and goals, aiming to study and deconstruct the power dynamics related to age depicted in literature for young audiences. While I employ Childism as child-centered umbrella approach that advocates for dismantling age-related social constructions and for broader age-inclusive research across disciplines, I use aetonormativity theory specifically to understand

[13] From Latin Aeto which means pertaining to age according to Nikolajeva ("Aetonormativity"16).

the age-based power dynamics reproduced, corroborated, subverted and challenged in children's literature and young adult (YA) fiction.

In this regard, Nikolajeva points out that writers might seek to empower their young heroes through situations that might be uncommon in real-life, but not in fiction. For instance, drawing from the carnivalesque, some narratives might have a subversive effect, challenging adult arbitrary authority and norms, especially through tales where the young heroes are temporarily or permanently dislocated from parental protection and set in extraordinary empowering situations ("Aetonormativity" 17). Even if in the end, these characters usually return to adult supervision, at least certain oppressive structures are examined and interrogated through different strategies that writers employ (Nikolajeva "Aetonormativity" 17).

Therefore, in fantasy, children are usually empowered through their transportation to a magical realm, the possession of a magical object or agent, or the acquisition of magical traits, making them superior to adults, or even omnipotent—for example, drawing from the romantic construction of childhood as intrinsically good and capable of triumphing over evil, the prophecy of a child that will overthrow an evil ruler is frequent in this genre (Nikolajeva, *Power* 41-42). Since fantasy has had a higher status in children's literature than in general literature, it contributes to reverse the existing order as a metaphor for reality and in this sense, Nikolajeva explains how:

> At its best, fantasy for children provides moral and spiritual guidance for young people, addressing an audience that has not yet discovered any firm distinction between reality and imagination; that does not dismiss magical worlds and events as implausible; that has stronger potential for secondary belief. (*Power* 42)

For instance, the association of childhood to the realm of dreams and the imaginary, play and fantasy lets literature to be more flexible for writers and illustrators compared to the rational constraints associated with adult norms (Reynolds 16). Dahl's stories are usually labeled as fantasy, but his narratives blend carnivalesque and magical devices with the harsh reality of the young characters, which is why sometimes his works are associated to magical realism as well. Likewise, young characters can be empowered through the presence of anthropomorphic or animated small or weaker animals and toys, as they can feel strong, clever, and protective (Nikolajeva, "Aetonormativity" 19). This is another carnivalesque effect that can be seen in Dahl's novels like *James and the Giant Peach* (1961) and *Billy and the Minpins* (1991) where

the young protagonists are able to face adultism by helping and teaming up with fellow animals, while learning about nature.

Carnivalesque devices to empower children cannot only be employed in fantasy, but also in realism through the provision of wealth, possessions, and leadership positions; for example, finding a treasure or when in Dahl's *Charlie* saga, the boy inherits Wonka's factory. This is something that in real life is unlikely to occur, but these fictional circumstances give the minor a higher status at least in an adult normative and capitalistic world. The orphan motif, common in several of Dahl's novels, is sometimes employed to free characters from adult supervision and let them face certain situations independently. Moreover, running away from adult supervision and protection at home or school, allows young characters exercise their independence and contest social norms. This can be seen through Holden Caulfield's lens across his journey in Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye*, even if at the end he must return to an adult normative society. Nikolajeva provides the example of Huckleberry Finn, Holden's predecessor, who at the end of Twain's novel is at least ethically superior to the adults around him because he does not see slavery as a normal condition anymore ("Aetonormativity" 21).

In this sense, children can be empowered when a character is depicted as smarter than most adults, and especially female young characters could challenge traditional feminine stereotypes by receiving traits like strength, bravery, and independence in untypical scenarios, like Dahl's protagonists in *The Magic Finger* (1966), *The BFG* (1982), and *Matilda,* even if the society remains patriarchal ("Aetonormativity" 21). Furthermore, children and teenagers can be characterized as more sensitive and empathetic than the adults in the story, such as Salinger's Glass siblings, even if the adult world is ruthless or phony, and its rules oppress this type of characters; this is also stressed by Dahl's abusive grownups who are usually the villains.

Not only adult characters can be authoritative, but the adult narrative voice could have more power than the child characters and readers, especially when they are talking down to them as if they are the voice of experience (Nikolajeva, *Power* 62-67). According to Barbara Wall, adults speak differently when they are aware that they are addressing children (2), however, this does not always have to be equated to talking down to young people in a patronizing and condescending way, but just having in mind that there are certain factors to consider about tastes, skills or frame of reference that characterize that part of the audience (15). The "overt authorial narrator," who makes the reader aware of their presence, and addresses them directly, flourished in the nineteenth century (B. Wall 5). Although it became

outdated and replaced by a first-person narrator, usually a young character like Holden Caulfield, there are still authors that continued to employ this kind of address like Roald Dahl (B. Wall 5). However, Dahl is trying to establish a new kind of relationship between the narrator and the reader, not only by addressing the young reader directly, but also by taking the side of the children and making the adult narrator join them in the fight against other evil adults (B. Wall 193-194).

Moreover, Nikolajeva suggests that even with a first-person young narrator, the authors' ideology could have preeminence (Nikolajeva, *Power* 106). Besides, the situation that empowers the young character in children's literature and YA usually happens only under certain conditions and for a determined period, and even if the child ends up winning, it is sometimes because they are saved by an adult (Nikolajeva, "Aetonormativity" 17-18). This is not the same as having cooperative and respectful intergenerational relationships, but closer to the white savior or the maiden in distress condescending stereotypes. For instance, Nikolajeva argues that adult normativity is endorsed in most narratives because it is difficult for authors to fully interrogate their privilege as adults (*Power* 203), but "what can differ is the degree in which the adult writers manage to subvert their own power position and empower the fictive children" (Nikolajeva, *Power* 62).

However, not every author could be aware of the audience that will read their work and its subsequent associations with children's literature, YA or adult fiction will be a result of a variety of factors like the historical and cultural context, the current social constructions about childhood and youth, educational policies and market tendencies. Furthermore, I agree with Flynn when he argues that "neither human beings nor texts are so thoroughly constructed by our dominant ideologies that no conscious or deliberate thought or action on the part of the person, the writer, or the reader is possible" ("Agency" 259). For these reasons, I will next explore the everchanging definitions of these genres associated with determined age groups to keep on building connections between intergenerational writers and readers, and then continue with the reception of Dahl and Salinger's works.

### 3.1.1 The Age Divide

Defining children's literature and YA is challenging because these genres have always been connected to adult norms; hence, another way of adultcentrism and adultism has been deciding what is appropriate material reading for children and young adults. Although "children produce

literature in vast quantities, oral and written, both individually wrought and through collaborative effort (sometimes diachronically), and in a variety of forms" (Rudd, "Theorizing and Theories" 19), most authors officially considered in these categories are adults. Thus, children's literature and YA are named by their intended audience, but usually exclude the young addressee from the production process (Clark 15). Adults are part of the literary industry and institutions—as publishers, sellers, parents, teachers, librarians, critics—and often decide what seems suitable, appropriate, or appealing for a determined age group (Nodelman 207).

Beauvais considers all the adult participants that play a part in the creation and diffusion of this type of literature, apart from other adults that indirectly influence it by perpetuating social constructions about childhood. For Beauvais, the writing practices include the authors and artists that either write or illustrate with a young audience in mind or intentionally send it to agents or publishers with a focus on children's literature and YA (8). There are also publishing practices which consist of formatting a book and paratexts to appeal to the intended reader's tastes and expectations, making it child friendly as Beauvais points out (8). Additionally, there are mediatory practices that include the teachers and librarians who classify or assign books to determined age groups (Beauvais 8). Beauvais also englobes in critical practices, the critics and reviewers that provide responses to a text considering the likelihood to appeal to an imagined young audience (8). Finally, the readerly practices refer to the parents and other adults who buy books to give to a child or read them themselves, "whether they perceive this book to be directed at them or at the 'other' audience" (Beauvais 9).

Therefore, age-differenced audiences are usually designated according to evolving views and social constructions about childhood, adolescence and youth that have influenced education and the market. Furthermore, these are the only genres associated to age groups while the term adult literature does not refer to a particular category and is only likely to be used when there is the need to establish a difference with children's literature and YA. However, if we go back in time, there was a moment when Anglo-American literature was not labeled according to these categories and plays, fairytales and folklore stories were addressed to all readers. According to Hunt, "meaningful distinctions between 'adult literature' and 'children's literature' only began with the separate marketing strategies of booksellers in England" in the eighteenth century ("Children's Literature" 45). Rudd explains that this division was consolidated during the nineteenth century, when the educational system promoting literacy was mostly established ("Theorizing and Theories" 20). Therefore, the term children's

literature originates from its recognition as a commodity since the cultural industry identified young people as a distinct audience with shared tastes based on their age group and consumer capacity. Besides, its associations with education also influenced the categorization of literature targeted specifically at children.

Although the earliest use of the term has not been established, children's literature appeared as the title of an article in the *Quarterly Review* in 1860 and by the end of that century, the term 'juvenile literature' was widely accepted, although it took a century for it to be included in academic courses in the UK and the US (Hunt, "Children's Literature" 42). During the late nineteenth century and especially, the early twentieth century, the canon of taste was changing, as Clark singles out, since "the cultural gatekeepers shifted from the likes of magazine editors to the professoriate […], only works (especially those by white men) seen as targeting an adult audience came to be seen as worthy of the highest approbation. children's literature came to be seen as inferior" (16). This genre was equated with popular culture since high literature was automatically regarded as part of adult literature and thus, the classics ceased to be regarded as children's literature, which explains why they have been often published in two different editions, one for adults and another abridged, or simpler, version for children (Hunt "Children's Literature" 44).

According to Shavit, children's literature inferior status comes from its association with the education system and pedagogical purposes which meant that it could not be regarded as highly as adult literature (ix), and this assumption has influenced and affected its development as a genre (178). Therefore, until recently, research was mostly dedicated to its didactic value, rather than considering it as a literary phenomenon. At first, there were other disciplines more concerned with it than literature per se, like librarianship, education and psychology (Shavit ix-x), until the inclusion of children's literature in academic departments that devoted courses and programs to its study, so this label as a genre and as a discipline came to be considered worthy of critical and theoretical study.

Because such literature has been undervalued, then writers for young audiences have not shared the same symbolic status as adult literature authors, suffering not only from "culturally inferior status," but also facing poetic constraints (Shavit 179), and even moral censorship, which has been Dahl's case. In this regard, Hollindale suggests that "highly successful children authors are in some way childish," but this is not a prerequisite to write children's literature; instead childlessness seems far more important for this scholar who describes it as having

childhood alive in memory or being able to experience a childhood intensity (70). Therefore, if we consider Barbara Wall's understanding of the implied author[14] as the idea of the author carried away by the real readers, not the implied readers (6), the common image of the author of children's literature or YA is someone that has either positive childlike characteristics, as Hollindale puts it, or is perceived as immature.

In this regard, children's literature usually relies on constructions and assumptions about children and childhood made by adults, and historically, it has been expected to withhold entertaining and didactic purposes, to include morals and help young people comply with social and gender expectations. McCulloch points out that "the *Bildungsroman*, translated from German as the novel of education or the novel of formation, is ideally positioned as a pedagogical model of childhood development within children's and young adult (YA) fiction" (174). As stated in the second chapter, Western views on childhood imply innocence, inexperience, immaturity, and dependence which means that it is impossible to have children's literature detached from adults' expectations (Hunt, "children's literature" 43). According to Nodelman:

> This suggests an important definition of children's literature that deserves more detailed investigation: the idea that it is a genre of literature whose defining characteristics can be accounted for by conventional assumptions about and constructions of childhood. The issue here is not what children do actually like or do need. It is how adult perceptions of what children like or need shape the literature that adults provide for children in ways that provide it with distinct markers that allow it to be identified as a genre. (188)

These markers are usually a childlike perspective or focalization, optimistic endings, plot-oriented stories, and midways between realism and fantasy. However, Reynolds argues that children's literature can also have a capacity for innovation, and not only include simple and direct language, but instead nonsense, incorporating visual elements as in picturebooks and narrative devices, stylistic forms and other media and formats that allow space for experimentation (6-9), and even employing the book as a medium, as in pop-up books.

Furthermore, there is a certain ambivalence in children's literature because it provides knowledge, but it also aims to keep children readers' innocent or unexposed to certain topics, realities or facts, making it conservative and subversive at the same time (Nodelman 243). For Reynolds, "children's literature provides a curious and paradoxical cultural space: a space that

[14] The implied author is a concept brought into critical prominence by Wayne Booth in *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (1961) to refer to an imagined personality behind a work or the authors' presence or second self (B.Wall 5-6).

is simultaneously highly regulated and overlooked, orthodox and radical, didactic and subversive" (3). In fact, retellings of myths and legends for young audiences are intended to pass on traditions and values like loyalty, honor, courage, humility, duty, and responsibility, from generations to generations, as attributes that encourage good citizenship (Reynolds 18). However, while such literature could intend to socialize the young to preserve traditional values, it can also withhold a social transformative capacity promoting radical ideas about alternative ways of living and new world orders, especially in times of historical change, considering that the young generation will inherit and shape the future (Reynolds 14). This idea is similar to Beauvais' theory of the mighty child, as well as the generational transmission process studied by Scabini and Marta which singles out how children's literature becomes the place where the intersections between literary theory and age-related studies occur.

The event of children's literature takes place between the author, the text dealing with constructions, and the child reader who is still constructing their own childhood (Hollindale 29). Hollindale argues that the author's purpose is to construct childhood, mostly through young characters, but not always, and that typically employs a "narrative voice and language that are audible for children" (29). For Rudd, childhood constructions in children's literature usually "display awareness of children's disempowered status," or symbolic equals, like toys, vulnerable animals, underprivileged grownups, either conforming or questioning these situations; thus, even if an adult discourse is present, "it is how these texts are read and used that will determine their success as "children's literature" ("Theorizing and Theories" 25-26). Therefore, children's literature and YA could not necessarily feature young characters, but provide a sense of childness, for example through animals, or just prove appealing to young readers, but not necessarily represent them or any related themes at all, as with some adventure stories (Hollindale 85). On the other hand, literature for adults can also depict constructions of childhood or adolescence; hence, either way, there can be complex or reductive representations according to age (Hollindale 85).

Since the seventeenth century, religious and philosophical thinkers, educators and psychologists, and critics have tried to determine what is appropriate reading material or good children's literature according to different understandings of children and childhood (Reynolds 4). For instance, Hollindale argues that if childhood—and I would add, adolescence—are only seen as developmental stages towards maturity, then it is possible that we only value books as educational tools, while if we see these phases as autonomous parts of life experience with its

loses and gains, then we will focus in how books enable the young person to be a child or a teenager (12-13). For these reasons, there is a constant debate about defining children's literature as literature intended for children or simply literature that children read, and in this sense, Clark asks if books that are appropriated for the young public could be considered children's literature or whether books marketed for that audience, but not necessarily written with that addressee in mind, could be included in this category (14-15). Scholars also debate if the focus should be placed on the targeted audience or the contents of the text; and others even ask if there is actually a children's literature since it is not conceived by children and does not entirely belong to them (Hunt, "Children's Literature" 43).

In this regard, Nodelman suggests that there is the figure of a hidden adult as an addressee in children's literature and, consequently, the writer must simultaneously appeal to a dual audience made of young and grown-up readers (206-208). Barbara Wall calls a dual address to the fusion of a single and double addressees (9). The double address characterized children's literature, especially in the Victorian era; however, "the gradual disappearance of an adult narrative voice which exhibited strong consciousness of the presence of adult readers and its replacement by a voice concerned more genuinely and specifically with child readers" (B. Wall 9) led to a single address. The single address became more common from the first half of the twentieth century and on (B. Wall 9), and popularized thanks to YA fiction. However, the fact that adults are the ones that make most of the official decisions creates a constraint for authors in these categories forcing them to find how to manipulate these two audiences simultaneously, while other writers have even managed to ignore the adult's approval and create worlds that exclude adults completely (Shavit 179).

Clark mentions that children, especially at an early age, are more "auditors of literature" than readers per se, so the term audience captures more effectively the many ways in which young people approach and consume literature (14). In turn, adults can also engage with this type of texts either reading out loud the story to children; being part of this exchange but only as observers, and even, read these books for themselves, accepting the child addressee—which according to Barbara Wall, does not make all adults comfortable (18-19). This could be due to the fact that associating any literature with a particular age group discredits its artistic value and further reach, beyond its targeted audience (Honeyman 7). Therefore, Honeyman argues that "literary childhood studies has emerged from traditional children's literature criticism

under the influence of the identity politics of cultural studies, to reevaluate the dubious definition of its genre by "intended audience" (7).

Similarly, Active Audience Theory argues that the public does not just receive information passively, but interprets the message based on their context (Bratich 40). Therefore, it should not be forgotten that children are not a passive audience as they can play a key role as readers and meaning-makers capable of providing their own interpretations to a work (Clark 15). In fact, "early marketing discourse was one of the first audience studies projects to take audience power seriously" because industries depend almost entirely upon the audience and not the other way around (Bratich 40). For example, while the book industry needs to market an oeuvre for a specific age group, Crossover Literature suggests that readers have always broken boundaries to read a text outside their designated audience, especially young readers. Furthermore, members of an intended audience could differ not only because of age or gender, but also because of socioeconomic and cultural factors, making it possible for two children of the same age, but with different living conditions, not to be interested in the same reading material.

The postwar period in the US witnessed a shift in the cultural and literary market, leading to the emergence of YA as a distinct category, separate from children's literature. Due to the association of femininity with concepts such as dependency, purity, innocence, and vulnerability, which were, in turn, linked to childhood, and since YA emerged to distinguish itself from children's literature, the initial works in this modern category were rooted in hegemonic masculinity (Reynolds 73). This genre often explores teenage identity and the process of individuation from childhood and adulthood (Reynolds 72). At the same time, McEvoy-Levy notes that YA promotes intergenerational connections and serves a socializing function (6). Defining YA fiction as a genre becomes complex because, while it is partially centered around books written for and about teenagers, many of these works have attracted an adult readership—not only as a hidden audience or mediators, as in children's literature, but as consecrated readers. Garcia suggests that the cross-generational appeal of YA may stem from its broader exploration of the human condition, not solely focusing on the adolescent experience (xi).

According to Reynolds, writing for this age group considers teenagers as immersed in culture, even highlighting the areas in which the young are the primary creators or consumers (69), as the paradigm of youth cultures in Youth Studies does. Therefore, youth culture is

reinforced and constructed through readings and interpretations of books that reify what it means to be a teenager in Western society (Garcia 5-6). However, YA and youth culture are also made up of tweens, and even goes until the generation of the mid-twenties to mid-thirties who are often associated with the terms 'kidults' and 'adultesence' (Reynolds 76-77). YA as a North American tradition was born when the market captured a possible audience among young people; with the postwar apparent prosperity in the US and the extension of education in the UK, young people were able to spend more money on products that appealed to their tastes and "in both countries from 1945 the term 'teenager' became widely used within the realm of consumption" (Hilton and Nikolajeva 6-7). However, during the nineteen-sixties, books were still a luxury, and the working and middle classes could not easily access them; hence, it was not until the seventies and eighties that the increase of shopping-mall bookstores led to mass buying practices and by the nineties, big stores emerged as a space of profitable bookselling, even online (Garcia 6-7).

In this context, YA as a genre reached its peak during the seventies thanks to the rise of the book industry through the proliferation of such stores and books marketed for teenagers (Garcia 6-7)—especially the ones known as 'problem novels' which focused on topics like pregnancy, drugs, etc. which were trending at the time and even became best-sellers. Therefore, YA has also been underestimated due to the expectations about its didactic function, its status as a commodity, its easy assimilation into popular culture and its overlapping with genres like fantasy and science fiction which have contributed to the idea that it is not serious literature and therefore, could be included in the traditional literary canon (Garcia xi).

As in children's literature, the *Bildungsroman,* sometimes referred to as coming-of-age story, "provides the narrative pattern that has had the greatest influence on adolescent literature" (Trites, *Literary Conceptualizations of Growth* 13). For this reason, it is frequent to find motifs related to growth and formation (*Bildungsroman*), character change and development (*Entwicklungsroman*) (Cadden 310), as well as education (*Erziehungsroman)* (Engel 265), and artistic development *(Künstlerroman)* (Engel 292) in YA. However, Trites argues that without issues of power, there cannot be growth:

> Thus, power is even more fundamental to adolescent literature than growth. During adolescence, adolescents must learn their place in the power structure. They must learn to negotiate the many institutions that shape them: school, government, religion, identity politics, family, and so on. They must learn to balance their power with their parents' power and with the power of the other authority figures in their lives. (Trites, *Disturbing the Universe* x)

Therefore, it is common to find in YA, and sometimes in children's books, narratives about youth challenging adult authorities, which stresses these asymmetric power relations and structures and reinforces the characterization of the outsider as the hero because they attempt to change the status quo, which is usually portrayed as unfair. According to Reynolds, "the adolescent critique of social organisation and interaction as dramatised in adolescent fiction was invested with meaning. Holden Caulfield and his successors pointed a finger at the world and cried 'phoney,' and the world appeared to listen" (78). Since then, the outsider is a beloved character in YA literature and not fitting in is usually associated with ideas of social standing (Garcia 59). Although, these types of characters often go from isolation and alienation and criticism of social structures towards socialization (Reynolds 72), endorsing adult normativity.

However, YA can also distance itself from the image of the unruly teenager who needs to be indoctrinated, to representations that celebrate adolescent creativity and portray teenagers as ethical and politically engaged (Reynolds 82). Therefore, YA also plays a significant role in providing sociocultural understandings of gender, race, class and power relations; and about the political and civil climate of a given time (Garcia 4). Young people are no longer seen as the problem, but the unfair systems that resent anyone who exhibits independent thought and agency, so this type of narrative validates youth culture as contributing to self-growth, independence and authenticity (Reynolds 84-86).

Both children's literature and YA can be conservative and endorse adult normativity, or be subversive and challenge adultist and adultcentric power structures. Despite the historical association of these genres with didacticism and moral lessons, writers have the potential to utilize them as tools for scrutinizing and criticizing the adult world. In doing so, they expose age-related social constructions and aim to shift the narrative perspective from adult normativity to child-centered viewpoints. Therefore, my intention is to study these nuances in Dahl and Salinger's works. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that these genre distinctions have not always existed, as literature divided and grouped according to age responds to changes in the publishing industry, education, socioeconomic conditions, and changing views on childhood and adolescence. Therefore, these genres can promote individuation for these young generations, but also foster intergenerational connections. This might be the reason YA has played a role in drawing attention to what has been more recently labeled as Crossover Literature which will be introduced in the following section, as it represents a significant

development in the evolution of literature beyond traditional age-based categorizations which could also be related to Dahl and Salinger's writing and readership.

### 3.1.2 Intergenerational Crossovers

Literature appealing to both younger and older audiences at the same time is not a novel trend and authors capable of writing adult fiction, as well as children's books are not rare; what is relatively new is the interest towards those trends from diverse milieus, including publishers and marketers, scholars, critics, and reviewers. Beckett explains that the term crossover became accepted in the post-Harry Potter era following the increasing appeal of YA literature to adults; this term expanded to films, TV shows, comics, music, and other cultural products addressed to a younger audience which have awakened the interest of the grownup public ("Crossover Literature" 58-61). The contrary phenomenon, children and teens enjoying adult literature, has more historical precedent.

During the twentieth century, these trends were already noticed and addressed as literature for dual audiences, books for all-ages, intergenerational or bridge literature, among other terms that emerged from either the academia or the book industry, while the term 'crossover' became mostly employed and discussed in studies devoted to children's literature "as theorists of adult fiction rarely 'cross over' to children's books and therefore, have shown little interest in the subject" (Beckett "Crossover Literature" 59). As mentioned, in a pre-literate and pre-print era, folktales, fairytales, and other oral forms were transmitted to all audiences regardless of their age and although Crossover Literature might be a twenty-first century label, it is more of a recovered tradition than a new trend (Beckett, *Crossover Fiction* 4). For example, "because of the high rate of illiteracy and the expense of paper during the early nineteenth century, books and newspapers were often shared by reading aloud" in family gatherings (Lutz 28). Some contemporary authors of children's literature and YA, like C.S. Lewis, Enid Blyton and Dahl, continued to use a tone that resembles the voice of the oral storyteller (B. Wall 18), as if their books were expected to be read out loud to an intergenerational audience.

As stated, the first ones to transgress boundaries were young people with books that are now considered classics, like Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) and Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726), sometimes under the form of abridged or adapted versions (Beckett *Crossover Fiction* 17-18). According to Beckett:

> These novels were never intended to be crossover books, however. The authors did not consciously seek to address young readers, but often their books contained themes that other adults saw as useful vehicles for conveying religious, patriotic, psychological, or moral values to children. While many of these books were adapted for children in order to offer them "great literature," it was often with a didactic intention. (*Crossover Fiction* 19)

In this regard, adaptations have frequently implied a simplistic and accessible version for children's assumed innocence and lack of knowledge, arguing that they are not capable of understanding all the layers of meaning of a given text, but without considering that neither do all adult readers understand them (Beckett, *Crossover Fiction* 19). At the same time, during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the divisions between adult and children's literature were blurrier than later with works like *Alice in Wonderland* (1865) that appealed to an age-diverse readership. Even if the twentieth century was marked by the division between adult and children's literature, and the creation of the YA genre, modern coming-of-age stories published during the fifties and sixties, like *The Catcher in the Rye*, *Lord of the Flies* and *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960), became and have remained popular among different generations of teenagers until the present, even if they were first intended for adults (Beckett, *Crossover Fiction* 23).

In this sense, as writers and critics become more influenced by Modernism, popular books about children and teenagers were often marketed only to young audiences by the growing publishing industry. Besides, some novels became so strongly appropriated by young readers that they ended up disappearing from adult catalogs (Beckett, *Crossover Fiction* 19). In fact, sometimes it has been the book industry with its publishers, marketers, and sellers who have divided books into narrower age categories for commercial purposes; for example, in some stores, there is a PG-15 section that includes YA books that deal with alleged heavier or more mature topics, including novels like *The Catcher in the Rye* (Beckett, *Crossover Fiction* 225). Since a decade ago, the term New Adult has also been used to categorize literature with characters in their late teens or twenties in order to appeal to adult readers in that age bracket, which might be connected to the demand of YA literature beyond its intended teenage audience.

Literary genres like horror, mystery, science fiction and especially, fantasy, have facilitated the cross over (Beckett, *Crossover Fiction* 20) as genre fans do not usually care about the high and popular literature gap or the age divide. The short story format is another means that has enabled the crossover phenomena, and as Beckett mentions, "the conciseness

of the short story genre lends itself well to a transposition from adult fiction to children's book, and generally, only paratextual changes are made to facilitate the crossover" (*Crossover Fiction* 43). This happened to Dahl's *Danny the Champion of the World*, since the novel is based on a short story the writer published for a grownup audience in the late fifties and that was later expanded to fill the gaps and "to make both the subject and characters acceptable within the children's code" (Beckett, *Crossover Fiction* 73).

Still, Dahl did not modify the main theme, the fact that Danny's father, who is a hero for his son, partakes in poaching pheasants, which was considered inappropriate since the tradition concerning adapted works demanded to provide morals and include a didactic purpose. Although for Shavit, the characterization and morals in the adult version remained more ambiguous, while in the children's novel, there is a sense of social justice (59). This scholar argues how even if *The Champion of the World* is an unconventional story, these points illustrate the imposed constrains when adapting a story for children (59). Besides Shavit (46-47), also Chambers (5) singles out how even if the narrator in both stories is in the first person, Dahl has changed the tone in the adapted version to a more intrusive narrator which ascribes to the oral storytelling tradition, providing explanations, while the original had a more neutral tone.

In this regard, Beckett argues that authors like Dahl, "who initially wrote only for adults and cross over without understanding these 'constraints' of children's literature, introduce a more emancipated style of writing" that paved the way to blurry the gap between fiction for adults and children's literature (*Crossover Fiction* 227). Hence, for Hunt, books like *Matilda* almost achieved the status of crossovers ("Commodification" 178). In 1990, Dahl would say through an interview by West that both his writing for children and adults was tied together by "a terrible fear of boring the reader," but that he was more concerned when writing for children which he found more difficult (65). In this context, it is important to understand the difference between cross-writing and crossover writing because the first concept means that a writer addresses children and adults separately, while the latter refers to a writer that addresses both audiences simultaneously (Beckett, "Crossover Literature" 59), as mentioned before regarding children's literature.

The English-speaking world has a long tradition of adult fiction authors that wrote children's books; in fact, "almost every major writer of the nineteenth century [in English and American literatures] wrote for children as well as for adults" (Commager qtd. in Beckett,

*Crossover Fiction* 6), and Victorian successful authors would employ techniques used in children's literature "to appeal to and instruct adult readers" (Reynolds 12). However, "until recent decades, children's literature was generally excluded from serious critical and theoretical scholarship" and children's authors were underrated by the press and literary journals and for these reasons, some writers did not want to fall into children's fiction or YA categories (Beckett, *Crossover Fiction* 12). Even studies concerning cross-writing authors have sometimes ignored their books for children when referring to their works, which has happened with studies devoted to Dahl's adult fiction, even if the English author is one of the most successful children's writers of the twentieth century (Beckett, *Crossover Fiction* 12-13).

In this regard, there has been a continuous debate among authors and critics on whether good children's literature should appeal to adults as well, or if it is the opposite, and good adult literature could be enjoyed by child readers too (Beckett, *Crossover Fiction* 9). Besides, there are ambivalent works that do not fit any of these categories, even if over the years they have been regarded as either children's or adult fiction. Therefore, the crossover phenomenon deals with different audiences in multiple ways, and for this reason, Beckett argues that:

> Crossover fiction blurs the borderline between two traditionally separated readerships: children and adults. However, it is not sufficient to see these works in terms of a dual address or dual audience, especially in the light of the burgeoning category of young adult fiction. Crossover texts address a diverse, cross-generational audience that can include readers of all ages: children, adolescents, and adults. ("Crossover Literature" 61)

Although the crossover category has a long and important background and each time children's literature and YA writers and scholars are taken more seriously, a few years ago, the fact that adults were reading children and YA books for their pleasure was considered, among critics, a form of escapism of a reality that was encouraging lighter readings, social immaturity, and cultural oversimplification society (Beckett, *Crossover Fiction* 251-258). It was attributed to the postmodern phenomena, that out of nostalgia, adults wanted to read books that harked back to their childhood, and at the same time, this alleged infantilization of adults overlapped with perspectives about the adultization of children and the fast growth of teenagers in the contemporary society demanding more sophisticated readings (Beckett, *Crossover Fiction* 251-258).

However, Falconer suggests that adults' interest in children's literature might reside in providing an experience of rethinking and reassessing personal values (34). Adults could also identify with these genres because they talk about change and rites of passage that we all share

as a society, regardless of the age group (Beckett, *Crossover Fiction* 258). Moreover, not all children and YA books promote an idyllic, innocent, comforting or safe childhood image, but many coming-of-age stories are complex and evoke psychological growing pains and not necessarily offer an optimistic view of the world (Beckett, *Crossover Fiction* 258). Furthermore, "every reader in the world, after all, either has been—or remains—a child, with access at some level to the child's capacity for rapture, terror, boredom and excitement" (Beckett, *Crossover Fiction* 258).

Children's literature success with adult readers might as well rely on the fact that some of it is narrative-driven and focuses on the art of storytelling through forthright accessible prose (Falconer 5; Beckett, *Crossover Fiction* 265). It does not mean that children's and YA fiction do not cross literary boundaries and can deal with experimentation too, even more than literature for adults that has often been divided into genres. However, Crossover Literature not only challenges these frontiers, but age boundaries too (Beckett, *Crossover Fiction* 259). In this sense, it is impossible to deny that crossovers are "transforming literary systems, canons, awards, bestseller lists, concepts of readership, the status of authors, the publishing industry, and bookselling practices" (Beckett, *Crossover Fiction* 253), since they create a space where the young and the grown reader meet and share an intergenerational experience.

Falconer suggests that, rather than defining Crossover Literature, it is better to ask what it does, arguing that cross-reading might trigger different responses and levels of reading from each age group (27-29). It encourages the reader to analyze changing views towards childhood, youth, adulthood, aging, maturing, and coming-of-age in the in-between ground it creates, and challenges traditional definitions of children's literature, YA, and adult fiction that have tried to determine what each category should contain or exclude (Falconer 27-29). Therefore, Crossover Literature is not a synonym of fantasy or science fiction, as it has sometimes been equated to; it is neither only a marketing strategy to increase sales by amplifying the targeted audience, and it does not rely entirely on the author's intention, but it rather emerges from its readership and it is linked to its reception which will be addressed next.

As studied, the classification of Dahl and Salinger's works has been dynamic. For instance, Dahl's body of work has been separated into adult fiction and children's literature, while Salinger's oeuvre is often categorized as YA or adult literature, since his readership has blurred these divisions throughout time. Considering the constraints for authors and works associated with these categories and their appeal to an intergenerational audience, the historical

reception and reader's response to their works will be discussed in more detail in the following section.

### 3.2 Reception and reader-response criticism in children's literature and YA

Children's literature and YA are labeled according to the age of the audience to which a work is intended or considered appropriate for, pondering on didactic, moral and aesthetic aspects. Iser introduced the term implied reader to refer to the hypothetical or ideal reader of a work (*Act of Reading* 27). In Children's literature and YA the implied readers are children and teenagers, while real readers could be of any age, even including adults for different reasons, as previously discussed. In this part, I will refer to how reader-response criticism, more popular in the Anglo-American world, and reception studies, founded in Germany, study both types of readers, and later how Dahl and Salinger's works were received considering these factors.

The phenomenon of reception is a situation of asymmetrical communication if we take into consideration that the moments of writing and reading happen at different moments and places, unlike the process of oral communication, because the author or sender is absent from the reading or receiving process. According to Schweickart, "the fate of a writer's communicative project is in the hands of the reader. The writer's project fails unless the reader is willing and able to undertake a careful and just understanding of what the writer has written" (13). In fact, children's literature and YA have been often approached with adultist prejudices that consider these genres inferior or simpler than other literary manifestations; however, it deserves to be taken with seriousness and openness by all readers, and not only by the implied young ones.

During the nineteen-thirties, Rosenblatt already referred to the transaction that occurs between the reader and the text and similar theories were assimilated into pedagogical and psychological studies due to a growing interest in child readers' competences. Although these studies were more focused on teaching children to read, they anticipated what theorists like Iser would expand later to readers, regardless of their age group (Appleyard 5). For instance, according to Iser, "a literary work has two poles, artistic and aesthetic: the artistic pole is the author's text, and the aesthetic is the realization accomplished by the reader" ("Interaction" 106). There are gaps in the text that will be filled in by the reader, but the number of gaps and

the possibilities to fill those gaps could lead to multiple interpretations (Lesnik-Oberstein 21). "Reading consists, therefore, of a process of decoding what has by various means been encoded in the text" (Suleiman 8), but not only one interpretation could be considered valid for a narrative and the approaches to it will differ among the pluralistic readerships.

Appleyard argues that some theories of interpretation tend to focus on the interaction between the text and the hypothetical or implied reader, or abstract readers, who are only generic constructs, grouping such studies into hermeneutics (6-8). In this regard, two hermeneutic positions emerged in literary criticism; textual realism defenders claimed that the meaning was already part of the text and only needed to be discovered, while readerly idealism argued that the interpretation depended entirely upon the reader and so was not to be found, but rather to be created (Mailloux 622). Stuart Hall, who first developed the encoding/decoding model of mass communication, explains how:

> [I]t is possible for a viewer perfectly to understand both the literal and the connotative inflection given by a discourse but to decode the message in a globally contrary way. He/she detotalizes the message in the preferred code in order to retotalize the message within some alternative framework of reference. (127)

In this regard, there is the possibility of interpretation following the dominant-hegemonic position, or either the recipient can understand the message intended, but adapt it to their interests by applying a negotiated code or even, recognizing it, the recipient still provides an oppositional reading based on an alternative agenda which Hall labels as oppositional code (125-127). Therefore, audiences and readers can provide different understandings and views on the same message or literary work.

Similar aspects were studied by scholars at the University of Konstanz, and although, some of their works were translated from German to English, at first, they were not considered independent within the field of Literary Studies, but rather associated with Audience Studies and Reader-Response Criticism. As mentioned, reader-response theories were popular in the US education system, more concerned with building a relationship between reading and teaching literacy and literature, which has influenced how young readers and their books have been perceived (Benton 88), stressing the pedagogical expectations regarding children's literature and YA.

The term Reception Studies did not emerge until the seventies because after decades of the predominance of the New Criticism's argument concerning the affective fallacy—which

considered that readers interpreted texts based on their emotional impulses leading to a misjudgment of the correct meaning—finally, the audience was beginning to be taken seriously thanks to the demands of the sixties and seventies' social movements that challenged the status quo in the academia (Radway 332). The uses of rhetoric and ideology in language and narratives to perpetuate social difference and control over certain populations awakened research interest, the author's privilege and the autonomy of the text were challenged, and oeuvres that were once discredited for their popular appeal started to be included (Radway 332-334). Since the late seventies, Reception Studies have become an accepted part of literary studies and "the words reader and audience, once relegated to the status of the unproblematic and obvious, have acceded to a starring role" (Suleiman 3). Therefore, Reception Studies appeared as a response to formalist theories that focused only on the text, leaving aside any other external factors such as the author, the sociocultural context and especially, the audience.

According to Jauss, to interpret the meaning of a text, it is necessary to consider the interaction between the author's historical context and the reader's own context, beliefs, and values, which leads to a particular interpretation; hence, it can be said that readers of past and present generations have their own horizon of expectations (18). Consequently, the reception of a text as either trendy or outdated, misunderstood or ahead of its time, depends on the degree that it reaches the readers' horizon of expectations on a given moment of history, but there is always the possibility that different reading publics with diverse opinions coexist within the same society (Suleiman 36-37). The difference on the horizon of expectations of readers that are separated temporarily is a consequence of sociopolitical and cultural changes and the reading process functions as an event that has historical influence helping to measure the impact of writers through time, as well as the actualization of meaning concerning their works (Jauss 22-23). In a few words, "because it recognizes that the traditional canon embodies the 'changing interests and beliefs' of authoritative readers or critics, reception study examines the socio-historical contexts of interpretive practice" (Machor and Goldstein xii). This means that thanks to the readers' updated views, the canon can change in the present and future, and include texts that were disregarded or considered immoral in the past.

Fish argues that the reader's interpretation coincides more with their own conventions and views than the author's intention or the formal structure of the text (Machor and Goldstein 2-3). According to this scholar, readers that share common interpretative writing strategies form interpretative communities which are responsible for validating a particular meaning

granted to a text, and the plurality of interpretative communities could provide different and even oppositional interpretations, making some of these views persist and others change over time (Fish 483-485).

Tony Bennett proposes a similar concept labeling it as reading formations defined as "a set of discursive and inter-textual determinations that organize and animate the practice of reading, connecting texts and readers in specific relations to one another by constituting readers as reading subjects of particular types and texts as objects-to-be read in particular ways" (7). Bennett argues that the post-Marxism criticism goal should be to move texts among reading formations to provide different interpretations and meanings from the ones linked to the dominant ideology and consequently, the reception of certain texts could become a space of contestation of hegemonic discourses and rhetoric (8-15).

In this regard, postmodernist Reception Studies include feminist, queer, postcolonial and cultural studies, and research in these fields pays attention to popular literature and the ordinary reader too (Machor and Goldstein xiii). Intersectional and cultural studies have also influenced reader-response criticism in children's literature and YA. For instance, there are studies on how children from diverse cultures respond to the same text, or identifying readings that can teach about empathy, gender, race; as well as the difference between reading for fun and for school (Benton 96-95). According to Benton:

> [T]he plurality of meanings within a literary work; the creative participation of the reader; the acknowledgement that the reader is not a *tabula rasa* but brings idiosyncratic knowledge and personal style to the act of reading; and the awareness that interpretation is socially, historically and culturally formed. All these ideas are ones that have had a sharp impact upon the study of texts and upon research into young readers' reading in the field of children's literature. (89)

Reader-response studies in children's literature could be text-oriented and focus on applying reader-response criticism to study the implied young audience (Benton 89). Sharing the same goals as when the field was emerging, there are other studies dedicated to analyzing children's responses but with pedagogical objectives of what constitutes good teaching practices, however, there are other researchers that employ reader-response methods to study children's social attitudes (Benton 89). Benton introduces a list of studies, some of them including young readers and categorizing them into: studies focused on how readers respond to literature and negotiate meaning, which have been usually practiced within the same age group and classroom (90-91), studies of readers' behavior and personal reading style (94), and development in reading, which could also be related to pedagogy.

In this regard, Appleyard, tries to question and answer why we read differently as we grow up from childhood to adulthood, implying that this is not only influenced by psychological development, or cognitive stages—popularized by psychologists like Piaget[15], but depends also on how culture teaches us to read (10-15). Therefore, it usually encourages play, fantasy and imagination in young children, identification with heroes in older children and tweens, an examination of values and beliefs in adolescents, analysis and interpretation in college students, and in adults, more possibilities to choose the uses we make of reading (Appleyard 10-15).

"Reader-response criticism accommodates both the reader and the text; there is no area of literary activity where this is more necessary than in the literature that defines itself by reference to its young readership" (Benton 98). In this regard, Lesnik-Oberstein argues that concerning children's literature, people feel free to comment and censor it; thus, literary criticism usually relies on the belief that it is easy to know children, what makes a good book for them, and what is appropriate in terms of content, accessibility, pedagogy, morality, and taste (1-9). This is usually grounded on childhood constructions, rather than actual children (Lesnik-Oberstein 1-9), and encouraged due to the adult-child hierarchy (Lesnik-Oberstein 27-28).

According to Beauvais, "children's literature remains commonly censored from the inside as well as the outside, and judged according to political and ethical criteria much more than any other type of literature" (182). Authors of books for young readers, whether they have been labeled as controversial or not, have to frequently justify their political, ideological, ethical inclinations because there is a notion of responsibility and accountability, that is not as decisive as in literature for adults (Beauvais 182). This can be clearly seen in recent controversies about changing certain words in Dahl's books for children to make them more progressive, while his literature for adults is not approached and scrutinized in the same way.

Furthermore, the fact that Dahl and Salinger's books have been historically targeted by censors demonstrates how interpretations could be influenced by adult-normative ideas about childhood and youth at a given time. Arguments about their books encouraging disobedience,

[15] Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget popularized during the first decades of the twenty century the model of cognitive development, proposing stages from birth to adulthood that show how intelligence or mental processes develop in humans, especially in children, which are both influenced by biological maturation and environmental experience.

blasphemy and setting a bad example for young readers have been defended by parents and teachers seeking to ban them from the school curriculum and public libraries, while other favorable interpretations have included these texts in formal education and popular culture. The next part will address the diverging responses and attitudes towards Dahl or Salinger's works from critics, reviewers, and scholars, as well as, studies associated with young reader's responses, and the historical reception of their works, especially during the second half of the twentieth century.

### 3.2.1 Readers, critics, and reviewers on Roald Dahl

Critics place the first golden age of children's literature during the Victorian and Edwardian eras, the Second Golden Age is frequently starting during the fifties, notwithstanding the different tendencies between the US and the UK (Schober 30-31). British children's literature holds a great tradition in fantasy, while in the US the trend was more inclined towards realism—especially under the influence of J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* in the upcoming children's and YA writers; thus, it is interesting that Roald Dahl's works were at first better appreciated in the US than in his country (Schober 30-31). In fact, Dahl was first published in the US, and it was not until the late sixties and seventies, when he gained recognition in both countries, that his books were edited in the UK as well (Schober 31).

Dahl started his writing career while working at the British Embassy in Washington DC. When a journalist was commissioned a piece on the former pilot's experiences in the war, Dahl ended up writing a draft about his accident in the desert of Libya himself, which was accepted for publication[16] (Sturrock 168-169). Not so long after, he wrote his first short story marketed for children*, The Gremlins* (1943), although he did not have any particular audience in mind. These creatures that messed with planes were already known folk among aircrews, but Dahl was one of the firsts authors to write about them and his story received praises from the public, including figures like Eleanor Roosevelt and Walt Disney—whose team illustrated the book and had a film project in mind, which ultimately was not executed (Sturrock 173-188). Regardless, the case shows one of the first attempts to illustrate, adapt and commercialize Dahl's work.

[16] He continued writing similar stories and as a result, his first short story collection titled *Over to You: Ten Stories of Flyers and Flying* was published in 1946.

Schober argues that Dahl's narrative style shares elements with tall tales in the North American tradition as comic exaggerated anecdotes that could be perceived as true or fictional (31-33). Inspired by his Nordic background and gothic influence from European fairy tales, Dahl portrays archetypal characters like witches and giants, but he does not create complete magical worlds in the way of his British predecessors where his readers can escape, instead he adds magical elements to realist situations to empower his working and middle-class heroes with whom his readers could identify easily (Donaldson 8). Another crucial element that might have affected his reception is Dahl's dark humor and grotesque caricature—complemented by Quentin Blake's cartoonish and sketchy illustrations.[17] As Dr. Seuss proved, overstatement, nonsense, and wordplay, as well as slapstick and physical comedy have been characteristic of North American children's literature (Schober 34). Popular elements in literature were more accepted in the US, while British literature was still struggling between high and low culture. For instance, in *Matilda*, the infamous Mr. Wormwood tells his daughter: "If it's by an American it's certain to be filth. That's all they write about" referring to a book she is reading (Dahl 34). Likewise, in a conversation with the librarian, the heroine talks about the lack of humor in Tolkien and C.S. Lewis' novels.

It was Sheila St Lawrence, Dahl's agent at the time, who first suggested him to write a children's book; after reading the manuscript of *James and the Giant Peach*, she told him: "I think you've done the undoable, crossed the border between adult and juvenile" (Sturrock 355). However, it was not this book that made instant success among reviewers and readers in the US, but the second of his children's novels, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. This book also triggered controversy during the film adaptation process for the racist illustrations and descriptions of the Oompa Loompas[18] as African pygmies, which Dahl accepted to change, so, they could portray the more contemporary orange creatures with green hair.

[17] Quentin Blake (b.1932) "was first paired up with Dahl for *The Enormous Crocodile* in 1978, but it was not until 1994, when a major standardization of Dahl's children's books was introduced at Puffin that Blake became Dahl's exclusive illustrator" (Viñas Valle 145). Before this partnership, Dahl's works had different illustrators like Joseph Schindelman, Michael Foreman, Jill Bennet, Tony Ross, Nancy Ekholm Burkert, and Patrick Benson and most of them, would provide more realistic illustrations, translating the aesthetic of the time. However, as Viñas Valle argues "the Dahl-Blake partnership is probably one of the most successful editorial decisions ever made from the visual-textual marriage point of view" rendering the books recognizable, and Dahl's text with Blake's images perceived as inseparable (147). Moreover, this created the possibility for uniformized sets with Dahl's books for the contemporary market.

[18] Considering the fight for Civil Rights that was taking place in the US in the seventies, when the plans to make a film adaptation were announced, the NAACP accused the book of reinforcing the stereotype of black slavery, hence Dahl changed the descriptions of the Oompa Loompas as African pygmies, and the illustrations were updated accordingly (Sturrock 493-495; Novy 139).

In the UK, both books were first rejected by editors and publishers, and then, accepted with reservations, on the grounds that they looked like adult stories, addressed to an adult audience or written on an adult level (Viñas Valle 37). According to Hunt, there was a big difference in attitudes towards childhood when *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* entered the British market, as children were still seen as innocent and in need of protection, while during the upcoming decades, they came to be perceived as sophisticated and demanding audience with consumer capacity; thus, by the time of Dahl's death during the nineties, his influence in broadening the range of what was acceptable, in terms of language, violence and vulgarity in children's literature was evident, as well as his work's influence on the commodification of fantasy ("Commodification" 176-179).

Dahl's books started to gain best-seller[19] status in both countries during the seventies, but it was not until 1983 that he received the British Whitbread Children's Book Award for *The Witches* published that year (Schober 31). Dahl had already been granted the Edgar Award from the Mystery Writers of America almost three decades before, after publishing his second short story collection for adults titled *Someone Like You* (1953), a book that also gave him the reputation of a master of the macabre among critics and awakened the interest of film director Alfred Hitchcock for adaptations in his TV show (Sturrock 329-330). Dahl's next short story collection *Kiss Kiss* (1960) made the *New York Times* bestseller lists[20] (Sturrock 356), and by "early 1988 the U.S. paperback rights to his books were renewed with an advance of $1.3 million" (Culley 59). "The film adaptations[21] of *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, *The*

[19] Laura Miller explains that "the term best-seller not only refers to an empirically determined ranking, but is sometimes used to describe a particular kind of book, one that is deemed especially commercial" (287). It is important to make a distinction between fast-seller which shows high sales at the beginning, steady-seller which remains popular even if it starts slowly, and the best-seller which starts and remains high (L. Miller 288). I agree with Miller's argument that even if best-seller lists and books have been used in literary criticism to study social trends, popular literature and reading habits, they are also grounded on market-based decisions that sometimes blurry the actual reception making it a more a cultural, than a scientific account, and for this reason, we employ this term to illustrate the reputation that Dahl and Salinger had in the US and UK during the period they published.

[20] *The Times* started its local lists in 1931 and national lists in 1942 becoming the most widely consulted best-sellers list; the method traditionally employed consisted of polling a representative sample of bookstores and wholesalers across the country to ratify their sales on a pre-selected list, and asking them for other best-selling titles to include in this list (L. Miller 290-291).

[21] *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* was adapted as a musical titled *Willy Wonka & The Chocolate Factory* in 1971. In 2005, Tim Burton adapted it to a movie retaining the same name as the novel, and there is the more recent musical adaptation *Wonka* (2023), only based in this character. *The Witches* has been adapted twice, one in 1990, that controversially changed the ending, making the boy recover his own shape, and the 2020 adaptation that included a more diverse cast. *Matilda* has been adapted twice first to Danny DeVito's 1996 movie of the same name and a few years ago, to the film *Matilda the Musical* (2020). *James and the Giant Peach* was adapted in 1996 to an animated musical film and *Fantastic Mr. Fox*, also an animated movie, was released in 2009 and directed by Wes Anderson. There are also less well-known adaptations of *Danny, the Champion of the World* in 1989 and a BBC *Esio Trot* adaptation of 2015. Most of these books have also been adapted to theatrical plays or musicals.

*Witches*, *Matilda*, *James and the Giant Peach* and *Fantastic Mr. Fox* have also contributed to increasing sales and to feeding into his popularity as a children's writer in the UK and internationally" (Viñas Valle 1).

Looking at different editions of the covers and peritexts of his books published in the UK and the US, from his first publications to contemporary ones, which I accessed at the IYL, I have noticed that there is a clear evolution of his popularity, including more and more facts about his life and writing, pictures of him and his family, interviews, and references to his other works. In this regard, Viñas Valle singles out that "the extraliterary material offering further insights into Dahl's life and works" takes up a considerable space since his public persona has been employed for the marketing of his works (148), whose recognition is highlighted with statements like "The world's No.1 storyteller" in the Puffin editions for instance (148-149). Therefore, Hunt concludes about Dahl that "his writing, his philosophy of writing for children, the marketing of his books (and his personality) were a perfect storm in terms of changing the culture" ("Commodification" 186).

However, Dahl's works tended to be ignored by scholars and critics who perceived him as a mere entertainer before the late twentieth century. For example, in 1972, Cameron describes *Charlie* as "nothing so much like one of the more specious television shows" (Part I, par. 18), and "a comment upon our age and the quality of much of our entertainment" (Part I, par. 19), and would criticize schools for including Dahl's books in their curriculum (Part II, para. 1). Similarly, in an article published in 1975, Merrick expressed how she could not understand the preference of her students to read Dahl, whose work she disliked like many other adults, over other works that this teacher considered of higher quality (21).

According to Sturrock, "at some level, short stories and children's writing made Dahl feel like a second-class literary citizen, and increasingly, both in the United States and Britain, he felt like an outsider to the writing community" (Sturrock 491), however, the daily pile of fan mail[22] through the sixties, seventies and eighties reinforced his self-assurance on his ability to reach the youth and help him to disregard bad criticism from adults in the literary industry (Sturrock 518). While Dahl's books for children were accused of being violent, sadistic, tasteless and vulgar, the author received positive mail from his child readers to whom he

[22] For example, Dahl received approximately between fifty to sixty letters a week in 1966 (Sturrock 497).

personally replied (Sturrock 492-498). One of these examples appears in the publication *The Roald Dahl Treasury* (1997) which includes a letter[23] of a fourteen-year-old boy from the US that assures Dahl that he has read and enjoyed most of his children's books, and even mentions one anthology for adults for which he was grounded for reading (50-52).

Becoming a parent also gave Dahl confidence because of the number of bedtime stories he would make up for his kids, making him feel reassured as a good storyteller for children, as can be noticed in a reply to one of Cameron's negative reviews (Dahl par. 5). In this regard, Viñas Valle explains that Dahl's criticism has been considered from different perspectives; for example, from the point of view of memory, he is usually regarded in a positive light as a person that remembers how it was to be a child (7). Even Dahl would agree with this idea stating that he could recall what he liked back then and how he would feel with adults, as he explains in an interview with Sykes in 1991:

> I have a great affinity with children [...] I see their problems. If you want to remember what it's like to live in a child's world, you've got to get down on your hands and knees and live like that for a week. You'll find you have to look up at all these bloody giants around you who are always telling you what to do and what not to do. (qtd. in Viñas Valle 13-14)

Critics would also refer to Dahl as child-centered or a childlike figure (Viñas Valle 14-17), "a literary Clitheroe Kid—a grownman in short trousers" as Haigh[24] writes in a 1982 essay (*CLR 7*, 68). Although, not always in a good way, for instance, in a 1981 article, Campbell[25] points out how "in order to achieve overwhelming success with young children it may well be that a writer has to exploit certain common juvenile tastes which to adults appear rather deplorable" referring to Dahl (*CLR 7*, 67). These examples stress what has been discussed about children's authors being regarded either as childlike or childish.

At the same time, critics and scholars tend to approve or disapprove Dahl's depiction of childhood according to the most prevalent constructions and ideas concerning children at various times (Viñas Valle 11). They often worry about his influence on young minds, perceived as malleable and innocent, and if his books transmit the right morals or values (Viñas Valle 21). For instance, in a 1968 review on *The Junior Bookshelf,*[26] Dahl is accused of lack of

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[23] The letter does not include a date, only the signature of the boy named Robin Chan and his address in Florida, but it seems to be dated after 1987 because he mentions this year as a previous date.

[24] The following are references offered by *Children's Literature Review*: Gerald Haigh, "For non Squiffletrotters only." *The Times Educational Supplement* (London). Nov 19, 1982, p.35

[25] Alasdair Campbell, "Children's Writers: Roald Dahl." *The School Librarian*, Vol. 29. No. 2. Jun 1981, pp. 108-114.

[26] A review of *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* and *James and the Giant Peach*. *The Junior Bookshelf*, Vol.32,

integrity for writing for children (*CLR 7*, 64), while in another review of the same year on *Children's Book News*, Jenkins[27] argues about *Charlie* and *James* that "both books will be snapped up by children if purists can be persuaded to throw their fearful scruples to the wind and let the children read" (*CLR 7*, 64).

Referring to the idea of the appeal, Viñas Valle singles out that "critics confidently claim which passages or elements of the book will be particularly enjoyed, what works for children in the text and what does not and, in general, how young readers will respond to the book" (18), and also if there will be identification with any of the characters (43). For example, in a guide for middle-schools from 1970, Gillespie and Lembo suggest that younger readers will enjoy the funny episodes in *Charlie*, while "more mature ones" will discover the morality behind the story (62). Similarly in a 1973 review to the sequel, *The Glass Elevator*, Kuskin[28] refers to the "humor that children will probably enjoy but their parents probably will not" (*CLR 7*, 73). *The BFG* received a similar approach by Gordon,[29] in a 1983 review published in a *New York Times* supplement, both as a book that children would enjoy thanks to Dahl and Blake's understanding of what they like, and as a story that many adults would dislike and find offensive (*CLR 7*, 83). Concerning *James'* reviews, Dalgliesh[30] wrote in 1962 that children would find the story exciting, however there is also concern on the passage about the parents' death, while a 1967 review published on *The Times Literary Supplement*[31] described the story as harmless (*CLR 1*, 52). This ambivalence is also present in reviews referring to horror, violence and grotesque language and characterization in the stories, identified as something that children will either enjoy or not, but also alluding to different interpretation from young readers aged differently, and the grownup audience.

As stated, children's literature writers were not the only ones to be underestimated; readers, especially young ones, were considered to require conventional narrative techniques only to understand the story superficially due to their presumed insufficient literary experience. For example, in a 1971 review, Hudson[32] singles out how in *Fantastic Mr. Fox* (1970), "a good-

n.1. Feb 1968, pp.36-37

[27] J.S. Jenkins, a review of *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* and *James and the Giant Peach*, *Children's Books News*, vol 3, n.2. Mar-Apr 1968, pp.77-79.

[28] Karla Kuskin, a review of *Charlie and the Great Glass Elevato*r, *Saturday Review, V*ol. 1, n.3. Mar 10, 1973, p.68.

[29] Ruth I. Gordon, a review of *The BFG*, *The New York Times Book Review*. Jan 9, 1983, p.32.

[30] Alice Dalgliesh, *Saturday Review*. Feb 17, 1962, p.32.

[31] No author, *The Times Literary Supplement*. Dec. 14, 1967, p.1225.

[32] Eric Hudson, *Children's Book Review.* Feb. 1971, p.17.

sized type is used for easy reading although some young readers will be puzzled by some of the author's choice of words" (*CLR 1*, 51). The difficulties with words were also signaled on a 1961 review of *James* by Pippett[33] (*CLR 7*, 68). Even Dahl's editors suggested making *The Twits* (1980) more comprehensible to the American audience, but the writer preferred to "let the kids figure it out for themselves" (Sturrock 503). Similarly, on a review released in 1984 on *Kirkus Reviews*,[34] it is mentioned that the American audience might not understand the British references and style on Dahl's autobiographical fiction book *Boy* (*CLR 41*, 33).

Apart from concerns about the nationality of the hypothetical readers, critics and reviewers would also allude to what they considered as the age-appropriate audience for some books, for instance, in two reviews from 1990 by Dooley[35] and Stell[36], respectively, *Rhyme Stew* (1989) was described not as a children's book, but more appropriate for teenagers as it contained intended sexual puns (*CLR 41*, 44). Maybe for similar reasons, some editions of the books include the warning "Unsuitable for small readers" in the cover. When consulting editions from the UK and the US at the IYL, I realized that covers and peritexts on other books would also suggest the targeted audience, and even on a short story anthology titled *The Wonderful Story of Henry Sugar and Six More* (1977), Dahl dedicates it to "all young people […] who are going through that long and difficult metamorphosis when they are no longer children and have not yet become adults" (dedicatory), motioning the intended readers[37].

In the twenty-first century, other stories from Dahl's collections for adults were repackaged and marketed, this time for teenagers (Viñas Valle 159). In this regard, Viñas Valle refers to the "instability in the classification of Dahl's children's production" (159), explaining that even his children's books have been sorted into narrower categories—for example, younger and older child readers—and how this classification has been changing from the eighties and nineties to the most contemporary renditions of the 2000s (158-159). This is clearly grounded on notions of appropriateness based on age-related social constructions and changing views. Another reason for these narrower classifications might be the inclusion of Dahl's works in school reading lists; for example, some of the contemporary Puffin editions,

[33] Aileen Pippett, "Between Perils, Song." *The New York Times Book Review*. Nov. 12, 1961, pp.35-38.
[34] A review of *Boy: Tales of Childhood*, *Kirkus Reviews* (Juvenile Issue), Vol. LII, n. 18-21. Nov. 1, 1984, p. J-llI.
[35] Patricia Dooley, A review of *Rhyme Stew*, *Library Journal*. Vol 115, n. 8. May 1, 1990, p.90.
[36] Ann Stell, A review of *Rhyme Stew*, School *Library Journal*. Vol 36, n.9. Sep. 1990, p.262.
[37] In 2023, Wes Anderson adapted two of these short stories as horror episodes premiered on Netflix for an intergenerational audience.

which I have employed for the analysis section, incorporate questionnaires and explanations of Dahl's made-up vocabulary. At the same time, Dahl saw the didactic purpose in children's literature too, as he points out in an interview with West in 1990, where he replied that "a good children's book does much more than entertain. It teaches children the use of words, the joy of playing with language. Above all, it helps children learn not to be frightened of books," signaling that his intention is basically to make readers out of children (65-66).

According to Maynard and McKnight, Dahl's popularity with child readers, especially in the UK, can be measured by his success among library users; for instance, they mention that Dahl was listed as one of the fourteen authors who had over a million loans annually from 1997 to 2000 (153-154). Furthermore, these researchers mention surveys by national newspapers, like the *Young Telegraph*, and BBC TV and radio shows during the nineties that inquired their young audience about their favorite books and authors, were Dahl and his works came usually on top of the polls (Maynard and McKnight 154). In 2000, he was chosen as Britain's most popular author on a nationwide survey carried out in bookshops and libraries, schools and the web—even placing J.K. Rowling as the runner-up (Maynard and McKnight 154).

Maynard and McKnight share their study on a small focus group of children that have read books by Dahl, to see what they like about them, to contrast their response to the arguments usually raised by critics. For instance, they find out that humor, which critics usually take for granted, seems to be more personal since each kid finds funny distinct parts (Maynard and McKnight 166-167). They also point out that children do not seem to register the violence that adults worry so much about, and that even if they find books like *The Witches* scary, some of them enjoy this and similar books like *Goosebumps*, while they do not find books like *Matilda* and *The BFG* as frightening (Maynard and McKnight 166-167).

Pope and Round introduce a study on two primary school classrooms of older and younger children that they conducted in 2013, where they asked about heroic traits in *Matilda*, considering that this is also a subversive character that could be seen as rebellious or vengeful (261-262). It might come as a surprise that the first reviews during the eighties described this novel as simple and easily forgettable compared to how popular this character has become. Thus, they worked with the classrooms drawing from Fish's theory of interpretative communities, through class discussion and questionnaires, and concluded that even if younger children's responses were more literal based on ideas about superheroes and powers, both younger and older "were overwhelmingly able to see the 'justice' in Matilda's acts. However,

they were also aware that not everything Matilda does is heroic. […] but the majority felt that because Matilda's actions were justified, she was a hero," even though she is also a normal girl (Pope and Round 269). Pope and Round define these as sophisticated answers which are usually overlooked by adults, as if children could not be able to see the nuances of moral ambivalent situations (270-271).

Likewise, a questionnaire on Dahl conducted by Culley to his students shows that they were able to understand if a character got what they deserved, and also stress that the vivid images were the most compelling for them (61-62). This scholar mentions Moss's account of a class discussion of 1981 concerning *Fantastic Mr. Fox* where the students were able to understand the moral ambiguity in the fact that the protagonist is good but is doing something bad like stealing (Culley 63). Already in 1971, referring to this same book, Kellman[38] suggested in *Grade Teacher* that "the irony of the final situation can be appreciated even by the younger children" (*CLR 1*, 51).

On a contemporary note, Hoffman studies *The Spaghetti Book Club*, a non-profitable online service for schools, which until now functions as a website to locate reviews made by children, and that offers a wide range of pieces for most of Dahl's books. Hoffman analyzes thirty reviews of *The BFG*, including their accompanying illustrations, posted until 2010 by children aged between eight and eleven "and representing a broad diversity of American demographic groups and geographic areas" (234). Hoffman mentions that "*The BFG* reviews were all the product of some measure of choice on the reviewer's behalf, because he/she chose to review *The BFG* rather than some other book, even if the choice itself was prompted by a classroom reading assignment" (237). The children usually name what they liked about the book, whether they identified with any of the characters or a particular situation, and even share original drawn interpretations, recommending it to certain audiences, not only based on age, but on other appeals of the book (Hoffman 241-247). Consequently, this study shows that children can be active readers, engaging in meaning making process and providing not only didactic, but aesthetic and even unpredictable responses to a text (Hoffman 248).

Even though child readers have proved to be able to provide their own interpretations, Dahl's books were considered vulgar and unsuitable for children during his lifetime, but the record of actual banned books dates to the time after his death, which might have raised new

[38] Amy Kellman, *Grade Teacher*. Apr. 1971, p.26.

debates concerning his works. *The Witches* is listed in the most banned books lists from schools and libraries in the US, with accusations of being satanic, sexist, violent, and encouraging disobedience, and hence, unsuitable for teaching moral values (Karolides et al. 317-319). *James and the Giant Peach* was challenged as inappropriate reading for children and banned from classrooms accused of crude language and encouraging drugs and alcohol use (Pistolis 14). Moreover, not only *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* triggered controversy, but its sequel *Charlie and the Great Glass Elevator* was banned from many American public libraries because of its parody of the US President (Culley 67).

According to Culley, "adult literature is unrestrained but children's literature, when it reflects much of children's culture in its use of vulgarity, is found offensive by adults" and that is why Dahl's "approach to vulgarity is a consequence of his throwing his lot in with the reader, not the critic" (Culley 66). Dahl would write freely about facial hair, pocking noses, bodily functions like farting or whizzpopping as he calls it in *The BFG*. Thus, "Dahl achieved a huge appeal by writing against this polite grain, allowing space for the unsocial and tabooed impulses of childhood, saying out loud what children might say out of the presence of adults" (Rustin and Rustin 22). At the same time, for Culley, Dahl's work contributes to exposing adult hypocrisy to child readers, and his books depict the adult world thoroughly, including its weaknesses, which grownups often find offensive as he is making them look bad in front of a younger audience and drawing attention to the fact that they are fallible humans (66), and not idealized role-models.

Dahl's reception has been oscillating between widespread popularity driven by his literary contributions and public persona, while simultaneously being disregarded by the academia, who perceived him only as an entertainer, viewed either as a childlike or childish figure. Despite this academic skepticism, Dahl's young fans were a constant reminder of the broader public's enthusiastic reception. This enduring appeal can also be noticed in the increasing adaptations of his works into other formats. Critiques and reviews on Dahl's body of work tend to revolve around questions of appropriateness and alignment with the tastes of young readers, both underscored by marketing strategies too. On the other hand, studies on reader-response criticism reveal that child readers can grasp the nuanced elements within Dahl's writings. In the following section, I will explore similar contradictions in the reception of J.D. Salinger, whose works, despite garnering a more favorable response from academia and

becoming cultural statements, faced continuous scrutiny and challenges regarding their suitability for teenagers and young people of different generations.

### 3.2.2 Readers, critics, and reviewers on J.D. Salinger

While taking writing classes at Columbia University, J.D. Salinger sent his first short stories to the *New Yorker* collecting rejection after rejection; however, he continued to write during World War II while serving in Europe, and although a few of his stories were printed in other magazines, it was not until the early postwar period that "Slight Rebellion of Madison" (1946)—the antecedent of *The Catcher in the Rye* already featuring Holden Caufield—was accepted for publication by the *New Yorker*. In the years to come, other stories that will later appear in *Nine Stories* (1953) were also printed in this magazine, granting the war veteran a published author status. One of those short stories, "For Esmé—with Love and Squalor," (1950) was centered on the theme of PTSD on war veterans, and according to Slawenski, "readers recognized the tribute that it tendered and flooded Salinger with mail" (189). Considering that before this story, Salinger had not received that many letters from readers for any of his stories, this raised expectations for his upcoming pieces.

Nevertheless, it was not until *The Catcher in the Rye* was published that Salinger's works received attention from critics, reviewers, scholars, parents, and especially, young readers. The novel was reprinted five times within two weeks of the date of its publication and three more times the next month thanks to the Book of the Month Club, assuring it a position in the best-seller lists for thirty weeks; the sales remained steady for decades, increased during the eighties[39] and it was reprinted over seventy times until the late nineties (Whitfield 567). Ciocia explains how "retrospectively, *Catcher* has been reclaimed as a forerunner of the Young Adult fiction phenomenon, the seminal text to have alerted publishers to the huge commercial potential of this section of the market" (202), although, in the UK the response was not as positive as in the US, replicating Dahl's reception there. Carpenter argued that while the Golden Age of children's literature took place in the UK, in the US, literature for children was usually either a "family story," a "historical novel" or an "animal story," however, this changed when *The Catcher in the Rye* was published in 1951 (214). Salinger's book "was seminal in altering American writer's attitudes to children and their relationship to the adult world and

[39] Selling an average of 250,000 copies a year (Whitfield 567).

adult morality" because before this, writers would only address subtly the shortcomings of the adult world (Carpenter 214).

After the first book reviews, only three pieces appeared in the next five years, but since the late fifties and until the mid-sixties, there were claims that "critics had written more on *Catcher* than on any other contemporary novel" (Ohmann and Ohmann 15), and it seemed that since Fitzgerald and Hemingway, none other than Salinger had stirred similar interest from readers as well as critics (Ohmann and Ohmann 15). Even William Faulkner, also a figure of the previous generation of writers, rated Salinger as the best writer of the new generation in a lecture he delivered at the University of Virginia in 1958 (244). The critics who praised the book for dealing with larger-than-life topics such as good, evil, death, rebirth, the complexity of modern times and the moral corruption of the grownup society gave it the status of a classic (Ohmann and Ohmann 15-27). Moreover, many related it to the narrative tradition of the picaresque quest between innocence and authenticity, establishing a common ground with *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (Whitfield 574).

On the other hand, the harsh reviews were as vehement as its praises; *The Catcher* was accused of being offensive, vulgar and profane, of promoting an inappropriate role model and diminishing parental authority and family values (Whitfield 579-581). For example, through a 1962 review, Bowen accuses the novel of being anti-war, anti-American, and against catholic values mentioning how youth have been corrupted in this context by Freudian and beatnik teachers and similar writers of the time (60). According to Graham, "the criticism, then, is not that reviewers find Holden unbelievable: rather, reviewers express anxieties that were common to their place and time about the potential of adolescents to behave in socially disruptive ways" (58), as mentioned in the second chapter. In a 1965 essay by James E. Miller Jr.,[40] it is established that young people will find in Holden an "ideal rebel," while older people, as they are satirized, would see the teen as a "neurotic misfit" that needs to adjust and settle (*CLR 18*, 187).

The contradictory reception could also be found in pieces written by critics and scholars interested in giving a political outlook to the book, arguing that it encouraged revolt, influencing the sixties anti-war movements, as well as the Vietnam War novel (Whitfield 583), while others, like Nadel, claimed that Holden Caufield was promoting McCarthyism and

[40] James E. Miller Jr. *J.D. Salinger*. University of Minnesota Press. Minneapolis, 1965, p.48.

communism red hunting in a Cold War context (Whitfield 588-589). Au contraire, for French, *The Catcher* resonates with the culture of the fifties precisely because, even if people were politically aware, they were intimidated by a possible ideological persecution in the context of McCarthyism, so the novel transmits a mood of resignation instead (30). Ohmann and Ohmann provide a socioeconomic perspective, arguing that the novel was critical of wealth, power and social classes (19), while a few scholars that analyzed it from the character's psychology claimed that it was rather about an adolescent grieving the death of his brother, which could also work as an allegory for the society as a whole that was at mourning at the time (Ciocia 201).

In this regard, reviewers have also seen the novel as "a representation of an adolescent perspective for an older readership, allowing an adult audience to better understand the adolescent experience, as well as offering a critique of contemporary society" (Graham 58). For instance, one of the first reviews of *The Catcher* on the same year of its publication by Roth[41] reads: "This may be a shock to many parents who wonder about a young man's thoughts and actions, but its effect can be a salutary one. An *adult* book (very frank)" (*CLR 18*, 172). These considerations already depict a feeling of otherness towards a teenage world where adults have limited access, but label the book as directed to that older audience. In a 1961 article, Corbett[42] argues that "Holden is not like the adolescents in the magazine ads—the smiling, crew-cut, loafer-shod teenagers wrapped up in the cocoon of suburban togetherness. He makes the adults of my generation uncomfortable because he exposes so much of what is meretricious in our way of life" (*CLR 18*, 178). Therefore, like Dahl, Salinger is situated on the side of young people, against the adults and the status quo.

A 1951 review by Peterson[43] in the *New York Herald Tribune* mentions that "those who have read Mr. Salinger's stories will remember his special concern for youth, and for its despairs" (*CLR 18*, 172). In this regard, the first edition of the hardcover book (1951), which I consulted at the IYL, includes a brief synopsis of the book in the front flap, with statements like "anyone who has read J.D. Salinger's New Yorker stories […] will not be surprised by the fact that his first novel is full of children" and later adds that "there are many voices in the novel: children voices, adult voices, underground voices […]" (Little Brown and Company),

[41] A review of *Catcher in the Rye*, *Library Journal*, Vol 76, n.13, July 1951, pp.1125-26.
[42] Edward P. J. Corbett, "Raise High the Barriers, Censors" in *America*, Vol 104, n.14, Jan 7, 1961, pp.441-443.
[43] Virgilia Peterson, "Three Days in the Bewildering World of an Adolescent." *New York Herald Tribune Book Review*, July 15, 1951, p. 3.

stressing the status of the book as an intergenerational crossover and age-inclusive story. During the next decade, in a 1961 article, Seng[44] mentions that perhaps Salinger "was trying to tell young people how difficult it was to move from their world into the world of adults" and adult values (*CLR 18*, 181), and four years later, Wayne Booth shares how his students described Holden as real and honest (161).

Rachels argues that adolescents do not look up to Holden but instead identify and recognize themselves in him, a tendency which contributed to the novel's popularity serving "as a literary rite of passage for hundreds of thousands of other young readers" (par.5). Maybe later, there have been more adults recommending *The Catcher* to young people, but at that time, the interest of young readers is what influenced scholars to write about these books and to study them in class. For instance, *Letters to J. D. Salinger* (2002) edited by Kubica and Hochman compile 150 personal letters addressed to the author, from writers and readers, students and teachers, and also posts online by other fans. This is an example of how different generations have approached Salinger's works, as well as *With Love and Squalor* (2001) edited by Kotzen and Beller which features pieces by fourteen contemporary authors who highlight the influence of Salinger in the new generations of writers.[45]

On an essay titled "The Age of Salinger" (1970), French argues that no writer monopolized readers for a decade as Salinger did in the fifties and that he is "one of the earliest chroniclers of the now formidable 'generation gap'" (24-25). However, the book later became a cultural statement according to Menand:

> *The Catcher in the Rye* was a best-seller when it came out, in 1951, but its reception as some sort of important cultural statement didn't happen until the mid-fifties when people started talking about "alienation" and "conformity" and "the youth culture"—the time of "Howl" and "Rebel Without a Cause" and Elvis Presley's first records. It is as a hero of that culture that Holden Caulfield has survived. (par.11)

Salinger's first two books became a cultural statement for young people and according to Slawenski, "among students, it became fashionable to be seen carrying *The Catcher in the Rye* or *Nine Stories*. Young men mimicked Holden Caulfield in their attitudes and their dress" (307). Much like Twain did with Huckleberry, Salinger built a typical American myth that

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[44] Peter J. Seng, "The Fallen Idol: The Immature World of Holden Caulfield." In College English. Vol. 23, n.3, Dec 1961, pp. 203-209.

[45] These novelists, journalists, and screenwriters are Walter Kirn, René Steinke, Charles D'Ambrosio, Emma Forrest, Aleksander Hemon, Lucinda Rosenfeld, Amy Sohn, John McNally, Karen E. Bender, Thomas Beller, Benjamin Anastas, Aimee Bender, Joel Stein, and Jane Mendelsohn.

praises individualism, non-conformism, and the revolutionary free spirit (Ciocia 205). At the end of the twentieth century, Whitfield claims that "no American writer over the past half-century has entranced serious young readers more than Salinger" (568), and at the same time, that "no postwar American novel has been subjected to more—and more intense—efforts to prevent the young from reading it" (575). Through a 1961 article titled "Raise High the Barriers, Censors," Corbett predicted that "adult attempts to keep *The Catcher in the Rye* out of the hands of young people will undoubtedly increase, for it is the one novel that young people of the postwar generation have been reading and discussing avidly" (*CLR 18,* 177). On another article of the same year, Seng argues that *Catcher* proved to be more than a trade novel, as it was part of class discussions and listed as school reading, but also challenged on the grounds of Holden's immoral activities, thoughts and language, but this scholar states that: "I doubt that modern adolescents are as innocent of these things as those parents and teachers suppose" (*CLR 18,* 179). In 1980, Dessner does not see harm in this novel, "unless professors succeed in making it a classic" arguing through an article that it is both "an insult to childhood and adulthood," growing up and "our ideas of civilization" (97), translating the adultcentric constructions discussed in chapter two, where adulthood is seen as a superior state that young people must attain through a process of civilization.

However, Salinger's novel became a modern classic and one of the most frequently censored books,[46] as well as one of the most taught in public schools, as Foerstel singles out in a list of readings banned in US schools and public libraries:

> The earliest recorded attempts at censorship were in 1954 in Marin County and Los Angeles County, California. In 1955–1956, eight more attempts to ban the book occurred nationwide. A 1961–1962 survey of New York high school librarians and 1963 and 1965 surveys of English teachers in Utah and Arizona found *The Catcher in the Rye* to be their most frequently censored title. Yet a 1962 survey of California English professors showed the book to be their number-one choice to teach to college students. By 1981 the original edition of the book had been reprinted thirty-five times and the paperback edition fifty-two times, with a total number of copies in excess of 10 million. Indeed, during 1981, *The Catcher in the Rye h*ad the unusual distinction of being the nation's most frequently censored book and, at the same time, the second-most frequently taught novel in the public schools. (212)

It is not surprising that for a postwar audience, this book could have come as shocking as Peterson pointed out in a 1951 review: "Recent war novels have accustomed us all to ugly words and images, but from the mouths of the very young and protected they sound peculiarly

[46] It did not help that during the eighties, John Lennon's assassin, Chapman, cited the novel as inspiration for his crime and that in two other attempts of murder to famous people, the perpetrators had the book amongst their belongings.

offensive" (*CLR 18*, 172). However, *The Catcher* was still challenged during the first decade of the twentieth-first century when young people were exposed to much more violent material through mass media and the internet; in fact it is registered as one of the most censored and challenged books in the annual lists by the American Library Association until 2009, still for "offensive language, sexually explicit, unsuited to age group" (ALA "Top 10 Most Challenged Books Lists"). Therefore, the main arguments against the novel address its profane and vulgar language, as well as the introduction of sexual content and immoral situations—such as prostitution and alcohol and cigarette use (Foerstel 212-214). In some cases, the novel was removed from libraries and required lists in schools altogether, and sometimes it remained, but it was assigned as a secondary reading or selected for an older or advanced class (Foerstel 212-214; ALA "Banned and Challenged Classics"). This has happened since the sixties, when discussions about censorship of teenage books were raised and there was a call for books such as *The Catcher in the Rye* to be assigned only to those students who had read the classics and had the tools and background for evaluating them properly (C. Smith 6).

However, once a book recommended by college teachers, *The Catcher* has become assigned to high school, while *Huckleberry Finn*, to which it has often been compared, is still considered a college book (Rachels par.7-8). This shows the arbitrariness in the way adults label books according to what they consider as the appropriate age audience; the education system has cataloged it as a book for teenagers and at the same time it has been challenged as unsuitable reading for its age group. The truth is that aside from the audience that it was marketed or designated for, the novel "earned Salinger critical praise and a wide readership from college professors, to high school students, to supermarket book buyers" (D. Smith 641). In fact, there was a time when people lined up in the newsstand to buy the *New Yorker* with the next Salinger's story (D. Smith 647).

One of these stories, "Teddy" (1952), published between *The Catcher* and *Nine Stories*, brought the author with more mail than any other story before, though this time it was mainly negative (Slawenski 245), as this was the first of Salinger's stories that came from his interest in eastern religions and also one of few with a controversially unpleasant ending. Despite its lack of success, Salinger included it in his short story collection *Nine Stories*, as well as other stories previously published in the same magazine, plus two unreleased texts. *Nine Stories* received mixed reviews mostly because it was inevitably compared to the authors' opera prima; in fact "most of the criticism was directed not at Salinger's craftsmanship, which was

undeniable, but at his perceived ability to sustain the level of quality established by *The Catcher in the Rye*" (Slawenski 247). Regardless of the reviews and critics, it became popular among the reading public and reached ninth place on the *New York Times* best-seller list, remaining in the top twenty for the next three months, which was unprecedent for a collection of short stories, since they were expected to sell less than a novel (Slawenski 248). In the following decades, it has been reprinted in paperback because the audience still reads it as Dominic Smith points out when referring to its reception fifty years later (644). [47]

At the same time, Salinger himself was becoming a legend because he refused to appear in the papers, media and public events, and did not want his biography or his picture on any of his books, unlike Dahl. In fact, this contrasts with the first edition of *Franny and Zooey* (1961), that I consulted at the IYL, where I noticed that the publisher was allowed to share a note by the author that explains about his upcoming plans for the Glass family characters and even offers personal details about where he was living at the time. Later, he was very private in general; journalists, photographers, and readers attempted to reach him through letters, or followed him and tried to approach his family and neighbors, mostly without success. Salinger became increasingly reclusive, and his upcoming works focused deeply on his faith; most of these stories, first published in the *New Yorker,* and later printed as books, featured the Glass family's precocious children, who had been previously introduced in stories like "A Perfect Day for Bananafish."

The first one of these ensembles, *Franny* and *Zooey*, divided the critics; when "Franny" was first published as a single piece in 1955, it provided not only Salinger but the *New Yorker* with the most fan mail they had received for any story (Slawenski 261); most reviews praised it for "its characterization, tone, and structure," while "Zooey" (1957) was disdained for its "religiosity, formlessness, extreme length" and the author's indulgence towards his characters (Slawenski 332). Maybe it came as a surprise to the critics who accused Salinger of writing just for an educated readership that *Franny and Zooey* reached number one in the *New York Times* best-selling list and remained there for six months, occupying the same position the next year; the publishers could hardly keep up with the demands of the hardcover which in the first year was reprinted eleven times and has remained in print since then (Slawenski 335-336), with

[47] According to Smith, the exact book sales figures for *Nine Stories* remains unknown (644).

readers describing it not as an intellectual piece, but rather as a story about "empathy, humanity and spirituality" (Slawenski 335).

Salinger's fourth book and the last to be published[48] during his lifetime, *Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters and Seymour—an Introduction* (1963) was also a result of the blend of two stories already published in the *New Yorker* about the Glass family. While reviewers were not as negative as with his previous book, the disenchantment was mostly directed to the Glass saga, which was tiring them; on the other hand, the public did not seem to have enough of these characters, and it became the third best-selling book that year, even if the sales were not as high as with *Franny and Zooey*[49] (Slawenski 349). In the second reprint, the author even includes a note to show that his book was not addressed to critics or scholars (Slawenski 349): "if there is an amateur reader still left in the world—or anybody who just reads and runs—I ask him or her, with untellable affection and gratitude, to split the dedication of this book four ways with my wife and children" (Salinger, *Raise High and Seymour* dedicatory).

Contemporarily, Garcia explains how, as a high school teacher of mainly black and latinx students, he wondered if they would identify with a white, upper-class, heterosexual male like Holden Caulfield. However, he says that each time he taught Salinger's novel, he had students asking if they could buy a copy afterwards and also, admitting that this was the first book they ever finished reading. This interest could be attributed to the fact that "Holden is the apotheosis of being a teenager and growing up" and that it is one of the few books that have a "near-universal positive response," encouraging students to discuss their "fears, uncertainties, and desires about growing up" (Garcia 130). In this regard, Appleyard shares examples of his students' comments on reading and the books they most enjoy and mentions a teenage girl saying: "I like stories that bring me on the edge of my seat, that stir my emotions" and mentions *The Catcher* as an example of this (101). On the matter of identification, she explains that she likes Holden because "he is a little self-conscious. He loves his sister a lot […] he's not afraid to do what he wants; he walked out of school and didn't tell anyone," and since she is shy, she likes to read about people that do things differently to her (Appleyard 104), showing how young readers can find identification in other aspects as well.

[48] Critics would also provide negative feedback to "Hapworth 16, 1924," the last story published by the author in *The New Yorker*, declaring it as unreadable (Slawenski 370-373). It was going to be published as a novel in 1996, but Salinger became rapidly discouraged during the process (Slawenski 394-395).

[49] During the first two weeks after it was published, *Franny and Zooey* sold 125,000 copies (Slawenski 335) and *Raise High and Seymour* quickly sold 100,000 copies after its publication (Slawenski 349).

For Garcia, it is important not to underestimate young readers and encourage the capacity to engage and participate in providing critical and meaningful interpretations and viewpoints about the politics of representation in aging texts like *Catcher* instead of removing these books from reading lists, notwithstanding the inclusion of more contemporary and diverse texts (130-131). In this regard, Benson shares discussions through a book club with high school students in 2015-2016 where he asked if Holden seems like "a typical rich white kid," and shares some of the responses where the teens replied that he does not respond to this stereotype because Salinger's protagonist is more complex, sensitive and dislikes phonies, but also other students saw Holden as sometimes overlooking his privileges and taking opportunities for granted (131). Thus, this scholar concludes that "the responses I received from both college and high school students reinforced my sense that Holden's disdain is primarily reserved for the dominant white culture in which he feels vulnerable but that he is unwilling or unable to fully disavow" (131). This exercise demonstrates how, as with responses to Dahl's books by children, teenagers and young people can also understand ethical nuances and provide different interpretations through innovative lens, and it also shows how different generations contribute to an actualization of meanings.

### 3.3 Closing remarks

Roald Dahl and J.D. Salinger do not only share a sociopolitical and cultural background, but the historical reception of their works also bears resemblances; interestingly, young readers were responsible for triggering the interest among critics and scholars. Therefore, their novels became mandatory school readings for children and teenagers because apparently, they speak directly to them in form and content, but they also have been fervently opposed by parents and teachers that have considered that the young heroes do not set a good example and that language in their works is vulgar and offensive. According to David Booth:

> Over the last two hundred years, children's books targeted for censure reflect changing ideas about childhood and notions of suitability. What constitutes "censorship," and whether limiting access to a book violates children's right to read or protects them from danger, has been a longstanding matter of debate. In dealing with sensitive and complex issues, there is no simple resolution to the dynamic tension between the need to protect children and the willingness to trust the relationship between a writer and a reader. (26)

I have addressed this complex relationship through aetonormativity that stresses the asymmetrical power structures between children and adults and the different possibilities for

subverting these structures in children's literature and YA, considering that these categorizations are often a result of views and constructions, and the influence of the market and education. Most of the negative criticism and challenges to Dahl and Salinger's books have been rooted in adultist and adultcentric perspectives regarding childhood and adolescence, and young readers. Due to parents and teachers' concerns about their inclusion in reading lists, some of their works were even censored or banned. Whatever the argument, their oeuvres have been passionately defended and opposed, but their lifelong controversial reputation[50] has never affected their works' appraisal by readers of all ages and their influence on popular culture. Whether it has been by cross-writing as in Dahl's case, or by cross-reading as with Salinger's readership, their novels and short stories have entered a blurred spectrum making readers transgress age-related boundaries.

Yet Dahl and Salinger share something else in common; most of their heroes are children and teenagers, and their works focus on issues of childhood, adolescence, coming-of-age and power dynamics with adults, which might be one of the main reasons for their continuous appeal to intergenerational readers. The following chapters are dedicated to the analysis of the selected corpus considering the theoretical framework introduced in the second chapter, as well, as aetonormativity and the authors' associations with children's literature, YA and crossovers discussed here.

[50] For example, in 2020, thirty years after his death, Dahl's state executors offered a public apology for the writer's antisemitic remarks made through a few interviews during his lifetime.

## Chapter IV

## Journeys, Coming-of-age and Independence

Due to the major influence of the Bildungsroman tradition, journeys in children's literature and YA usually function as rite-of-passages or initiations related to the development and growth of the young heroes, but these are also universal and recurring themes and motifs that frequently appear in intergenerational crossovers. This chapter is dedicated to analyzing journeys in Dahl and Salinger's works because as Nikolajeva argues, drawing from aetonormativity theory, through displacements, young characters are also empowered to face the world independently of adult supervision at least for a while and have adventures on their own. Hence, adult normative values and constructions can be examined throughout the ride and influence their process of identity building which I will study from a child-centered perspective. Furthermore, thanks to the change of scenarios, characters are forced to face different realities, new perspectives, confront their memories of the past, and go through a process of self-actualization, not always as children or teenagers, but even as adults. All these stories show how life is a journey in itself, and how we remain in perpetual evolution and constantly negotiating expectations according to age and life stages as Youth Studies on transitions suggest.

Considering that both Dahl and Salinger were born and raised into immigrant families, moved from their homes to boarding schools during their childhood and adolescence, and to foreign countries for work and during the war, it is not surprising that journeys are a recurring theme in their novels and shorts stories. In Dahl's *James and the Giant Peach, Charlie and the Great Glass Elevator, The BFG*, *The Witches,* and *Billy and the Minpins,* the main characters experience fantastic journeys to unexpected places. J.D. Salinger's "For Esmé—with Love and Squalor" depicts a young soldier in a foreign country, while *The Catcher in the Rye* and short stories like "A Perfect Day for Banana Fish," "The Laughing Man" (1949), "Franny" and "Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters" (1955) make the setting another character in the story. New York City predominated in Salinger's works, similarly to Dahl's novels like *Danny, The Champion of the World*, which is set in the English countryside, featuring local journeys and explorations of unknown places.

Drawing from Childism and Youth Studies, this analysis has been divided into two

main sections. One is mostly dedicated to studying Salinger's works set in New York City. However, this part concludes with an exploration of vacation settings in works by both authors. The second part is devoted to novels and short stories in which Dahl's young characters travel overseas or to other worlds, which ends up with a comparison between works by both authors as well, also considering narratives taking place in foreign lands. Considering the argument by Nodelman that the home/away/home is the most common narrative pattern in children's literature (223), this analysis will be expanded in chapter five taking the heroes back to their home and communities to study intergenerational relations and power dynamics.

McCulloch argues that "literature for children often concerns itself with a journey or quest which the young hero or heroine must undertake in order to advance themselves and, often simultaneously, their society" (174). Scholars have attributed this storyline to the influence of the linear and circular journeys in folktales, where the main characters are usually displaced from the home environment, or to the fact that these stories are usually retelling the hero's archetypical journey proposed by Campbell[51] (in Nodelman 223). Therefore, this narrative pattern is frequently associated with the Bildungsroman, or coming-of-age, stressing how this type of stories often focus on a journey that the protagonists must undertake leaving their comfort zone, exploring unfamiliar territories and destinations while facing challenges along the way that represent rites of passage (174).

According to Beauvais, most of contemporary children's literature follows the aesthetic narrative pattern of "departure and adventure" where the child goes on a journey to face the world, which is usually connected to existential crisis and a feeling of otherness with adulthood (52). In this regard, Trites singles out that growth seen as a journey can be typically found in coming-of-age narratives like *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, where "an adolescent experiences a crisis and either undertakes a journey to escape the crisis or to find a way to overcome it" (*Growth* 50). The arrival at the destination, return home or relocation are typically associated with acts of maturation (Nodelman 226), as young characters go through an introspective journey while dealing with a new external context and social relations. They learn to understand themselves while shaping their relationship with their community and the world around them (McCulloch 174), and hence, there is not only a physical quest and external

[51] In a *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949), Joseph Campbell studies the monomyth or the "mythological adventure of the hero" as a magnification of the rite of passage standard formula: "separation-initiation-return" (23).

pursuit, but a process of internal transformation and identity building.

According to Trites, "when readers bring to the text an expectation that an adolescent character will grow, they are using their own stereotypical knowledge (stored in their memories) to anticipate a script of maturation, one that has likely been influenced by the pattern of the Bildungsroman" (*Growth* 39). In this regard, "children's literature critics frequently construct a 'story' of a movement from darkness to light—just as developmental psychologists, like Piaget, envisage the child growing from an original, autistic state to adult rationality" (Rudd, "Theorizing and Theories" 15). Therefore, Honeyman draws attention to how even when we ask children innocently what they want to be when they grow up, this simple query can be ideologically charged (Honeyman 1), as we are implying that they are not yet accomplished or complete. Therefore, much YA fiction privileges growth, especially psychological, and embodied metaphors such as the journey or the voyage are frequently used to depict embarkation into adulthood; however, many narratives also "defy the predictable pattern of the bildungsroman-influenced novel about a maturing teenager" (Trites, *Growth* 54).

In this regard, YA fiction might have evolved from the Bildungsroman tradition, but according to Trites, in several stories, the main character has not yet reached adulthood at the end and plots are more oriented towards development, making these novels *Entwicklungsroman (Disturbing the Universe* 10-14). Either way, YA novels usually portray the interaction of teenagers with the social institutions and the Ideological State Apparatuses of power and repression that construct the individual in a capitalist system, whether by interrogating or learning to conform with such structures (Trites, *Disturbing the Universe* 20). "In turn, the intended reader of children's and YA fiction is induced towards emulating this process of self-development with a view to socializing or readying them for their place as future citizens" (McCulloch 174), which does not imply that the reception is passive; au contraire, the young person, as character and reader, must also consider their relationship with the society and contest it and request accountability when necessary.

For Nodelman, the voyage narrative pattern is an instructive way of reaffirming the need and value of a home and especially, of ensuring parental protection to young people, but at the same time, the fact that the child leaves home to have an adventure shows how these places may not be as safe or impenetrable as it might seem, and stresses how the young character might feel like an outsider even in the inside (224). Therefore, referring to subversiveness and carnivalesque plots that challenge aetonormativity, Nikolajeva suggests

that:

> The most important condition is the physical dislocation and the removal, temporary or permanent, of parental protection, allowing the child protagonist to have the freedom to explore the world and test the boundaries of independence. The protagonist may be placed in a number of extraordinary situations, such as war or revolution, exotic, far-away settings, temporary isolation on a desert island, extreme danger, and so on. All these conditions empower the fictional child, and even though the character is most frequently brought back to the security of home and parental supervision, the narratives have a subversive effect, showing that the rules imposed on the child by the adults are arbitrary. ("Aetonormativity" 17)

Therefore, these narratives are not only about voyage and discovery, but also about empowering children and teenagers to explore and question dominant social structures and adult-normative values and constructions independently. As studied in chapter three, "children's and YA literature interrogates childhood as a contested and dynamic rather than settled space" (McCulloch 175) and thus, the ability of YA fiction to question authority helps to shift the traditional conventions of the Bildungsroman and turns it into a genre in a perpetual process of becoming and evolving (McCulloch 198-199), much like the young travelers in the stories that I will address through this guided tour of selected works by Roald Dahl and J.D. Salinger.

## 4.1 Psychogeographical journeys in Salinger's New York City: revisiting places and memories

Even if maturation occurs within a large age spectrum that goes through various stages of life, it usually enters in the discourse as if it were a binary, being an adult or not (Trites, *Growth* 111). Therefore, "adulthood is the normative benchmark against which childhood is measured. One attains full personhood by becoming an adult which is usually marked by marriage, parenthood, work and independent living" (Pease 210). This idea comes from social constructions that rely on biological and psychological factors, socioeconomic practices related to education and work, religious and cultural rites of passage, personal decisions (e.g. marriage, having children), and other factors that keep changing and determine conceptions about age, transitions and generations. Trites argues that researching how language shapes these concepts "provides a way to account for the child both as embodied in infancy/childhood/adolescence, while simultaneously being shaped conceptually by the ideological pressures of the world in which s/he grows" (*Growth* 121). In this regard, adolescence as portrayed in literature is determined by a blending of embodied metaphors and cultural narratives of growth (Trites,

*Growth* 57*)*.

Throughout this section, I study a few representative works by J.D. Salinger that explore the urban setting of New York City, relating the journey to life-changing experiences throughout various stages such as childhood, adolescence, and early adulthood. The analyses focus on how the young characters do not need to go too far physically to travel a long distance on the inside and make sense of their life purposes, their own contradictions, the obstacles they must endure along the way, the choices they ought to make and their relation towards the passengers they encounter. These young characters in *The Catcher in the Rye,* "The Laughing Man," "Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters" and "Franny" revisit memories along the way to understand their existential journey and construct their identity, throughout a psychogeographical[52] exploration.

### 4.1.1 Holden: a tourist in his own city

Holden Caulfield has been often compared to Mark Twain's character Huckleberry Finn in the sense that both teenagers take a journey to escape a personal crisis, but unlike Huckleberry, Holden "is not in the midst of the "untracked American forest" but rather in the urban "jungle" of the mid-twentieth century" New York City (Steinle 139). As Locke points out, "Salinger transforms Huck the frontier fugitive into Holden the prep-school dropout" (139). Closer to the Christmas holidays, Holden takes us from Pencey Academy—from where he has recently been expelled—to New York where he is "traveling incognito" for a few days until he is ready to go back to his home in the Upper East Side (Salinger, *The Catcher* 68). Drawing from the archetype of Joyce's *Ulysses* (1920), Ghasemi and Ghafoori find in Holden a personification of the flâneur,[53] who "undertakes a journey of initiation in the heart of the city in order to become aware of the ambiguity of modern life, and of his own identity" (74). These scholars argue that:

> The celebrated figure of the flâneur was the most eminent answer of literature to this urban anxiety: the idling, strolling, mainly upper class and without exception male gazer who walked slowly and aimlessly through the city, and ''read'' and ''interpreted'' the seemingly ambiguous

[52] Psychogeography "describes the point at which psychology and geography collide," and denotes how places and spaces affect human behavior and emotions (Coverley 10). It is also applied to fields like architecture, but the first uses of this term date to the decade of the 1950s and the Paris Letterist Movement, a forerunner of the Situationist International, a radical and revolutionary group made up of artists and thinkers that attempted to transform urban life for aesthetic and political purposes (Coverley 10).

[53] This concept was first popularized by Charles Baudelaire in *The Painter of Modern Life* (1860) and *Paris Spleen* (1869) in the nineteen century. Walter Benjamin made this an archetype of academic interest through his essays on Baudelaire on the twentieth century.

and obscure city as a text. (Ghasemi and Ghafoori 81)

In a context of consumerism, mass society and social change, when thinking about the modern metropolis, "questions of identity, life-style, social interaction and social reality" come to mind (Ghasemi and Ghafoori 74). In this environment, Holden aimlessly wanders observing the city, its social types and spatial configurations (Ghasemi and Ghafoori 82). Ghasemi and Ghafoori also compare Holden with the figure of the flâneur seen as the hero of the novel, as studied by Lukács because of its "transcendental homelessness," with Bakhtin's views on this character as a performer that uses masks and disguises for his face-to-face relations, and with Girard, who relates the flâneur to consumerism which has a big impact on *Catcher*'s context (85).

Holden begins to hide his identity once he is on the train to Penn Station where he encounters the mother of one of his classmates and not only introduces himself with a fake name, but also makes up a story about her son. Once in New York, he behaves like a backpacker tourist staying at a cheap hotel, as if he was in fact homeless, leaving his luggage at the train station, going to Broadway, Radio City Music Hall, ice skating, visiting bars, museums, and acquaintances, and taking long walks mainly through Manhattan and Central Park and at the same time taking us through a guided tour of his memories on past experiences—some of them funny, most of them traumatic.

With his colloquial style that sounds more as if he is speaking than telling a written story (Locke 141-142), this seventeen-year-old recalls the loss he has experienced in his life since he is still mourning his younger brother, Allie, who died a few years before; neither he is over the suicide of one of his classmates who was bullied at school (Locke 144). Holden vilifies this exaggerated destructive male behavior that he has seen at Pencey Academy where "men perform their manliness in order to live up to a macho standard that often leads to aggression and violence" (Benson 30), and which he dissects throughout his journey.

In this regard, Kidd describes *The Catcher in the Rye* as "both a psychological and a literary work" (156), that fostered a more negative and dystopian tradition intended to show psychological and social vulnerability in YA literature. Kidd emphasizes that "Holden Caulfield, after all, became popular not only as a hero but also as an ordinary teenager" (169). Nowadays, this teen could be psychoanalyzed as depressed or anxious which indeed affects his process of self-knowledge which is why he repeatedly calls himself a madman. According to Kidd, this novel helped model the identarian novel whilst showing "the precariousness of identity formation" since Holden is not confident of his selfhood (169-170), and "full of

contradictions and ambivalent feelings" (Alsen 153).

According to Ghasemi and Ghafoori, identity crises are a common consequence of modern urban life, since the big size of the metropolis and its great distances lead to a constant feeling of displacement and disconnection (75-76) and "memories [are] negotiated over time and space, and situated directly in the urban context" (Gordon qtd. Ghasemi and Ghafoori in 77). Therefore, to heal and regain his path, Holden must go back to his hometown and revisit familiar places disguising himself or even getting lost in the way—as he does one night when he has trouble finding the lagoon in Central Park which he says he knows like the back of his hand. As Holden himself explains when he visits the Museum of Natural History, "nobody'd be different. The only thing that would be different would be *you*. Not that you'd be so much older or anything. It wouldn't be that, exactly. You'd just be different, that's all" (Salinger, *The Catcher* 135).

Holden admits that even if he is seventeen, tall and already has a few grey hairs, he sometimes behaves immaturely and when this happens, everybody reprimands him; however, when he acts a lot older than he is, no one notices. In this regard, Pease argues that "positing young people as lacking control and being immature and irrational is part of the stereotype of adolescence" (213). As a matter of fact, when the novel was recently published, critics suggested that it was a symbol of American immaturity (Kidd 169). Therefore, this passage clearly refers to the comparisons of young people to the standard of the normatively mature adult which according to Tribunella does not necessarily correspond with real people, but is usually portrayed in fiction as an idealized figure, anchored in masculine constructions, typically portrayed as serious, responsible, knowing, experienced, hard-working, law-abiding, disciplined, self-controlled and able to restrain emotions, as well as, heteronormatively gendered (xxii-xxv). About this last point, Kidd explains:

> In writing for adolescents, gender demands and assumptions about sexuality are intimately bound up with the interiorist tendencies of the protagonist. Put another way, the adolescent character's struggle for selfhood, often symbolized by creativity, thought, and other ostensibly psychological and private activities, is often staged around or against expectations about gender and sexuality. (158)

Holden is trying to make sense of his approach to sexuality and what his postwar society expects of a white heterosexual cisgender male teen, soon to become an adult. Drawing on parallelism with Twain's hero, Benson argues that "Huck's moral choices indict white power structures in the same way that Holden's indict mainstream guy culture" (12). On one side, he

is a virgin and respects women when they tell him to stop, however, he is also aware that his schoolmates have been able to sleep with girls because they have not asked for consent—something that seems to be the norm in his context. On the other side, he is curious and decides to call a striper who is not able to meet him, and later pays for a prostitute, but when the girl, who is about his age, appears in his hotel room, Holden feels miserable about the situation and ends up not having intercourse with her.

Moreover, he makes homophobic jokes and personal questions to Carl Luce, a former schoolmate, when he meets him in a bar during his NY exploration and his peer repeatedly calls out on him for behaving immaturely and suggests he needs to see a psychoanalyst. Later, Holden experiences advances from his former English teacher, Mr. Antolini—one of the few adults in the story he actually likes and does not call a phony or a bastard. Holden is then confused and unsure on what to think as he is torn between the fact that although his postwar society tells him the contrary, the teacher's sexuality should not matter on his views on him. Therefore, "Holden's refusal to dismiss Antolini for his sexual advance and his refusal to sexually exploit women mark him as a potential traitor to a white male culture" (Benson 14). At the same time, Holden suggests that this is not the first time he has suffered from sexual harassment saying that "that kind of stuff's happened to me about twenty times since I was a kid. I can't stand it" (Salinger, *The Catcher* 213).

Even if he does not reflect on these traumas anymore, this sort of situation certainly has affected him because since the beginning of the story, Holden is worried about his roommate Stradlater taking advantage of a girl he used to date—and whom he seems to still like a lot—named Jane Gallagher, so he picks a fight with him, and ends up beaten up. Thus, "Holden struggles between overcoming his desire to be manly and his sympathy for anyone who is oppressed" (Benson 35). Furthermore, he has suspicions that Jane's drunkard stepfather may have behaved inappropriately with her. For this reason, this teen wearing his red hunting hat backward wants to be the catcher in the rye and protect all the children playing in a field from falling from a cliff, as an allegory to all the harmful and abusive situations they may experience growing up. According to Steinle:

> It is in this sense that Salinger, in his development of Holden as a hero, perhaps unwittingly draws attention to a paradox within the tradition of the American Adam: heroic status is attained by gaining moral strength through "falling," yet the future role of the hero is to prevent (in actuality or figuratively) others from taking the same fall. (137)

According to Steinle, this quixotic gesture is marked by the fact that Holden feels upset when

he sees obscenities written on the walls of the railway station, the museum, and his former school—where his little sister Phoebe goes—and would like to erase them all, even if he knows that it would be impossible (139-140). Thus, he believes that "you can't ever find a place that's nice and peaceful, because there isn't any" (Salinger, *The Catcher* 224), at least in New York City, which is why near the end of his account, he decides to escape "from the inauthenticity of adult society" (Steinle 139). He first insinuates his plan to Sally Hayes, a pretentious girl whom he only seems to date out of loneliness since he describes her as someone comfortable with her privilege, that enjoys her materialistic life, and superficial name-dropping conversations; certainly, not the kind of person that would run out to live in a cabin in the woods (Locke 151). For this reason, Holden decides to go by himself, but his sister Phoebe has other plans when she arrives at the Museum of Art with her suitcase ready to tag along.

Bags are important symbols during Holden's journey; for instance, he recalls a time when he shared his dorm with a boy who was not as wealthy as himself and even if they liked each other, his roommate would tease him for his bourgeois bags, but at the same time try to pretend they were his. Similarly, Holden feels sorry when he sees the kind of bags that two nuns carry when he talks to them at Grand Central Station. These moments offer him an awareness of the fact that even if you want someone as your partner during a journey, socioeconomic constructions such as class rule who you end up sharing your seat with and where you are supposed to go. Therefore, Holden intends to alienate himself from the adult world where he would be expected not only to behave with toxic masculinity as he has already seen through his teenage years, but also as a member of his privileged and phony social class. In this regard, Benson mentions that *Catcher* draws on intersections of gender, sexuality and race (13), but I would add that social class and age are also included, drawing attention to the fact that Holden has difficulties with ascribing to all the social identity marks he has been privileged with, but also to adult normativity once he grows up.

For this reason, he likes some details that seem to be immutable like the dioramas at the Museum of Natural History and the song played in the carousel at Central Park's zoo where he takes Phoebe to make amends and convince her, and maybe even himself, that he would not run away. According to Locke, "Holden's mournful journey ends when he returns his sister to her childhood. He stops his active, linear wandering and contemplates her circular play" (146), aware now that she is not responsible for his future and that he cannot protect her from falling either as he realizes that children cannot be saved from all the harm in the world (Alsen 161).

He finally decides to go back and ends up healing of burn-out in what seems to be a mental health facility in Florida, as he explains in the beginning "I got pretty run-down and had to come out here and take it easy" (Salinger, *The Catcher* 3). He tells his story from there as Mr. Antolini had advised him: "Many, many men have been just as troubled morally and spiritually as you are right now. Happily, some of them kept records of their troubles. You'll learn from them—if you want to. Just as someday, if you have something to offer, someone will learn something from you" (Salinger, *The Catcher* 209).

Regardless of how unreliable as a narrator Holden Caulfield has been described to be, and compared to Huckleberry Finn in that sense too, what matters here is that this teen is owning his coming-of-age journey from the beginning when he states that he won't tell "that David Copperfield kind of crap" (Salinger, *The Catcher* 3), which means that his narrative would not follow the Bildungsroman pattern in the strict sense, exploring his upbringing, education and socialization in a biographical or traditional way. It is more a *Entwicklungsroman* or novel of development, as Trites would suggest, and centered on one important moment of his life when he is standing on the border between childhood and adulthood. Reprising Trites and Beauvais' arguments, the journey in this narrative stands as an allegory of facing an existential crisis and dealing with the otherness of adulthood.

Furthermore, according to the closing chapter of the novel, he is not much interested in providing details about getting back home and especially, about what is he going to do with his future which is what everybody seems to ask. Although Holden may grow up and conform in some ways, at least through his psychogeographical journey, the adult normative rules and values of his entourage are deeply criticized and scrutinized, providing a subversive and empowering effect. Holden shares his story to provide a testimony not of how he became an accomplished mature adult, but of his journey, because as he states: "I don't care if it's a sad good-by or a bad good-by, but when I leave a place, I like to *know* I'm leaving it" (Salinger, *The Catcher* 7).

### 4.1.2 Outgrowing childhood through mental journeys

According to Hollindale, we build our identity through "a constant dialogue between experience and memory" which are both unstable categories meaning that "we construct our personal continuities, but we do not remain the same people: we evolve. Only by memory can we cope with our own personal evolutions, but memories are not constants: we revise and alter

them to fit our present needs" (71). This pattern has been seen in Holden who creatively intertwines his strolls through New York City with his memories, experiencing a psychogeographical journey to understand himself, his process of development and identity building, his relationship to his childhood and past years as a teen, and what is going to come in adulthood. After all, contrary to other marks of identity that could be stabler in a person, we are constantly evolving as we age, and negotiating with the social expectations linked to different life stages in our context and our generation historically.

Considering Hollindale's view and definition of what childness means for adults, mentioned in the second chapter, which alludes to the memories of childhood that offer us continuity between infancy and adulthood and a sense of having left childhood behind (49), I study here "The Laughing Man" and its connections to mental traveling. This short story tells the childhood experiences of an unnamed adult narrator when he was a member of the so-called Comanche's club at nine years old and his memories regarding their leader, an NYU law student that they used to call the Chief.[54] This young man would entertain the group with the adventures of a fictitious pulp antihero during the bus ride after their activities either visiting a museum in Manhattan or doing sports in Central Park. In fact, "the precise geography of the city forms a substructure for the double-layered story" (Prigozy 93), in which the frame story is centered on the law student's relationship with a girl named Mary Hudson. On the other hand, the framed story is about the larger-than-life adventures of the Laughing Man—a deformed-faced outcast that lives with bandits and freaks, speaks with animals, and paradoxically steals, highjacks, but donates to fair causes, through the Paris-Chinese border.

Although at the beginning, both stories do not seem to relate, by the end, the framed story serves as a fictionalized metaphor for the law student's broken heart and these events seem to resonate with the narrator since they appear to be a life-changing moment during his childhood that he intends to dissect. Therefore, the following analysis shows how both a child and a young adult can experience trouble dealing with similar feelings of trauma, heartbreak and loss. The narrator says that he was first aware of their leaders' new relationship when one day during baseball season, the boy notices a photograph of a girl hanging in the bus and later recalls "one day as we were on our way to the Park, the Chief pulled the bus over to a curb on Fifth Avenue in the Sixties, a good half mile past our baseball field" (Salinger, "Laughing

[54] The uses of Comanche and Chief are taken from Native American Culture. Youth associations in the US like the Boys Scouts have historically misappropriated these terms and practices in their activities.

Man" 60). This change in their usual route denotes how the group's routine has been altered and from that point on, the girl in the photograph joins them on the bus and plays baseball with them a few times. At the same time, the folktale has evolved during their bus rides reaching a climax when the Laughing Man comes to rescue his timber wolf that his enemies, Detective Dufarge and her daughter, have captured. This scene ends with the villains firing his gun toward the antihero, leaving the club members in a cliffhanger.

After this, the narrator recalls seeing their leader and Mary Hudson having a sort of fight in which she cries, and both seem upset. Referring to children's literature, Joosen argues that it offers glimpses into adult lives from the child's perspective (*Adulthood* 1). Even if this story could be considered for an older audience, since it is a childhood memory, it represents the point of view of the narrator who was a child at the time, but it also shows how this memory is recalled and could have been disseminated along the years, accumulating different meanings. Along the bus ride home and as a symbol of his recent breakup, the law student tells the group the ending of the Laughing Man's story in which he kills the eponymous character.

The story stresses that the Laughing Man was a hero for the nine-year-old boy and the rest of the group who dreamed of being his descendants and were always "waiting for a decent chance to strike terror and admiration in the next mediocre heart" (Salinger, "Laughing Man" 59). The Chief is also a role model for him which can be noticed not only when he says that every member loved and respected their leader, but also when he tells the following:

> I remember getting lost one Saturday somewhere on that tricky stretch of terrain between the Linit sign and the site of the Western end of the George Washington Bridge. I kept my head, though. I just sat down in the majestic shadow of a giant billboard and, however tearfully, opened my lunchbox for business, semi-confident that the Chief would find me. The Chief always found us. (Salinger, "Laughing Man" 54)

The frightening idea of getting physically lost in the city, but believing that someone older than him, whom he trusts, will eventually find him, seems to be reassuring for the boy, as well as knowing that the Laughing Man will emerge victorious from each episode. For this reason, "the end of the Chief's romance and the violence with which he concludes the story of the Laughing Man profoundly affect the narrator. The elusiveness of both tales, with their shattering finales, adds a tragic dimension to this affectionate memoir of an unforgettable episode of his youth" (Prigozy 97). The frame and framed stories in "The Laughing Man" are combined in such a compelling way that they portray the experience of loss—of a loved one, a hero, optimism and hope, for the first time from a child's perspective.

In this regard, Nodelman explains how "texts of children's literature most typically reverse the supposedly normal chronology of childhood so that their child protagonists experience the adult world away before they gain the safe and more limited world of childhood" (225). Once a repetitive journey for the boys, that were only experiencing play and fun, as well as reassuring adventure stories in which a sort of Robinhood character would end up winning, it later gets disrupted by a shocking event. Joosen alludes to the fact that although children do not have access to some of the experiences of adult life, they can understand the feelings that come from these experiences which do not depend on age (*Adulthood* 88). Hence, the young members of the Comanche club get to be spectators of a youth love and heartbreak, and even if they have not experienced this yet, they can understand what their leader is feeling when their fantasy is shattered. Thus, while some life experiences can differ according to age, feelings are intergenerational, and there can be empathy and understanding between people going through different life stages.

According to Tribunella, this type of narrative of love and loss where the protagonists must sacrifice something meaningful in their maturation process is common in children's literature and YA, where young characters experience the traumatic situations that real children are supposed to be sheltered from in order to toughen them for adulthood (xi-xiv, xxvi). Much like Holden Caulfield, the Chief stops being the catcher in the rye that will protect children by telling them stories about victorious outcasts and physically finding them if they get lost, which makes this an experience of coming-of-age for him. Although the children do not become grownups by the end of the story, through these rides in the city, the boy has a taste of adulthood, and this is maybe the reason why as a grown man he remembers in detail this passage of his life in which he learned that his older heroes are fallible mortal humans too.

Flynn points out how Childhood Studies could also encourage criticism that "investigates childhood as a temporal state that is often experienced more in memory than in actuality" ("Intersections" 144). This mental traveling is constantly repeated in literature, even in fiction for adults as Hollindale argues, referring to how narratives can revisit childhood episodes, demonstrating an enduring relevance and impact that transcends temporal constraints (116). Much like the persistent impact of these memories in "The Laughing Man," they serve as conduits for an existential continuity, connecting us to our past selves. Even once we acknowledge having outgrown those earlier phases of life, we continue to delve into these memories, seeking understanding of our present circumstances and the socio-temporal

transitions we have undergone. The following section continues this reflective exploration, shedding light on both the past and the uncertainties that lie ahead.

### 4.1.3 Short stays: epiphanies and nervous breakdowns

Like "The Laughing Man," "Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters" is based on the adult narrator's memories as well. This story and "Franny" depict three of the Glass siblings—recurring characters in Salinger's short stories, going through life crises in their early adulthood. As in the previous narratives, these stories also allude to the fact that reaching a certain age does not mean that we automatically become the figure of an idealized mature adult. Instead, these characters still experience identity crises, emotional breakdowns, as well as growth and development as someone younger does.

In the first novella, Buddy Glass, the second eldest sibling, recalls the events that occurred during a weekend in 1942 when he was just been released from the hospital due to pleurisy and granted a three-day pass from his post as a soldier in Georgia to attend his older brother's wedding. Although the Glasses are New Yorkers, Buddy is portrayed as taking a train to their city where he no longer lives as he is serving in the war and as a result, becoming an invitee in a place he and his brother Seymour do not belong anymore, in a similar way to Holden. Furthermore, Buddy seems to be the only representative from the groom's side attending the wedding, and since Seymour, the eldest of the Glasses who is serving in the war too, never arrives at the ceremony, Buddy ends up sharing a cab with the Matron of Honor and her husband, as well as the bride's aunt and uncle. Much like Holden, minus the lies, Buddy must hide his identity because his companions are upset with the groom, until much later when he is recognized as his brother.

Most of the events occur during the ride through Madison Avenue where the group is caught in traffic due to a parade, while the second part of the story, once Buddy is identified, takes place at the Glasses' apartment where he takes the group when they realize that the taxi is not going to move any further. Then, this "conspicuously retarded," "newly drafted" and lonely twenty-three-year-old, as Buddy describes himself (Salinger, "Carpenters" 13), transforms into the host at his old home, until the group leaves when they found out the bride and groom have eloped. When Buddy is playing host, he finds Seymour's diary and the first passage he reads opens with his brother referring to a parade while in the army; hence, "the immediate narrative of the characters' movements through the streets of New York

foreshadows the diary excerpts" (Seed 82).

Throughout the narrative, Seymour's mental state is discussed from different points of view; the negative criticism usually comes from the Matron of Honor who repeats what Seymour's mother-in-law had said about him, which is also retold in one of the diary's entries. As a result, Buddy loses his patience when the Matron of Honor refers to *It's a Wise Child*, the radio show in which the Glasses used to participate when they were children:

> '[I] mean how can you have any kind of a normal *child*hood or anything?' […] 'That's probably what's the matter with that brother of yours,' [...] 'I mean you lead an absolutely freakish life like that when you're a kid, and so naturally you never learn to grow up. You never learn to relate to normal people or anything.' […] 'Your brother's never learned to relate to anybody.' […] 'He's absolutely unfit for marriage or *any*thing halfway normal, for goodness' sake.' (Salinger, "Carpenters" 47-48)

The Matron of Honor's speech is anchored in constructions and views about normativity regarding life transitions that are grounded in the idea that if childhood is a certain way, then people would grow up to be mature adults with normal social skills and capable of reaching certain benchmarks, like getting married in a determined approved way. At the same time, no one considers that Seymour is serving in the war at the time and might be affected by this experience, which is in fact extended in "A Perfect Day for Bananafish." As a result, Buddy has an outbreak and defends his brother in front of his guests arguing that he was a gifted child; for instance, in "Zooey" it is mentioned that Seymour obtained his Ph.D. at the age most people are in high school. Thus, before reaching legal age, Seymour not only had a taste or glimpses of adulthood, but was already academically accomplished before the expected age. Through the diary, it is also revealed that he is in love and willing to get married, describing it as "the joy of responsibility for the first time in my life" (Salinger, "Carpenters" 73), although, he suffers from social anxiety and has already tried to convince his bride to elope before the wedding day.

At the same time, perhaps the reason Buddy tells this story is that he is trying to find clues on Seymour's later suicide which he mentions at the beginning of the narration, and which is told through "A Perfect Day for Bananafish." Seed argues that "by stressing how young and confused he was in 1942 Buddy surely implies" (82) that he might have "missed some tell-tale signs in Seymour's diary" about his enigmatic death (83). As in *The Catcher,* it is the loss of a sibling that fosters the young character's self-reflection through a journey back in time through his memories, and like the narrator in "The Laughing Man," he is trying to recall a passage of his life about love that has marked him in order to comprehend heartbreak and loss as an adult,

and thus, existential continuity and internal evolution.

The existential crisis is exacerbated in "Franny" where what also seems to be a romantic plot or situational comedy, results in the young heroine's spiritual quest. From the beginning of "Carpenters," we know that Franny is much younger than her brothers since her name is briefly mentioned in the story recalling a time in their lives when she was a baby, and they were teens. Yet "Franny" is set later, when the heroine is a twenty-year-old college student and takes a train to spend the weekend of Yale's game with her boyfriend Lane to an unnamed campus, making this the only story discussed along this section that is not set in New York per se. However, thanks to "Zooey," we know that after that weekend, Franny goes back to the Glasses' apartment where Buddy was playing host years ago.

After meeting Lane at the train station, the couple goes to a restaurant where the boy is described as someone who "has been monopolizing conversation for a good quarter of an hour or so…" discussing an essay on Flaubert that his teacher had praised, and whose interest in Franny only rests in "finding himself at the right place (…) with an unimpeachable right-looking girl" (Salinger, "Franny" 10). From the beginning, his girlfriend seems uncomfortable and when she finally gets the chance to speak, she calls out on him for behaving like a "section man" or an intellectual postgraduate student who works as a substitute teacher and criticizes some writer during the class he takes over, ruining it for the students as she puts it (Salinger, "Franny" 13). She also corrects Lane when he refers to her teachers as poets: "They're just people that write poems that get published and anthologized all over the place, but they're not *poets*" (Salinger, "Franny" 16).

Later, it is revealed that all this discomfort has caused Franny to drop out from most classes and even a play she was in because she felt acting was turning her into a competitive and egocentric person. In this regard, Grant points out that:

> [W]hat in the gifted literature is a psychological/socialization problem is for the Glasses a spiritual problem. Maybe not a problem exactly—more of a task, really, the task of the spiritual life: overcoming/coming to terms with an ego-centered/ego-ridden/grasping view of self and the world so that one can see things aright. (10)

Franny does not want to be like Lane or his friend Wally Campbell, whom she describes as someone comfortable with his privilege and who fits right in with their social class through gossiping, name-dropping, summering in Europe and taking jobs in the stock market or advertisement, much like Holden thought of Sally Hayes, and neither "go bohemian or

something crazy like that" because she believes "you're conforming as much as everybody else, only in a different way" (Salinger, "Franny" 23). Through these comments, she is criticizing both the upper-middle classes and consumerism, as well as the hippie counterculture of her time. As Grant explains referring to The Glasses, "their center of life is not school success or socialization, but, roughly, the existential task of figuring out who they are and how they should live . . . and living as they should" (9).

All this internal turmoil leads Franny to a nervous breakdown that is portrayed, first, when she goes to the bathroom and cries, and later when she faints; she also refuses to eat and is described as "pale as hell" (Salinger "Franny" 23), "a ghost" (Salinger "Franny" 27) and sweating from her front. The only thing that seems to give her some sense is a book she is carrying in her back, *The Way of a Pilgrim*, a Russian tale about a peasant who takes a journey across the country to learn, perfect and later, teach a method of incessant prayer that consists of repeating the same phrase like a mantra "to purify your whole outlook and get an absolutely new conception of what everything is about" (Salinger, "Franny" 32). When Franny recovers after passing out, and Lane leaves her for a moment after he "opportunistically uses her passivity to insist on his sexual rights to her, once again partly camouflaging this pressure as concern for her physical welfare" (Seed 75), she seems to start an incessant silent prayer. Even if it is not as evident as in the frame and framed stories in "The Laughing Man," in this story, both Franny's weekend trip, as well as the mention of the journey in *The Way of a Pilgrim* stress the heroine's spiritual quest, the same way that Seymour's diary foreshadows Buddy's experiences during his three-day pass for the failed wedding ceremony in New York.

Both "Carpenters" and "Franny" have open endings. Were it not for other stories by J.D. Salinger expanding on these characters, like "A Perfect Day for Bananafish," "Zooey," and "Seymour, an Introduction," it would be difficult to know what road the Glass siblings take in their early years of adulthood regarding age-related social expectations, but what I can argue from this analysis is that the pressure associated with time leads these characters to suffer from emotional turmoil, much like Holden. In fact, Franny's breakdown continues in "Zooey" taking her to the Glasses' apartment in Manhattan which will be discussed in the next chapter as it touches upon the theme of family relationships.

Memories, loss, identitarian and spiritual quests can also be found in another of Salinger's *Nine Stories*, "De Daumier-Smith Blue Period" (1952), when the nineteen-year-old protagonist decides to apply for a position as an instructor in a correspondence art academy in

Montreal. He has been living in Paris since he was ten years old, until his mother died, and has recently moved back to New York with his stepfather, with whom he has an estranged relationship. Unlike Holden and the Glasses, from the first paragraphs we already know that New York appears a hostile environment to him, besides being crowded, noisy and disorganized, which is mostly represented through public transportation. Besides, the fact that he is experiencing a cultural barrier which is noticed when he mostly employs French in his communications; thus, he stresses that he would like to be left alone. Trying to escape from the oedipal nest, Jean De Daumier-Smith, as he signs in his inflated résumé trying to create a new image, leaves his new home to make sense of a world from which he feels disaffiliated (Galloway 32-33).

When the so-called Jean arrives at the art academy in Montreal, it is not what he expected; it is located at a small apartment where the Yoshotos, who run Les Amis Des Vieux Maîtres, live and work, and the new instructor will occupy their son's former bedroom. However, the young protagonist is not able to develop a relationship with them, other than professional, since they are described as inscrutable. Besides, he is disappointed by most of his correspondence art students, until he finds a letter with paintings by a nun named sister Irma. Jean finally feels that he has found another sensitive spirit and writes her a passionate letter that ends up causing the nun's superior to make her withdraw from the classes, as well as Jean's despair, represented through a particular moment.

"Les Amis Des Vieux Maîtres is located over an orthopedic appliances shop, and as Jean pauses before the window, he seems to see it as a collage representing all of the crippling inhumanity of the world" (Galloway 33). Like several of Salinger' young protagonists, Jean first points out to symbols of misery; for instance, the Bananafish for Seymour Glass, which will be discussed next, and the insults on the school's walls for Holden. However, after those moments of despair, the protagonists can either collapse, like Franny, or find a way to move on, sometimes finding signs of hope as it will be noticed in "For Esmé." In consequence, in "De Daumier-Smith," while Jean is again staring at the window, he notices how a girl is changing one a truss in a wooden dummy and:

> Suddenly (and I say this, I believe, with all due self-consciousness), the sun came up and sped toward the bridge of my nose at the rate of ninety-three million miles a second. Blinded and very frightened—I had to put my hand on the glass to keep my balance. The thing lasted for no more than a few seconds. When I got my sight back, the girl had gone from the window, leaving behind her a shimmering field of exquisite, twice-blessed, enamel flowers. (Salinger, "De Daumier-Smith" 161).

Salinger's interest in non-western spirituality and mysticism inspired several of his works like *Franny and Zooey*. This story is not the exception and, as Galloway mentions, Jean experiences this illumination or epiphany towards the end, a circumstance that helps him change this vision of the world (33), which is reinforced when he reflects: "I am giving sister Irma her freedom to follow her own destiny" (Salinger, "De Daumier-Smith" 161), and maybe he is granting himself this permission as well. As much of the works I have analyzed throughout this section, this story is also told as a memory to understand loss, in this case of the protagonist's mother, and consequential grief which becomes a transitional point to reinvent himself as a young adult. Jean recalls his story as an adult and dedicates it to the memory of his stepfather with whom he had become closer apparently.

Hollindale argues how in some books, the event retains its powers of epiphany into adult life demonstrating its length and psychological importance as part of a lived experience, and even if these texts would not normally be considered children's literature, they fall within a literature for the youth as they refer to it as a bridge between childhood and adulthood (116). Most of the young characters I have studied throughout this section are in their teens or twenties and they all could be considered immature or kidults, for not been able to reach certain adult normative standards, but as this analysis has shown, these age-related transitional points do not always fit in with personal trajectories. When these stories were first released, social expectations about family and career were different; however, these novellas might still resonate with younger generations and the impossibility to reach certain transitions due to socioeconomic conditions and views that have changed leading to the extension of the period of adolescence.

Moreover, transitions, development and growth can take place at any life stage, and not only through adolescence in a child/adult dichotomy. Existential crises that lead to a self-actualization journey towards authenticity and identity building are represented in these narratives as occurring during childhood as in "The Laughing Man," in adolescence like in *Catcher* and even, in a young person that starts to face the world as an adult like The Glass siblings and De Daumier-Smith's protagonist. New York City is the urban landscape that serves most of these purposes providing a simultaneous sense of familiarity and alienation; at a given moment, these young characters become outsiders in a place where they are required to belong, and experience loss as growing signifies leaving something behind, being forced to mature.

Most of Salinger's stories depict psychogeographical and existential journeys, as well mental wanderings through memories. These trips could be compared to life seen as a journey and these transitional points as moments of development and growth, which influence identity. However, these are not coming-of-age narratives in the strict sense, following the tradition of the bildungsroman, but almost a criticism or a parody of linear transitions. This is taken even further in the conclusive part of this section which offers a comparison of two stories, "A Perfect Day for Bananafish" by Salinger and Dahl's *The Witches,* about loss, grief, alienation and unfair power structures that feature the main characters during a vacation on a resort in the sea.

### 4.1.4 Vacations with a dark turn

This section will take us to holiday destinations, that although at first glance seem like an escape from reality, it will not be the relaxing and paradisiac setting that we may imagine, but one that turns dark and tense. Like Dahl, who lost his father at an early age and was raised by his mother, an immigrant from Norway, *The Witches* introduces a boy that has recently lost both of his parents and has been left in the care of his eccentric and loving Norwegian grandmother. Due to the elder's deteriorating health and by the doctor's recommendation, the duet decides to take a holiday in the Magnificent Hotel on the English South Coast; however, it turns into a stay that will not give rest to the protagonists as the hotel is invaded by monstrous witches.

Salinger's "A Perfect Day for Bananafish" is also set in a hotel resort, but in Florida, where Seymour Glass, now a war veteran who has recently been released from an army hospital due to PTSD is taking a recovery vacation with his wife—with whom he eloped in Buddy's tale in "Carpenters." However, they are not portrayed together until the very end, because while Muriel is in the room talking on the phone to her concerned mother about her son-in-law's mental stability, Seymour is entertaining a young child named Sybil on the beach. He tells the little girl that it is a perfect day for Bananafish and that perhaps they can see them in the sea, and when they both get into the water, Seymour explains that these fish "lead a very tragic life" because "(…) they swim into a hole where there's a lot of bananas. They're very ordinary-looking fish when they swim *in*. But once they get in, they behave like pigs" (Salinger, "Bananafish" 14). Seymour explains that the gluttony leads the fish to inevitable death, a description that resonates with the war he has just experienced; at the same time, the Bananafish work as an allegory of a greedy society that sacrifices young people for adultcentric purposes

causing general destruction (McCoppin 3). Likewise, in Dahl's novel when the grandmother describes the witches to her grandson, she also mentions that they have ordinary looks because they are disguised as ordinary women, but whenever they remove their external cover, they have a horrible appearance and worst, their main goal is to destroy undervalued members of the society too, in this case children.

In both stories, the main characters are dealing with loss and the world in which they live whether real or fantastic, is presented as wicked. Evil is embodied in folkloric creatures described by an adult to a child who in turn, understands and believes, while other grownup characters think they are mad—as it is implied about Seymour through his mother-in-law and regarding the boy's grandmother by other hotel guests. Therefore, both the war veteran and the boy's grandmother are "separated from all adults throughout most of the story" (McCoppin 3). According to McCoppin, referring to Salinger's story, the other grownups seem to be untouched by the war—as in Dahl's story by the trouble with the witches—and leading a disconnected life (2), something that is emphasized through both recreational settings. For these reasons, the children feel as if they can have trusting relationships with Seymour and the grandmother respectively with whom they share honest and open conversations, as well as kind and attentive interactions (McCoppin 3), and hence, intergenerational solidarity.

On the contrary, the witches, ironically disguised as The Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (RSPCC) are gathered in the English hotel to plot the next way to get rid of all the children in England and while the boy is hiding, the Grand High Witch introduces a formula that transforms kids into mice so other adults will end up killing children without even knowing it. This narrative exposes the hypocrisy of a society that promotes discourses and actions in pro of children's well-being but at the same time abuses, mistreats and neglects its youngest members (Curtis 167-168), and shows how through a familiar façade, children can be tricked into trusting adults that will later hurt them.

In fact, the Grand High Witch proves this formula in a child she has misled with the promise of sweets named Bruno Jenkins, and then, when the witches discover the young protagonist in his hideout, they turn him into a mouse too. According to Trites, "one reason that authors who write for adolescents rely on embodied metaphors to represent maturation includes the inherently embodied experience of puberty" (Trites, *Growth* 32). As I have previously discussed on a book chapter dedicated to the adaptation of this narrative to a graphic novel, the mouse-boy "midway form serves as an allegory to puberty that implies unexpected

physical and psychological changes for the young person who is no longer considered a child nor a grown-up by a society that encourages adult normativity and relegates anything regarded as infantile" (Albuja Aguilar, "Oppressive Structures" 38). In his new form and with his grandmother's help, the boy manages to steal the formula from the Grand High Witch's room and add it to the sorceress's meal, so they are the ones that end up transformed into mice and thus, exterminated.

In her posthumanist reading and about the criticism that Dahl's novel has received as misogynistic for its description of the witches, Duncan asks if the novel could actually be read as "an imaginative literary representation of many contemporary feminist ethical ideals" (60), arguing that not only the grandmother is a complex character that does not correspond to sexist archetypes, but the boy's metamorphosis and upcoming shorter life eliminates the possibility of an ascription to adult gender norms (Duncan 61). Evidently, any narrative that depicts women as witches has origins in patriarchal views that have been historically normalized through discourses and rhetoric to justify gender violence, but this analysis is mostly centered on views from Childism and aetonormativity because, as Duncan singles out "these witches seem to have no interest in harming adult men, simply in ridding the world of all children—boys and girls alike" (61). This plot reflects the unfair balance of power between adults and children stressed through the fact that the witches, or the adults, have magical power (Albuja Aguilar, "Oppressive Structures" 40), while the child as a mouse is in an even more vulnerable position. According to Bird:

> Dahl's text exposes this unequal balance in power between the child, whose transformation into a mouse makes him a more identifiable symbol of the small and the weak, and the adult, who, in the guise of the witch (with her supernatural powers), becomes a much more potent symbol of adult power. The issue of female subjectivity is not raised in Dahl's text; evil is not gender specific but is located within the "all-powerful" threatening adult figure. (121)

The mouse embodiment serves as an allegory to show how young people can easily be targets of violence and hatred from adults and feel voiceless and powerless to even denounce it. For this reason, even with the victory, the ending is not as happy as it may seem because contrarily to other narratives with the metamorphosis motif, neither Bruno nor the protagonist regain their human appearance (Lassén-Seger 215). Still, unlike Bruno who is rejected by his parents as a mouse, the young hero accepts and adapts to his new form because of his grandma's unconditional love which is stressed when he says: "It doesn't matter who you are or what you look like so long as somebody loves you" (Dahl, *The Witches* 190). According to Reynolds:

> At a primary level, magic(al) realism, with its emphasis on transformation, corresponds closely to the conditions of childhood and adolescence, which are intrinsically about change, metamorphosis, and growth of body and mind. Magic(al) realism's requirement that readers accept the improbable—even what is held to be impossible—also mirrors the constant mental adjustments the young make as they undergo new experiences and encounter new ideas. (20)

In this respect, Lassén-Seger sees this story as "a reworking for the classic theme of a return to eternal childhood" because it is suggested that since mice do not live as long as humans, the boy won't survive his grandmother (222), so they plan to profit this short time defeating witches and therefore, adultism. In fact, "the ending of *The Witches* is a curious blend which promises both a secure, eternal childhood and an exciting future. While Peter Pan's regression has a dark and tragic thrust, the ending of Dahl's book reads like the beginning of a great adventure" (Lassén-Seger 222). At the same time, "the ending defeats adult normativity because the characters are never going to comply with growing up requirements per se and would remain subversive to adult oppression" (Albuja Aguilar, "Oppressive Structures" 40).

On the other hand, Seymour's tragic suicide at the end of "A Perfect Day for Bananafish" could be closer to Peter Pan's dark and tragic regression, because as McCoppin argues, "Salinger's depiction of children serves to illuminate the tainted adult world Seymour cannot reenter" (3). Even with the compassion offered by Sybil, it seems that it is too late for him because unlike the mouse-boy, Seymour is not able to defeat the monsters in his life and hence adultism. Both characters suffer from a traumatic experience that changes them forever, but Salinger's hero is unable to fit in the adult society as it is anymore, even worst than his siblings that suffer from existential crises due to these expectations. In both stories, the adult society represents greediness, violence, authoritarianism, the use of force, hierarchical institutions and unfair power structures that sacrifice young people or set them in precarious or vulnerable conditions. This emphasizes how in Salinger's works, especially the ones dealing with war PTSD as it will be seen in analyzing "For Esmé," children are symbols of hope, an idea which originates in romantic views of young people as wise and an allegory for redemption, or the idea of the mighty child that has more power in the future, as mentioned in the second chapter.

From a posthuman perspective, "existence itself is fluid and interrelational; rather than focusing on what it means to already *be* something or someone, it focuses on the activity of *becoming*" (Duncan 65), regardless of the stage of life or age. This idea goes in the direction of what has been argued throughout this section; childhood has been placed as opposed to adulthood and thus, narratives have given predominance to the idea of growing up in a certain

way and leaving childhood behind—as a period often related to innocence, ignorance, inexperience, immaturity, irresponsibility and hence, a stage that must be surpassed through adolescence, perceived only as a transitional period. Contrary to the witches, and other adults that perpetuate the idea of eliminating these stages as soon as possible, in the novels and short stories studied, the journey and its pace are treated with respect and the young heroes are not only necessarily growing up in a socially prescribed manner, but evolving, shifting and changing throughout their whole existence and as they move and explore their world around. The next part will take us to Dahl's novels where young protagonists end up embarking on a great adventure, either locally or overseas to unimaginable places and worlds. I study here how these journeys are a sign of independence, empowerment and agency for the young characters who must face challenges along the way and examine adultist unfair power structures.

### 4.2 From Dahl's English countryside to incredible faraway worlds

Townsend argues that "the themes of all these three books—the dangerous journey, as in *The Pilgrim's Progress*; the deserted island, as in *Robinson Crusoe*; and the miniature or other imaginary world, as in *Gulliver*—have served for innumerable later books, both children's and adult, and are by no means worn out" (13). For instance, these crossover themes appear in some of the following selected works by Roald Dahl. This section is dedicated first to a comparison of two of Dahl's novels that depict the exploration of nature as a metaphor for facing adult-normative values. Even though the landscape changes from the North American metropolis to the English countryside, the young heroes must undertake a local journey and explore unfamiliar places to challenge adultcentric social constructions.

Second, I study Dahl's *James and the Giant* Peach where the young hero embarks in an unexpected journey with a unique crew of insects facing challenges along the way, as well as *Charlie and the Great Glass Elevator*, in which the protagonist, accompanied by his grandparents and the eccentric Wonka, travels even beyond earth reaching the galaxy. In both local and faraway adventures, the journey represents independence and subversion of power structures through carnivalesque techniques that challenge aetonormativity, thus, discovering something new or going away means freedom and agency for these young heroes. Finally, I make a comparison between Dahl's *The BFG* and Salinger's "For Esmé," both located overseas, where intergenerational bonds are created between characters from different origins.

### 4.2.1 Danny and Billy: The champions of their worlds

*Danny, The Champion of the World* and *Billy and the Minpins*' young heroes have a lot in common, even if the first narrative is more on the realist side, while the latter could be labeled as a fairytale. First of all, both Danny and Billy grow up in single-parent families in the countryside. Danny is raised in a free environment and lives in a caravan where his father, the owner of the gas station, tells him stories, indulges in all kinds of amusing activities like flying kites and fire balloons, builds a treehouse and a toy car for Danny and teaches him facts about the animals and natural creatures that live in the fields and hills that surround them, encouraging "love of the beauty of the natural world that, via Danny's father" which "Dahl is seeking to generate in the young reader" (Pinsent 75).

On the other hand, *Billy and the Minpins* begins like a lot of classic fables and fairytales where the boy's mother is "always telling him exactly what he was allowed to do and what he was not allowed to do" and evidently, "the things he was allowed to do were boring" (Dahl 9). She specially warns Billy against one thing he has prohibited but sounds the most exciting of all, which is "going out through the garden gate all by himself" to the Forest of Sin where she believes all kinds of dangerous creatures live (Dahl, *Minpins* 9). As expected, Billy disobeys his mother, but atypically the boy realizes that she was mistaken when instead, he discovers human-like Lilliputian beings that live in the trees and cooperate with birds who are their means of transportation for traveling and collecting food (Albuja Aguilar, "An Ecological Perspective" 173). Since his mother refers to Billy as little Billy, which the narrator replicates to show how he is perceived in the real world, why paradoxically around the Minpins, he is big, this metaphorical physical growth empowers him to have agency and authority which his mother would not grant him.

Even with this mutual aid system, the Minpins live in fear threatened by a terrifying beast known as the Gruncher, a creature "that belches smoke from his nose which makes him blind, but still can smell its prey" (Albuja Aguilar, "An Ecological Perspective" 173), and that follows Billy for a frightening moment when he begins his exploration. Danny's villain is also personified by someone bigger and more powerful than him, Mr. Hazell, the wealthiest man in town who hosts a shooting party every year for the richest and the royals, while the rest of the community is described as middle and working-class people, e.g. the vicar, the policeman, the doctor, etc. Mr. Hazell first mistreats Danny in the gas station, but his father defends him telling the bully: "I suggest you pick on a person your own size" (Dahl, *Champion of the World* 44),

which evidences how the magnate is taking advantage of his adult privilege. After this episode, now exercising his socioeconomic and political power, the villain starts sending every day some authority so they could find something to run Danny and his father out of their land, but luckily, they pass every inspection.

Nonetheless, Danny's father is no saint; he enjoys poaching pheasants from Mr. Hazell's property at night, but only for his consumption; apparently, he has learned the main techniques from his own father and tells the surprised Danny about them. One night, Danny realizes his father has not come back yet from his endeavor which is unlikely for him and decides that something must have happened, so the boy—who thanks to his dad already knows a lot about mechanics and cars—decides to borrow an Austin from their workshop and subversively drives it to rescue his father. Billy must use an even more uncommon transportation for a child, which is riding a swan to put into action a plan he has devised to save the Minpins from their menace, although at first, he wants to go home and even calls for his mommy, when he is first persecuted by this beast. Working together, child and bird, get to trick the Gruncher into following them and falling on a lake which puts out the fire the beast has inside, destroying it. Danny is also capable of driving to Mr. Hazell's property and after a lonely and scary moment in the woods wandering without direction, he finally finds his father, who has fallen into a pit and hurt his leg. Both boys behave altruistically risking their lives to save someone else's and learn that "most of the really exciting things we do in our lives scare us to death" (Dahl, *Champion of the World* 54).

When Danny rescues his dad, the balance of power between child and adult changes because from that moment on, the father relies on his son because he is injured (Worthington 131-132); besides, Danny even comes up with the best way to steal all the pheasants from Mr. Hazell's shooting party in a sort of act of justice. Even from the beginning of the narrative, next to the magnate, Danny's father is depicted almost at the same level as his son because he comes from a disempowered position too; this is also replicated during an episode in which Danny is beaten by a teacher at school and later, we learn that his dad used to be beaten at school too. Therefore, the plan works as a symbol to face, not only adultism, but all the bullies that abuse their power and are not held accountable in the world. Conversely, father and son obtain the help and appreciation of their community, who are also accomplices in the poaching business.

When the magnate arrives in the gas station to confront Danny and his father, the birds

exact a revenge, scratching and damaging the painting and making a mess on his Roll Royce and "finally, even to Danny and his father's surprise, the pheasants fly away in the opposed direction to Hazell's land, freeing themselves" (Albuja Aguilar, "An Ecological Perspective" 178). In this sense, birds are important symbols in both stories since growing up is often compared to leaving the nest, as a metaphor for gaining independence; thus, when Danny and Billy contribute to freeing the birds in their narratives, they are also liberating themselves to "watch with glittering eyes the whole world around you because the greatest secrets are always hidden in the most unlikely places" (Dahl, *Minpins* 39).

Children's books by Roald Dahl have been labeled as fantasy, but also as falling into the category of magical realism, as he does not build entire fantastic worlds, but provides magical elements to everyday situations and relatable young heroes. Furthermore, "in cultural and literary terms, magic(al) realism shares with children's literature links to ideas and values associated with the Romantic tradition. For instance, it values and is concerned with developing the relationship between humans and nature[55], and celebrates the power of the imagination" (Reynolds 20), which are characteristics stressed in several of Dahl's novels like *James and the Giant Peach* and *The Magic Finger*. These two novels highlight that there is more to the world than what we can see and comprehend logically (Reynolds 20), "it validates childhood and the socially marginalized" and "is driven by the urge for change" (21).

Even if they return to where they started, which is their homes, they do it with open eyes and both endings suggest that the boys will continue their adventures; for instance, Billy keeps on disobeying his mother and escaping at night for a swan flight to see the Minpins, but he never receives punishment for this. Au contraire, both boys are celebrated by these communities who call them heroes and champions. The subversive and carnivalesque strategies are put in service of social justice and both children have challenged adult normative rules and values via understanding the fact that not everything is black and white, or good or bad, but that the world is full of moral ambivalence, and that which seems the right thing to do sometimes relies more on our own ethics, rather than what is endorsed by adultcentric constructions and unfair power structures.

[55] For a deeper analysis of these topics, see "Re-Reading Roald Dahl From An Ecological Perspective" (2022), *Revista Canaria de Estudios Ingleses* n.84.

### 4.2.2 Giant peaches, glass elevators and unique crews

Several of Dahl's novels introduce a child that has become an orphan, as in *The BFG*, *The Witches* and *James and the Giant Peach*, or a hero who has recently lost one of his parents as *Danny, The Champion of the World*; or worst, their parents are alive but do not love them, like in *Matilda*, or if they do, they are really poor and unable to take care of their kid like Charlie Bucket's family. Anyhow, the Cinderella plot, as well as Dickensian young characters, are frequent in Dahl's works; "for instance, Dahl presents a number of characters who have lost their sense of wonder but are transformed when it is restored" (Jeffcoat 210). As in the previous analysis, this apparent hopelessness only changes when these young characters leave their comfort zone to face dangerous and frightening situations that remind them that the world offers endless possibilities to those willing to take the risk and what they discover and learn along the way, all through adversity, helps them to transform their initial circumstances into what looks like a better future (Jeffcoat 205).

The young hero of Dahl's *James and the Giant Peach* has not only suffered the loss of both of his parents, but lives at the mercy of his abusive aunts, Sponge and Spiker, who mistreat him, using diminishing language, exploiting the boy through forced labor, and even starving him, and keeping him in isolation from other children. Due to these terrible living conditions, when the opportunity arises, the boy decides to leave the top hill in his town in South England and take a rolling Giant Peach for a ride with a crew of insects, without a clue of what their destination will possibly be. As in other novels, Dahl borrows from fairytales such as *Cinderella* and *Jack and the Beanstalk* to build James' fantastic story because, as Haase argues, the fairytale "has the potential to become a template for the actual experience of human displacement and the perception of a defamiliarized geography" (363), and offers a possibility of identification to children who have been displaced by violence (362).[56]

James feels like he has lost every hope after he drops some magic seeds he received from a mysterious man, and later, once he enters the peach that has grown thanks to those seeds, he does not have another option than to share the uncommon transportation with the enormous insects he finds there—The Centipede, Miss Spider, Old Green Grasshopper, Earthworm, Ladybug, Glowworm, and Silkworm; at first, James is afraid, but little by little, he

[56] For further analysis on this specific topic, see Albuja Aguilar, "James, the Giant Peach and Other Uprooted Children," *La Aventura de Viajar y Sus Representaciones Literarias y Artísticas*, edited by Elios Mendieta et al., Andavira, 2019, pp. 19–26 where I compare this novel with real uprooted children's migration journeys.

learns more about each one of them, behaving as an ethical hero towards the crew along the journey (Bokma and Barkman 55).

Bokma and Barkman relate the fantastic to the idea of a "higher, mysterious reality" that empowers James to enjoy his freedom and seize the opportunities that come along his journey toward self-actualization (47-48). For instance, when the peach reaches the sea and is attacked by sharks, James is the one that devices the plan, considering the insects' abilities, so that the giant fruit is left up by seagulls. Then, when the centipede falls out of the giant fruit, the boy is the one to risk his life to save him, and close to the end, he becomes a sort of captain telling the crew how to slowly descend when they see land. Finally, he behaves as their representative in front of the frightened authorities and citizens of New York City, who believed the peach was a bomb and that the insects were aliens, so they are welcomed to stay.

"Fantasy literature is precisely a literature of subversion, and the empowerment of the child and the (temporary) reversal of normative social structures in children's literature are subversive" (Worthington 125). Through the fantastic, James's initial oppressive situation is subverted thanks to a magical journey where he is not only free from adults at all, as his aunts were accidentally crushed by the peach when it first started to roll, but instead paired with vulnerable creatures who treat him with respect and recognition; and even on arrival to New York his independence and agency is respected by the community because while the insects find jobs and form relationships, he keeps on living independently in the peach's stone in Central Park. Evidently, leaving alone a real child to live on his own would be a form of adultism, however in fiction, similarly to the journey employed as a narrative device for freedom, this ending fosters the subversion of power structures and adult normativity.

Thanks to the magic and beauty he has found along the journey and the strong bonds he has made, James is not "alone and frightened in a vast unfriendly world" anymore (Dahl, *Giant Peach* 1), but surrounded by children who come to visit him at the Giant Peach. Beyond a physical epic journey, this young hero has gone through a process of personal growth, development, and identity formation, and in the end, it is revealed that the boy is the one that has written the novel about his adventures; therefore, James is retelling his story in a way that empowers him and defeats adultist structures.

Something similar happens to the young hero of Dahl's *Charlie and the Great Glass Elevator*, the sequel to *The Chocolate Factory* that ends with the Bucket family reunited with

Willy Wonka in the fantastic elevator that will take them to live in the factory, as Charlie has been proclaimed Wonka's heir, which I examine in the next chapter. In the sequel—which was written in the Cold War context—the group travels by mistake to the outer space where the American government has built the first spatial hotel. Three astronauts are piloting a commuter capsule with future hotel employees while Vermicious Knids, scary aliens from the planet Vermes, invade the Space Hotel U.S.A. Willy Wonka, Charlie and the Buckets, who are exploring the hotel at that same moment, manage to get out alive back to the elevator which is made of a material strong enough to repel the attacks of the aliens.

Like James at the beginning, Charlie is introduced as a shy boy in *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, where he only follows the factory tour guided by Willy Wonka and remains mostly a mere spectator of the misfortune that the other pretentious and spoiled children go through. However, this is already a changing point in his life, which takes him from his usual routine to what he thought impossible, like other child heroes in Dahl's novels like Danny, Billy, James, and the boy in *The Witches.* In this sequel, Charlie has more opportunity to prove his agency and the journey helps him to feel more self-confident to make decisions that not only involve him but others, behaving like an ethical hero too.

For instance, Charlie realizes that the commuter capsule is in danger and suggests that they tie it to the elevator to protect it from the Vermicious Knids. The crew's operation is successful, and the elevator quickly flies back to earth, shooting rockets, thus even if the Knids follow them, they are burnt once they enter the atmosphere at such a high speed and hence, thanks to Charlie, the commuter capsule is saved. Furthermore, the fact that Charlie is going to run the factory someday is repeatedly reminded to him by his grandpa Joe, as well as Willy Wonka, throughout the novel and especially in the second part, when they get back from the galaxy to the factory and Wonka wants to continue with the tour, but the grandparents refuse to leave their bed and hence, he offers them rejuvenating pills of his invention.

The grandparents, dreaming of youth and behaving greedily, take too many pills of Wonka-Vite and as a result, grandma Josephine and grandpa Joe become babies, while Grandma Georgina disappears. Then, Willy Wonka and Charlie must travel again to a strange place called Minusland to find the grandmother because she could be subtracted due to her negative age. The boy is the one who decides to go there even if it is described as a frightening and dismal place, and after a couple of accidents, Wonka and Charlie, working together, manage to bring all the grandparents back to their actual age. This part also works as a parodic

commentary of age-related contradictions in a society that dreams of eternal youth, not in terms of power, but only physically, as it despises aging and perceives old age as a decline, and hence, such society is ageist.

Although Charlie is the only minor in this adventure, he behaves more wisely than most of the adults because he learns faster and can adapt easily to the new uncertain situations that keep happening. Perhaps this is the only novel by Dahl where all adults in the story treat the child with kindness and respect, listening to him and recognizing his needs and abilities, but also acknowledging his agency, independence, decisions, and ideas. During the journey, the boy remains hopeful and is not only capable of traveling farther, but to see further. For this reason, when Grandpa Joe at the end claims: "Well Charlie, it's certainly been a busy day," he replies: "It's not over yet, it hasn't even begun." (Dahl, *Glass Elevator* 159). This dialogue underscores Beauvais' theoretical approach mentioned in the second chapter, about the adult whose experiences rely on the past, and the young person who still has a future ahead which makes them mighty (18-19).

I have examined how the journey overseas serves as a metaphor in Dahl's oeuvre; for instance, the physical movement from familiar territory to unknown lands is depicted as an internal process that helps young characters to make sense of who they are far from home, acting independently, and empowers them to find their own identity and agency. At the same time, the exposition to foreign experiences inspires empathy and understanding in those who realize that the world is bigger than they think and encourages them to be ethical heroes, as Bokma and Barkman suggest about James' character development. Billy and James team up with vulnerable creatures, while Danny and Charlie rely on respectful adults with whom they can experience intergenerational solidarity. In the *Giant Peach* and the *Champion of the World* the villains, the aunts and Mr. Hazell represent adultism and unfair power structures, while in *The Minpins* and *The Glass Elevator* these are impersonated by metaphorical scarier monsters like the Gruncher and aliens that represent a menace. In this sense, greed, vanity and ecological destruction are criticized in adults like Hazell with the shooting party, the aunts who want to use the peach as a public attraction to make money and enslave their nephew, and even Charlie's grandparents who dream of youth, as well as even parodying authorities and the space race at the time—everything that Holden would label as phony. Therefore, the upcoming section continues to unpack the comparative analysis of narratives by both authors, this time, those located in foreign territories.

### 4.2.3 Understanding other "human beans" between love and squalor

McCulloch argues that, in a globalized world, the Bildungsroman must respond to the demands of an interconnected planet where journeys have a transnational impact; this adds an ethical component to character development as it involves empathy and solidarity with others beyond the familiar environment as form of resistance to the hegemonic status quo (180). Therefore, narratives about adventures overseas or exploring other worlds usually encourage the young protagonist and readers to experience unfamiliar places, interact with different characters, get rid of their preconceptions, and think beyond borders. The following section offers a comparative analysis of Dahl's *The BFG* with Salinger's "For Esmé—With Love and Squalor" in which the child heroines form an unexpected bond with newcomers.

An orphan girl living in London befriends a foreigner adult male who is in danger and the only way he could survive is by finding warmness and support in that connection; this concept can surprisingly sum up either Salinger's "For Esmé—With Love and Squalor" or Dahl's *The BFG*. Both stories take place in England, however, in Salinger's story, Sergeant X comes from the US for special training for D-Day, while Dahl's Big Friendly Giant travels from Giant Country—where he is bullied by the other much bigger giants. The BFG has a sort of catcher-in-the-rye task as he collects dreams to give the good ones to children and remove the bad ones from them. Somehow both characters have dangerous missions and must defend themselves from something or someone stronger and more powerful than them.

Sergeant X and the BFG are not the only ones forced to leave their familiar territory since thirteen-year-old Esmé, accompanied by her younger brother Charles, is willing to "be more compassionate" and approaches the American soldier in a teashop in Devon because he "looked extremely lonely" (Salinger, "For Esmé" 92). While Charles is telling funny riddles, making faces, and asking humorous questions, his sister starts a conversation with the soldier in which she makes a few stereotyped and insulting remarks about Americans. For instance, the first thing she says to him is: "I thought Americans despised tea" (Salinger, "For Esmé" 89), and, when he asks for her name, she only gives her first one and explains: "I have a title and you may just be impressed by titles. Americans are, you know" (Salinger, "For Esmé" 92). Later, she tells him: "You seem quite intelligent for an American" and adds: "Most Americans I'*ve* seen act like animals" (Salinger, "For Esmé" 91), translating the views of the time of the English upper classes towards the US, associated in their mindset to popular and low culture.

As for Sophie, she has no other choice than to leave with the BFG because when he realizes she saw him while he was dream-catching at the orphanage, he takes her to Giant Country. Dahl is portraying in this story his views that "all grown-ups appear as giants to small children" (Dahl, *Boy* 41). Hence, Sophie is completely terrified thinking that the giant might eat her, but when they arrive at his cave, he explains that even if the bigger giants do eat humans, especially children, he only eats snozzcumbers, which is the only vegetable that grows in his land and that the reason he took her was to avoid that other people find out about his existence.

Both girls have preconceived ideas about the foreigners they encounter, however, they soon realize that their prejudice is incorrect. The Big Friendly Giant teaches Sophie the importance of avoiding homogenization and generalizations about people of a particular group or community as everybody has their individuality and peculiarities. On the other hand, Sergeant X provides Esmé a lesson of empathy encouraging her to think about other people's circumstances before deciding she has figured them out already; for instance, the sergeant explains to her "that many soldiers, all over the world, were a long way from home, and that few of them had had many real advantages in life" (Salinger, "For Esmé" 91).

In this regard, McCoppin argues how "though Esmé appears to be more mature than other children, it is important that Esmé is still a child. In Salinger's *Nine Stories* children are the social barometers of the postwar society and the purity and hope of a better existence. Esmé is both here; she and her brother have been greatly affected by the war" (5). In the conversation with Soldier X it is implied that the children are orphans and now live with their aunt, and that the father had died in battle. Therefore, Esmé is able to empathize with the soldier's situation and becomes interested in his writing career before the war, which means that even if she represents her society narrow-minded ideas that are usually encouraged by adults, the girl begins to see Sergeant X as a human being, and not only as a number as several young lives were perceived at that time.

The second part of the story, "the squalid, or moving part of the story" where "the scene changes. The people change too…" as Sergeant X, the narrator, describes, takes place in a completely different context (Salinger, "For Esmé" 100). In an Allied-occupied home in Bavaria, the soldier is experiencing what was called battle fatigue at the time, but refers to PTSD; and although he has been released from the hospital where he "looked like a goddam *corpse*" (Salinger, "For Esmé 104), his hands are still trembling, and he often feels nauseated.

For a moment, he shares a conversation with another fellow soldier, Corporal Z, whose girlfriend has told him that X was probably unstable his whole life, as his breakdown could not only be caused by the war, which resembles to the remarks about Seymour Glass by adult characters outside his family.

Contrary to this lack of compassion, he finds a package and a letter by Esmé explaining that she is sending him his father's wristwatch, which she was wearing when they met, as a lucky talisman. When Sergeant X opens the package, he notices that the "crystal has been broken in transit" which works as a metaphor for his current mental state (Salinger, "For Esmé" 110). He has not returned from the war with all his faculties intact as Esmé wished when they said goodbye in Devon, however, the ending suggests that this altruistic moment will help the soldier to start healing (McCoppin 5-6).

*The BFG* might be a fantastic story, but it also deals with trauma and refers to human destruction. The novel depicts a scene where the bigger giants behave violently towards the BFG, however when Sophie expresses how horrible is that they mistreat him and eat humans, the BFG argues that "human beans is killing each other much quicker than the giants is doing it" and he adds "giants is not very lovely, but they is not killing each other" (Dahl, *The BFG* 70). The BFG even paints a picture of wars stating that "they is shootling and going up in aerioplanes to drop their bombs on each other heads every week" (Dahl, *The BFG* 70-71), which makes Sophie reflect on whether humans are any better than giants.

In fact, in both stories, the English girls have preconceptions rooted in Eurocentric views about civilization, which means they see both North Americans and the giants as uncivilized; the same way as adults have frequently seen children. However, the conversations between the main characters are meaningful, showing how exposition to diverse experiences and views may help us evolve if we are open to listening, understanding and learning. According to Kleist, concerning *The BFG* main characters, "they teach us the importance of staying true to who we are, while still recognizing our limitations and being open to change" (172). Therefore, children and adults share the same level of respectful dialogue without behaving condescendingly due to their companion's age or educational level, which is emphasized in Dahl's novel because the BFG mispronounces some words, causing humorous confusion, but Sophie does not correct or make fun of him because, as a child, she understands how it feels not to be taken seriously (Kleist 170). Something similar happens with Soldier X and Esmé's younger brother, Charles, to whom the soldier always pays attention, and treats as

seriously as his sister, even if she is addressing difficult topics, while Charles is mostly making funny comments and behaving childlike.

Moreover, "through Sophie and the BFG, Dahl teaches us that people can inhabit different worlds and yet maintain a genuine friendship" (Kleist 169); hence, together, child and giant plot to catch the bad giants that are planning to eat several children and with a little help from the Queen of England, the duet succeeds. As in *The Witches*, Dahl borrows from fantasy and folklore, proving that "through the fairy tale, people tell stories about challenge and survival, hardship and hope" (Kidd 187). Therefore, at the end it is revealed that the BFG, who has improved his English, is the author of the novel concerning him and Sophie. Likewise, in Salinger's story, Sergeant X is recalling the events and telling the story about squalor that Esmé requested him to write for her. Hence, both the giant and the solder are survivors, sharing their journey like other characters portrayed in narratives by both authors. Moreover, these are stories about kinship between young and older characters which is what Gubar defends, stating that children and grownups are not opposed, but instead share similar characteristics and could have a complementary agency, reflecting their unique abilities ("Risky business" 453-454). In conclusion, there is solidarity though this intergenerational friendships or adult-child duets made up of vulnerable adults and empowered girls.

### 4.3 Closing remarks

Throughout this chapter, I have analyzed children's novels by Roald Dahl where young characters take journeys as a metaphor for independence, exploration of unknown places, and empowerment. Dahl's narrative universe usually contrasts heroic children with villainous adults, stressing how due to adult privilege there is an unequal balance of power between them both. However, this does not mean that children are innocent, unknowing, or that they do not have agency to overcome challenges and design the life they want. Journeys serve for the purposes of subverting these unfair structures and examining and challenging adultcentric values and constructions and adultist actions, through liberation and independence, as well as positive intergenerational collaboration and unexpected bonds.

I have also analyzed how the idea of coming-of-age is discussed through psychogeographical journeys in Salinger's stories, and how this commonly used allegory does not reinforce the fact that childhood and adolescence are only transitory stages towards

adulthood, neither it establishes adulthood as a period exempt of life transformations. Instead, these narratives celebrate the process of change and self-actualization at any point of one's lifetime, sometimes even through mental travel to reconstruct the bridge with our past selves and previous life stages, in order to find an existential continuity. In this regard, Salinger's works portray young characters that have reached certain ages that are socially considered to be transitional turning points towards adulthood, which means integrating a phony society to which they do not want to belong. For these reasons, these characters usually face emotional and psychological crises that challenge the idealized portrayal of a mature person rooted in adult normativity, showing that growing and building and identity is not inherent to any age in particular because people can change and evolve at any stage of their lives for multiple reasons.

Therefore, in examining the works of Roald Dahl and J.D. Salinger, I have found that there is a thematic focus on journeys of young characters, although with distinct nuances. Dahl's novels serve to challenge unfair power structures, emphasizing the agency of young individuals to shape their destinies. On the other hand, the exploration of journeys, rites of passage and coming-of-age takes a more existential route in Salinger's works, which celebrate the ongoing process of change and self-discovery throughout life. While Dahl focuses on the power dynamics between children and adults and their ability to subvert oppressive structures, Salinger delves into a more existential exploration of identity, emphasizing the ongoing nature of personal growth. In this way, while both Dahl and Salinger explore transformative journeys, Dahl focuses on the immediate struggles of young protagonists against adultcentrism and adultism, while Salinger takes a broader view, challenging the very concept of fixed life stages. Both authors, however, examine adult normativity and contribute to a nuanced understanding of youth and maturity, challenging conventional notions and highlighting the complexity of individual development across the lifespan.

Since most of the journeys end up with the young heroes back home, or at least reaching a certain destination, the next chapter of the analysis is dedicated to continuing exploring these aspects concerning intergenerational relationships, power dynamics and solidarity within the family, school and other social structures within the community. This chapter will focus on how young characters are portrayed in connection to the adult world.

## Chapter V

## At Home: Power Dynamics and Intergenerational Solidarity

After a journey, it is customary that characters return home, especially if they are young, and even if their destination does not always match their origin, there is always a landing, a sort of new home or a newfound community. As Nikolajeva suggests, home represents security and a sense of belonging so there is where characters "return after any exploration of the outside world" (25). Even in Campbell's monomyth the hero's initiatory journey, ends with the return. In this sense, Alston argues that "nowhere is this desire for home better illustrated than in the pattern of returning home after a journey that is prevalent in children's fiction" (*The Family* 71), which according to this scholar, is crucial as it ensures that the young characters return to adult control (Alston, *The Family* 71-72). Therefore, this chapter is dedicated to examining the representation of power dynamics between young and grownup characters within the household and the community in the works of Roald Dahl and J.D. Salinger. Here, I consider narratives depicting family relationships and intergenerational dynamics at home, school, through friendship and other institutions within the community.

Drawing from Althusser's Ideological State Apparatuses, Trites analyzes how institutions like family, education, politics and religion condition and influence the individual into socialization, studying how YA novels reproduce interactions with such structures aimed to simultaneously empower and repress young people (*Disturbing the Universe* 22-23). In this regard, Nikolajeva points out how even with the removal of parental authority in certain settings, for instance, in a school context, there is always a presence of adult supervision and surrogate figures that provide a sense of security to the young character, but also dictate the rules that corroborate adult normativity, and who work as figures to whom these characters rebel against (*Power* 16); for example, Miss Honey and The Trunchbull in *Matilda*. At the same time, Joosen argues that adulthood is also a social construction, but stresses the fact that there are fewer studies dedicated to the representations of adult characters in literature for young readers, which seems surprising in genres that are solely founded on age divisions (*Adulthood* 5), as it has been discussed in chapter three.

Therefore, this chapter is dedicated to analyzing the distinct types of intergenerational relationships that appear most frequently in novels and short stories by both authors to identify

instances of power imbalance and determine how young characters find agency and empowerment in an adultcentric and normative world, as well as how collaborative intergenerational bonds emerge. Reprising the concept of intergenerational solidarity, Deszcz-Tryhubczak and Jaques defend the possibility of children's cultural products, such as literature and film, to portray not only a binary conflict between young people and adults, but also bonds within families and interdependency in the society, as a basis for its sustainability and welfare (xxi). For instance, first I explore how Salinger represents communities of siblings through the Glass and Caulfield families as these intergenerational relations seem to be more horizontal and less hierarchical than parent-child relationships. Then, I study mother and child relationships in two of Salinger's short stories anthologized in *Nine Stories*, which could be compared with Dahl's novels about grandmothers and grandchildren, as in both cases, one text depicts a positive relationship with a female adult and the other, a negative one. Finally, I analyze issues concerning adult-child friendships, as well as mentorship and learning instances in Dahl's *Matilda* and the *Charlie* saga.

## 5.1 Communities of siblings: The Glass and Caufield families

Salinger introduces two main families throughout his short stories and novels published as books, the gifted Glasses and The Caulfields—mainly seen through Holden's eyes. Along this section, I argue that the narratives surrounding both families explore the theme of alienation during World War II and the postwar period in which younger generations were trying to understand the world after such an overwhelming historical event and the technological changes the modern times were bringing. This period gave rise to alternative religious beliefs, and Eastern views influenced philosophical thinking, which can be mainly noticed in The Glasses' stories, but also through Holden's existential crisis and angst to partake in a phony adult world. Both families scrutinize the society and the education system and face the loss of siblings, stressing how young lives at the time were both expandable and idealized. Along this section, I argue that the intergenerational influence and dynamics between siblings remains more horizontal as older siblings do not have the same authority as parents with children, encouraging a network of solidarity through a sense of community and fraternal love.

### 5.1.1 Family trees and a sense of home

Some members of the Caulfield family already appear in former short stories by J.D. Salinger, but the facts in the characters' backgrounds do not always match, and the names often change, so this analysis will focus on the depictions of the four siblings reprised in *The Catcher in the Rye* (see figure 1: The Caulfield's Family Tree). The oldest brother, D.B., is introduced by Holden at the beginning of the novel as a war veteran, currently working as a scriptwriter in Hollywood. This character may have been inspired by Vincent Caulfield, who appears in previous short stories as Babe Gladwaller's friend and a former writer, who ends up dying in battle according to "The Stranger" (1945). In "Last Day of the Last Furlough" (1944) and "This Sandwich Has no Mayonnaise" (1945), Vincent refers to Holden as his brother who is also serving and has gone MIA, a statement which contradicts *The Catcher* where he is the troubled seventeen-year-old protagonist, whose journey has been analyzed in the previous chapter.

It has been mentioned that some of the chapters of this novel with slight changes were already published as short stories titled "Slight Rebellion of Madison" and "I'm Crazy" (1945)—which is the only work that depicts another sister between Holden and Phoebe named Viola that *The Catcher* does not feature. After Holden, Allie, death from leukemia at eleven years old, comes in third. In a former unpublished story,[57] "The Ocean Full of Bowling Balls" (1945), there is a similar character called Kenneth who also writes poetry on a baseball mitt like Allie in *The Catcher,* dying young of a heart condition in the company of Vincent, and Holden. Finally, there is the ten-year-old Phoebe and Holden's closest sibling, who is also mentioned in some previous short stories that portray her similarly to the character in *The Catcher.*

On the other hand, the Glass family's story is much more consistent as most facts match and are repeated from novelette to novelette (see figure 2: The Glasses Family Tree), apparently written by the second sibling Buddy, who is usually either a first or third-person omnipresent narrator. Considering this fact, the perspective comes from one of the siblings as in *The Catcher*. They are depicted as gifted children that grew up replying to questions on a radio show called *It's a Wise Child,* taking turns according to their age. They were already considered precocious and bizarre at the time, but later, this becomes evident in the character of the oldest sibling Seymour—a genius, already teaching university at twenty years old, a poet and a specialist in Eastern philosophy too, but also a war veteran that suffers from PTSD, who ends

[57] While this story was unpublished and remained only for consultation at Princeton's Firestone Library, it was leaked online along with other short stories in a publication titled *Three Stories* making it easily available to public access in the last few years.

up eloping with his wife Muriel in "Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters," and committing suicide in a vacation resort in Florida in "A Perfect Day for Banana Fish." His death leaves a wound in the family, for they still grieve him, especially his younger brother Webb, alias Buddy. He is also an expert in Eastern religions and ends up being a writer, who confesses to have authored all the stories about Seymour, including "Bananafish," and an elegy through "Seymour, an Introduction" (1959). According to "Carpenters," he was serving in the war when he attended Seymour's wedding at the age of twenty-three, and is frequently mentioned in "Zooey," when Buddy is middle-aged and besides writing, has then a job as an English teacher at a women's college.

The third sibling is Beatrice, alias Boo Boo, who only appears epistolary through a letter addressed to Buddy to attend such wedding in 1942, as she is an ensign at the navy at the time. In "Down at the Dinghy" (1949), she is introduced a few years later, at twenty five years old, when she is already married and has her first son, out of three—which is mentioned in "Zooey" and "Seymour," where she is described as a suburbanite and a homemaker. The twins come up next: there is Waker, a priest, who is rarely mentioned and never present, for instance, in "Carpenters" he is at a conscientious objectors' camp in Maryland as a young man, and later, in "Zooey," he is at a Jesuit conference in Ecuador. The other twin is Walt, dead in a silly accident with a stove in occupied Japan during the War, which is mentioned in "Uncle Wiggily," "Carpenters," and "Zooey."

Finally, the youngest are Zachary, alias Zooey, who is twenty five years old in his eponymous novelette and a neurotic TV actor living in the same apartment with his parents which was introduced in "Carpenters," who was also a child genius. And Frances or Franny in *Franny and Zooey,* who is in her twenties and a college student recently experiencing a spiritual and emotional breakdown in her eponymous short story. The youngest Glasses are the most influenced by Seymour and Buddy in their upbringing because of the big age difference; for instance, at the time of Seymour's wedding, they are the only siblings that are still children at the care of their entertainer parents in LA.

However, The Glasses and The Caulfields' headquarters are in Manhattan, in an upper-middle-class environment during World War II and the postwar period. The Caulfields are of Irish descent, and Holden's father was once a Catholic before marrying his mother, who is probably Protestant, while scholars like Benson argue that she might be Jewish[58] (8). Holden's

[58] Benson argues that Holden seem to be a closeted Jewish because his dissatisfaction comes from his probatory

parents have traditional professions and roles in the sense that the father is a corporate lawyer, and according to Holden lawyers like his dad "make a lot of dough and play golf and play bridge and buy cars and drink Martinis and look like a hot-shot" (Salinger, *The Catcher* 190), while the mother is probably a homemaker as she is the one that shops for the kids, and she is mentioned when Holden points out that his aunt is all well-dressed for charity events, activities that might involve his mother too. She is also described as nervous and not too healthy since Allie's death, and the most perceptive of both parents concerning their children; for instance, Holden often mentions that if he calls and hangs up during his escapade, she will intuitively know is him.

Mrs. Caulfield only makes a brief appearance when she has just arrived from a social event with her husband when Holden is hiding in D.B.'s room and Phoebe covers for him. However, "while parents are physically absent [...] they remain key figures in the psyche of the child" (Alston, *The Family* 53) because they usually have an authoritative repressive function against whom the adolescent character will rebel (Trites, *Disturbing the Universe* 56). In fact, both parents are for the most part absent characters and they pose a threat to Holden as he thinks the mother will get "very hysterical" if she finds out that he has been expelled again, but once she digests this news, she is "not too bad" with him (Salinger, *The Catcher* 58). Holden thinks that his mom will even beg him to stay if she discovers he intends to escape, while the father will kill him as Phoebe states several times during Holden's visit at night.

The Glass siblings are half-Irish and half-Jewish. Their parents, Les and Bessie Glass, used to be vaudeville dancers. Les, the father, has Australian origins, and after they stop their career as entertainers, he takes a job at a commercial radio and later, is also hustling talent for a motion picture. According to his wife, although he looks preoccupied, he often distances himself from the family problems by listening to the radio and nostalgically expecting to hear his children in the show again, and he only watches TV when his son actor Zooey appears; thus, he is proud and sentimental about his children, but like a man of his time, hides his emotions. Bessie grew up poor in Dublin, and has a tougher temperament than her husband, which is exemplified regarding the fact that she was able to talk about his sons' deaths frankly. She is also not posh enough compared to other women in their building in Manhattan who own fur coats, while she only wears a dark shawl if she ever goes out.

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whiteness in a WASP controlled atmosphere that makes him inclined to sympathize with the vulnerable and the marginalized (6, 130-135). However, this religion is not explicitly mentioned as it is concerning The Glasses' backgrounds.

Although the Glass parents are often only mentioned and absent in most stories, Bessie makes an important appearance in "Zooey" because she is worried about Franny's breakdown, exhibiting a mediator role as she begs her younger son to talk to his little sister and keeps thinking about calling her oldest boys, Buddy and Waker, for advice. This story provides hints of her relationship with Zooey as he replies reluctantly and ironically calling her "fatty" and "buddy," which seem to be endearing ironic terms that she is used to hearing because she never gets upset about this, but is also honest with him about the fact that her children are intelligent but socially and emotionally troubled. Although, through a letter, Buddy advises Zooey to be kinder to her, not because she is their mother, but since she is weary. What he is trying to say is that Bessie deserves respect and compassion not because of her authority as a parent, but because she is a person with her own burdens as any other human being. This conversation provides an example of the complexity of conflict and solidarity in familial intergenerational relations which according to Bengtson and Oyama:

> Conflict is more than simply the absence of solidarity; high conflict and high solidarity can coexist. For example, it is hard to escape conflict in intergenerational relations. At the macrosocial level there is conflict between youth and age, at the microsocial between fathers and sons; such are the themes of Western civilization's oldest literature. (37)

"Zooey" is not the exception, being the story that exemplifies the family dynamic. Since home "represents the location in which family matters are dealt with" (Alston, *The Family* 71), the Glasses' apartment is an important setting not only in "Carpenters," but in this novelette too, which takes place just after Franny's panic attack over the weekend visiting her boyfriend. The story opens with twenty-five-year-old Zooey reading an old letter from Buddy in the bath, and his mom interrupting him to talk about Franny's breakdown. The first part of the story occurs in the bathroom where the siblings used to leave notes between them in the mirror, and where Buddy reads Seymour's diary next to the bathtub in "Carpenters"—as if this was the sacred place for the Glasses to reread past notes among family members. The second part takes place in the living room where years ago Buddy had to entertain Seymour's wedding guests. This space is described in detail and summed up on what Buddy would describe as "a kind of visual hymn to commercial American childhood and early puberty" (Salinger, *Franny and Zooey* 103), where the furnishings are "clotted with memory and sentiment" (104). These objects represent the Glasses' historical context, but are also fixed in a time where the family was younger.

For instance, there are nice memories mentioned throughout The Glasses' stories, like the younger siblings performing at Seymour's birthday, how they used to fool around when the oldest were babysitting the youngest, besides other moments of shared camaraderie between the ones close to age. In this regard, Bessie points out:

> 'I just don't know any more what's happened to all you children,' […] 'In the old radio days, when you were all little and all, you all used to be so—smart and happy and—just *lovely*.' [...] 'I don't know what good it is to know so much and be smart as whips and all if it doesn't make you happy.' […] 'At least,' she said, 'you all used to be so sweet and loving to each other it was a joy to see.' (Salinger, *Franny and Zooey* 101)

Even if as grownups they have some bitterness and resentment, and are experiencing crises, they are still sensible, and caring between each other, which is difficult for Bessie to see, who like her husband maybe wants things to remain as they used to, when they were children and she was able to understand and help them more. In this sense, when Franny is experiencing her breakdown at home, there is the sensation that she has harked back to childhood. For instance, she is depicted sleeping on the sofa, looking almost as if she had her thumb in her mouth and was at the nursery again (Salinger, *Franny and Zooey* 105). There is also a description of her silk dressing gown turning into a small child woolen's one when she reaches her parents' room (Salinger, *Franny and Zooey* 158). These images stress how regardless of her age, as the youngest of the family, when she is back home, she is offered more protection than in the outside world. For this reason, Zooey reminds her that she should have gone back to college where she is not "the baby of the family" (Salinger, *Franny and Zooey* 135), pointing out how outside their family she is perceived differently and treated harshly.

In this regard, when Zooey enters the scene, Franny is taking a nap on the sofa and, according to Bessie, she has barely eaten. The siblings share a lengthy conversation about Franny's dissatisfaction with college that ends up in a big argument as the eldest is too hard on his sister even if he understands what she is going through as he confesses that he is constantly dissatisfied about most things too. Finally, he goes to Seymour and Buddy's old bedroom where the second sibling found his older brother's diary years ago, while lending the phone to the wedding guests, and where now Zooey pretends to be Buddy calling Franny to comfort her. Thus, the main spaces in the apartment, repeated through The Glasses' stories, are loaded with symbolism. According to Seed:

> Our sense of the apartment as a home is crucial here. In *The Catcher in the Rye* Holden's return to his parents' apartment is ambiguous. It cannot function as a refuge, nevertheless it tugs him back; he pays a visit, but almost like a thief since he is only seen by his younger sister Phoebe.

> In *Zooey* the detailed description of the contents of the family medicine cabinet, of bookshelves and furnishings, becomes an important part of the novella's rhetoric. (78)

In *The Catcher*, the only part of Caulfield's apartment that is described in detail is D.B.'s room, where Holden secretly enters at night to see Phoebe, who sleeps there when her older brother is away, while New York City is described in detail, reflecting Holden's journey. On the other hand, the Glasses are often found back in their apartment as the home according to Alston "is the antithesis of away, and therefore the word 'home' becomes culturally loaded as it invokes a nostalgia for warmth and comfort" (*The Family* 70). In this regard, during their discussion, Zooey reminds Franny:

> *You came home*. You not only came *home* but you went into a goddam collapse. So if you look at it in a certain way, by rights you're only entitled to the low-grade spiritual counsel we're able to give you around here, and no more. At least you know there won't be any goddam ulterior motives in this madhouse. Whatever we are, we're not *fishy*, buddy. (Salinger, *Franny and Zooey* 165)

Both in *The Catcher* and "Zooey," one sibling is experiencing a life crisis while another one talks some sense into them, but at the same time, offers them comfort. While the fathers are distant figures depicting a typical paternal role during the historical context, the mothers are more involved even if they appear briefly in both stories talking to the sibling that will help the other one. The next parts will focus, first, on the dead siblings who become *puer aeternus*—locked in time in their childhood and youth, and thus, idealized by the rest, and how these losses influence and affect the family dynamics. The final part will be dedicated to studying internal and external bonds, and consequently, the relationship between the remaining siblings, considering the age differences, as well as their social interactions outside the familial microcosm.

### 5.1.2 The *puer aeternus* sibling

According to Seed, "Seymour (and specifically Seymour's death) becomes a crucial reference-point within the Glass family" (77). Already from "Carpenters" it seems that Buddy is trying to figure out Seymour and understand his suicide. Moreover, in a letter addressed to Zooey in the eponymous novelette, Buddy explains that he was the one that had to go to Florida to bring back the body and "wept like a slob on the plane for five solid hours" (Salinger, *Franny and Zooey* 53-54), and confesses to having avoided visiting NY for a year after the suicide because he was scared of the questions Zooey and Franny could pose him. But he goes on further to describe his brother in detail in the elegy "Seymour, An Introduction" recounting what he meant for his siblings; "our consultant genius," "our portable conscience," "our one full poet,"

"our rather notorious mystic" and "our unbalanced type" are the descriptors that Buddy employs (Salinger, *Carpenters and Seymour* 85-86). According to Galloway, "to his brothers and sisters he stands as a kind of Christ-figure" (34) who constantly idealize him. For instance, to explain Seymour's death and his feelings towards him, Buddy recalls a past anecdote when the twins were given bicycles as presents for their nine-year-old birthday, and there was a dispute between Waker and the parents because that same day he has given away his bike to an unknown child that asked for it, claiming that he never had one, so Buddy explains how a teen Seymour made everybody reconcile.

Buddy also uses giving away the bicycle as a metaphor for giving away Seymour through his elegy in which, he mentions Seymour's interests in Asian poetry, the sports and games he was good and bad at, and describes how he dressed and looked physically, even mentioning the similarities between him and the other siblings; besides all the mannerisms, quirks and behaviors that he could possibly remember. Hence, he points out that Seymour will remain for most of his elegy a child and a young boy, and so is he, as he revisits memories, "distribute mementos" (Salinger, *Carpenters and Seymour* 86) and "pass around snapshots" (87), still he stresses that "a very nearly middle-aged man is running this show," making it a melancholic tale for him (137). Like Holden, Buddy is the one responsible for writing the family's story, including "Zooey" where he introduces himself as the narrator of "a sort of prose home movie" (Salinger, *Franny and Zooey* 41). Once again, Buddy mentally travels and recalls past memories, now of different stages of his life, and while reconstructing his brother's childhood and youth, he is also trying to understand his own existence; in fact, as the storyteller of the family, Buddy often tells his story tied to his family's.

Concerning the parents, Les still expects to hear his dead sons again through the radio, as his wife points out, while even with the tough facade, for Bessie, Seymour was "her favorite, her most intricately calibrated, her kindest son," and Walt was "her only truly lighthearted son" (Salinger, *Franny and Zooey* 78). When Bessie talks about Seymour and Buddy, Zooey replies that "this whole goddam house stinks of ghosts" (Salinger, *Franny and Zooey* 88). In this sense, according to his brother Waker, Zooey is "the only one who was bitter about S's suicide and the only one who really forgave him for it. The rest of us, he said, were outwardly unbitter and inwardly unforgiving" (Salinger, *Franny and Zooey* 59). According to Galloway, "he is the only member to have forgiven Seymour his suicide because he is the only one who fully understands it" (46). Zooey is the one to go to Seymour and Buddy's old bedroom to read the literary quotes they had on the board—similarly to Holden, who keeps Allie's glove—and he

is the one to employ his dead brother's wisdom to help Franny find her way again, first pretending to be Buddy. On the other hand, Franny does not seem to accept Seymour's death since according to Buddy, she swears to remember a Taoist tale that teen Seymour told her when she was a baby, and in "Zooey" when her brother asks if she would like to talk to Buddy, she replies that she would like to talk to Seymour.

It has been stated that a big cause for Holden's breakdown is his brother Allie's death, considered the most intelligent and kind, and remembered by Holden as a happy boy who would laugh hard and was never mad and loved poetry. Like Phoebe, Allie had ginger hair, while he has gray hairs already, so "Holden wears a red hat to invoke his dead brother's memory" (Trites, *Disturbing the Universe* 117), and "keeps Allie's left-handed outfielder's mitt, covered with lines of poetry, as a magic catch-all for his memories and love" (Locke 144). According to Benson, thanks to his "intelligence, sensitivity and vulnerability," Allie stands for an alternative male role-model in the macho culture that Holden is surrounded by (22), which is reinforced by this idea of a baseball mitt, or a symbol of male-dominated sports, as a vehicle for beauty.

Throughout the novel, he describes a few activities that he used to do with Allie, like taking Phoebe to the park together on Sundays to play with a sailboat, and the shared liking of a drummer of an orchestra on a Christmas show. He also states that when he feels depressed, he talks to his dead brother; for example, he usually remembers how once Allie wanted to tag along with him and his friend to ride their bikes and Holden did not let him because Allie was younger than him. Since he still feels sorry about this episode, he sometimes addresses him replying: "Okay. Go home and get your bike and meet me in front of Bobby's house. Hurry up" (Salinger, *The Catcher* 110). Again, the bike functions as a symbol of connection with the dead sibling, like Buddy with Seymour. Holden also sort of prays to Allie "don't let me disappear" when he has a feeling that he will not get to the other side of the street (Salinger, *The Catcher* 218), or complete his rite of passage, stressing again the fact that he is on a journey. Holden even thanks him afterward as if Allie was his guardian angel or catcher in the rye preventing him from his fall, and as Alsen points out, worshiping his brother in some way or thinking of him as holy (155), a superior force that will serve as the hero's guide.

Hence, when Phoebe declares that he does not seem to like anything, Holden states that he likes Allie, but the girl points out that he is dead, showing how she has learned to accept this loss, unlike Holden and his mom. This mirrors Zooey's acceptance of Seymour's death and

Franny's struggle with this, which singles out how the sibling who helps the more vulnerable one is also the sibling that is able to let go and move on. Freeing Phoebe, as he does at the end of the novel, means letting go of Allie too and healing his grief, especially if we consider that now Phoebe is almost Allie's age, while Holden will soon become a young adult. According to Trites, for teenage characters in YA novels, understanding death also functions as a rite of passage when the protagonist accepts the possibility of losing others and his own mortality which empowers them, but also exposes them to their limitations (*Disturbing the Universe* 117-119). For instance, in Holden's journey, his sibling's death is first guiding him into self-destruction, as he is depressed, but later this encourages his self-acceptance (Trites, *Disturbing the Universe* 117-119).

However, Holden hates that his extended family commented on how peaceful Allie looked in his grave considering that he could not attend the funeral since he was at the hospital at the time because, when he found out that his brother died, he broke all the windows in the garage with his hand out of despair. For instance, he talks about wanting to be dead several times in the story and especially, when he is freezing and scared about catching pneumonia, he explains that he would not like to be buried like Allie, confessing that he does not go often to visit his brother's grave since he does not like the cemetery, as well as the fact that people leave flowers and then go on with their lives.

Furthermore, James Castle, a bullied boy from Holden's school who commits suicide, is heard by Holden jumping from a window. After seeing his dead body on the school patio, when Holden talks about being the catcher in the rye, he is also talking about protecting young people from this sort of fall (Trites, *Disturbing the Universe* 117), in a similar way to what happens with Walt and Seymour during and because of the war. The deaths in *The Catcher* do not occur onstage, like Walt's, while Seymour's suicide can be directly seen in "A Perfect Day for Bananafish." The war does not happen live and direct in any of these novels either, but Holden refers to how D.B. was dealing with battle fatigue pointing out that when he was home during furlough, he would just lie in bed and alienate from the family. Like Salinger himself, D.B. landed on D-Day and "hated the Army worse than the war," saying to Allie that "the Army was practically as full of bastards as the Nazis were" and "that if he'd had to shoot anybody, he wouldn't've known which direction to shoot in" (Salinger, *The Catcher* 155). Walt was a victim of the stupidity of the war, dying in his twenties of a tragic mistake, involving an explosion of a stove that he was packing for his commanding officer in occupied Japan—which is confirmed in "Carpenters"—and leaving his girlfriend Eloise, the protagonist of "Uncle

Wiggily in Connecticut" (1948), scarred for life; thus, Salinger also stresses how this deathly context affected the young people that stayed.

Since both families have experienced the tragic loss of siblings at young ages, Allie Caulfield, Seymour, and Walt Glass are idealized by their families, becoming eternal children or *puer aeternus*. Referring to children's literature, Beauvais argues that characters held in place or locked in time:

> [A]re children whose potential is preserved. By virtue of being without an adult future, they remain in complete indeterminacy, basking in an infinite wealth of possibilities […] They are immutable and unevolving, and yet endless signifiers of something *else*, something unknown. The fascination for *puer aeternus* figures resides, therefore, in the ever-postponed choice of what they *will* be… (22)

I transpose this concept to Salinger's young characters because even if Seymour and Walt died as adults, since they were young, they also subscribe to this analysis. They will always be remembered as either kind, lighthearted, pure and wise, especially the older brother as it has been argued, creating impossible standards for the remaining siblings who had to grow up and are constantly facing the real-life possibilities that they have left, which they are not always equipped to face. The anxieties of the fragmentation of the family in postwar society (Alston, *The Family* 54) become evident in both narratives because in *The Catcher,* as well as in The Glasses' stories, most siblings are usually separated, not only due to their age, but also because of institutions at the time, like the war, boarding schools, and even the entertainment industry, which was capturing young people. The next part focuses on how the siblings interact amongst them and outside the family, and how these exchanges with the outside world are in turn determined by their internal dynamics.

### 5.1.3 Kinship and age-differences

Holden's journey in *The Catcher* begins because even if he states that he is "quite illiterate" but reads a lot (Salinger 21), he has recently been expelled from his third prep school. The all-male boarding academy is another place where this teen encounters the phony society he so much criticizes, so his interactions with teachers and peers provide the context for his dissatisfaction with the adult world and a constant feeling of disaffiliation and madness, which mirrors Franny's views on college. Drawing from Truffin's work on Schoolhouse Gothic, Atwood and Lee argue that American preparatory schools in fiction share its main theme of "tyrannies of the past, confinement in the present" (107), as they are characterized by tradition, norms and rituals that enforce conservative social codes, while erasing change and individuality

(104-106). Besides, most students share a usually male and upper-class legacy and hence, these places perpetuate elitism and social hierarchies (Atwood and Lee 104-106). Moreover, the campuses with Gothic architecture are usually secluded through boarding schools or have the students confined and controlled, for example, through curfews (Atwood and Lee 104-106).

This is exposed by Holden when he states that even if his school slogan is: "Since 1888 we have been molding boys into splendid, clear-thinking young men" (…) "They don't do any damn more *molding* at Pencey than they do at any other school. And I didn't know anybody there that was splendid and clear-thinking and all" (Salinger, *The Catcher* 4). This shows "Holden's inability to exist within institutions that socialize white male students into privileged men who maintain racial, sexual, and gendered divisions in order to perpetuate their own privileged status" (Benson 21). This school mirrors social conformity in general where the deviant is shouted digression as in Holden's Oral Expression class or meets violent ends, like James Castle, or becomes mad like the hero himself (Atwood and Lee 114-121). Referring to dystopian novels, Nikolajeva explains that:

> [T]he adult world is interrogated, as it is presumably the adults who have created the highly ordered, hierarchical, but dull society […] Further, in accordance with the conventions of children's literature, a child or a young person questions the society and reaches the insight about its injustice, but it is the adult society that suppresses the revolt. (*Power* 73)

This could be applied to Holden who does not seem to fit in this space, neither with the popular guys like his roommate Stradlater because he sees them as phonies, nor with any clique that he enlists to Sally Hayes, and although he does not like him much, he invites the rejected Ackley to hang out on his last day because he feels sorry for him. He even seems to have tried to partake in some collective activity because it is mentioned that he was part of the fencing team, but lost the equipment on the subway, and has flunked four subjects, only passing English.

When he goes to say goodbye and leave a note to his former history teacher Mr. Spencer because he does not want him to feel bad about flunking him, he receives an unkind lecture, and the teacher makes Holden feel bad rereading his failing exam sarcastically (Alsen 156). While Mr. Spencer, close in age to retirement, embodies tradition as he repeats what the headmaster has said to Holden—"Life *is* a game that one plays according to the rules" (Salinger, *The Catcher* 11)—Mr. Antolini, who is only a little older than D.B., provides a more progressive outlook on education related to each one's individual pursue, rather than social pressure. He tells Holden that whenever he finds out where he wants to go, he should apply himself and get there since his love of knowledge already make him a student, and even with

its flaws, the academic experience can provide him an idea of what his mind is capable of (Salinger, *The Catcher* 208-210).

Trites explains how the school setting in YA fiction usually follows this pattern: "The dynamic of (over)regulation → unacceptable rebellion → repression → acceptable rebellion → transcendence-within accepted-limits" (*Disturbing the Universe* 34), which is comparable to Holden's journey. Even if he ends up healing in a psychiatric clinic, it is stated that he would return to school next fall. The circular plot around his education shows the ambivalence of these institutions as places of discipline and promotion of individual thinking. For instance, in the Caulfield family, the relationship between siblings is only presented through Holden's perspective and voice that monopolizes the narrative, but also seems to feel like he is the black sheep or disappointment of the family which is exemplified through this quote referring to Phoebe and his brothers' approach to education, and metaphorically to how the society values individuals:

> She's really smart. I mean she's had all *A*'s ever since she started school. As a matter of fact, I'm the only dumb one in the family. My brother D.B.'s a writer and all, and my brother Allie, the one that died, that I told you about, was a wizard. I'm the only really dumb one (Salinger, *The Catcher* 75).

Allie was the most intelligent in the family according to Holden and so good at school that his teachers were always congratulating their parents; besides being smart and getting straight As, Phoebe writes detective novels, and D.B. is a brilliant writer. However, in the first pages of the novel, he already criticizes D.B. because he used to be a short story writer, and Holden's favorite author, and now he considers him a sell-out for taking a job as a scriptwriter in Hollywood, mentioning that he makes a lot of money and drives a Jaguar, and even calling him a prostitute. Moreover, at the end of the story, he is mentioned alongside the grownups that make him to many questions about his future, but signaling that he "isn't as bad as the rest of them" (Salinger, *The Catcher* 234), pointing out how D.B. is now for Holden someone who has been corrupted by capitalism and adult normativity, but still, he has ambivalent feelings towards him because they are brothers.

According to Alsen, "when we compare Holden's attitudes toward his brothers D.B. and Allie, we can see clearly that he respects Allie's kindness more than D.B.'s success" (155), and therefore, Holden is associating values like purity and kindness to childhood, while success comes from corruption and banality in adulthood. However, it seems that D.B. is actually involved in Holden's life as he often comes to visit and has offered to drive him home from

school, gives him books as presents, and throughout the story, Holden shares memories of them going to the movies, the theater, and a night club together. Phoebe has participated in some of these activities and D.B. lets her sleep in his room when he is away. For this reason, even in Holden's fantasy of escaping to a cabin in the woods, he says that he would let Phoebe come to visit, and D.B., but only to write short stories or novels, not anything phony. Thus, Holden sees Allie as an idealized *puer aeternus*, or a child held in place, that will always be remembered as he was during his childhood, while D.B., is alive and had to grow up, and so he is now associated with adulthood even if Holden used to find in him creativity and purity as well, that have been corrupted as he has aged.

Probably, that explains why Holden is now closer to his child sister, Phoebe, who he describes as smart and pretty, and the only member of the family he wants to see and seeks for advice during his crisis because he believes that he can talk to her about anything, and she gets it. Throughout the scenes with her, she lends him his savings and covers for him in front of his mom, even if she also reprehends him, maybe repeating what the parents have commented on Holden. Holden mentions that she is too affectionate and emotional sometimes; such attitude explains why she wants to come along when he decides to escape, so his brother does not run away alone. Furthermore, even if Phoebe is young, she is also mature and perceptive because, when she realizes that Holden has come home early, before winter break, she is certain it is because he was probably expelled again, but Holden also decides to take the responsibility as the older brother and realizes he should not let her miss school, and especially the play she is in, when she wants to accompany him in his escapade (Alsen 158).

Even if they first share a funny moment dancing during his visit, Phoebe becomes Holden's catcher after he cries with her, showing his vulnerability, which is when he lends her his red hat. Later, when she is going to ride in the carrousel—where all the Caufield siblings used to go together when they were children, she gives the hat back and at that point, Holden does not come with her or says anything, even if he is afraid that she may fall. According to Alsen referring to the carrousel, "although it awakes childhood memories in Holden, it helps him define himself as being no longer a child" (Alsen 165). Is in the contrast between his older brother and his younger kid sister that Holden draws attention to the differences between the phony adult world that he does not want to enter and the children's, more authentic world, where Allie will always remain, knowing that Phoebe and he are alive and both will grow eventually, whether they like it or not.

However, this trio makes Holden feel less alone and misunderstood because they are the only ones he actually listens to, and he shows his vulnerability with them. Although it seems that he likes his mother more, his parents are already eaten by the Bananafish grownup society. On the other hand, even if he makes the wrong questions, D.B. visits him at the mental facility and listens to his story in the end; with the ghost of Allie he shows his darkest fears, and Phoebe reads through his ironic persona and comforts him, signaling how they do not see him as a family's failure, but as a human and an equal because his true value as a person is not only connected to practical success.

There is a similar development with The Glasses, who are all gifted children, but the most cited in this regard are the two pairs of oldest and youngest siblings, Seymour and Buddy, and Franny and Zooey respectively. Concerning the twins, Waker is absent in all the stories, but he is sentimental according to Zooey, and his childhood gesture—giving his bike to another child—demonstrates his detachment and solidarity, attributes that maybe led him to his religious life; Walt is regarded as lighthearted by the family, in the same way his ex-fiancée Eloise remembers him in "Uncle Wiggily." As for Boo Boo, she seems to be the most down-to-earth, cheerful, and the one that has a good relationship with everybody, the same way she is empathetic and funny with her son Lionel in "Down at the Dinghy" which will be analyzed in the next section.

As mentioned, Seymour was a Ph.D. in his late teens and a professor in his twenties, so it is not surprising that at seven he was already requesting theological and philosophical books, as well as literary classics through a precocious letter from camp in "Hapworth 16, 1924"—only published in *The New Yorker* in 1965. While Buddy was writing since childhood and already spoke a few languages at that time, the second Glass sibling did not pursue higher education for two main reasons he enunciates in a letter addressed to Zooey at the beginning of the eponymous novelette. One has to do with the fact that he was a snob then and thought that he "didn't want any degrees if all the ill-read literates and radio announcers and pedagogical dummies (…) had them by the peck" (Salinger, *Franny and Zooey* 51), and second, because he was always compared to his brother in so many ways, and it was late for him to catch up with what Seymour had already accomplished. For instance, according to one of Seymour's letters translated into his elegy, the second sibling did not particularly enjoy being often compared to his older brother as he was always in his shadow and following his steps, as mentioned regarding their education. Seymour argues back at this as follows:

> One of the few things left in the world (…) that sadden me every day is an awareness that you get upset if Boo Boo or Walt tells you you're saying something that sounds like me. You sort of take it as an accusation of piracy, a little slam at your individuality. Is it so bad that we sometimes sound like each other? (…) For us, doesn't each of our individualities begin right at the point where we own up to our extremely close connections and accept the inevitability of borrowing one another's jokes, talents, idiocies? (Salinger, *Carpenters and Seymour* 127)

At the same time, Buddy seems to have enjoyed growing up close to Seymour and having so much in common, sharing activities, and receiving criticism for his writing from him which he nostalgically reminisces about in "Seymour." In this sense, not only do Seymour and Buddy share a complicated relationship because of their similarities, but the relationship between the oldest with the youngest is complex too as the older ones have too much influence, but also often encourage the youngest. Buddy addresses this in his letter to Zooey stating that: "The age differences in the family always seemed to add unnecessarily and perversely to our problems. Not really between S. and the twins and Boo Boo and me, but between the two twosomes of you and Franny and S. and me" (Salinger, *Franny and Zooey* 56), after all, all their childhoods joined the eras of Charleston and the World War II.

According to Alston, when the parents are absent, it is the eldest children who assume the role of socializing the youngest (*The Family* 51). The Glass parents are not physically absent; however, they often distance themselves, as Les does, or only exhibit the role of mediators, like Bessie, who does not seem to be able to penetrate the siblings' network because they are "all so secretive" as she mentions (Salinger, *Franny and Zooey* 82). Thus, Buddy explains:

> If you're an older brother in a large family (particularly where, as with Seymour and Franny, there's an age difference of roughly eighteen years), and you either cast yourself or just not very advertently, become cast in the role of local tutor or mentor, it's almost impossible not to turn into a monitor, too. (Salinger, *Carpenters and Seymour* 134)

Hence, both siblings influenced the education of the others, as Buddy points out in this letter, but the difference is that while they encouraged Boo Boo and the twins to read the classics, they made the youngest learn all about religion, conducting home seminars and metaphysical sittings. This was so they could find a spiritual life and a state of pure consciousness before seeking to learn arts, sciences or languages because according to Seymour "education by any name would smell as sweet, and maybe much sweeter, if it didn't begin with a quest for knowledge" (Salinger, *Franny and Zooey* 56). For this reason, Zooey resents them arguing that they are responsible for him being too critical of everything and everyone, like Holden, especially now that he is in the acting business, and of Franny's breakdown and impossible

religious search. Buddy seems to justify this through the letter, explaining that Seymour and him, had their best intentions, but also advising Zooey to be careful because he demands too much of something that is just not there.

Considering Beauvais' concept about the pedagogical romance as the didactic generational transmission influenced by the time gap "which signals a perceived difference in knowledge and, on each side, a desire to inculcate knowledge and to draw it from the other" (190), it could be argued that the older siblings want to teach the youngest out of love and concern, respecting the fact that, in turn, the youngest are free to undertake their own projects because they do not have control over their futures. When they have grown and only the younger ones are still at home, Bessie, as the mediator, usually passes information to Buddy about Franny and Zooey. Although, when they were still living at home, Seymour and Buddy were more involved in their younger siblings' rearing and education, later, as mentioned in the letter, Buddy uses his experience to provide advice, instead of orders. For example, although Bessie asked him to convince Zooey to get a Ph.D., he respects his acting career too and that might be why Zooey seems to value his letter enough to read it several times. They also have gone together secretly to see Franny in a play and indirectly encourage her, without making her feel unconformable.

Like Seymour, Zooey was a favorite in their radio show and as a child, he was the most studied, examined and interviewed of the siblings by psychologists and professional educators. Therefore, "they are, all of the Glasses, "freaks," as Zooey calls himself and Franny, raised or born with odd, high standards for themselves that put them at odds with themselves and nearly everyone else" (Grant 10). The third chapter already explores Franny's dissatisfaction with college, her peers and teachers in her eponymous short story in which she criticizes her boyfriend for his essay, teacher assistants, and poet scholars, as well as the fact that acting was making her egocentric and turning her into a competitive spirit she does not want to have. Reflecting Seymour's views, she expands this in "Zooey" stating: "I don't think it would have all got me quite so down if just once in a while—just *once* in a while—there was at least some polite little *perfunctory* implication that knowledge *should* lead to *wisdom"* (Salinger, *Franny and Zooey* 124), pointing out that the only time she heard this word was in reference to a statistician, which shows how she sees the academic world as shallow and arrogant as anything else.

Grant argues that "everything in school and camp and the military has to do with mass values, conformity, cruelty, insensitivity, vanity, and ego" (9), so the stories about the Glasses offer "a spiritual critique of schooling" (7), were they usually feel stuck or uninspired. In turn, Zooey replies:

> These other people you've been ranting about are something else again […]. I've had *them* by the dozens, and so has everybody else, and I *agree* they're not harmless. They're lethal as hell, as a matter of fact. God almighty. They make everything they touch turn absolutely academic and useless. Or—worse—*cultish.* To my mind, they're mostly to blame for the mob of ignorant oafs with diplomas that are turned loose on the country every June. (Salinger*, Franny and Zooey* 136)

Even if he agrees with his sister, he says the reason he has an ulcer is that he also takes everything too personally; hence, "Zooey tells Franny two things. One has to do with who she is. The other with who everyone is" (Grant 12). He points out that everything and everyone has an ego, and that she must act, not only because she is brilliant at it, but just for the sake of it. He retells an anecdote when he was a child and refused to shine his shoes because they were only performing on the radio, but Seymour asked him to do it for the "fat lady." Likewise, Seymour once asked Franny to be funny for the "fat lady," implying that there must be a regular person from the audience that still deserves respect, as according to their beliefs, every creature is God-like and worthy of love. This idea leads to the conclusion that "wisdom, compassion, and an awareness that all beings are connected replace ego, contempt, isolation, and bitterness" (Grant 12). In this regard, Holden also brings Phoebe back to her play about Benedict Arnold at school at the end of the novel, and at the same time, his younger sister helps him to face reality and start to heal.

Unlike *The Catcher*, which is mostly centered on a time in Holden's life, offering mostly his point of view, The Glasses' narratives present different perspectives of the siblings at different ages, from childhood to adulthood, and they seem to remain close, even throughout conflict. Scabini and Marta allude to the importance of considering the bonds between family and society when studying intergenerational relationships because generations are located within the complex dynamics between the familial and social spheres (88). Therefore, the socio-cultural context influences the family and the individual who negotiates between internal and external exchanges (Scabini and Marta 88), which could be seen in the characterization of Franny as represented in both stories differently. For instance, in "Franny" where she is appears outside the family, traveling independently to see her boyfriend in a college campus, while in "Zooey," she is experiencing a breakdown in the family couch, and everybody is worried about

her. After they share a lengthy conversation, as Holden does with Phoebe, leaving her upset and crying, Zooey impersonates Buddy through a telephone call to let Franny take out everything on him until she discovers his true identity. Therefore, Zooey is the one who at the same time, shakes and supports her, reminding her of the fact that she relies on her family.

According to Buddy, as the narrator, he is not offering "a mystical story, or a religiously mystifying story, at all," but "a compound, or multiple, love story, pure and complicated" (Salinger, *Franny and Zooey* 43). The Glasses all feel alienated from society, but form a fraternal community of intergenerational solidarity. There are six conceptual dimensions[59] employed to measure intergenerational solidarity identified by Bengtson and other scholars throughout different studies. Affectual solidarity refers to the sentiments between family members, associational to "the type and frequency of contact between intergenerational family members" and consensual to the "agreement in values and opinions" (Bengtson and Oyama 42). The Glass siblings share love, or affectual solidarity, as well as consensual solidarity as they share beliefs and views. They also have associational solidarity because they are always interacting, either through letters, messages, even passing on wisdom from their deceased siblings, or sharing face to face conversations which helps them to get going in a world that they do not understand, especially when they grow up. They know that the only ones who understand what they are going through are their siblings because they share the same intellectual and spiritually challenging upbringing, as Buddy points out in his letter's postscript: "As one limping man to another, old Zooey, let's be courteous and kind to each other" (Salinger, *Franny and Zooey* 60*)*.

Therefore, it becomes evident that moments of conflict within families are counterbalanced by a remarkable sense of solidarity and community. This is particularly apparent in the horizontal relationships among siblings, even when older siblings exert influence, as seen in the Glass family, or symbolize the adult world, exemplified by D.B. in relation to Holden. There is a mutual understanding because of their shared upbringing, education, the loss of idealized *puer aeternus* figures, and a common disdain for a society deemed both authentic and unattractive. In these familial microcosms, parents play a minimal role, often absent, or only acting as mediators and possible threats. Consequently, the absence of typical adult power dynamics allows siblings to navigate existential crises collaboratively,

[59] The six dimensions of intergenerational solidarity are affectual, associational, consensual, functional (material support across generations), normative (family values and parental and filial obligations) and structural (geographical proximity between family members).

fostering compassion and support, instead of employing punishments or power strategies that adults usually have with their children. The shared vulnerabilities, memories and tragedies create a network of solidarity that works as a protective shield against external challenges, as seen in the analysis of personal lives, education, and careers within and beyond the family context. This exploration sets the stage for an in-depth examination of how similar dynamics manifest in the relationships between women and children in the works of J.D. Salinger and Roald Dahl.

## 5.2. Women and children

The following section is dedicated to comparing two short stories by J.D. Salinger that have been considered for an adult or YA audience and centered on intergenerational relationships between mothers and children, followed by a study of two children's novels by Roald Dahl that portray the dynamics between grandmothers and grandsons. This section aims to analyze how each author portrays these power dynamics in narratives addressed to different age-related audiences. I argue that these stories are centered on these characters not only because women are often associated with child-rearing, but due to discrimination according to gender, and age in older women, they are often infantilized by the society that sees them as vulnerable, innocent, and irrational like children have so often been considered too. Through these stories, it can be noticed how adult women distance themselves from the patriarchal idea of the mature adult as they are open to showing emotions, engaging in play, and teaming up with children leading to instances of solidarity and conflict, mutual agency, and empowerment.

### 5.2.1 Mothers and children in Salinger's short stories

This section is dedicated to a comparative analysis of two short stories by J.D. Salinger featured in the *Nine Stories*' collection, "Uncle Wiggily in Connecticut" (1948), originally published in *The New Yorker*, and "Down at the Dinghy" (1949), which first appeared in *Harper's Magazine*. Set in the postwar period, these short stories capture the atmosphere of estrangement, loneliness, spiritual bankruptcy, conformism, and materialism of such context in the United States (Prigozy 93). For instance, they take place in suburban middle-class spaces and while the first story deals with loss due to the war, the second one stresses antisemitism, both focus on the role of women during that period. At the same time, both stories depict an emotional scene between mothers and children which will provide a glance at how both adults

and children deal with crises and find intergenerational solidarity in the form of mutual understanding, compassion and empathy.

5.2.1.1 The hidden child

Drawing from Nodelman's concept of the hidden adult reader in children's fiction mentioned in the second chapter, Joosen refers to the hidden child reader which usually influences the construction of adulthood and blind spaces in children's narratives, arguing that this could be represented, for instance, through private conversations between adults without children, or either, when they are unaware of their presence (*Adulthood* 20). Even if Salinger's stories tend to be associated with YA and adult literature, Joosen's perspective seems relevant to study these works as both short stories open with conversations between adults that at some point refer to a hidden child character creating gaps in the text.

"Down at the Dinghy" opens with a conversation between Sandra, the housekeeper, and Mrs. Snell, who seems to be a temporary hire as the story is set in a vacation home on the outskirts of New York City in October. They both work for Mr. Tannenbaum, his wife Boo Boo Glass and their four-year-old son, Lionel. Sandra is worried about something she has said in front of the boy and seems upset about the fact that she usually cannot hear where he is hiding, stressing how as a child, Lionel is physically small and able to fit in tiny spaces, or just walk around quietly. Joosen argues that "in other private exchanges, the adults talk about the child characters in the story, sharing information about them, expressing feelings about them or discussing the best approach to deal with them" (*Adulthood* 21). In this case, Sandra shows her distress about the fact that the boy usually understands what adults mean mentioning: "'I mean ya gotta weigh every word ya say around him,' Sandra said. 'It drives ya loony'" (Salinger, *Nine Stories* 72), and later, she adds: "A four-year-old kid!" (72), implying that as an adult, she would not think she would need to be careful and respectful with such a young child.

"Uncle Wiggily in Connecticut" opens with Eloise entertaining her former college friend Mary Jane, who has come to visit her at her house in the suburbs. They are enjoying a conversation about old friends, sharing anecdotes and memories which exposes Eloise's bitter personality through her harsh criticism and ironic comments that point out that she is not happily married. Since they are drinking, Eloise gets sentimental about the boyfriend she lost during the war, Walt Glass, and even if at that moment her daughter Ramona is not present,

like Lionel, it is later confirmed that she has heard this story. According to Joosen, children's literature offers a keyhole or glimpses into adult lives with blind spots as the focalization usually comes from the child's perspective (*Adulthood* 1), however, this scholar suggests that "some young focalizers are presented as been more broad-minded and observant when describing their mothers than others" (Joosen, *Adulthood* 19). Even if these description could apply to the children in these stories, what differs is that the focalization comes mainly from the mothers, so in this case, there are glimpses to the children's life from the adult perspective; in fact, it seems that both the adult character and the child have a limited access to the other's world.

In "Down at the Dinghy," Boo Boo joins the conversation with the cleaners in the kitchen, and throughout this exchange, it is revealed that Lionel has run away, and that this is not the first time. According to Alston, "the home is at once a place of security, a haven from the outside world, and a place of constraint" (*The Family* 89), and as illustrated in the previous chapter, young characters typically need to leave their homes to enjoy independence and freedom, which is what Lionel replicates on a smaller scale. Apparently, when he was three years old he ran to the mall in Central Park, two blocks from their apartment in the city, and they even had to call the police only to find him there much later, freezing in the middle of winter. When he was two years old, they found him hiding under a sink in the laundry room at their house basement and some other time, he was waiting at the building's front door to say goodbye to his father before escaping. The reason for Lionel's behavior is that, on all these occasions, before running away or hiding, he was insulted or bullied by other children; hence, whatever Sandra has said, had to be offensive to cause this reaction again, which is why she is worried that the kid might tell on her to the bosses.

In "Uncle Wiggily," Ramona also displays another behavior that is typically associated with young children; the girl has an imaginary friend that she has named Jimmy Jimmereeno, who does everything with her, and even at night, she only occupies one side of the bed to leave room for him. Alston suggests that the space division in the house separates adults from children (*The Family* 89); for instance, while Lionel has left the house, Ramona, who was playing outside with her imaginary friend, makes a short appearance in the living room which is monopolized by the adults at this point, and she seems to feel as an outsider in her own house. She is subjected to a conversation controlled by the adults in the story where her mom keeps ordering her to stand up and still, not scratch or put her finger on her nose, and to reply to her

friend and describe her imaginary "beau." Mary Jane seems interested, but talks to her condescendingly repeating typical phrases like "Oh, what a *pretty* dress!" (Salinger, *Nine Stories* 22), "Will you give me a little kiss, Ramona?" (23), to which the girl answers that she doesn't like to kiss people. Mary Jane responds with a forced enthusiasm to what the girl is telling, which both adults seem to perceive only as an infantile invention, rather than a sign of loneliness, even if she points out that Jimmy is an orphan. Joosen exemplifies how even well-meaning adults could perpetuate adultism through certain attitudes grounded on childhood constructions (*Adulthood 1*37), for instance, perceiving Ramona as an innocent and silly girl. Finally, Ramona leaves again to play, after asking her mother for permission, which evidences how her freedom to move around the house is more constricted than in Lionel's case.

On the other hand, Boo Boo behaves differently to Eloise and Mary Jane as she is the one that initiates the make-believe play when she spots her son Lionel in the dinghy at the lake outside the house. She enters the pier whistling a song and first addresses his son as: "Ahoy," Boo Boo said. "Friend. Pirate. Dirty dog. I'm back." And adds: "It is I," Boo Boo said. "Vice-Admiral Tannenbaum. Née Glass. Come to inspect the stermaphors" (Salinger, *Nine Stories* 77). Even if Lionel remains serious and does not turn around to look at her, for a brief moment, he pretends to sail. She even makes what she refers to as a secret bugle call that Lionel seems to enjoy, although, he is probably aware that his mom is inventing it, as the narrator points out. This is interesting in terms of aetonormativity because the third-person and probably, adult narrator, does not diminish the capabilities of the child character alluding to the fact that Lionel cannot be easily tricked by grownups which is exactly what Sandra dislikes.

Deszcz-Tryhubczak and Kalla dedicate a volume to studying play representations and connections with children's literature, arguing that intergenerational play can foster more egalitarian and communal dynamics that challenge age hierarchies and the adult-child binary (8-9). In both stories, play is encouraged and comes as a sign of compassion from adult to child and vice versa. For instance, the make-believe play continues in "Uncle Wiggily," but in a rather dramatic way as "Eloise's violent and tragic story repeats itself in her daughter Ramona's imaginative life" when the girl announces that her imaginary friend Jimmy was run over by a car while playing outside (Prigozy 94-95). This is due to the fact that even if children do not have access to some of the experiences of adult life like having a relationship and losing a partner as in Eloise's background story, they can understand the feelings that come from these experiences, like sadness and depression, which are not related to age (Joosen, *Adulthood* 88),

as seen in "The Laughing Man." Ramona's imagination serves as a parallel to her mom's story about her lost love which she creates in an act of solidarity or empathy because now she understands the reason for her mother's unhappiness and rough facade.

Eloise does not seem to care about her daughter's announcement and only sends her to her bedroom declaring that the girl feels feverish. Alston argues how the bedroom usually works both as a sanctuary for children, but also as the place where they are usually grounded or held prisoner since it is part of the house where adults have the ultimate control (*The Family* 99). Certainly, the division of spaces is what physically separates members of the family at home, making it complicated for adults and children to metaphorically see each other, they can only peek at each other's keyholes and see glimpses of their lives, while hiding. At the same time, physically accessing each other's space is what strengthens the bond, but sometimes it can be a transgression too. In other stories, this transgression is important to reclaim power, as it happens with several of Dahl's child characters that invade adult spaces. The next part focuses on what happens when these mothers access the spaces where the children are hiding.

5.2.1.2 Mother and child

At the pier, Boo Boo sits in a squat to be at the same level as her son and always addresses him with love and respect, sometimes making funny remarks to lighten the atmosphere, but also, it is evident that she takes him seriously. In this regard, she tells Lionel that they had agreed that he would not run away anymore, which shows how as a parent she does not forbid her son to do things, but instead negotiates with him because, unlike Eloise with Ramona, she understands that his behavior has valid motives. Hence, even if she wants him to share the reason for his latest escape, Boo Boo does not pressure him into it and does not even come into the dinghy when the child does not let her, and therefore, respects Lionel's space and pace to deal with his emotions and to open up, showing that she is not angry with him for running away again. The boy throws some goggles he finds in the dinghy out to the lake and Boo Boo only says: "That's nice. That's constructive" (Salinger, *Nine Stories* 81), disclosing that the googles belonged to her older brothers, Seymour and Buddy. She also offers Lionel a key chain, just like his dad's, as a peace offering, but the boy throws this into the lake too, bursting into tears. Boo Boo comes into the dinghy to comfort him and while she is hugging him, he changes his attitude from defiance to vulnerability, finally revealing the source of his distress.

As for Eloise, after getting more drunk and upset, she throws one of Ramona's galoshes which she finds in her way, which works as a parallelism to Lionel's actions to display anger. Then, she invades her daughter's bedroom, waking the child up, and asks her why she is sleeping only on one side of the bed if Jimmy is dead to which the girl replies that she has another friend named Mickey Mickeranno. As McCoppin points out, "this news sends Eloise into a mad fit; clearly it is related to her own tragic tale, and she goes on to take her anguish out on her daughter" (4). Raising her voice, she orders a really frightened Ramona to get on the center of the bed, and does not listen when the child tries to explain that she does not want to hurt her friend. Consequently, "Eloise forces her daughter to perform what Ramona sees as a destructive act, the death of her imaginary friend" (Caldwell Smith 493), destroying the inventive play. As a consequence, "Eloise grabbed Ramona's ankles and half lifted and half pulled her over to the middle of the bed. Ramona neither struggled nor cried; she let herself be moved without actually submitting to it" (Salinger, *Nine Stories* 34-35). Although her mother is stronger and able to move her, this does not mean that Ramona agrees with these actions, which is clarified when the third-person narrator again stresses the child's decision not to submit, even if she is not able to fight back.

According to Prigozy, both stories center "on relationships between adults and children," but unlike "'Uncle Wiggily,' the key relationship—between mother Boo Boo Tannenbaum and her son Lionel—reveals the affection and understanding of a parent for her child" (97). While Boo Boo is able to offer her son Lionel another perspective of adulthood by being "affectionate, patient and understanding," Eloise is not comfortable in her role as mother, and unable to comfort her daughter because she is struggling too (Gonçalves Gomes 57). In her conversation with Mary Jane, she mentions that her child looks more like her dad and mother-in-law, with whom she does not have a good relationship, making ironic comments on how they look like triplets, while she should maybe find a dog that looks like her. Therefore, Ramona is her reminder of the life she was not able to have with her lost lover Walt and shows how she feels alienated from her nuclear suburban family.

In this sense, both short stories deal with postwar themes. The ending of "Down at the Dinghy" reveals that Sandra commented that Lionel's father is a "big—sloppy—kike" (Salinger, *Nine Stories* 82), which denotes the antisemitism of that period. As a matter of fact, antisemitism in the United States peaked during the nineteen-forties and in New York, acts of discrimination including the burning of synagogues and beatings of young people were

common, as there were the negative views associated with this ethnicity among the mainstream society (Caldwell Smith 479). Therefore, Sandra does not seem to feel bad about what she said, only worried about their bosses finding this out because, in the opening conversation, she points out to Mrs. Snell that the boy is "gonna have a nose just like the father" (72-73), making again a remark about a stereotypical hurtful trait related to Jewish ethnicity.

When Boo Boo asks Lionel if he knows what this slur means, he replies that it is the thing that goes up in the air, which means he has confused the word with kite—similarly to when he confused the maid's last name Snell with Smell. Still, it becomes clear that he has understood the tone and intentions behind Sandra's words, which is why he was upset and has run away; like he has done before after being verbally abused. Boo Boo flinches when hearing the slur, but after Lionel's reply, she does not explain anything else providing certain protection to his son's innocence. As an adult, she has the power to either clarify this incident or not, but at the same time, she decides to respect again her son's process and pace to face prejudice knowing that eventually, he will understand more. According to Caldwell Smith, "Salinger shows Boo Boo permitting her son to keep his own language until he is capable of dealing with the reality and until she is ready to loosen the maternal strings" (490), and hence, in their relationship, there is a balance between parental protection, but also respect for the child's freedom. The story offers a heartwarming closure as mother and child race while going to pick up the dad from the train station with plans to come back and sail.

Eloise does the contrary as she forces the hardness of the world into her daughter by making her kill her only company and in that way, she transfers her loneliness to her. After the disturbing scene, as McCoppin points out referring to the fact that Eloise ignores and abuses her daughter (4), she even forces Ramona to close her eyes and sleep. Then, in the dark, Eloise pushes her own ankle against the footbed purposefully, comforting herself by repeating "Poor Uncle Wiggily," which is what Walt had once said to her when she had hurt her ankle (Salinger, *Nine Stories* 35), employing once again world play as in "Down at the Dinghy." Eloise picks Ramona's glasses which she has accidentally thrown while crying, and wets them with her tears, a moment which resembles Lionel throwing his uncles' googles into the lake. Glasses and goggles are objects that symbolize seeing clearer and beyond, but in both stories, these are blurred out of anger and frustration.

Ramona has been crying too and her mother kisses her, but as opposed to the closing scene between Boo Boo and Lionel, this ending is heartbreaking and she goes down to ask

Mary Jane if she was a nice girl back then, which means that experiencing coming-of-age during the war and losing someone important in it has hardened her. As discussed, in an existential reading on overlapping temporalities and temporal otherness between childhood and adulthood, Beauvais points out how adults legitimate their authority in their past and accumulated experience, while in the child rests the power of what they might do in the future where the adult has no control over (18-19). Thus, "to be mighty is to have more time let, to be authoritative is to have more time past" (Beauvais 19), which can be translated to the power dynamics in the relationship between Eloise, who has more authority, but cannot go back in time, while her daughter has more possibilities awaiting. According to Prigozy, "Ramona is pitiable in her homeliness and her need for love and companionship; Eloise is cold and unfeeling, yet even she, reduced to tears by missed opportunities, evokes reluctant sympathy" (92).

Referring to adult main characters in children's literature, Joosen points out how some books "explore adulthood more fully and directly—acknowledging difficulty, crises and doubts, but also showing resilience, hope and fun—aspects that are vital to any stage in life" (*Adulthood* 92). This explanation could also be translated to these short stories featuring female adult figures that exhibit certain childlike behaviors which are usually based on age assumptions that differentiate childhood from adulthood (Joosen, *Adulthood* 81), or at least, the idealized mature adult mentioned in the previous chapter. These stories reveal how in fact both adult and children can experience tantrums, emotional crisis, and engage in play, actions that are not exclusively relegated to youth. However, the fact that these characters are women also determine that, in their context, they spend more time with their children at home, and they are more open to show vulnerability and emotions, while the husbands are in the outside world distanced from the domestic life and daily problems. The next part is dedicated to show how gender roles and social differences have an impact on age-related dynamics as well.

5.2.1.3 Postwar women

"Uncle Wiggily" shows how as a woman and a college dropout during that time, Eloise had only two options after losing Walt, marrying someone else or becoming a "career girl" like Mary Jane, who seems to be some sort of assistant for a male boss. As Eloise's points out "at least you have a job" (Salinger, *Nine Stories* 30), signaling how she envies that Mary Jane has something that is hers. In this regard, both short stories portray the role of women during the

postwar period as all characters are women or children, and the husbands and fathers are only mentioned. According to Caldwell Smith concerning "Down at the Dinghy":

> The three women—Sandra, the maid; Mrs. Snell, the woman who does the laundry; and Mrs. Tannenbaum, Lionel's mother—are all potential maternal figures in Lionel's world, as they interact to some extent with the boy and with each other, with each of the women using language in a way either to subvert Lionel's maturation or to facilitate it. (481)

Alston argues that "the mother is always presented as the key symbol of the home, and therefore, the family," as the home is usually associated with a projection of a feminine, comforting and encircling space to protect children from the harshness of the world (*The Family* 78). At the same time, even if women are usually linked to the idea of home, they have no private space or a room of their own, as opposed to the father, who is usually associated with the library or the study, while the children are connected with their bedrooms (Alston, *The Family in English CL* 99). Hence, it is not surprising that the opening conversation between the three women in "Down at the Dinghy" takes place in the kitchen, a typically feminine space, while the men, the husbands and fathers in both stories do not appear since they are the ones usually related to the outside world as Alston argues (*The Family* 97), which stresses gender roles at the time.

As a result of their coming-of-age and experiences during the war, both Boo Boo and Eloise question these roles. For example, Lionel's first reaction to Boo Boo saying that she is an admiral is pointing out: "You aren't an admiral. You're a *lady*" (Salinger, *Nine Stories* 77), and when she asks who told him that, Lionel replies that it was his father. According to Caldwell Smith, "in this instance, the binary positioning of gender suggests the significant roles that both mother and father play in socializing the child; for example, Lionel denies his mother's claim to being an admiral on the basis of her gender" (488). Hence, Boo Boo still needs to convince her son about her military experience challenging his father's word to deconstruct gender roles in her child. Hence, she explains: "'Your daddy's a nice fella,' she said, 'but he's probably the biggest landlubber I know. It's perfectly true that when I'm in port I'm a lady—*that's* true. But my true calling is first, last, and always the bounding—' (Salinger, *Nine Stories* 77-78). Lionel interrupts now repeating: "You aren't an admiral. You're a lady all the time" (Salinger, *Nine Stories* 78), but his mother keeps on explaining patiently how: '*Many* people think I'm not an admiral' […] 'Just because I don't shoot my mouth off about it' (78).

From "Carpenters," we already know that Boo Boo was an ensign in the Navy WAVES[60] in 1942, which is the reason why she misses Seymour's wedding and asks Buddy to attend instead in a letter, but even without this background information, this story subtly confirms this fact when she is described as peeling her cigarette "Army style" (Salinger, *Nine Stories* 77). In a context in which many women joining the Navy, Boo Boo could have been upgraded to admiral during the following years as she was not even twenty back then, which could be deduced because in "Down at the Dinghy" she is twenty-five years old, although this is not confirmed in other stories. However, through this dialogue, she intends to clarify to her son how these roles were changing and how she could be a mother, and feminine, but also partake in activities mainly regarded as masculine.

On the other hand, when Mary Jane asks if Eloise has ever told her husband about Walt, she replies that when she mentioned this to him, he only asked what his military rank was, while Walt would use an allegory to explain how he would feel more naked with each promotion even if he would be wearing more medals. According to McCoppin:

> Eloise then goes on to give the reader insight into Walt's unhappiness while serving in the war; he felt that his involvement in the war, and even the war itself, seemed meaningless. She recounts the events surrounding Walt's accidental death to Mary Jane and begins to cry; this is the first time Eloise's emotion is explicitly seen [...] (4)

It has been mentioned that Walt died in an accident involving a stove explosion in occupied Japan, thus, this is not what men like Eloise's husband would consider an honorable death, hence, if she ever tells him about this, she would have to lie that Walt died in battle. Thus, she advises Mary Jane not to tell anything to her husband if she ever gets remarried, especially about former lovers, as men are not smart and get immaturely jealous, signaling how her husband would only ask about Walt's rank in a sort of male competition. She also comments on her husband lying about liking Jane Austen before marrying her and how actually his favorite book is about four men that starve to death in Alaska. In this regard, she opposes what is considered feminine literature with a manly narrative, making fun of his masculinity again when he calls her to request to pick him up because it is snowing, and she replies: "Oh. Well, that's tough, kid. Why don't you boys form a platoon and march home? You can say that hut-hope-hoop-hoop business. You can be the big shot" (Salinger, *Nine Stories* 33). Her husband

[60] In 1942, U.S. President Roosevelt signed the act that created the WAVES or Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service. During that same year, Mildred McAfee was sworn in as a Navy Reserve lieutenant commander and became the first female officer in U.S. Navy history, as well as the first director of the WAVES (Cipolloni para. 2-3).

represents conformism, pro-war ideology, and gender stereotypes associated with traditional masculinity which is the exact opposite of Walt who seemed to be fun, genuine, and "a symbol of innocence and tenderness for the heroine of 'Uncle Wiggily in Connecticut'" (Galloway 38). Like Holden, Eloise compares and contrast different types of men, finding in Walt an alternative to the macho culture of the postwar.

At the same time, both narratives deal with intersectional aspects linked to the depiction of social classes. Not only in this, but in *The Catcher in the Rye* and other short stories, Salinger already criticizes the upper-middle class he was surrounded by, and probably felt alienated from, due to his probatory whiteness as a Jew, as Benson points out (1-6). In this case, through the depiction of the service, we know that both families are from a higher social class. In "Down at the Dinghy," Sandra criticizes her bosses for throwing "good money" into staying in the summer house in October even if they do not go in the water or the boat (Salinger, Nine Stories 73)—which may come as vain and superficial to someone that has a completely different lifestyle and only able to afford a modest life. In the opening conversation, she keeps on worrying about Lionel telling his mom what she had said because this could mean her losing her source of income.

Therefore, both stories provide glimpses of how women from lower classes have even fewer opportunities, stressing the fact that characters like Eloise are unable to relate to this difficult situation and be compassionate about it. In "Uncle Wiggily," the maid Grace asks Eloise if her husband can spend the night since it is snowing outside and she coldly denials this request, saying "I'm not running a hotel" (Salinger, *Nine Stories* 33), while she seems fine with her friend Mary Jane taking a nap in the couch as they get drunk. Even if her reply to Grace fits more with her hardened personality, evidenced when she is denies her owns husband's request to pick him up during the snow, it also shows signs of classism.

On the other hand, Boo Boo seems to have a better relationship with the maids as she addresses them in a friendly manner, thanks Mrs. Snell and tells her paycheck is ready when she is about to leave, and also while consoling Lionel about what Sandra had said, she replies: "Well, that isn't *too* terrible (…) That isn't the *worst* that could happen" (Salinger, *Nine Stories* 83), showing that she does not want her son to have a bad image about the maid and never says anything against her. As a half-Jewish person, there is more intersectionality to her identity and her personality seems more empathetic in general. But socioeconomically speaking, as the "lady of the house" (Salinger, *Nine Stories* 73), Boo Boo is more privileged that the other

women in the story who address her as ma'am, the same way Grace does with Eloise, showing that she is the authority figure there. As a result, both stories depict power dynamics between adults and children, men and women, as well as women from different social classes.

"Uncle Wiggily in Connecticut" and "Down at the Dinghy" emerge as compelling narratives offering important insights into the intricate dynamics between mothers and children during the postwar era. These stories delve into the complexities of gender roles and social differences, revealing how adults play a pivotal role in shaping social constructions of childhood. However, beyond the perpetuation of these views, a theme of intergenerational solidarity emerges, emphasizing the capacity for connection and empathy between adults and children even in the face of sociopolitical challenges. Therefore, these narratives stress the profound impact of the war and issues like antisemitism on different generations. The characters not only face their own trauma and depression but also find solace and understanding within family relationships. This highlights the interconnections of social contexts and family dynamics, showing how external structures determine and are shaped by more personal bonds.

Moreover, both stories introduce hidden children, Lionel and Ramona, who like the boy in "The Laughing Man," have glimpses into the adult world. Several of Salinger's child characters could be considered wise or mature because they are curious enough to peek through the key holes and see what could be considered adult matters, providing a unique perspective. Something similar happens with Dahl's empathetic child characters, including Matilda, Sophie, Danny, Charlie, and the boy in *The Witches*, who are able to sympathize and understand vulnerable adults. In turn adults, can empathize with children's struggles as well, or either ignore them or exhibit disdain. The following section will address similar aspects concerning the relationship between grandmothers and grandsons in the works of Roald Dahl.

### 5.2.2 Grandmothers and Grandchildren in Dahl's novels

The previous section offered an analysis of the relationship between mothers and children in two short stories by J.D. Salinger for an older audience. Roald Dahl also represents diverse kinds of family relationships, but several characters in his children's books are orphans, and every so often, mistreated by their surrogates. For instance, the protagonist of *James and the Giant Peach* not only loses his parents in a terrible accident, but following a Cinderella plot line, suffers abuse from his aunts. In this sense, Todres and Higinbotham stress the difference between the boy's life with his parents and later with his new guardians, as follows:

> Dahl's first children's book, *James and the Giant Peach* begins with a diametrical contrast between four-year-old James Henry Trotter's life before and after his parents die. Before they die it is a "perfect life for a small boy," with a beautiful house by the sea, a supportive family dynamic, friends to play with, and an ocean in which to swim (106).

And then referring to his life with his aunts, these scholars explain:

> These infamous surrogate parents, Aunt Sponge and Aunt Spiker, are two of the most abusive caretakers in children's literature. They are "selfish and lazy and cruel," they beat James "for almost no reason at all," they conscript his labor in their garden, and they shut him in a room "as bare as a prison cell." To make it even worse, James can see the house where he used to live way off in the distance, a constant reminder of his once happy and secure place in a loving family. (106)

*George's Marvellous Medicine*, published in 1981, and *The Witches,* which appeared two years later, address some of Dahl's most frequent themes and share some similarities with James' story. In *The Witches*, the young hero also loses his parents in a terrible and more realistic accident since they die in a car crash—while James' parents are eaten by a rhinoceros, but fortunately, in this case, the boy is left under the care of his loving grandmother. According to Trites, death in children's literature usually appears so children can learn to separate and find independence from their real or symbolic parents (*Disturbing the Universe* 118). On the other hand, George's parents, The Krankys, are alive, but leave him frequently with his grandma, who seems to have more common ground with James' aunts, since she is a terrible person. In this regard, Alston states that even if parents are absent, young "characters are frequently dependent on some aspect of family whether presented as siblings, parents, aunts, uncles or grandparents, and these family members can be good or bad role models" (*The Family* 2). Therefore, the following sections aim to compare these children's books that depict power dynamics and intergenerational solidarity between these contrasting grandmothers and their grandsons.

Both stories open with a chapter dedicated to describing the grandmothers from the child's perspective, painting a picture of their relationship. Drawing from Dahl's background, *The Witches* dedicates a chapter to "My Grandmother" which describes this character and the boy's parents as Norwegian, but while the elder has been living in their country of origin, the parents have migrated a long time ago to England were the boy was born and raised, which is close to the author's own upbringing, as seen in the first chapter. Before the parents' accident, the boy used to visit his grandmother during the summers and on holidays, and it is actually, on one Christmas while the family was "driving in icy weather just north of Oslo" that the parents are killed in a car crash and the boy survives (Dahl, *The Witches* 7). The first-person

narrator and young character describes his feelings towards this traumatic experience as follows: “I won’t go into the horrors of that terrible afternoon. I still get the shivers when I think about it. I finished up, of course, back in my grandmother’s house with her arms around me tight and both of us crying the whole night long” (Dahl, *The Witches* 7). This moment is accompanied by an illustration by Quentin Blake that shows both characters holding each other, stressing the close bond that the boy shares with his grandmother.

Furthermore, we know that throughout the story, the grandmother takes care of her grandson even with her poor health condition, and does everything she has at her disposal to comfort, protect and help the child, even after he is transformed into a mouse. Therefore, this character’s depiction could correspond to the description provided by the omniscient narrator in *George’s Marvellous Medicine* who points out how “most grandmothers are lovely, kind and helpful old ladies” and adds “but not this one” referring to Grandma Kranky, who is just the contrary, “a selfish grumpy old woman” that always complains and is not even remotely interested on anything regarding her grandson, like his day at school, or in playing with him (Dahl, *George* 8). It seems that instead of her taking care of George, he is supposed to serve her while her parents are away; for instance, when he prepares tea for her, she keeps on criticizing him, but it is mentioned that she does not order her grandson about or treat him badly in front of the parents.

Both grandmothers are from the mother’s side, but while it is stressed that “George couldn’t help disliking Grandma” (Dahl, *Marvellous Medicine* 8), in a chapter titled “Grandma,” the boy in *The Witches* states that he “absolutely adored her,” even feeling closer to her grandmother than to his own mother (Dahl 6). The boy also seems to enjoy her company because either the grandmother is telling him a story, lets him build a tree house, gives him pet mice, and takes him on a vacation, like Danny’s father who would play and build things with his son, and who encourages adventures. In this regard, in the afterword of *Danny the Champion of the World*, Dahl provides the following advice: “A stodgy parent is not fun at all! What a child wants—and DESERVES—is a parent who is SPARKY!” (206). It seems that Dahl celebrates adults with childlike and playful characteristics as good parental figures, like Boo Boo in Salinger’s story.

According to Joosen, rather than immaturity, the term childlike is usually employed positively by critics and scholars to describe adult characters that display a romantic innocence, or engage in activities typically associated with childhood like flying kites, eating cookies, or

showing playfulness and empathy with animals (*Adulthood* 79-80), but also, since "these adult figures have maintained a sense of originality and amazement from childhood" they are also portrayed as rather dynamic, open to new experiences and growth (87). For instance, after the tragedy in *The Witches*, both grandmother and grandson want to stay in Norway, but according to the parents' will, the elder is supposed to come and live with the boy in England where he can continue his education and keep living at home. Hence, the grandmother sacrifices her preferences for the boy's sake, even if this means that she will go through a big life change at her age, so her grandson does not have to go through other difficulties while both are grieving. At the same time, her health condition does not let them take a vacation in Norway, so instead they go to the English South Coast where they encounter the witches as described in the previous chapter.

5.2.2.1 Beware of adults

Even after the parent's death, the grandmother in *The Witches* respects their will and behaves respectfully towards her grandson, while George's grandmother diminishes both parents telling the boy not to listen to them and even calling her own daughter as stupid as her grandson. At the same time, she hides her real thoughts and behavior in front of the couple because she knows they would disapprove, in a comparable way to the witches that hide their true intentions and appearance in the eponymous novel. Even as an exaggerated caricature, the grandmother stands for family members or people from the entourage that can also mistreat children, but hide their true intentions in front of other adults, who sometimes end up not believing the young victim, in a similar way that the mice appearance render the children more vulnerable and voiceless in *The Witches*.

In an article dedicated to addressing how fairy tales stand for violence that occurs at the domestic level where the perpetrator could use a familiar face to disguise true intentions (80), Calloni argues that since children are unprepared, they become "undefended because they are more vulnerable so that violence can be more easily perpetrated, remaining unreported" (81). For instance, the first-person young narrator of *The Witches* explains how these creatures are never caught because they do not commit abuse or violence towards children out in the open. In fact, the boy sees them while hiding, which reminds us of the hidden child that has limited view of the adult world, but is trying to figure it out, as Lionel and Ramona, and how this exposition can pose a problem for some adults. At the same time, the witches could also stand

for structures of adultism in general terms, or even people from the outside world that exhibit this type of behavior, which sometimes is normalized.

To distinguish these aspects, names and physical descriptions usually match the characters' personality in Dahl's books, for example in *Matilda* with Miss Honey on one side, and The Trunchbull and The Wormwoods in the other. In *James and the Giant Peach,* Aunt Spiker is tall and bony, while Aunt Sponge is a fat woman with a flabby face, and both are described as "really horrible people" (Dahl 1). Dahl explains this in *The Twits*:

> If a person has ugly thoughts, it begins to show on the face. And when that person has ugly thoughts every day, every week, the face gets uglier and uglier until it gets so ugly you can hardly bear to look at it. A person who has good thoughts cannot ever be ugly. You can have a wonky nose and a crooked mouth and a double chin and stick-out teeth, but if you have good thoughts they will shine out of your face like sunbeams and you will always look lovely. (7)

In this regard, Blake's monochromatic illustrations in *George's Marvellous Medicine* depict Grandma Kranky with a witchy appearance, slim body, and a large, crooked nose, sipping her tea while sitting with her back in a curved position, while the description suggests that she has "pale brown teeth and a small puckered up mouth" (Dahl 8). On the other hand, the grandmother in *The Witches* is described as "tremendously old and wrinkled, with a massive wide body," who to the boy looks "majestic in her armchair" smoking a cigarette (Dahl 9), which is also represented through an illustration that translates the positive image that the child has of his grandmother.

On the other hand, the young hero and narrator from *Danny, the Champion of the World* advises the reader: "so watch out, I say, when someone smiles at you with his mouth but his eyes stay the same. It's sure to be a phony" (Dahl 9), as if he was warning other children to be wary of hypocritical adults. This is stressed through the witches' appearance who look like regular women on the outside, but are horrible and scary on the inside which implies that some adults may look nice, but their ugly feelings may not equal their beautiful appearance, or their superficial good intentions as the RSPCC meeting frontage. For instance, in the opening note, the boy points out: "this is not a fairy-tale. This is about REAL WITCHES" and addressing the reader, he says: "Listen very carefully" to enunciate instructions to protect from these evil creatures (Dahl, *The Witches* 1). Therefore, several of Dahl's stories seem to warn children against suspicious and untrustworthy adults, as opposed to moralizing and didactic tales where the children learn to obey their seniors.

For example, *George's Marvellous Medicine* has an opening like *Billy and the Minpins,*' where the mother says that she is going out shopping in the village and advises her son to "be a good boy and don't get up to mischief" (Dahl 7). This warning could be associated with the construction of children as uncivilized and undisciplined beings who are always going to get in some sort of trouble, which the narrator ridicules stating: "This was a silly thing to say to a small boy at any time. It immediately made him wonder what sort of mischief he might get up to" (Dahl, *Marvellous Medicine* 7). The third-person narrator mocks and reinforces the idea that this type of warning can only inspire curiosity in a child, much as Billy when his mother forbids him to go to the Forest of Sin, because they know the adult world has something to hide in the forbidden space.

Like Billy, who was only allowed to do what he considered as boring activities, George is "bored to tears" because his family lives on a farm far from the village (Dahl, *Marvellous Medicine* 1), so he is not able to play with any other children and does not enjoy spending time with his grumpy grandma. This reminds us about James' loneliness too with his terrible aunts, who have imprisoned him because they also think that: "the nasty little beast will only get into mischief if he goes out of the garden" (Dahl, *The Giant Peach* 3). The idea of comparing James's room to a prison cell stresses the panoptical or all-seeing view that adults have at home to assure control over the child to remain in a designated space, as they will always feel observed, while violating these rules usually means facing danger and punishment (Alston, *The Family* 92-93).

At the same time, the grandmother in *The Witches* also provides a cautionary tale for her grandson, but only out of concern, as she wants him to be informed and able to defend himself from possible harm from adults, which is stressed when she points out: "you won't last long in this world if you don't know how to spot a witch when you see one" (Dahl 8). In this regard, Joosen points out how adults can be gatekeepers or enablers, explaining that "gatekeepers make sure that adult knowledge is kept from the young, while enablers facilitate children's access to knowledge and skills" (*Adulthood* 44). In this regard, unlike George and Billy's mothers and James' aunts that want to shield them from the world, through storytelling, the grandmother in *The Witches* facilitates this knowledge to her grandson, but always respecting his freedom and agency. Something that resembles to what the Glasses do with their younger siblings, and even other children like Seymour with Sybil showing her a gluttonous world through a metaphor.

Even knowing that there are witches out there, she does not keep him enclosed, but is aware that the only thing she can do is pass on what she knows.

However, the boy does not believe his grandmother instantly when she first tells him about the witches, questioning if she is really telling the truth or only trying to scare him throughout the following dialogue:

> 'You swear you aren't pulling my leg?' I kept saying to her. 'You swear you aren't just pretending?'
> 'Listen,' she said, 'I have known no less than five children who have simply vanished off the face of this earth, never to be seen again. The witches took them.'
> 'I still think you're just trying to frighten me,' I said.
> 'I am trying to make sure you don't go the same way,' she said. 'I love you and I want you to stay with me.' (Dahl, *The Witches* 9)

This is an example of Beauvais' pedagogical romance in which the adult transmits knowledge to the young person, even with the uncertainty about what they will do with that information in the future (186-192). This scholar explains that "the pedagogical romance rests on the "risk-taking" behavior of the loving adult, who wills the child to take up their project freely, and thus accept that they could do *anything* with it" (Beauvais 192). In this case, the grandmother tells the boy how to recognize witches, which comes in handy when he experiences his first encounter with one; this creature approaches him offering a present, showing how adults could try to win children's trust in order to abuse or hurt them later.

On the other hand, George's grandma tells him many scary things suggesting she is a witch dressed up as a woman, recalling passages in *The Witches*. For example, there is a moment when George doubts that witches are only in fairytales, wondering if his grandma could be one after she is advising him to eat insects, which stresses the idea that this is not only a made-up story because evil adults can be real. Later, she tells him to come closer since she is going to tell him some secrets, and with a throaty voice that George has never heard before, she says: "Some of us […] have magic powers that can twist the creatures of this earth into wondrous shapes…" (Dahl, *Marvellous Medicine* 16). The next lines sound like the description offered by the boy to introduce the witches' magical and devil powers. George's grandma also winks at metamorphosis like the mouse transformation when she says: "We know how to have you wake up in the morning with a long tail coming out from behind you" (Dahl, *Marvellous Medicine* 10).

Through the illustrations and descriptions, we can see how menacing the elder seems and consequently, how frightened is her grandson as she is leaning and pointing an accusing finger

towards him. The boy seems tense and scared to move and whenever he tries to go backward, she makes him feel guilty asking: "'You're trying to get away from me, aren't you?' [...] 'You're trying to get away from Grandma.'" (Dahl, *Marvellous Medicine* 14). When he finally manages to escape after begging her to stop her speech, she threatens him: "'It doesn't matter how far you run,' he heard her saying, 'you won't ever get away…'" (Dahl, *Marvellous Medicine* 17). According to Scott, who describes Blake's illustrations of this increasingly tense and startling interaction, "the intensity of the central three images is increased by eliminating any background, and featuring just the figures and Grandma's chair, so that the reader focuses upon the power of the passions expressed" (167). Scott points out how, for instance in the second image, the grandmother looks like a bird of prey while George is protecting himself with his arms, while in the last image, before he escapes, she has "her whole head poked far forward and a menacing expression on her face, while George leans so far backward and away from her that he almost falls over" (167).

This horrible moment makes George think that he must do something about it, so he tries to steel himself, aware that he is still afraid. Like Matilda with her adult enemies, George wants justice and thinks of everything he would like to do to his grandma. He considers scaring her using snakes or rats, but finally decides to prepare her a new medicine. He thinks that since what she usually takes does not seem to make her any better, maybe a magic medicine will cure her completely or either make her explode.[61] According to Worthington, these passages in Dahl's fantasies "allow child readers a safe space in which to explore their personal and social anxieties and to vent, in their imagination and/or unconsciously, their own feelings of anger and resentment towards the adults who control their world" (124). Hence, George takes everything he finds at his disposal from different rooms in the house, only respecting that the medicine compartment is off grounds, but using some of the animal's pills as "nobody had ever told him he mustn't touch *them*" (Dahl, *Marvellous Medicine* 33), and thus, stressing how he is clever enough to twist adult's rules about the spaces controlled by them. In this regard, in both novels the boys decide to trespass to forbidden ground; for instance, the mouse-boy enters the Grand High Witch's room to steal the formula and then, the hotel's kitchen to add it to their soup.

[61] In this regard, while most editions since the first one include the dedication "this book is to doctors everywhere," more recent editions include the following "WARNING TO READERS: Do not try to make *George's Marvellous Medicine* yourselves at home. It could be dangerous" (Dahl, *Marvellous Medicine* dedication page).

Like Salinger's narratives, these novels present two distinct intergenerational dynamics: one emphasizes solidarity, while the other exposes issues of adultism and an unfair power imbalance between adults and children. Besides, Dahl's stories offer warnings for children to unmask the adult world, as Salinger does, exposing a phony adult society. The overarching message in these novels is that constructive and collaborative relationships can thrive across big age differences if adults are willing to support and respect children's agency. Conversely, the narratives suggest that when such cooperation is lacking, children have the right to challenge existing structures and change them. In essence, these stories not only reflect adultist norms, but also encourage a critical examination and potential metamorphosis of these dynamics.

5.2.2.2 Metamorphosis and change

Drawing from folktales about witches and potions, both stories deal with medicines and formulas. Georges creates his marvelous medicine and uses it as a tool for justice, like the mouse-boy in *The Witches*. Besides, both stories deal with bodily transformations because when George gives the medicine to Grandma Kranky, she starts growing and growing, even breaking the ceiling of the house, especially after she wants to have more. As an adult, the grandmother is happy, looking bigger and scarier, while the witches turn children into a mouse to give them a weaker, smaller and more vulnerable appearance. In *George's Marvellous Medicine*, there is also a metamorphosis of animals since the boy proves the medicine in the farm animals with different outcomes, which reminds us of Willy Wonka's experiments, which are sometimes employed only for humorous purposes, but also as some sort of punishment for the insufferable children in *The Chocolate Factory,* and even for the grandparents in *The Great Glass Elevator* so they can learn a lesson.

In another novel by Dahl, *The Magic Finger*, the bodily transformation occurs as a metaphor for giving a lesson to adults about environmental consciousness. In this story, when the heroine is feeling angry, she is able to use her magic finger to make her neighbors switch bodies with a family of ducks that they are trying to shoot, so they can literally step on their shoes and understand that hunting is not a good practice. In this stance, a woman with magic powers is not considered a villain, instead she is the heroine challenging a patriarchal and violent practice, which shows how the enemies in most of Dahl's stories are the adults, regardless of their gender, and whether they have magic or real power, as they can easily use their privilege to oppress others and affect the world negatively. According to Worthington,

"what Dahl's writing for children recognises is the child's perspective, particularly when adult behaviour is inconsistent or evidently unfair" (125-126).

The boys are around the age of eight years old and thus, even if they are not going through puberty yet, as mentioned in chapter three, physical changes in stories for children could also be associated with growing up. The witches, for example, differentiate children and adults from a biological trait, the smell, which is also employed with humor and to mock adult normative rules when the grandmother advises her grandson to take fewer baths so these evil creatures cannot smell him. For instance, when Grandma Kranky is upsetting George, she points out that his problem is that he is growing up too much, so it is ironic that he invents a medicine that makes her physically grow in seconds, but she also criticizes what she considers to be childish. The ambiguous dialogue goes as follows:

> 'You know what's the matter with you?' the old woman said, staring at George over the rim of the teacup with those bright wicked little eyes. 'You're growing too fast. Boys who grow too fast become stupid and lazy.'
> 'But I can't help it if I'm growing fast, Grandma,' George said.
> 'Of course you can,' she snapped. 'Growing's a nasty childish habit.'
> 'But we *have* to grow, Grandma. If we didn't grow, we'd never be grown-ups.'
> 'Rubbish, boy, rubbish,' she said. 'Look at me. Am I growing? Certainly not.'
> 'But you did once, Grandma.'
> 'Only very *little*,' the old woman answered. 'I gave up growing when I was extremely small, along with all the other nasty childish habits like laziness and disobedience and greed and sloppiness and untidiness and stupidity. You haven't given up any of these things, have you?'
> 'I'm still only a little boy, Grandma.'
> 'You're eight years old,' she snorted. 'That's old enough to know better. If you don't stop growing soon, it'll be too late.'
> 'Too late for what, Grandma?'
> 'It's ridiculous,' she went on. 'You're nearly as tall as me already.' (Dahl, *Marvellous Medicine* 10-11)

Since the grandma does not want her grandson to grow and look taller than her and gain physical power, it makes sense that she is happy when she becomes gigantic. She also refers to some negative characteristics that she associates with the state of childhood, and like the Trunchbull in *Matilda,* almost denies being a child. Adults show ambivalence towards children, since they have negative associations about the state of childhood but, at the same time, they usually not want them to grow up. This attitude could stem from constructions about the evil, savage child that needs discipline, and the angelical child whose innocence must be preserved. As Curtis points out regarding *The Witches*, Dahl "is responding to the notion that we have indeed moved to a culture that (on the surface, at least) values and, at times, sacralizes the child" (168). For instance, while the witches want to eliminate children and what they consider to be childlike, when they transform the boy into a mouse he will not grow up as a person, but

he will still age as himself. This is stressed when the boy points out how as a mouse, he has benefits compared to being human because even if this makes him an easy target, children could be killed too, and at least now, he does not have to worry about school, money, or fighting in the war when he grows up, demonstrating that he associates adulthood to unfair and violent power structures.

At the same time, the evil characters in both stories are also punished through metamorphosis. Thanks to the formula that the mouse-boy adds to the witches' dinner, they are transformed into horrible rats that will be exterminated by the hostel staff. George invents another formula that ends up shrinking his grandmother until she vanishes, reminding us of Wonka's rejuvenating and aging pills which end up making Charlie's grandma disappear. However, Charlie's grandma is saved because even if she was a little selfish and vain about the pills, she is still a nice person and a good grandmother to the boy. On the other hand, even in a new shape, George's grandma does not change inside and keeps being grumpy, insulting her grandson, and ordering him now even in front of the parents, as she is the tallest of them all. Since she is the one that fetches the shrinking formula from the boy, at the end Mr. Kranky states: "That's what happens to you if you're grumpy and bad-tempered" (Dahl, *Marvellous Medicine* 111). According to Alston:

> Dahl's stories suggest that adults can only learn and grow through and with their children; that nurturing and prioritizing the young forces adults to lose their selfishness and become better-rounded individuals, but if they neglect to do so, they are destined to vanish literally and metaphorically and their memories and stories will not survive the generations. ("Unlikely Family Romance" 91)

I have argued, drawing from Salinger's narratives, that change is a constant possibility at any life stage. Expanding on this theme, Dahl frequently employs physical transformation as a consequence for the failure to change inwards. As discussed in the previous chapter, this also stresses the notion that life is a journey that requires constant evolution. Moreover, it challenges the perception of adulthood as an immutable stage that young people must reach, and ageing as typically associated with a decline instead of progression. The underlying idea suggests that change is an inescapable aspect of life, whether embraced or resisted. These dynamics usually influence intergenerational transmission and contribute to the emergence of generational clashes rooted in age-related differences.

5.2.2.3 Adultism and Ageism

Nikolajeva explains how intergenerational conflicts and solidarity can be explored from an evolutionary framework since grandparents or seniors taking care of children with absent parents or because parents are either working or engaged in other occupations, contribute to group survival ("Afterword" 241), but also because "evolution benefits from survival of the fittest, and fictional children are allowed to take over the world from less adaptive adults" (236). Moreover, Nikolajeva argues that from the aesthetic perspective, children's literature's purpose is to portray a conflict between young people and grownups, especially through carnivalesque narrative devices intended to subvert roles and hierarchies ("Afterword" 234). Therefore, from a narrative point of view, disdainful adult characters are also there to play a role in the plot and move it forward because, as Joosen points out, "in children's books they often serve as antagonistic characters who challenge the child to embark on an adventure and who are often defeated in the end" (*Adulthood* 131). This is the case of George's grandma and the witches, or even James' aunts, who are crushed by the peach. Furthermore, children's literature compares and contrasts adult figures offering role models which could make the adult reader a learning subject as well (Joosen, *Adulthood* 28), as discussed in chapter two.

Therefore, in both novels, the boys are allowed to have agency to defeat adultism because they are the ones who make the plans to face their antagonists and, instead of being punished as in a conventional moralizing story, they are assisted by positive adult figures, as the grandmother in *The Witches* and Mr. Kranky. Bergson-Shilcock argues that with the grandmother as an ally, the boy challenges different forms of authority throughout the story and even if the elder is creative and seems that there is no problem she cannot solve, she asks and listens for the boy's ideas, suggestions and opinions, which this scholar considers a "fairly radical behavior for an adult in a children's book" (447). Gubar proposes the kinship model to challenge the idea that adults and children are complete opposites or that because children are in a state of dependency, they cannot have agency; instead, adults and children are akin or interrelated to each other and both have agency ("Hermeneutics," 297-300; "Risky Business," 453-454. Moreover, since development is not a linear path, children should not be underestimated, while we should not overestimate adult's capacities because people from different ages could have different abilities (Gubar "Hermeneutics," 297-300; "Risky Business," 453-454).

This is perfectly illustrated through the grandmother and boy's plan because each one uses their abilities to defeat the witches; for example, while the mouse-boy has better possibilities of entering places without being noticed, the grandma is the one in charge of creating distractions as she is good at striking conversations and convincing people. Besides, both the grandmother in *The Witches* and George's father recognize their child's agency through uplifting honest words like "genius," "tremendous" and "fantastic" to celebrate their ideas and inventions, as Danny's father does with his boy when he calls him the "champion of the world" (Dahl, *The Champion of the World* 153). For instance, after testing the medicine on the farm animals with great results since they become bigger, George's dad proposes to his son to prepare more medicine so they can sell to every farmer and not only become rich and famous, but also resolve world hunger; in fact, Mr. Kranky sees a social potential in his sons' invention pointing out that it will change the world (Pötzsch 154).

Even if the dad helps the son to recreate what he has done and encourages him in the process, George is not able to redo the medicine, but instead ends up preparing the one that has the opposite effects, so the grandmother vanishes as a result. Referring to this type of carnivalesque plot where the child defeats the adult, Nikolajeva points out how "this script also conveys the message that adults are not necessarily omniscient and omnipotent—to put it plainly, that children have the potential to make the world a better place" ("Afterword" 236). In this regard, the witches also stand for the representation of adultist structures as they have an authoritarian system based on abuse of power and use of force, where the Grand High Witch mistreats her subjects who are a homogenized crowd that only follows her rules out of fear, and offer her praises, while she only employs diminishing and abusive language towards them (Albuja Aguilar, "Oppressive Structures" 34). They also use the capitalist system in their favor, apparently through money laundering, and exploit hierarchic institutions; for example, the plan includes schools setting mousetraps after finding mice instead of students (Albuja Aguilar, "Oppressive Structures" 35). Like Danny and his father standing up to Mr. Hazell, grandma and grandson work together to defeat unfair social structures too.

Therefore, in the end they both want to continue to travel and get rid of witches from all over the world, knowing that they have short lives ahead of them:

> My grandmother picked me up off the table and kissed me on the nose. 'Oh, my goodness me, we're going to be busy these next few weeks and months and years!' she cried.
> 'I think we are,' I said. 'But what fun and excitement it's going to be!'
> 'You can say that again!' my grandmother cried, giving me another kiss. 'I can't wait to get started!' (Dahl, *The Witches* 201)

Addressing children's books with elder characters, especially about old widows that find motivation and embark on new adventures, defeating common stereotypes associated with old age as inflexibility, resistance to change, and lack of creativity, Joosen argues that "this future-oriented-stance makes clear that [...], life can hold new experiences and the potential of growth at any age, not just in childhood" (*Adulthood* 91). This could be true for the ending of *The Witches* too and the development of the grandmother as a character. In this regard, children's literature could hold a more optimistic discourse about old age than what is usually portrayed in narratives aimed at adults focusing on the strengths of a late-life stage (Joosen, "Second Childhoods" 136).

Joosen mentions that life course theories can show how life stages are diversified through children's literature and provides examples that portray seniors in a positive way, as opposed to adult books that often represent it as a period of loss and pain ("Second Childhoods" 127). For instance, *The Witches* shows how a child can face and handle loss and death, and how an old person can still have a fresh start and experience change in several ways. In fact, the books that Joosen considers for her study "describe an alliance between young and elderly characters on the basis of four related aspects: an interest in stories and the supernatural, a connection with the past, a passion for fighting social injustice, and a fondness for play" ("Second Childhoods" 128), also found in Dahl's novel, as well as the fact that "the relationship with an older person is usually constructed as being in the child's best interest, fostering his or her agency, emotional strength, and imagination" (Joosen, "Second Childhoods" 128).

While *The Witches* offers an example of intergenerational solidarity, generational transmission and complicity between an old person and a child, *George's Marvellous Medicine* provides a representation of conflict in family dynamics and intergenerational relations between old and young people. In this respect, Worthington argues that:

> While children will enjoy the humour of *George's Marvellous Medicine*, the potentially realistic depiction of family dynamics in which an elderly relative is seen as intrusive and unwanted—indeed, the entirely negative representation of old age—is relatively unusual in children's literature, which tends to support rather than criticise the ideology of family. *The Witches* (1983), by contrast, offers a positive depiction of the elderly in the figure of the grandmother. (127)

Therefore, the representation of George's grandmother could be considered ageist as it might be associated "with the 'decline narrative' that dominates Western thinking: growing old is depicted as an unpleasant ride downhill, with death looming at the bottom," and "this model empowers youth at the expense of the elderly" (Joosen, "Second Childhoods" 126). In fact,

seniors are often represented only in the interaction with the child and from their point of view, similarly to other grownup characters in stories aimed at a young audience (Joosen, "Second Childhoods" 137). This can be noticed through the third-person narrative voice that following a typical Dahlesque technique to take the side of the child, interferes in the story by referring to George's grandmother in a diminishing way, with descriptions like "old hag," "old grunion," "old witch," "old grouch" and aligned with the same thoughts as the boy, and possibly the young reader, which are not supposed to be said out loud because of normative rules that dictate that young people should respect and obey their seniors.

On the other hand, we see examples of disrespectful adults in several of Dahl's stories, and insults to children are commonplace, like James' aunts, that instead of comforting him when he is crying, diminish him calling him often "nasty little beast," "disgusting," "lazy" and "stupid" (Donaldson 136); the witches who consider children "repulsive," "revolting," "foul" and "filthy," and George's grandma as aforesaid. Therefore, it makes sense that children in Dahl's stories are equated with small and vulnerable animals and creatures, to which humans, especially adults, address with the same adjectives, like insects and mice. In this sense, the boy in *The Witches* asks Bruno if his parents will treat him with sympathy and kindness after they find out he has been turned into a mouse, as he is sure his grandma will do; hence, they consult her first on what to do and also, in the ending, she adapts the house to the needs of the mouse-boy. On the contrary, Bruno's parents ironically own a cat and do not end up accepting him as his dad represents the normative mature male adult. For instance, he underestimates the powers of the witches for looking like women, and thinks that the grandmother is a silly old woman for telling him something beyond his comprehension, and finally, he threats to talk to the police and his lawyers about his child's metamorphosis. In this regard, Joosen argues that some children's books:

> [C]ast the young as empowered, intelligent, and sensitive beings and suggest that the equation with childhood is the biggest compliment an adult can receive. They project not the weaknesses, but the supposed strengths of childhood—creativity, fantasy, curiosity—onto old age ("Second Childhoods" 129).

Adult characters with childlike characteristics are usually represented positively; however, older people can be infantilized too, in a diminishing way. In this regard, Joosen refers to other stereotypes about old age that are common in literature and points out how both infantilizing, but also equating wisdom to old age could be prejudicial too because then, intense emotions, especially anger, are not tolerated or dismissed even as a sign of illness or dementia ("Second

Childhoods" 132). For example, even if Mrs. Kranky is at times worried about her mom, both she and her husband often refer to her as a "nuisance" and "annoying" because of her difficult character.

On the other hand, the grandmother in *The Witches* is a complex character; for instance, she could exhibit childlike positive characteristics when she encourages play and adventure in her grandson, but also takes everything seriously concerning his well-being, showing a wide range of emotions ranging from anger, frustration, and sadness to cheerfulness and excitement, acting wise, but also human. These emotions can be noticed through the tender scene when she first sees her grandson as a mouse and seems deeply affected. She has poor health, but she is also active, so there is no denial of old age and physical limitations which could also be misrepresented according to Joosen ("Second Childhoods" 136). For instance, this might be exaggerated with Charlie's grandparents that cannot even move from bed.

Children can also connect with older characters because of their vulnerability, and this is why parents, who represent middle-age and the pick of adult privilege, are often excluded from this bond which is usually fortified through memories and stories (Joosen, "Second Childhoods" 133-135). For instance, in *The Witches*, the grandmother relives trauma when she remembers everything that the witches did to her childhood friends and even there is a wink to something horrible that happened to her back then, as she has a missing thumb and seems upset to talk about it. However, she still wants to help her grandson, so he and other children do not have to face a similar fate and live under constant danger. In this regard, she is an enabler who believes that it is better to talk to children about difficult topics than let them remain ignorant with the goal of preserving their innocence, and indirectly affecting them.

Furthermore, even with the grandma's love and support, trauma already hunts the boy's life because he has experienced the loss of both his parents, and when her grandmother is diagnosed with pneumonia, he "is made vividly aware of the fact that his grandmother does not have much time left" (Donaldson 138), and is at risk of being orphaned again (Worthington 128). Finally, he must face his own mortality as a mouse, even if he will not outlive his grandmother, which makes the ending of the story reassuring in some degree, but already exposes him to dealing with loss as part of life and a finite existence. Therefore, the stories explored in this section delve into themes of loss, whether physical or metaphorical, resulting in a depiction of vulnerability akin to the examination of sibling communities in the earlier part of this chapter.

The extended family is at the center of most of Dahl's narratives and grandparents play a significant role in shaping children's experiences. Within these family structures, grandparents either uphold traditional hierarchies based on age or demonstrate the powerful intergenerational bond that emerges when bridging the beginning and end of life. This unique connection stems from the shared experience of age-based discrimination faced by both children and seniors, as neither conforms to the societal norms of a mature adult. The narratives portray elders and women alike as often being infantilized, fostering a camaraderie with the younger family members who also contend with being dismissed, diminished and ignored.

Even with the power that grownups always have over children, female adult characters in these four stories are equated with children as they are sometimes treated similarly by the society and thus, are perceived through similar social constructions on the basis of age and gender. Besides, women are usually associated with the home and child-rearing practices, even if they usually do not have a room of their own. At the same time, there is a division of spaces between children and adults who usually have more control and possibility of surveillance over the youngest, something that all these narratives exemplify.

While in children's books adults are usually presented from the perspective of the child, as threatening or trustworthy, in the short stories for older audiences that have been first analyzed, there is a limited perspective from both sides, stressing the otherness between the hidden child and the hidden adult. While "Down at the Dinghy" and *The Witches* portray caring relationships among characters to defeat or understand external power structures, like adultism and antisemitism, "Uncle Wiggily" and *George* depict children facing adults that are hard on them, even if they are family members. In response, these children must either assert their agency, as George does, or demonstrate compassion, like Ramona with her mother.

Beauvais' theory, suggesting that adult authority is rooted in experience, finds resonance in these stories, offering opportunities for adults to undergo metamorphosis or inner change. This may lead to intergenerational bonds and collaboration with children based on common ground or complementary agency, or alternatively, adults may find themselves defeated by the younger generation, highlighting the existential future that lies ahead for the youth. In all four stories, whether for adults or children, inventions and play serve to accentuate intergenerational solidarity or conflict, setting the stage for further exploration of similar instances through the lens of education and friendship between adults and children in the subsequent section.

### 5.3 Adult-child duets: an analysis of *Charlie* and *Matilda*

*James and the Giant Peach* provides an important example of child's deprivation; James is deprived of love, friends, education, toys, and a happy childhood as he is enslaved, imprisoned and mistreated by his aunts. In consequence, he seems to be suffering from depression, as we can guess from the following description: "he became sadder and sadder, and more and more lonely, and he used to spend hours every day standing at the bottom of the garden, gazing wistfully at the lovely but forbidden world" (Dahl, *The Giant Peach* 4-5). Since the world seems forbidden to James, he goes on an exploration far away accompanied by insects, that serve as an allegory of the treatment he receives, and ends up living happily by himself, surrounded by children. The young heroes from *Matilda* and *Charlie*'s saga move from home, as well, to change their previous circumstances of deprivation. Matilda lacks adult figures that encourage her skills and abilities which she later finds in her teacher, Miss Honey, who becomes her new caregiver. And what better than inheriting and moving to a chocolate factory to alleviate Charlie's hunger caused by life in extreme poverty.

In this regard, Donaldson argues that Dahl often places children in dysfunctional families where they feel lonely, frightening and cruel environments, but never leaves them stranded there; instead, they are empowered through fantasy and magic, so eventually they can find new familial relationships and safe spaces where they are loved (131-134). For instance, these novels empower the young heroes by depicting Matilda as smarter than all the adults around her and even granting her with a telekinesis power at least until her new life is restored. Or after Charlie receives the factory, he is encouraged to feel more confident in the sequel, where he takes a leading role next to Willy Wonka as seen in the previous chapter. In both cases, as Nikolajeva would suggest, they return to adult normativity, unlike James, but at the same time, since real children need care from grownups, these stories provide examples of characters that end up in healthier and better places for their development, where their agency and individuality will be respected. Therefore, both novels feature solidarity in intergenerational relations through these celebrated adult-child duets, while also delving into themes of friendship, mentorship and education, as well as agency to face injustice. The following pages will be dedicated to analyzing these aspects on these novels.

### 5.3.1 Family, home, and injustice

Both *Charlie* and *Matilda* dedicate one of the first chapters to introducing family life connected to space and class. According to Alston, "by placing the home at the beginning of the narrative it is shown to be integral to the text; it is the foundation of the story regardless of whether it is a good or bad home" (*The Family* 75). Matilda lives in a typical suburban middle-class house where each child has a bedroom of their own, separated from the parents, and the first floor is divided into the dining room, living room and kitchen, creating a conventional separation of spaces between adults and children. On the other hand, Charlie's home is described as "small wooden house on the edge of a great town" (Dahl, *The Chocolate Factory* 14), with two rooms, one where the grandparents share a bed, and a second one for Charlie and his parents to share, which means that the boy has no privacy, but also there is no separation of spaces according to age or gender in the family. In this regard, Alston points out how the working-class home in children's literature is usually an ideal of the middle-class nineteenth-century home (70), which is also illustrated in Miss Honey's fairy-tale cottage.

In the novel, Charlie's life is described as unfortunate as his father is the only one that provides for the family, but at some point, he loses his job in the toothpaste factory and the only way to support his family is by shoveling snow from the streets. Miss Honey's living conditions are closer to the Bucket's since her tiny and old "farm-labourer's cottage" is located outside of town, in a rural area, where she must take water from a well (Dahl, *Matilda* 177); and inside, she does not have proper furniture, heating, or enough food. Charlie's life in extreme poverty is also emphasized through the lack of food; the tiny meals the family has are detailed and their hunger is accentuated as it gets cold during the winter when the grandparents are described as "bony as skeletons" (Dahl, *The Chocolate Factory* 19), and Charlie as growing "thinner and thinner" (58). These descriptions are contrasted with Charlie's walk to school while he sees "great slabs of chocolate piled up high in the shop windows" (Dahl, *The Chocolate Factory* 16), or when he passes in front of the factory and "hold his nose high in the air and take long deep sniffs of the gorgeous chocolate smell all around him" (18).

In both cases, the stories revolve around the approach to food consumption through dinner and family time. For instance, even if they do not eat much more than cabbage soup, the Buckets enjoy storytelling after supper which makes them forget for a while their hunger and poverty, much like in *The Witches* when the grandmother begins to tell stories to her grandson to face their grief after the parents' accident. On the other hand, Matilda's hunger is for

knowledge which is not appreciated by his parents who believe "looks is more important than books" (Dahl, *Matilda* 91). Hence, storytelling is used as a tool for rebellion and resilience by Matilda as well, for example, after being left alone by her parents in the afternoons, she discovers her chocolate factory at the library, where she devours the classics encouraged by the librarian, Mrs. Phelps.

However, considering that "contemporary children's literature often represents child characters whose time left, uses of time, and internal rhythms are constantly under threat from the adults that surround it" (Beauvais 57), at dinner, the girl is forced to watch soap operas and eat ready-made meals from trays, which makes it ironic when the father states that "supper is a family gathering and no one leaves the table till it's over!" (Dahl, *Matilda* 22). Consequently, Alston points out how "the heroine escapes her family by retreating to her bedroom with a variety of books" pointing out how rooms can have a double function as a "sanctuary to run to in times of emotional distress" or a space where children are punished or imprisoned (*The Family in English CL* 99), like in *The Giant Peach*.

Considering the period in which both novels were published, it makes sense that Charlie's family is described as living in hunger and poverty to remind us of the context of the British postwar austerity, while Matilda, set in the eighties, features a consumerist middle-class family, a model which was more consolidated at the time. To some extent, the novel criticizes and mocks this social class and the nuclear family's suburban values depicting the parents as corrupted and materialistic who only enjoy superficial activities, while the story ends with a single woman adopting Matilda; in *The Chocolate Factory*, the extended family and even the inclusion of Wonka is represented as positive. In this regard, Alston argues that the one-parent family replacing the nuclear biological family seems radical and forward-looking even if the signifiers of what makes a good family remain conventional ("Unlikely Family Romance" 94).

Considering the financial situation in both stories, Matilda's father owns a second-hand dealer shop where he uses tricks like turning the mileage down to persuade his clients into buying cars. Mr. Wormwood is creative in his fraud, but not clever enough to keep his business running; when the authorities are looking for him, he manages to escape to Spain where he will probably continue pursuing fraudulent activities as he does not seem to repent from his previous shady dealings. Even if at the beginning of the novel, he points out that Matilda's brother is going to inherit the business and not the girl, at the end of the story, he does not really seem to care about any of his children's future. These generational unfairness goes further with

Miss Honey because the terrible Miss Trunchbull, her aunt and the school headmistress, has stolen everything she had from her when her father died, taking advantage of the fact that her niece was a child when she was left under her care. Moreover, she treated her orphaned niece as a servant in a Cinderella plotline like *James,*' cutting all the possibilities for her to develop and gain independence until she is finally able to free herself at twenty-one years old.

On the other hand, in *The Chocolate Factory*, we find an entirely different kind of businessman and process of generational transmission. Willy Wonka wants to revolutionize things with his inventions; for example, he creates gums that represent a complete meal and sweets that can be grabbed directly from advertisements on TV, and since his former employees were selling such recipes and ideas to other entrepreneurs, he ends up locking the factory from the public, although he mysteriously keeps selling his delicious products. In fact, he is creative in every way he runs his business, devoting himself to his inventions, defending his intellectual property, finding magical employees that he pays with cacao beans,[62] but also looking for the right heir to leave his factory because he does not want to lose what he has built; he wants that future generations keep enjoying his products, even if he won't gain anything from that later. In this regard, Beauvais points out how adults invest in children based on the idea of future progress (70), even knowing that the result will take place after the adult's death, which is usually due to existential aspirations and a desire to instruct per se (84).

Moreover, Charlie's family lovingly cares for him. Like *The Witches* and *George's Marvellous Medicine*, the *Charlie* novels give a significant role to grandparents, even over parents who in this case are not absent or dead, but do not seem to play a big role in the adventures. According to Joosen, middle-age in children's books is usually associated with domestic or monotonous tasks and stress since adults are rarely seen having fun or engaging in important activities, unless it is at the service of the child, like parenting or exercising professional tasks (*Adulthood* 83-84), as in the novel, where traditionally, the father is the breadwinner and the mother is in charge of home care. The grandparents are described as being over ninety and not able to move from their bed, so their only joy is spending time with Charlie.

[62]Due to the depictions of the Oompa Loompas as a workforce that came from the jungle, and references to the fact that they have learned English, but still wear deerskin and leaves dresses, it resonates with colonized workers in imperial Great Britain as Novy points out in his analysis of the original and the updated novel, as well as the film adaptations, "Willy Wonka and the Imperial Chocolate Factory." Since Dahl himself experienced working for Shell in Africa, Culley observes that "this looks more like a personal insight into imperialism and traditional relations between the industrialized and Third World countries" (65). In some way Dahl translates the colonial ideology that was normalized at the time, as well as the nullification of othered populations, but at the same time, satirizes this system as Singh points out (104).

In this regard, Beauvais argues that "while the adult perceives itself as anchored, situated and blocked, it sees the child as future-bound, free-flowing and boundless. Hope is the specific modality of the existential wait at the heart of children's literature" (49). When Charlie visits, the grandparents have something to look forward to, and at the same time, they are all concerned about his well-being; for instance, when the family is starving during winter, the elders worry because they think that a growing boy needs to eat, and although they want to share their part, their grandson refuses to take food from them. Even with their lack of means, the family finds a way to treat Charlie with one annual chocolate on his birthday that the child eats painfully slow to make it last and in this case, it is Charlie who offers to share the bar, but the adults do not allow him.

As described, both narratives portray unfairness, but while Matilda will take matters into her own hands, for Charlie an opportunity arises that will change his fortune. Willy Wonka, the Chocolate Factory's owner, has launched a contest that consists of finding the golden tickets hidden in chocolate bars and anyone who finds one is invited to a tour inside the factory that has been closed to the public for a long time. The grandparents believe there is a chance for Charlie to find the golden ticket, but also prepare the boy for disappointment, knowing that there are children with more possibilities in the world, so they try to remain calm, but also share the tension and excitement of the moment. As the winners are announced, it is disclosed that they are spoiled and privileged and, in most cases, their parents made sure they won, for example, by buying several amounts of chocolate bars. Thus, Charlie's grandpa Joe helps his grandson to buy a couple more chocolate bars and as impossible as it may seem, the boy ends up finding non less than the last golden ticket.

Therefore, they are all concerned about Charlie's growth and future possibilities and potential, which is usually associated with hope, but at the same time, when Grandpa Joe invests more is also because he is facing the possibility of change for himself as well. From the beginning, Grandpa Joe is the storyteller, like the grandmother in *The Witches*, and the one who transmits what he knows about the factory and its owner to the child. The text illustrates this as follows: "In the evenings, when Charlie, his beloved grandson, was in the room, he seemed in some marvellous way to grow quite young again. All his tiredness fell away from him, and he became as eager and excited as a young boy" (Dahl, *The Chocolate Factory* 22). Therefore, when Charlie finds the golden ticket, this moment is captured through Blake's illustrations that depict the grandpa jumping from the bed and Charlie staring at him. Jeffcoat

points out how Grandpa Joe's life goes from anesthetic to a heightened vitality because the world now becomes alive with possibilities and wonder both for his grandson and himself (210-211).

Thus, while the other four selected children bring their parents, Charlie goes with his grandpa to the tour at the Chocolate Factory, and while the parenting of the other kids is questioned throughout the novel even by the grandparents when the winners are announced on the TV, the intergenerational relationship between Grandpa Joe and the boy is depicted as positive. For instance, in the novel's sequel, when the elevator lifts, both Charlie and Grandpa confess that they are scared and hold each other, challenging roles where either the old or young person has to show bravery to protect the one that seems more vulnerable; and when the commuter capsule is threatened by the Vermicious Knids, they both show that they selflessly care about helping other people, as well as Wonka, while the rest of the crew is also worried about their own well-being during the dangerous operation.

Drawing from the conceptual dimensions employed to measure intergenerational solidarity, the relationship between Charlie and his grandparents, especially with his Grandpa Joe, stresses the affectual or affectional solidarity, or feelings of closeness and reciprocity, as well as the consensual solidarity which, as explained, refers to the shared values, views and beliefs among different generations on a family (Bengtson and Oyama 42), also prevalent in the relationship between the boy and his grandma in *The Witches*. Even when the grandparents turn into babies in the sequel—which could be a way of infantilizing them, Charlie always treats them with kindness and affection, showing his respect both to his seniors and juniors.

Hence, while all members of Charlie's family love and respect the child, Matilda's family is just the contrary; they are sexist and adultist toward her, and do not care at all about her well-being. According to Todres and Higinbotham, "Roald Dahl's classic children's book *Matilda* confronts the experience of being both a child in an adult-dominated world and a girl in a patriarchal society, the intersection of two different forms of discrimination" (78). This can be noticed in the way the Wormwoods treat her since she is baby and learns to speak properly at the age of one and a half years old and her parents "told her sharply that small girls should be seen and not heard" (Dahl, *Matilda* 5). Later, when Matilda solves a difficult arithmetic problem off the top of her head, the father points out that she must be cheating because it seems impossible for anyone to do that, "especially a girl" (Dahl, *Matilda* 49). According to Pennell, Matilda suffers from "parental psychological abuse connected to her

gender" in a family where his brother is favored over her (114). At the same time, when Matilda points out that the family business is dirty, Mrs. Wormwood tells her to not talk to his father like that, although he just called the girl ignorant, stressing how she must respect her parents only because of their authority or seniority over her.

In this regard, at the beginning of the novel, the narrative voice points out how most parents elevate their kids even if they are terrible, like the parents of the spoiled children in *The Chocolate Factory,* and while Matilda is introduced as sensitive and brilliant, Mr. and Mrs. Wormwood usually diminish and ignore her. Hence, "readers of *Matilda* are invited to adopt a critical attitude with regard to adult authority, and to trust in his or her own intelligence and moral judgment instead" (Kullmann 177). Like George with Grandma Kranky, Matilda hates her parents and feels anger towards them, although she also shows remorse since it is a typical adult normative message to respect parents, elders, and love family members regardless of how they behave. In this regard, Pennell argues that "the novel repudiates idealisations of the nuclear family and suggests that 'familial bonds' may be non-existent among biological kin" (114). The fact that Matilda is gifted and precocious seems to represent a problem or challenge for her parents making the girl an easy target for their contempt, resentment, and misogynist attitudes (Butterfield 36).

A similar situation occurs in one of Salinger's short stories "Teddy" (1953) which features a child prodigy and specialist in Eastern religions whose hostile parents fail to understand, representing the materialistic, corrupted, selfish and egocentric adult world of the U.S. postwar society (Kaufman 116). According to Kaufman, through this mystic persona, the unloved and frightened ten-year-old boy is looking for the acceptance and love he desperately needs, but also to gain independence and distance himself from his uncaring family and the adult world that is satirized through this story (107-109). In this regard, Kullmann argues that:

> Evil is no longer something which belongs to some outside world; it rather proceeds from those whom a child would normally be must inclined to trust and respect. It is the child's protagonist's own parents, whom from carelessness, greed or passion, act irresponsibly. The child protagonists get an awareness of human (adult, parental) failings and learn to question parental authority. (182)

While *Teddy* ends in a tragedy with the self-predicted death of the child hero in an accident at the pool on board while touring Great Britain since he had been interviewed by adults from the academic world at universities, reminding us of Zooey Glass, Matilda's fate is much more optimistic. She decides that she is not a victim of her destiny and that every time her parents

behave horribly towards her, she will get back at them in some way, although, "it is not easy for somebody as small as that to score points against an all-powerful grown-up. Even so, she was determined to have a go" (Dahl, *Matilda* 23), as the narrator explains, stressing her agency to face adultism using her intelligence.

According to Stallcup, "the character of Matilda functions quite subversively in many ways: she is exceedingly intelligent—much more intelligent than her parents—and she outwits the adults around her in humorous ways" adding that "such derision makes the adults appear foolish and undercuts the status and authority that we normally associate with adulthood" (44). For example, she puts superglue on her father's hat and, later makes him accidentally dye his hair blond. At this point maybe she is not defeating adult power and normativity yet because she is still very small and young—as she is only five years old and consequently, forced to obey her parents (Dahl, *Matilda* 43), but at least through the pranks intended to make them look silly, she is interrogating, mocking and ridiculing the adult world—as Nikolajeva suggests referring to another heroine of children's literature Pippi Longstocking[63] (*Power* 49).

The slapstick humor is intertwined with issues of gender as mentioned above; for example, the ironic narrator signals how Mr. Wormwood always had to make a loud entrance: "One could almost hear him saying, 'It's me! Here I come, the great man himself, the master of the house, the wage-earner, the one who makes it possible for all the rest of you to live so well! Notice me and pay your respects!'" (Dahl, *Matilda* 53-54). He suddenly requests his breakfast to his wife, who in turn screams in shock noticing his dyed hair, so the narrative is mocking his arrogance as he becomes the center of attention, but for the wrong reasons. In another scene, when Mr. Wormwood arrives irritable from work, Matilda is on his way reading calmly in the living room which makes him even more upset as his daughter is enjoying something he is not able to understand, as the narrator singles out (Dahl, *Matilda* 32-33), so he replies violently destroying a book she has borrowed from the library. To counterattack, Matilda brings a parrot home and hides him, letting him talk, and when Mrs. Wormwood asks her husband to save and protect the family since they think they are facing burglars or a ghost, he only shows he is scared and does not exhibit even a slight indication of bravery, stressing

[63] Natov actually makes a comparison between these two heroines in his book *The Courage to Imagine the Child Hero in Children's literature (2019),* in a section titled Girl Power inside the chapter dedicated to "New Visions of Childhood."

how characteristics that are usually associated to men, like anger and violence, are only signs of weakness and ignorance.

At the same time, Mrs. Wormwood may seem complicit to patriarchy, but she is also benefiting from it (Pennell 116); for instance, in a conversation with Miss Honey about Matilda's skills she states that women should make themselves look attractive to find a husband and that a girl does not get a man by being smart (Dahl, *Matilda* 91-93). In fact, she points out how she is happy to be married to a businessman that provides for her so she can live in a nice house, and apparently, being able to spend her days playing bingo which seems to be her main activity and not home care (Pennell 116). Thus, she is smart enough to take advantage of the situation and use it at her convenience, showing how she is probably only playing along with her husband and telling him what he wants to hear because she tells Matilda: "I'm afraid men are not always quite as clever as they think they are. You will learn that when you get a bit older, my girl" (Dahl, *Matilda* 59); and when her husband has the hat glued on, she thinks he looks stupid, "hardly the kind of man a wife dreams about" (Dahl, *Matilda* 29). She criticizes Miss Honey, diminishing her profession teaching kids, as if this was not merit, and hence, the narrative voice satirizes these traditional roles showing the moral superiority of Miss Honey as a working, single and educated woman.

In this case, it is the child who returns Miss Honey her autonomy, as I will analyze next, but in return, she will take care of Matilda; hence, to some extent, they both reclaim what was intended for their generation. At the same time, for Charlie, winning the golden ticket to visit the Chocolate Factory signifies that his life circumstances will change forever once he becomes Wonka's heir, receiving similar possibilities that other spoiled kids have from the start. Therefore, through functional solidarity, "the giving and receiving of support, usually financial, across generations" (Bengtson and Oyama 42), Wonka is passing on what he owns to someone that really needs it, rather than perpetuating privilege; by doing so, he is redistributing wealth. When Wonka explains that the tour to the factory was intended to choose his heir, he states that he had a hunch that Charlie was going to win, explaining that the boy will run it someday. In some way, through this functional exchange, he is empowering the child that needs the most to face an unequal world, whereas the other children are encouraged by their parents on any whim, even if it is irresponsible or selfish. The next part is dedicated to analyzing injustice in both stories and how the children are empowered to face it, through the subversion of power structures and the support of childlike adults.

### 5.3.2 Under attack: Adultism and unfair power structures

*Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* and *Matilda* are underdog stories and "beneath the simple underdog tale lies our desire for something more. We desire justice—and a particular kind of justice" that entails reward for the heroes and accountability for their oppressors (Held 19-20). Charlie's antagonists are external to his home and community; for instance, in *The Chocolate Factory,* his antagonists are the spoiled children who portray privileged classes, while in *The Great Glass Elevator* he must face fantastic figures and worlds that empower him to act with bravery, turning the underdog into a hero in a typical Dahlesque plot. On the other hand, Matilda's adversaries are closer to her and "thus has two fronts on which she is under attack, school and home" (Donaldson 139). Both novels share similarities with *Danny, The Champion of the World* since the hero receives violence from a teacher, but is also under the threat of the richest man in the city, Mr. Hazell. What all these narratives have in common is that the child is challenged by an unfair enemy with unlikely possibilities to succeed due to their vulnerability and social status as children, even if in the end they find agency and are empowered to do it. As mentioned, Matilda's anger toward her oppressors at home and school leads her to take justice into her own hands, making pranks on her parents and the principal (Butterfield 39).

Leonard introduces the concept of generagency to study the "relational processes and the links between macro childhood and children's everyday lives," where the generational component plays a role in determining the location and positioning of childhood and adulthood, while recognizing the agency that children play in constructing their own lives (154-155). There are the following two derivative concepts that could play a role in determining such agency:

> Intergeneragency draws attention to the different generational positionings of children and adults which reflect hierarchical relationships, power differences and constraints within which children's agency may be practiced while intrageneragency emphasizes the diverse ways by which children are positioned within generational relationships based on structural variables such as race, class and gender which intersect with childhood to produce diverse experiences for children. (Spyrou 124)

Therefore, social constructions and factors of social difference play a significant role in determining how much agency and how empowered an individual can be. Children's freedom is often constrained both by different forms of authority from the adult world as they are dependent on them (Foy and Dale 112), and the social conditions they are offered that do not always give them the options to materialize their dreams due to "structural barriers that eliminate choice by denying access to opportunities" (Foy and Dale 118). For example,

"Charlie is characterised from the beginning as the least likely to succeed" (Cogan Thacker 21), which is stressed when the grandparents are aware of the fact that the children that can afford to buy chocolate every day have more chances of finding a golden ticket; even more for children like Veruca Salt, whose father owns a peanut factory where he has made all his female employees look for the tickets. Besides, Augustus Gloop even receives a parade and a holiday from his town to celebrate him finding the golden ticket showing how "society often seems to praise those who possess the most money or power or fame (…) In such cases, wealth or status become a benchmark for what is praiseworthy, rather than evaluating individuals based on other traits like kindness, compassion, honesty, and altruism" (Foy and Dale 111).

When grandpa and grandson go to the factory where Charlie's luck will finally work in his favor, the families are welcomed by Wonka and his employees, the celebrated Oompa Loompas, who assist, sing, and mock the children's misadventures along the tour. The families take a "pink boiled-sweet boat" along a chocolate river (Dahl, *The Chocolate Factory* 106), and get to visit different rooms in the building where most of the children are victims of Wonka's inventions. The gluttonous Augustus Gloop falls into the Chocolate River, while Violet Beauregarde, addicted to chewing gum, blows up and her skin turns blueberry, and Mike Teavee, a TV addict, is shrunken down by a television device. Charlie remains respectful following the instructions, while the other children misbehave showing their impoliteness and self-centeredness which leads them into trouble and in most cases, the parents are also to blame (Held 27-28); for example, the spoiled Veruca Salt and her parents are thrown down the rubbish chute after she unluckily tries to catch a nut-test squirrel, which her parents intended to buy from Wonka.

Therefore, the four children are caricatures of bad habits or sins, offering commentary on modern capitalist lifestyle, a model that promotes exacerbated consumerism and consumption, and mass media—which Charlie does not have access too. Instead, he is a model child, kind-hearted and generous even in poverty, so the hero is the conventionally good boy (Stallcup 45), following the construction of the angelical innocent child. This is reinforced by Wonka's speech when he refers to the children that have been left behind as "naughty" and the ones that are still standing on the tour as "good" (Dahl, *The Chocolate Factory* 130). "Forming a sort of Greek chorus commenting morally on the action" (Rudd, "Roald Dahl and Language" 58), the Oompa Loompas sing and make fun of the children and their parents, warning them about their destiny and providing cautionary tales in both novels. Wonka also laughs and makes

jokes, teasing the parents and making them look foolish, reminding us of Matilda with her parents. Due to their greed and selfishness, the children receive these humorous physical punishments, which could also "suggest how Dahl encourages young readers to laugh at issues related to their own expanding, developing bodies" (Stallcup 32), as in *The Witches* with the mouse-boy transformation, while Charlie is rewarded with generosity so he can help his starving family (Cogan Thacker 22). As Held points out:

> He (Charlie) remains hopeful and good in a world that seems hell-bent on seeing him and his family fail. Meanwhile, we hear of these other children, these rotten, spoiled, gluttonous, ungrateful children who are afforded every luxury, and have every whim satisfied for no other reason than that they were lucky enough to be born into wealth and privilege. (29-30)

Therefore, the reader roots for underdogs like Charlie and Matilda and not only wish that the wicked receive punishment, but also for the heroes to be rewarded (Held 30); in a few words, it encourages us "to demand justice," which Wonka later provides when Charlie earns his spot as the Chocolate Factory's heir only by being his authentic self and offering us "a glimpse of human dignity" (Held 32). At the same time, this novel follows the good and bad child tropes introduced in the first chapter, holding a more conventional moralistic premise,[64] and it is not until the sequel that Charlie has a more active role and displays leadership skills. According to Foy and Dale:

> Many of Dahl's protagonists are children who come from backgrounds of poverty (or at least of simple means), are orphans, or suffer physical and emotional abuse. Among his other heroes are anthropomorphic bugs or animals that are usually looked down upon […] These are not what are commonly thought of as heroic figures. Yet, by focusing on the least advantaged members in a society, Dahl causes us to truly reflect on how just and fair our rules are. (116)

Charlie suffers from socioeconomic inequality, while Matilda faces violence, abuse, and neglect due to her gender and for being a child, which makes them both disempowered and marginalized from the start, but through justice and virtue they overcome different forms of oppressive structures (Foy and Dale 107). Matilda employs and devices funny punishments in a similar way to Wonka with the spoiled children, but in this case, it is the child that punishes the selfish privileged adults, so we can see how Dahl goes from a conventional moralizing story in the sixties, to a subversion of these characteristics in the eighties.

[64] Both the peritexts and the foreword of the first edition by Alfred A. Knopf reinforce this idea summing the story as an "uproarious morality tale" and providing long descriptions of each of the five children and depicting Charlie as "honest, obedient, loyal, trustworthy, brave, good, kind," followed by the question: "What happens, when one by one, the children disobey Mr. Wonka's orders?" Subsequent editions vary on the descriptions of the children making them more straightforward and describing Charlie only as the hero, and leaving any morality-tale reference out, and hence, adapting to the new context.

*The Great Glass Elevator* also follows its Cold War context and makes fun of adult authorities and political institutions at the time, representing the astronauts as dumb and the president as someone that was not good at anything so the only thing he could do was become a politician; other authorities from China and Russia are mocked through wordplay with racist undertones, translating again Cold War issues. Singh argues that "as is often the case in Dahl's books, there is a reversal. Here, those in authority act and sound like little children—the president actually pleads with his nanny not to make him drink milk and the ex-chief of the army is made to stand in the corner by the nanny, Miss Tibbs" (110), who is the vice-president and the real power behind as pointed out in the narration. Therefore, adult men with positions of power are infantilized and ridiculed instead of depicting them as the ideal of the mature adult and consequently, mocking traditional patriarchal authority figures.

In *Matilda*, there is another figure of authority that is challenged, Mrs. Trunchbull, the school's Headmistress, "a gigantic holy terror, a fierce tyrannical monster who frightened the life out of the pupils and teachers alike" (Dahl, *Matilda* 61). This character is openly adultist and uses her power to mistreat and abuse children; for instance, Blake's illustrations show her as menacing, big and scary. She is often engaged in acts of bullying like throwing a boy like a frisbee and a girl from her pigtails, taking a boy by the hair or ears, or hanging them upside down, forcing another one to eat a whole cake, and of course, calling them insulting terms and treating them like criminals that will learn through violence, which symbolizes how often young people, and youth revolt are considered threats to the system. She even says that she would like to use her belt as in the "good old days" (Dahl, *Matilda* 83), reminding us of Dahl's real teachers denounced in *Boy, Tales of Childhood*—an autobiographical fiction that depicts his experiences with cruel figures of authority and even abuses from older peers at boarding schools where "all grown-ups were dangerous creatures" (Dahl 85).

Exhibiting the asymmetrical power between children and adults, Matilda and her classmates believe they are in a war with the principal in which they are unfairly equipped because even the parents are scared of the Headmistress and sometimes, they do not even believe their children in a classic adultist behavior. Hence, the children are left undefended because even the teachers are not able to protect them entirely which happens to Miss Honey too as she is also personally dominated by The Trunchbull, and is only available to advise the children to behave around her and to never answer back, instead of defying the cruel woman. In this regard, Karavitis points out how:

> This daily example reinforces the hierarchical structure that children will be expected to follow in the real world. Conformity and obedience are valued, whereas creativity, independence, and free thinking are condemned. Proper behavior is also reinforced through the threat of punishment. Disobedience is punished severely, and children are constantly reminded to behave. (97)

In this regard, both of Matilda's antagonists join forces; for example, The Trunchbull defends Mr. Wormwood saying that he is a pillar of society after he has sold her one of his cars, which satirizes how adults lie and cheat among them; and he has told the principal that if anything bad happens at school, it must be his daughters' fault. Todres and Higinbotham single out how the antagonistic adults in the novel continuously label Matilda as a bad girl, when it is noticeable that she is rather wonderful (79), for example, when Miss Honey approaches the parents and the principal to talk to them about Matilda's skills, they instantly think that the child is in trouble.

Furthermore, the Headmistress' ideology endorses the Wormwoods' ideas because she believes that "a bad girl is a far more dangerous creature than a bad boy" (Dahl, Matilda 79), and denies being one herself, at least for too long, like George's grandma. The Trunchbull states that she hates little children, comparing them to insects as in *The Giant Peach,* and ironically calling Matilda a worm; hence, she thinks that children should grow up fast, suggesting again the ambivalent idea that adults have about children as emerging adults. Moreover, like the High Grand Witch, she declares that children are disgusting, and we should get rid of them, even proposing ideas on how to do it; for example, a spray that kills them like insects. This sounds like *The Witches* with the mousetraps that will be employed by teachers to indirectly get rid of the students, pointing out how educational institutions become accomplices in an adultist system that reinforces children's precarity (Albuja Aguilar, "Oppressive Structures" 35).

Through humor and rebellion, these carnivalesque devices provide an outlet for children to question the establishment and the school is represented "as a site in which they are simultaneously repressed by authority and peers and in which they are liberated by socializing with their friends and by learning new ideas" (Trites, *Disturbing the Universe* 35). Even if Matilda is intellectually superior to her classmates, she is not arrogant about it and makes friends easily. She admires Lavender, who puts a newt in the Headmistress' water, because she is gutsy and adventurous. They also befriend Hortensia, an older girl that is like a legend because of the pranks she has made to The Trunchbull, and that tells them all about The Chockey, where the principal punishes and locks the children that misbehave. As an older girl,

Hortensia shows signs of internalized adultism because she treats Lavender and Matilda as if they are newbies and could easily be scared and may not be able to help the older girls in the missions against The Trunchbull, to which Lavender replies: "We may be small but we're quite tough" (Dahl, *Matilda* 103).

Even if at first Miss Honey thinks that the parents are the ones responsible for encouraging Matilda's knowledge, we quickly see that they do not value education and make their daughter start school late, and even think that places like universities teach bad habits. Danny's father in *The Champion of the World* also delays his son's formal education, but with the goal to teach him practical knowledge that he believes that he would not receive in school; in this regard, Danny's father actually wants his child to become an engineer and so, it seems that he sees the potential of higher education that he had not had the chance to access. The Trunchbull thinks that children should be with their age groups regardless of their abilities, but Miss Honey finds learning activities that encourage Matilda's skills, in a similar way to Mrs. Phelps that provides reading that seems appropriate for the girl's intellectual curiosity, rather than her age. According to Karavitis:

> Matilda is presented as a child prodigy in order to reinforce the idea that each child is different and that it is nonsensical and counterproductive to teach all children at the same pace. Gifted children will become bored, and children who need help will fall further and further behind. (104)

This philosophy is reproduced in Salinger's Glass characters who are presented as gifted and usually feel stuck in uninspiring educational environments as studied in the first part. Therefore, while the Wormwoods and The Trunchbull are gatekeepers of knowledge, characters like Miss Honey and Danny's father are enablers of knowledge. In this regard, Pinset argues that:

> The influence of Dahl's own education is certainly to be detected in his depiction of teachers in his fiction. His characterisation of the many teachers who appear in his novels tends towards a degree of polarisation which reflects his ambiguous sentiments towards these powerful figures who have the potential to impart a love of knowledge and of literature yet all too often, in his view, are associated with sadism and small-mindedness. (77)

According to Pinsent, this polarization is especially evident in Matilda even referring to teaching methods and pedagogical approaches (79). For example, Miss Honey is described as someone who makes the newly arrived and confused students feel comfortable and the first to notice Matilda's genius, trying to raise awareness about this important fact and defending her fiercely in front of the parents and the principal, and even disobeying them when she starts to

tutor Matilda personally. Matilda's intelligence is recognized and appreciated by her teacher, who believes the girl is not only intellectually superior for her age, but also has a developed emotional intelligence that makes her wiser, or as the teacher points out, like a "grown-up child" (Dahl, *Matilda* 189). In a study dedicated to classifying teachers in fiction, Triplett and Ash propose four main categories and associate Miss Honey with two, labeling her as a relational teacher—or teachers that form personal bonds with students, and an ethical rebel—or teachers that break the rules for the students' sake as she does with Matilda (244-247).

On the other hand, The Trunchbull is labeled as an actively non-relational educator which they define as someone who is not only emotionally dismissive of her pupils, but is also verbally and physically abusive towards them (Triplett and Ash 244-247). Drawing from Althusser's theory of Repressive and Ideological State Apparatus employed to perpetuate a hierarchical social structure through family, education, religion, politics, culture, and similar institutions, Gaba argues that The Trunchbull "uses all coercive means at hand to discipline her students and prevent them from exercising their will that essentially threatens the social order" (2144). In fact, Miss Honey is the result of this violent upbringing when she states that "any courage I had was knocked out of me when I was young" (Dahl, *Matilda* 189), as she was psychologically dominated and controlled for years by her aunt.

As the narrator signaling that George's grandma was the exception in grandmothers, The Trunchbull is described as an oddity of school principals because "most head teachers are chosen because they possess a number of fine qualities. They understand children and they have the children's best interests at heart. They are sympathetic. They are fair and they are deeply interested in education" (Dahl, *Matilda* 76). In *Danny, The Champion of the World*, Mr. Snoddy, the Headmaster, is described as a likable person, although the story provides hints that he is an alcoholic, while Danny's teacher Captain Lancaster, a former military man, is represented as violent and the one responsible for hitting the boy with a cane. There are other teachers described as nicer to paint a picture of a spectrum with various kinds of authority figures and learning facilitators, as well as empathetic friendly adults in school. This can be also noticed in Salinger's novel where the only headmaster introduced is described as someone that treats parents differently according to their social status; besides, Holden goes to visit different kinds of teachers and Mr. Spencer is presented as adultcentric and discouraging, while Mr. Antolini comes about as reassuring and friendly, as discussed above.

The educational context emerges as a pivotal factor, acting as both a gatekeeper and an enabler for young characters. Within this realm, adults use their experience and authority either to motivate and respect the agency of children or enforce discipline and control in them. This dynamic illustrates the potential for education to be adultcentric and educators to exhibit adultist tendencies. However, it also highlights how schools can serve as spaces for emergence of intergenerational bonds and friendships. This is particularly evident in the concept of the pedagogical romance, where adults seek to impart knowledge to young individuals. Although, there is an awareness that adults cannot predict how young people will use that knowledge in their own futures, futures over which they have sole control. The upcoming section seeks to expand on these dynamics of mentorship and friendship concerning the celebrated adult-child duets in both *Matilda* and *Charlie* novels.

### 5.3.3 Intergenerational friendships

It is in the educational context where Matilda accomplishes her biggest victory which is defeating the authoritative adult and representative of hierarchical power structures, which leads to her friendship with Miss Honey and to find a new home with her after her parents' escape. Due to unfair treatment by the Headmistress, her feelings of anger make Matilda develop a telekinesis capacity, a power Miss Honey helps her to master, which she later uses to confront Miss Trunchbull. She makes the chalk in the board write a message for the Trunchbull, to make her believe his brother's ghost is telling her to give back what belonged to his daughter, scaring her, so she returns everything to Miss Honey and disappears. Similarly, in *The Magic Finger*, the heroine makes her teacher grow whiskers and a tail, after she calls her stupid, for misspelling "cat" on the board. Both girls' power is located within themselves rather than on an external object, and this not only allows them to become transgressive women, but also subversive children, unapologetically channeling their righteous power to shout to adults from whom they receive unfair treatment (Pennell 105-107).

Todres and Higinbotham call *Matilda* an alternative fairy tale where instead of the prince saving the damsel in distress, it is a small girl who helps defy "patriarchal notions of a young girl's worth" (80). In this sense, Pennell argues that:

> In terms of feminist reversion of the patriarchal storyline, there is a double rescue, with each female subject rescuing the other. Miss Honey rescues Matilda from her parents and from intellectual stultification and Matilda plays the heroic role of rescuing Miss Honey from her aunt, Miss Trunchbull. (115)

This way, the child helps the adult, as Danny does with his father, reversing conventional roles. Seeing what Matilda has done for her, Miss Honey hugs and kisses the girl to thank her, making this the first time they share physical affection, but we already see other displays of love, admiration, and recognition from Miss Honey when she conquers her fears to talk about the girl to The Trunchbull and defends her passionately in front of the parents, but also she continuously calls her "precious," "wise" and "genius," which does not go unrequited by Matilda who from the beginning cherishes her teacher, making this a novel where women uplift each other. No longer after, the authorities come for Matilda's father because his business is corrupted; therefore, the Wormwoods decide to leave town, but the girl stays with Miss Honey and as a result, "she rises above the mediocrity of her situation to take the reins to her future, creating a life for herself—a life that *she* wants and that is of her *own* design" (Butterfield 45).

Therefore, Miss Honey starts as a teacher, then becomes Matilda's friend and finally a parental figure for her, in a similar way that Wonka becomes Charlie's mentor and friend, but also, it is shown that he will become family too. According to Pennell:

> There is the representation of an interpersonal relationship that argues for mutuality and reciprocity of care between adults and children. Here Dahl envisions the postmodern family, where 'family' signifies 'subjective meanings of intimate connection rather than formal blood or marriage ties.' (115)

Matilda knows that moving in with her teacher means she will be valued for who she is and equipped with the necessary tools to grow in a healthy environment, much like Wonka will do for Charlie, helping him to feel more empowered; after all, he did not want a "grown-up person at all" (Dahl, *The Chocolate Factory* 185)—still the lovely Buckets are tagging along too. Butterfield refers to the "difficulty of living as a true individual who stands out from the crowd" (34); however, both Charlie and Matilda prove that this is possible if we are faithful to who we are, stand for what we believe and deserve, and find the right place to do so.

This authenticity is also found in Wonka, who exhibits similar characteristics to Danny's father and the grandmother in *The Witches*. According to Joosen, when adult protagonists have jobs in children's books they often have professions that allow them to engage with children like teachers as seen in *Matilda,* or "that allow them to travel, meet with various characters, and appeal to children's sense of adventure" as seen in Wonka's Chocolate Factory (*Adulthood* 78). In this sense, Willy Wonka is often described as a genius and even as a magician, but at the same time as someone mad and crazy by other adult characters in both novels. According to Cobb, he is perceived as a person that goes beyond normal, usually

through critical and derogatory language setting him in best terms around eccentricity and at worst, questioning his sanity (73), and in other words, a person who defies the ideas of what a normative male adult should be. Cobb concludes:

> Wonka's perceived madness also might be linked to his tremendous hubris and extraordinary appearance/behavior. He is, after all, constantly being judged on his unconventional aims and extraordinary actions. While the space between being *seen* as a genius and being *called* a madman appears to be a difficult one for Wonka to traverse, it is one that he navigates with zest throughout Dahl's classic novel. And by countering social expectations with such zest, perhaps Willy Wonka is meant to subvert—and prompt readers to question—the constraints of normalization. (80)

Therefore, when Wonka makes his first appearance, he is described as wearing his particular recognizable outfit—that has been rendered through illustrations and film adaptations, but also as someone with sparkling eyes, full of laughter and life, and moving energetically and sharply, almost like dancing. He seems to be in a "perpetual state of childness (as a *puer aeternus*)" (Joosen, *Adulthood* 86), which might be the reason why other adults do not take him seriously, believing that he is lying because a lot of what he says seem impossible, as when adults do not believe children or think what they say is silly or only part of the child's imagination, as with Ramona in "Uncle Wiggily." However, Wonka makes clear that for him "a little nonsense now and then, is relished by the wisest men" (Dahl, *The Great Glass Elevator* 88). Grandpa Joe and Charlie are the ones that usually believe in his ideas and defend him because they value him for being extraordinary, rather than average or normal. Conversely, he is able to bond quickly with them, the most vulnerable, warmhearted and empathetic people from all the characters in both novels.

At the same time, "Wonka recognizes a kindred spirit in the boy, someone who can truly appreciate and care for his factory and its wonders" (Rider 17). According to Napolitano, this duet develops "a mentor/protégé relationship" (91), which later turns into a friendship, and like Matilda and Miss Honey, they both express their care about each other which goes further than their business partnership. Already at the beginning of the sequel, Charlie states that Wonka is his friend and that he loves him. Although at first, he is only following instructions and learning, Charlie starts to work with his mentor when they must save the commuter capsule and later, when they travel together to Minusland.

Even if that place looks scary, Wonka encourages the boy to be brave, but admits he prefers to be there accompanied because he had to come alone the other times, exposing his vulnerability, like Grandpa Joe, and confessing his limits. Since he knows this means a lot to

Charlie, and maybe also to him, he is happy to reunite the Buckets, after they save the grandmother, and helps Charlie to bring the parents back to their age, even if he had distanced himself when they were debating about the pills as he does in *The Chocolate Factory,* actually turning a deaf ear to foolish comments. He also makes Charlie feel special calling him brilliant and congratulating him for learning fast and assuring him that his choice was right because he is leaving the factory safe; in fact, he always addresses him with kindness, respect and encouraging terms like Miss Honey does with Matilda.

Referring to the sorceress apprentice[65] folktale as a meme employed by different cultures that explains the survival strategies employed by young people to face adultism, Zipes argues that this tall tale is so common because it explains how adults, as teachers and mentors, share an ambiguous relationship with children in which they want to both discipline and nourish them, as we have analyzed through *Matilda* and *Charlie*'s novels (36-38). According to this scholar:

> [A]dults eventually experience a fraught relationship with children that involves two contradictory impulses and drives: (1) adults want to nourish the individual talents of children and guide them to comprehend the complex social networks into which they are born, and protect them from adverse forces; or (2) adults seek to regulate and discipline children according to arbitrary rules of the civilizing process to which they are disciplined to comply […] even though the adults might not understand the source and sense of the rules and do not even legislate them. (Zipes 35)

In both novels, the connections between "magic, power, and knowledge" are evident as in the sorceress apprentice tale (Zipes 38), thanks to carnivalesque narrative techniques employed to subvert hierarchical adultist structures. This is exemplified through Matilda's powers to confront oppression and sexism and the portrayal of a magical world in Wonka's Chocolate Factory, aiding Charlie in facing an unfair system. The narratives mock privileged children and adult figures of authority, from parents to teachers and politicians. Additionally, both novels explore intergeneragency, delving into hierarchical relationships and power dynamics between children and adults, while simultaneously addressing intrageneragency by emphasizing social differences that contribute to each child's diverse experience. These intersections shed light on how social positions impact children's daily lives, fostering different forms of agency for both Charlie and Matilda as they build their own lives.

[65] For an analysis about this folktale regarding *Charlie and the Great Glass Elevator,* as well as the study of Willy Wonka's character as the mad scientist, and the elements of science fantasy, space opera and time travel in the novel, read the chapter "*Charlie y el Gran Ascensor de Cristal*: intergenérica e intergaláctica" by Albuja Aguilar in *Reflexiones en torno al comparativismo en literatura y arte. Tendencias clásicas y modernas*.

## 5.4 Closing remarks

Whether considered for children, young adults, adults or intergenerational crossovers, all the novels and short stories that have been compared and contrasted throughout this chapter depict intergenerational solidarity and age-related power dynamics. Particularly, these narratives challenge and scrutinize hierarchical institutions in the family, the education system and the society. The analysis of Salinger's works reveals a consistent theme of familial conflicts counterbalanced by a keen sense of solidarity, particularly among siblings. The absence of typical adult power dynamics within these family structures allows for collaborative navigation of existential crises, fostering compassion and support. This shared bond acts as a protective shield against external challenges, influencing personal lives, education, and careers within and beyond the family context, but it also shows how generational dynamics take place within internal and external exchanges between family and society.

Similarly, Dahl's novels that focus on extended families point out how grandparents and children can team up due to their vulnerability, since their shared experience of age-based discrimination creates a unique connection. In this regard, elders and women are often infantilized, fostering camaraderie with younger family members who face similar dismissal. Therefore, Salinger and Dahl's works examine gender and age-related constructions, showcasing instances of solidarity, conflict, mutual agency, and empowerment. Dahl's novels also show how bonds are not always formed through blood as a parody of the nuclear family. Therefore, a child should not be forced to respect and obey adults only because they are family members or due to their seniority; hence, these stories do not endorse a blind obedience from children to adults, but actually offer warnings about them.

In examining stories for both children and older audiences, there is a perceived otherness between the worlds of the child and the adult, where each one has a limited perspective of the other, evidencing how if there is a hidden adult in children's literature and YA, there is also a hidden child when these narratives represent adulthood. Adults can either uphold traditional hierarchies or foster powerful intergenerational bonds. In this regard, both authors show how adults can be cruel, abusive and phony, but also be childlike, enjoy invention and play, and experience emotional turmoil. Therefore, adults, no matter how old, can still change, grow, learn and go through new experiences, while young people can die and suffer from loss too. In this regard, the *puer aeternus* perception of people as locked in time or in their childhood or youth is also an existential construction related to the idealization of these stages.

Concerning the education system, all the narratives give hints of the fact that schools are both places to learn and form friendships, but can also be unfair systems of repression, where young people who stand up are not always allowed to succeed, and where traditional ideologies are usually perpetuated. However, teachers and mentors are not only all-knowing authorities, but they can be friends as well, through their empathy and humanity. The concept of the pedagogical romance reveals an ambiguous relationship between adults and children, where adults aim to be both enablers and gatekeepers of information, agents who discipline and nourish, recognizing that young people have sole control over their futures. The exploration of intergeneragency and intrageneragency underscores how social positions impact children's lives, fostering diverse forms of agency for children to construct their own paths, even in the face of different forms of oppression.

Overall, through all these novels and short stories, children and young people are empowered thanks to a subversion of power dynamics, especially in Dahl's works—where there is an exaggerated, but truthful caricature of antagonistic grownups—or at least, they are able to scrutinize these structures, as in Salinger's narratives, where the society is deeply criticized through the eyes of teens and young adults scared to partake in that system. In fact, in both cases, the middle-class postwar society and authorities are parodied, as well as the war, and the Cold War eras, and these stories show how not even grownups are able to conform to unreal standards of maturity and adult normativity in literature dedicated to intergenerational readers.

## Conclusions

In conducting a comparative analysis on the representation of childhood and youth in the works of Roald Dahl and J.D. Salinger to find out whether age is depicted as a factor of social difference, and if their works are subversive and challenge adult normativity, I have drawn from an interdisciplinary framework grounded on Childism—an approach dedicated to dismantling age-related constructs and promoting more age-inclusive research that takes into account intergenerational dynamics. My study adopted a child-centered perspective, emphasizing age as a crucial element in social differentiation which could track more attention in the realm of cultural studies. For this purpose, I have attempted to build bridges between age-related studies like Childhood and Youth Studies with children's literature and YA literary studies. In this path, I have come up with the idea that literature classified according to the age of the intended reader deserves a connection with its reception and reader-response. Thus, I compare two authors with a cross-generational appeal that have exhibited an ambivalent reception and a significant readerly success, and whose works address age-related themes.

The initial chapters are dedicated to contextualizing their oeuvres and offer a theoretical framework. First, I have analyzed the authors' socio-political and cultural context and conducted research on social constructions regarding age and life stages, especially in children's literature and YA. Then, I have studied how their body of work has been often associated with these genres and intergenerational crossovers and how these connections have influenced the reception of their works, considering the impact of age-related constructions to determine such categories, and posterior didactic and moralizing expectations, as well as censorship or challenges regarding appropriateness. Finally, considering the theoretical framework of Childhood and Youth Studies with literary theories like aetonormativity, I have made a comparative analysis of selected works by both authors to study the representation of young characters, life stages, coming-of-age, and intergenerational power dynamics in their works through two main themes: the journey and the return home.

It is emphasized that both the field of Childhood Studies and children's literary studies have reassessed childhood and life stages as concepts that extend beyond mere biological factors and are significantly influenced by social constructions. Therefore, concepts such as age and generation should be approached from the point of view of intersectionality, privilege,

and oppression. In this regard, the examination of age differences comes from adultcentrism, where adulthood is often positioned as a superior state, a paradigm that promotes an idealized image of the mature adult—usually white, male, heterosexual, and middle-aged, as this is often rooted in notions of civilization and other markers of social difference. It is worth noting that ageism is frequently employed to refer to discrimination against the elderly and their exclusion from the idealized adult image, whereas adultcentrism addresses the oppression of children and teenagers by adults through acts of discrimination, which is termed adultism.

Adultism manifests itself in many ways and could even be internalized by young individuals or become structural through policies, norms, and socioeconomic conditions that put younger generations at a disadvantage. Furthermore, adultism can be cultural, entrenched in views and constructions that portray children either as innocent, pure, and angelic or, conversely, as uncivilized, undisciplined, and irrational, anchored in notions of rationality and civilization, typically associated with adulthood. Over time, the perception of childhood has evolved as influenced by education, developmental psychology, and philosophy, as well as political and socioeconomic factors, especially in the postindustrial era marked by the extension of education. The concept of adolescence gained widespread recognition in the last century, as before this time, young individuals were expected to enter the workforce, and the postwar context fueled this shift finding a market for cultural products targeting teenagers.

Moreover, teenagers or young adults are often viewed as rebels in need of socialization or as individuals in the process of becoming adults, framing childhood and adolescence merely as transitional phases toward full adulthood. However, some of the works I have examined highlight the enduring impact of childhood events on the later stages of our lives, challenging the notion of completeness achieved only in adulthood. In this regard, adults can also be perceived as childlike when retaining positive characteristics associated with childhood, or childish when they are regarded as immature. Consequently, the concepts of youth and adulthood are dynamic and constantly evolving, often overlapping or serving as bridges to other life stages such as childhood, adolescence, and early adulthood. Thus, while transitions and benchmarks change over time, a sense of temporal otherness persists between childhood and adulthood.

In this regard, generations can be viewed on different scales: at the micro or family level and as cohorts in the broader societal or macro level, often tied to specific historical and political contexts, or seen as a target audience within the market. Conflict between youth and

adults may arise as new generations seek individuation, while older generations aim to foster cultural transmission, a means of achieving symbolic immortality, much like the role of education, or the pedagogical romance as designated by Beauvais. This might be the reason this tension is reflected in YA literature, which frequently features outsider characters, mirroring the desire of young individuals to differentiate themselves from older generations. Additionally, intergenerational solidarity can emerge to bridge the gap of generational unfairness, for instance, when the political or socioeconomic conditions change for newer generations.

The postwar and Cold War era witnessed the creation of a significant generational gap in the UK and the US. In this context, young people were reevaluating their perspectives on armed conflicts and imperialism, viewing them as sacrifices of young lives and sources of enormous tragedies; instead, they advocated for pacifism, and women and racial minorities advocated a change in the fight for civil rights. This resulted in perceptions of young people as both rebels and victims in the postwar and Cold War period. Moreover, on a cultural level, the gap between high culture associated with the old generations and the influence of the new generations in shaping popular culture, intertwined with these generational dynamics in such context in both countries.

Therefore, literature went from a portrayal of a more idyllic and protected childhood during the first half of the twentieth century, towards interiority and the emergence of YA in the postwar period, which Salinger has been often associated with, thanks to his opera prima *The Catcher in the Rye,* featuring the celebrated teen Holden Caulfield. Dahl also departs from an innocent representation of childhood to children's novels with antagonistic adultist grownups. However, at the same time, Salinger and Dahl adhere to romanticized portrayals of children in their works. For instance, Salinger often represents children as exceptionally gifted, possessing a maturity and wisdom surpassing that of adults. He links childhood to noble values, exemplified by Holden's admiration for his deceased brother Allie, represented through the concept of the *puer aeternus*—a child locked in time, while viewing adulthood as synonymous with corruption. Similarly, Dahl employs the notion of the *puer aeternus* portraying childlike adults, like the eccentric Willy Wonka.

Dahl also sees children as noble savages, depicting them as undisciplined, but placing the blame on adults who attempt to impose discipline. However, there is an evolution in Dahl's works, for example, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* as an early novel conveys a moralizing

tone where child characters are categorized as good or bad; however, he later offers more nuanced characterizations, as seen in works like *Matilda*, reflecting a departure from black and white moral tropes towards more complex character portrayals. Unlike his contemporary British writers, Dahl does not create completely fantastic worlds, but his children's books tend to bring some magic to the crude life of his young heroes, which is why it can also be associated with magical realism as well. Evidently, his influences from Nordic folklore come from his origins, as well as his background writing horror for adults.

As a matter of fact, both authors are significantly influenced by their backgrounds and origins in such a complex historical context. For example, J.D. Salinger's experience in World War II played a pivotal role in shaping his works; as scholars like Benson argue, it probably was his probationary social status and whiteness as a Jew that influenced his empathy towards the outcasts depicted in his works. Additionally, the alternative religious beliefs that gained traction among young people in the postwar era also left an imprint on Salinger's later works, such as the stories of The Glass family—and even leading to his reclusive lifestyle. Dahl, too, drew inspiration from his wartime experiences as a pilot, evident in his initial stories. The impact of their respective boarding school experiences is apparent in both authors' works—Salinger critiquing the superficiality of society and elitism, and Dahl addressing the violence and oppression faced by children within these institutions. Furthermore, both authors criticize the nuclear family, exploring themes related to social classes, gender roles, and the concept of extended family, emphasizing how friendships can evolve into familial bonds— especially in Dahl's works—and both portray conflict and solidarity in these relationships.

In the realm of children's literary studies, the focus has shifted from the traditional adult-child dichotomy to the exploration of intergenerational relationships. Both perspectives could acknowledge the connection between the adult author and the intended young reader. Nikolajeva has labeled aetonormativity as the phenomenon in which adult norms often prevail in children's literature and YA; hence, even when young characters are portrayed exercising agency, this empowerment is sometimes time-constrained, and they may ultimately be rescued by adults. However, writers might employ subversive carnivalesque techniques, challenging and examining these power structures, and demonstrating resistance to perpetuate age-related stereotypes. As scholars like Honeyman argue, the depiction of childhood in literature could also serve as a form of denouncement, offering alternative readings and reconstructions regarding age and life stages. For instance, Salinger intends to show the world from the

perspective of teenagers and young adults, while Dahl aligns himself with the children, against the villainous adults. Consequently, children's literature and YA literature can simultaneously embody both conservative and subversive elements, fostering power dynamics and intergenerational solidarity.

However, children's literature and YA were not always divided, as the classification of literature into narrower age categories was influenced by educational and market factors. This association, however, resulted in these genres being relegated to an inferior status in academia, often perceived as popular literature that should be didactic and moralizing, despite its inherent complexity. Social constructions further played a role in determining what was deemed appropriate in these genres due to the important adult presence in the publishing business, and as teachers, librarians, and parents who end up making the key decisions. Notably, even acclaimed authors like Dahl and Salinger faced challenges and censorship to the appropriateness of their works well into the twenty-first century, despite their continued presence in school reading lists and as bestselling titles. Similarly, Dahl has demonstrated versatility by writing for both children and adults, while both facing constraints and imposing changes in the culture to more acceptance of certain taboo topics, language, and depiction of violence for children.

Despite Dahl's initial dismissal by academia as merely an entertainer due to his popularity, his works have garnered appreciation from readers since they were first published until the present, enhanced by the adaptations of his works in different media. Dahl's public persona, oscillating between childlike and childish, further influenced how his books were received and marketed. On the other hand, Salinger's reclusive persona restricted adaptations of his works even though they became cultural statements—a notable exception being *My Foolish Heart* (1949), loosely based on his short story "Uncle Wiggily in Connecticut." Moreover, Salinger's works tended to be more accepted in academic circles, probably because his works were considered appropriate for college-level readers and hence, granted more seriousness, while Dahl was associated with genre fiction and children's literature. In this sense, it is noteworthy that the inclusion of both Dahl and Salinger in popular culture initially found more acceptance in the United States than in the United Kingdom, where the gap between high and low culture was much more significant.

I have argued that categorizing literature into age-specific genres impacts how it is socially perceived, driven by the notion of protecting children. While audiences may influence

how writers address readers and how readers interpret works, this classification tends to limit a work's reach and assumes a passive readership. Interestingly, reader-response studies contradict criticism about appropriateness, revealing that children are capable of understanding moral complex themes in Dahl's works, for example. Therefore, young readers can be meaning-makers and provide different interpretations, and reception and reader-response criticism play a crucial role in genres aimed at implied readers. Likewise, Salinger's historical reception has been marked by censorship, yet his works, especially *The Catcher in the Rye*, have consistently held a prominent position on reading lists. In fact, real readers often defy boundaries, evident in phenomena like crossovers or literature designed for all ages. Salinger's works, for instance, have found an intergenerational audience, showcasing the ability of literature to transcend self-imposed age boundaries. While not a new phenomenon, the popularity of crossovers emerged with the challenge that adults were immature and children were growing up quickly, reflecting social constructions as well. However, the concept of crossovers represents an intersection where intergenerational readers come together, catering to diverse audiences. Thanks to cross-writing and the dual nature of children's literature, Dahl has also enjoyed a crossover audience, even if his works have often been divided into narrower age categories.

Considering these theoretical frameworks, the authors' context, and associations with age-related genres, the practical analysis has focused on two recurring cross-generational themes prevalent in fiction, especially in children's literature and YA, the journey and the return home. The concept of the journey is often linked to the process of coming-of-age, involving rites of passage for the hero's personal development and identity building. At the same time, for young characters it often signifies independence from adult supervision, providing them with the agency to navigate challenges along the way. My analysis delves into the portrayal of these themes in both Dahl and Salinger; specifically, it explores whether they represent growth as a linear transition towards socialization, as in a typical bildungsroman, or if this view is examined, challenging the notion that adulthood is exempt of change and should be considered a complete state. Additionally, I studied if young characters exercise agency to subvert power structures and overcome challenges, or if adult normativity is indeed endorsed in the end.

Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* features a teenager on the borderline, socially expected to transition into adulthood, while reflecting on leaving behind his childhood. The

psychogeographical journey through New York City becomes a backdrop for this exploration, with memories intricately linked to specific places. The protagonist embarks on this journey independently, meditating on the future ahead while examining and exposing the phony adult world. A similar pattern is observed in "The Laughing Man," where the adult narrator mentally travels through memories of childhood to understand his existential continuity, even considering what he has lost or left behind. Salinger further explores existential crises and epiphanies related to the transition to adulthood in works like "Franny," "Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters" and "De Daumier-Smith's Blue Period." These narratives scrutinize transitional points, illustrating how benchmarks such as marriage, completing studies or a career, and other religious or cultural rites of passage are not only constructed, but also subject to change, and rely more on personal trajectories.

Dahl's stories do not delve into existential crisis, but into moral complexity, providing a narrative space for young protagonists to defy adultist norms and dismantle unfair power structures. These tales become a medium for the characters to build their childhood, demonstrating empowerment, independence, and agency in shaping their lives. For instance, Billy's act of disobedience, Danny's demonstration of moral complexity, and James's rejection of adult normativity showcase the multifaceted ways in which young individuals can assert themselves against social expectations. Even in the *Charlie* saga, where the protagonist changes his circumstances, the presence of positive adults encourages him on his transformative journey. Certainly, in Dahl's oeuvre, the exploration of unfamiliar places denotes a subversion of unfair structures where children feel more empowered; for instance, Billy in the Minpins' world, James along the journey in the peach and on arrival to NYC, and even Charlie in the Galaxy and unknown lands.

The comparison of both authors sheds light in their similar views on vulnerability. Dahl's *The Witches* introduces a story that underscores the vulnerability in children, but also the possibility of hope in overcoming adultism and unfair power structures, aligning with the idea of Beauvais' mighty child. This contrasts with Salinger's "Bananafish," where the narrative may be seen as less optimistic because the protagonist has been already consumed by a greedy society and is not able to face the adult world, even if a child offers him a moment of hope. Similarly, works like *The BFG* and "For Esmé" highlight friendships between children and vulnerable adults, or giants, emphasizing the importance of opening up to diverse experiences. In conclusion, these narratives collectively convey a powerful message that

challenges traditional power dynamics, asserting the potential for young individuals to navigate their own paths and shape their destinies.

While the journey in Salinger's works could be considered more existential, scrutinizing this traditional linear growth and emphasizing on temporal continuity that influences the identity-building process, Dahl focuses on the power dynamics between people in different life stages, and thus, underscores temporal otherness as well. However, his novels also encourage self-actualization and continuous evolution, metamorphosis, and change at any age. Moreover, both writers associate adulthood with unfair power structures, Dahl providing specific examples of grownups that exert adultism, while Salinger focuses on how childhood and adolescence are usually portrayed in comparison to adulthood. Therefore, they both examine adult normativity, but also, they provide alternatives for better intergenerational dynamics as Gubar proposes through her kinship model of complementary agency.

This is often illustrated in the relationships within the family, the education system and the society depicted in their works and studied in the second part of the analysis dedicated to homecoming, which is often stressed in children's literature and YA to corroborate young people's return to authority and control. In this regard, Dahl consistently portrays children as heroes and most adults as antagonists, creating narratives where empowered children with agency, like Matilda, face abusive grownups like The Trunchbull, and even end up saving adults, reversing the most common occurrence. Dahl's novels do not aim to be moralizing or advocate blind obedience to adults, they offer instead warnings for children, to even doubt their family members, highlighting how seniority should not be always equated with respect.

However, Dahl's works also emphasize positive intergenerational relationships, fostering connections with older adults, such as grandparents, or vulnerable and childlike figures, as seen in characters like Wonka and Miss Honey. These characters are usually supportive, dynamic, open to change, and enablers of knowledge; they also respect children's agency and do not worry about appearing silly and not subscribing to the mature adult ideal. In this regard, in both works it is highlighted how older characters and women are constructed in similar terms to children as they are often infantilized, not taken seriously, and considered irrational, when as seen in the analysis, playfulness, tantrums, imagination, can come at any stage of life.

Salinger's short stories and novels depict children as wise and more mature than adults,

whereas adolescents and young adults, failing to meet societal expectations of adulthood, offer a strong critique of the postwar society and unfair power structures, which could resonate with the challenges faced by young people today. Salinger's narratives promote more horizontal intergenerational relationships, particularly evident in bonds between siblings, as these are less hierarchical than relationships with parents, which are exemplified in the family dynamics of the Caulfields and the Glasses. In this regard, while parents in children's novels by Dahl are often dead, in Salinger's works they are mostly absent, and in both cases, they could represent a threat too. In this sense, there is a limited view of each other's world in intergenerational relationships leading to the idea of hidden adults and children in these narratives, and encouraging characters to peek through keyholes to each other's world, and trespass adult or child-designated spaces, and thus, age-related divisions.

Both authors introduce significant intergenerational duets and question hierarchical power structures, challenging authority figures not only within the home but also at the societal level, particularly within educational institutions and social class structures. In the education system, we find relationships with mentors that want to both nourish and discipline the young students, enablers and gatekeepers of knowledge, and the school represents a place that could limit and encourage young minds, as well as reproduce unfair structures. These spaces could be traditional or represent an opportunity for society to change at the micro and macro level, suggesting that if adults do not adapt, they will be surpassed by the next generations. In this regard, they usually show how children are positioned considering Leonard's concepts of intergeneragency and intrageneragency, and thus, their intersectional identities, in the face of the generation to which they belong, as well as through other categories of social difference. Therefore, this analysis reveals common threads in Dahl and Salinger's corpus, transcending genre differences and targeted audiences, to emphasize the shared themes of intergenerational dynamics and the critique of unfair structures, including adultism, adultcentrism and adult normativity.

In summarizing the findings from this analysis, several key conclusions emerge. For instance, both authors, while drawing inspiration from romanticized notions of childhood in their characterizations, consistently challenge prevailing age-related stereotypes. Consequently, in their works, young characters often exhibit complexity, empowerment, and agency. A common theme in their works is an examination and confrontation of adultcentrism, highlighting the inherent power imbalance between young individuals and adults which leads

to the oppression and control of young people through adultism, as adulthood is typically privileged in society. For example, Dahl's novels often subvert traditional power structures, deviating from moralizing approaches that dictate children should unquestioningly obey adults. Instead, Dahl's stories empower children to resist adultism, showcasing their ability to make independent decisions, shape their childhoods, and forge their own paths; hence, these novels do not consistently endorse adult normativity.

In this regard, Salinger's short stories and novels criticize established boundaries between life stages and transitional points. They illustrate how adults who deviate from societal expectations may face dismissal and existential crises, denied the opportunity to conceive life as an evolving journey with changing routes. In turn, Dahl embraces these childlike and vulnerable adults featuring them in prominent roles alongside children, emphasizing that growth and development are not confined to specific life stages. Furthermore, both authors use parody and humor to criticize and challenge authority and unfair power structures within families, educational institutions, and society at large. They underscore age as a social difference factor that positions young people and adults differently, aligning with other intersectional categories. Despite conflicts due to these power dynamics, there is also a potential for intergenerational solidarity and the scrutiny of age-related constructions and norms which are examined and painted as arbitrary in their works. Their novels and short stories offer alternative bonds that transcend age barriers, resonating with readers across different generations to which these novels and short stories have appealed.

My research has attempted to establish unprecedented connections between Roald Dahl and J.D. Salinger, emphasizing that the study of motifs, themes, and characterization related to childhood and youth should extend beyond the confines of children's literature. This analysis underscores the idea that any literary work has the potential to offer insightful depictions of these stages, integral to the human experience, and stresses the complexity that children's literature and YA can offer. In this regard, this research demonstrates the ambivalence grounded on evolving social constructions to designate a work as intended for a specific audience—whether to censor it, challenge it, or use it as a tool for generational transmission and education. In turn, examining children's literature and YA through a child-centered analysis can offer insights into how it either examines, challenges or endorses social constructions and power dynamics, potentially subverting established structures and age-related standards.

Furthermore, targeted audiences or new generations could contribute towards fresh perspectives and interpretations, creating a dynamic dialogue between the past, where adults' authority and experience are anchored, the present, where intergenerational dynamics occur, and the future, where adults would not have control. Thus, interdisciplinary age-related studies also explain our existence and history, and how literature works as a vehicle trespassing time, singling out to the fact that intergenerational dynamics and solidarity are important for the sustainability of the humanity and the world. While the current research does not include empirical studies, a promising avenue for future exploration lies in participatory analysis with real readers, especially young ones, and intergenerational audiences.

Additionally, the theoretical connections established here can serve as a foundation for further investigations and comparisons involving cross-generational authors, particularly those subject to ambivalent reception due to their engagement with age-related themes and genres. The inclusion of non-canonical texts or more diverse and less normative authors can also contribute to expanding on intersectionality. Furthermore, this work advocates for an increasing interest in cultural studies on similar analysis that consider age as an existential and social factor, emphasizing the potential for interdisciplinary connections aimed at dismantling age-related constructions and fostering literary research on intergenerational solidarity.

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## Annex: The Cauldfield's and The Glasses' family trees

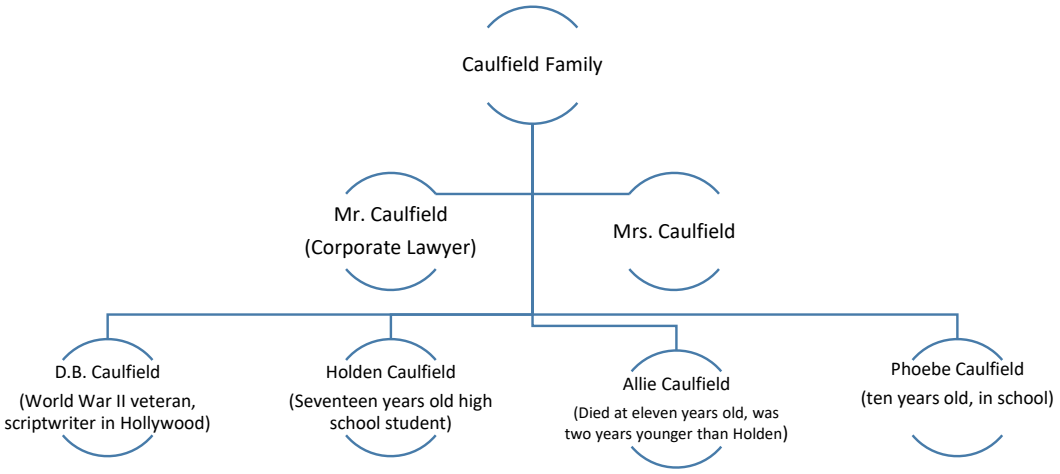



**Fig. 1**
**The Caulfields' family tree**
**Data from *The Catcher in the Rye***

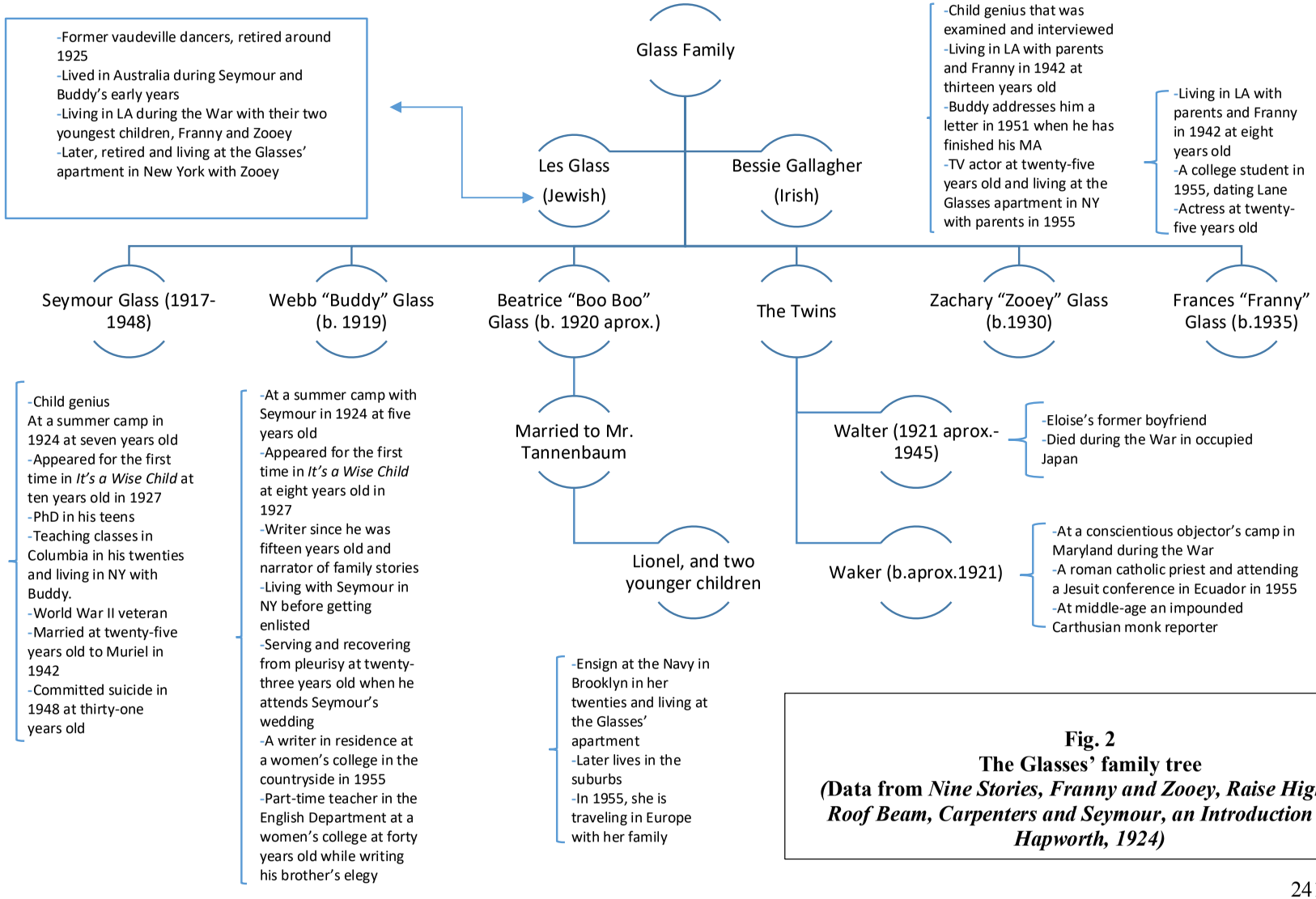



**Fig. 2**
**The Glasses' family tree**
***(*Data from *Nine Stories, Franny and Zooey, Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters and Seymour, an Introduction and Hapworth, 1924)***