

**“Let there be wicked kings and beheadings”**

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**The Place and Role of Violence in *The Lion, the Witch and the  
Wardrobe, The Witches and The Tulip Touch***

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## Sammendrag

I et samfunn hvor voksne mennesker gjør alt i sin makt for å beskytte barn fra voldelige situasjoner, er det interessant at mange bøker for barn ofte inneholder voldelige elementer og grafiske beskrivelser av vold. Denne oppgaven tar for seg tre ulike barnebøker og ser på hvilken posisjon og hvilke funksjoner vold har i dem. De tre bøkene som blir diskutert er *Løven, Heksa og Klesskapet* (1950) av C. S. Lewis, *Heksene* (1983) av Roald Dahl og *The Tulip Touch* (1996) av Anne Fine.

De tre romanene er eksempler på barnebøker som inneholder ulike elementer av vold og oppgaven analyserer hvordan dette blir fremstilt med hensyn til de ulike fiksjonelle universene i bøkene. Videre ser oppgaven på hvordan ulike sjangre påvirker fremstillingen av vold i de tre bøkene. En kan hevde at all litteratur inneholder didaktiske elementer ved at en alltid kan lære noe av å lese en bok. Tradisjonelt sett har barnelitteratur blitt sett på som spesielt didaktisk og oppgaven tar for seg hvordan vold i barnelitteratur kan ha en danningseffekt på leseren. Det blir også diskutert hvorvidt det er en forskjell på voksne lesere og unge lesere og hvordan de vil oppfatte de ulike beskrivelsene av vold en kan finne i de tre bøkene.

Oppgaven argumenterer for at tilstedeværelsen av vold er nødvendig for at de ulike romanene skal fungere narrativt. Uten vold ville de ulike historiene i bøkene kunnet ha funnet sted.



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## Introduction

Then she began to whet her knife. It looked to the children, when the gleam of the torchlight fell on it, as if the knife were made of stone, not of steel, and it was of a strange and evil shape. [...] ‘Now I will kill you instead of him as our pact was and so the deep magic will be appeased. But when you are dead what will prevent me from killing him as well?’ (Lewis, *The Lion* 181)

Those huge eyes were the saddest things I had ever seen. It suddenly occurred to me that almost certainly once upon a time they had been children, those frogs, before The Grand High Witch had got hold of them. [...] ‘So there you are, my little firroggies,’ I heard her saying. ‘You can stay where you are until I go to bed tonight, then I shall thrrow you out of the vindow and the seagulls can have you for supper.’ (Dahl, *The Witches* 134-35)

‘You don’t understand. If you tell him what she’s been doing, he’ll half murder her. He’ll just be glad to have the chance. He’ll sound reasonable enough while you’re there. But the minute you’re gone -’ [...] ‘The minute you’re gone, he’ll thrash her like a red-headed stepchild! He’ll whip her till her freckles sing!’ (Fine 140)

Stories for children ranging from *The History of the Fairchild Family* (1818-47) by Mary Martha Sherwood to the Harry Potter series (1997-2007) by J.K. Rowling contain elements of violence. The presence of violence in children’s literature is both troubling and fascinating. Violence in children’s literature is not a new phenomenon. James Janeway’s *A Token for Children* from 1672, for instance, is a collection of stories that describe the dramatic deaths of young children in order to show the importance of finding religion at a young age to avoid ending up in hell. These texts were influenced by religious fervour and a wish to influence the child reader’s behaviour and thus making them good Puritans.

The author of *The History of the Fairchild Family* (1818), Mary Martha Sherwood, also had a religious approach to children's literature. Furthermore, her idea of the child as an evil creature that needed to be guided by the sensible adult was evident. According to her:

All children are by nature evil, and while they have none but the natural evil principle to guide them, pious and prudent parents must check their naughty passions in any way that they have in their power, and force them into decent and proper behaviour and into what are called good habits (Sherwood, qtd. in Hunt, *An Introduction* 48).

Sherwood was convinced that children needed to be educated in order to "become pious and prudent" (Sherwood, qtd. in Hunt, *An Introduction* 48), and she hoped to achieve this through her writing. This becomes clear from the title page of *The History of the Fairchild Family*: "The History of the Fairchild Family or, The Child's Manual being a collection of stories calculated to show the importance of effects of a religious education" (Sherwood 1). Both the works of Janeway and Sherwood contain violence in order to educate the young mind, and this makes them highly didactical.

The education of children through literature seems to have been a goal for many authors. In her book *Off With Their Heads! Fairy Tales and the Culture of Childhood* Maria Tatar states that "almost all of us turn to children's stories with the expectation that morals and lessons will be forthcoming, even in those cases where they are not spelled out in the text" (xv). Traditionally children's literature has been expected to have a moralising effect on its readers. This was especially true for the works of fiction for children produced before the nineteenth century. Arguably there was a shift in this trend towards the second half of the nineteenth century with the emergence of works such as *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) which seems to be more interested in entertaining than moralising. Although there might have been a shift towards a wish to entertain the child reader, the concepts of education

and socialising are ever present in children's literature. In *Language and Ideology in Children's Fiction* (1992) John Stephens writes that:

Writing for children is usually purposeful, its intentions being to foster in the child reader a positive appreciation of some socio-cultural values which, it is assumed, are shared by author and audience. These values include contemporary morality and ethics, a sense of what is valuable in the cultures past (what a particular contemporary social formation regards as the culture's centrally important traditions), and aspirations about the present and future. (3)

Stephens states that writing for children often tries to fulfil certain expectations towards socialising the child reader. With this in mind one can pose the question of whether the presence of violence in a book written for children is still linked to that of socialising the child reader. Through reading Stephens, one would very much expect this to be the case.

The presence of violence, whether for entertainment or educational purposes, is still an important feature in many books written for children. Recently published books for young readers such as the hugely popular *Hunger Games* trilogy (2008-2010) and the science fiction series about the young criminal mastermind *Artemis Fowl* (2001-2012) are filled with violence. The fact that different representations of violence in children's literature seems to be thriving is interesting in a society that seems preoccupied with the possible danger of playing too many violent video games and the need to shield children from the brutality of the world. Arguably the wish to protect young children has always been the concern of many adults. However, the preoccupation with shielding children from violence, both physically and psychologically, seems to be growing more important in parts of society, to the extent that parents will not bring their children to the funeral of a close relative because experiencing death might traumatize them. Death is a natural part of life, and it is interesting that a parent, who would not let his children attend the funeral of their grandmother for fear of their reaction, will let them read *The Hunger Games* trilogy, a series of novels where children and

young adults kill each other in an arena as part of a live TV show broadcast designed to entertain a nation.

This thesis investigates the different representations of violence in three novels written for children: *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (1950) by C. S. Lewis, *The Witches* (1983) by Roald Dahl and *The Tulip Touch* (1996) by Anne Fine. Some of the questions that will be addressed are: How is violence manifested in the three novels and how does it function? Does the manifestation of violence in the different novels have something to do with the fictional universes created in them? Do the different genres of the novels and their respective narrative structures affect the way in which violence is represented in the novels? Since violence in literature for children has, as mentioned above, been used as a way to socialise children and a means of educating the child reader, does the violence in these texts function as a socialising tool, simply as entertainment or could it be perceived as both? How can one expect the child reader to react to the violence of the novels, and is it to be expected that there is a difference in the reactions of child readers and adult readers?

Before answering these questions one needs to establish what is meant by violence and children's literature. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* violence is: "The exercise of physical force so as to inflict injury on, or cause damage to, persons or property; action or conduct characterized by this; treatment or usage tending to cause bodily injury or forcibly interfering with personal freedom" ("Violence," def. 1a). Furthermore, for the purpose of this thesis, violence will also be understood as the wish to inflict physical harm in order to injure or kill someone. Although direct physical damage is often the first thing that comes to mind when thinking about the term violence, the *threat* of physical violence can be just as harmful to a victim. Psychological violence will be regarded as equally injurious as physical violence in the discussion that follows.

According to Peter Hunt “Children’s literature seems at first sight to be a simple idea: books written for children, books read by children. But in theory and in practice it is vastly more complicated than that” (*An Introduction* 4). When trying to define children’s literature one is faced with the problem that adults read books written for children, and children read books written for adults. Children, being curious and prone to exploring, will find books that may not have been intended for them to read, and still find them highly enjoyable. The intent of an author, a publishing company or of parents might not be taken into account by the child reader. What is understood as a child reader in the context of this thesis, is a young human being, no more than twelve years of age. The three novels might be expected to be read mainly by children from the ages of eight to twelve. They could, however, possibly be read by a younger audience. The novels could also quite conceivably be read out loud by an adult in the presence of a child.

Maria Tatar states that “children’s literature is designed both *for* the child as audience and *for the sake of* the child” (73). The idea of children’s literature being designed “*for the sake*” of the child is in line with Stephen’s view of writing for children as being purposeful. In her discussion of what children’s literature is, Barbra Wall turns to Aidan Chambers for guidance. He writes that:

Children’s books are generally shorter; they tend to favour an active rather than a passive treatment, with dialogue and incident rather than description and introspection; child protagonists are the rule; conventions are much used; the story develops within a clear-cut moral schematism which much adult fiction ignores; children’s books tend to be optimistic rather than depressive; language is child-oriented; plots are of a distinctive order, probability is often disregarded; and one could go on endlessly talking of magic, and fantasy, and simplicity, and adventure. (Chambers, qtd. in Wall 9)

Chambers makes some good points when it comes to what counts as children's literature. However, his terms are somewhat limiting. He, for example, mentions that "children's books tend to be optimistic" (Chambers, qtd. in Wall), but *The Tulip Touch* is not necessarily an optimistic novel. It leaves the reader assured that Natalie will be fine, but one is left with a sense of uncertainty when it comes to Tulip's future. Does this mean that *The Tulip Touch* is not a children's book? Maria Nikolajeva suggests that there has been a shift in what constitutes as children's literature. In "Exit Children's Literature?" she writes: "an ever growing segment of contemporary children's literature is transgressing its own boundaries, coming closer to mainstream literature" (222). This suggests that the borders of what constitutes as children's literature are becoming hazy. Nikolajeva states that "we must acknowledge that, sooner or later, children's literature will be integrated into the mainstream and disappear" (233).

In *Children's Literature* (2001) Peter Hunt writes that: "Children's texts are commonly assumed to be restricted (as well as restrictive) and yet the subject embraces – and is expected to embrace – oral forms, folk-tales, fairy-tales and legends (with, of course, international implications), the illustrated text, the highly illustrated text and the picture book" (3). Children's literature is a vast field, consisting of numerous texts belonging to different genres, being produced for people of different age groups, and with different aims when it comes to reader response. Children's literature may be notoriously difficult to define. However, the three novels discussed in this thesis were written for children, and are undeniably read by children. This together with the fact that they contain elements of violence makes them valid topics for discussion.

As mentioned above the three novels chosen for analysis are *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, *The Witches* and *The Tulip Touch*. In the *Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* we meet the four Pevensie children: Peter, Susan, Edmund and Lucy. In attempting to escape the

blitz in London during World War II, the children are evacuated to the British countryside. Here they leave their own world, through a magical wardrobe and enter Narnia, a fantasy world, where they meet magical creatures, an evil witch, and the godlike lion, Aslan. Both the primary and secondary worlds of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* contain violence. The many fantastical elements of the novel, and the existence of a secondary world in the shape of Narnia, distinguish *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* from the other two novels.

Although some fantastical elements also feature in *The Witches*, this novel is set in a universe that is meant to resemble that of the reader. The novel tells the story of a young boy and what he claims to be his meeting with a group of dangerous witches. After the death of his parents, he is to live with his grandmother, and together they travel to England where they have several encounters with witches. In contrast to the other two novels, *The Tulip Touch* does not feature any magical elements. The novel is set in a universe that is meant to be the same as that of the reader. The novel introduces a young girl, Natalie, and through her narration, tells a story of her friendship with Tulip Pierce. Tulip comes from a questionable background, and partly because of this her behaviour is difficult and at times violent.

Both in *The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe* and *The Witches* there are clear lines between good and evil whereas in *The Tulip Touch* this becomes more uncertain. Tulip's violent and perhaps evil behaviour could have its origin in social background. However, one can possibly argue that her disposition is hereditary as her father is described as a violent and sometimes sadistic person. This suggests that the novel, to a certain extent, deals with problems concerning nature versus nurture.

Two of the novels chosen for discussion have appeared with editions featuring illustrations, most notably, the illustrations by Quentin Blake in *The Witches*. Blake's illustrations feature in most of Dahl's books for children, and are considered integral parts of Dahl's books. Blake's illustrations help emphasise the mood of the story, and are to be found

regularly throughout the novel. The illustrations depict all kinds of different situations in the novel, depending on what goes on. However, they are seldom found to portray actual violence. They will rather show the event directly before or after something violent takes place, often with comic effect.

The illustrations presented in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* are by Pauline Baynes. Pauline Baynes was the official illustrator of The Chronicles of Narnia, and provided illustrations for all seven books. In *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* the illustrations are present at the beginning of each chapter depicting events that will take place in the forthcoming part of the novel. None of them depict any violent events, apart from one. The illustration featured in chapter sixteen, “What Happened About the Statues” (Lewis 187), shows a battle featuring numerous different animals, mythical creatures, Peter, Aslan and the White Witch. Although depicting a violent event, the illustration shows Aslan defeating the White Witch in battle, and could therefore be considered a good omen for the chapter.

The books have all been best sellers in Great Britain. Two of them have become classics. This is advantageous in an examination of this sort as it shows that they are good examples of popular books for children. The books serve to exemplify that violence occurs in novels read by children today, representing different genres, different decades and different authors. My thesis is that violence is an integral part of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, *The Witches* and *The Tulip Touch*. The novels would not function without it. Violence is an indispensable part of the fictional universe of each novel, and through its manifestation in the different worlds of the novels it becomes an important part of the plot of each novel.



## Chapter One

### Violence and the Fictional Worlds

Let there be wicked kings and beheadings, battles and dungeons, giants and dragons, and let the villains be soundly killed at the end of the book. Nothing will persuade me that this causes an ordinary child any kind of degree of fear beyond what it wants, and needs, to feel. For, of course, it wants to be a little frightened (Lewis, “On Three Ways” 31)

C.S. Lewis was a firm believer in the need for violence in children’s books. As seen in the epigraph from his essay “On Three Ways of Writing for Children,” he insists that children both want and need to feel fear when reading stories. This is obviously not true for all stories children might read, but Lewis argues that an author writing for children should not censure his or her writing in order to avoid violent and scary situations in the text. Lewis’ reasoning that children both need and want “to be a little frightened” (31) is interesting, as his wording suggests that without the ability to create fear for the reader a text would be weaker, and the reading experience less rewarding. Lewis’s sentiment was shared by Roald Dahl who stated that “By creating suspense, the writer is simply playing upon the subconscious masochistic instincts of the reader. He is torturing him. And if the torture is expertly applied, the reader will cry out: ‘I can’t stand it, not for another moment! Oh, isn’t it wonderful!’ –and he will read on” (Dahl, qtd. in Tatar, “Violent Delights” 81).

Fear is surely connected with feelings of excitement and anticipation when reading, and those are feelings most authors undoubtedly would wish for their readers to have. This chapter will take a closer look at violence and its different manifestations and functions in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, *The Witches* and *The Tulip Touch*. The discussion will focus on the role of violence in the fictional worlds of the three novels. Violence could be said to have many different functions in these books. It creates scary situations, suspense, excitement and fear, and it may also have a humorous effect, as especially seen in *The*

*Witches*. It serves as a means to an end in order to overcome an obstacle, and it is often very important to the plot of the novels. Arguably all three novels would be severely altered without the elements of violence in them; in fact they would simply not function. Without the evil and violent Witch the Pevensie children would not have to go on a quest to free Narnia from her spell and there would be no plot. In the absence of witches in *The Witches* the boy and his grandmother would live a care-free life, and what would *The Tulip Touch* be without Tulip's violent background and actions? Without violence all three novels would turn into books about rather content children living their lives in peace and harmony, where nothing too exciting ever happened. Undoubtedly this would make rather dull reading, and thus violence can be argued to be necessary in order for these novels to function. Violence is the driving force of all three narratives, as it is the catalyst for action urging the plot to develop.

### **Into the Wardrobe: Narnia – a Violent World**

In *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* violence has an important place in both worlds of the novel. In the primary world, set in England during World War II, violence is a part of daily life for the citizens of London, due to the air-raids. The protagonists are sent away from London in order to be kept safe from the dangerous and violent situation. Ironically they end up in Narnia, where their very presence is the cause of the escalation of a violent conflict. In the universe of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* violence is an important factor in the relationship between good and evil. In the primary world it may seem like the forces of evil the Nazi bombers are the only ones using violence. However, although it is not mentioned in the novel most readers, at least when it was first published, would know that the British sent air raids over Germany and other opponents in the war. Violence in the primary world can therefore be said to be used by both forces of good and evil, as they fight for freedom and supremacy of that world.

The violent struggle of the secondary world, Narnia, could be read as mirroring that of the first one. Here the violent struggle is between the potential rulers of the land, as the characters fight over the supremacy of Narnia. However, the White Witch is the character who initialises the use of violence in Narnia. Her remorseless violent acts separate her from the other characters. She is portrayed as a cold and relentless woman, who is not a stranger to using violence in order to reach her goals. Yet, violence is used by both antagonists and protagonists in the novel as a means to an end. The White Witch uses it in order to stay in power in Narnia, whereas the Pevensie children and their accomplices use violence in order to remove the despot from power. This use of violence by the protagonists is presented as justified. If the protagonists use violence in order to defend themselves or their loved ones the novel suggests that it is a reasonable thing to do. This could again be seen as a parallel to the frame story of the Second World War and the British participation in it. The Pevensie children represent the side of good, fighting the intruder in Narnia, as do the British soldiers, simply defending themselves against the evil of the Nazi regime. The fact that the Pevensie children are no more native to Narnia than the White Witch does not seem to make them intruders in the same way as her. Four children were predestined to come to Narnia, in order to sit at the thrones on Chair Paravel, and it turns out to be the Pevensie children. This makes the children entitled to the rule of Narnia and to a certain extent suggests that the White Witch is fighting a losing battle for the supremacy of Narnia.

Here one could see a link to the religious allegory that parts of *The Chronicles of Narnia* represents, in that the struggle between The Witch on one hand and Aslan and the Pevensie children on the other represents the struggle between Satan and Christ. According to the Christian Bible Christ defeats Satan in Hell and rises to Paradise. If the White Witch is a representation of Satan in the world of Narnia, she is pre-destined to be defeated by the Christ-like Aslan. Although this might be the case, a violent struggle seems unavoidable as

the satanic White Witch has to be defeated by Aslan in order for him to be a truly Christ-like figure.

As already mentioned, the fictional universe in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* is divided into two different worlds, separated by the “big wardrobe; the sort that has a looking glass in the door” (Lewis 113). The world that the Pevensie children live in is a fictional representation of England during the Second World War. Seemingly this world does not have any magical elements except for the Wardrobe in the Professor’s house. The Wardrobe functions as a portal into the magical world of Narnia where animals can speak, mythological creatures roam the forests and human beings are uncommon. Although the two fictional worlds in the novel are quite different, violence is a common feature in both. The title of the novel includes the two characters, the lion Aslan and the White Witch, who represent the embodiment of the struggle in Narnia, and the Wardrobe functioning as a gateway between Narnia and the “real” world of the Pevensie children. The lion is the saviour of the novel, he is great and good, whereas the Witch is the personification of evil. The conflict in the novel is ultimately staged as a struggle between the two of them. The Witch brings evil into Narnia, and although Aslan is the creator of the world of Narnia, as seen in *The Magician’s Nephew* (1955), he does not have the power to ban the Witch from it. The Witch wishes to gain control of Narnia and to be its ruler. Due to her despotic nature she can only do this by force. Aslan intended to create a peaceful and harmonious world. However, evil was introduced to Narnia when the world was in its infancy “for though the world is not five hours old an evil has already entered it” (Lewis, *Magician’s Nephew* 72).

Interestingly evil, in the form of the Witch, was introduced into Narnia by the fault of a human boy. The young boy who accidentally introduces the White Witch to Narnia has grown up to become the professor who owns the house the Pevensie children come to live in in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. Thus a human is the cause of the manifestation of

evil in Narnia, and through it violence. The boy does not intend to do this, but he seems unable to control himself: ““Oh, but don’t you see it’s no good?” said Digory. “We can’t get out of it now. We shall always be wondering what else would have happened if we had struck the bell” (Lewis, *Magician’s Nephew* 35). Interestingly it is a boy who is tempted to do something that releases evil into the world, as opposed to the female Eve in the Bible. He does, however, manage to resist eating the forbidden fruit when the Witch offers it to him later in the novel. In *The Magician’s Nephew* the Witch acts like a combination of Eve and the snake in Paradise. On the one hand she eats the forbidden fruit, in the shape of an apple, and on the other she tries to lure Digory into eating an apple, although he knows he is not supposed to.

When Lewis argues that children need and want to feel fear when reading, he makes a strong case for the presence of violence in children’s literature. Violence, both physical and psychological, is surely the key to the creation of fear in a text. This is certainly true for *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. The White Witch is the main threat to the Pevensie children in the novel, and she is indeed a violent threat. From the moment she is introduced by Mr. Tumnus it is clear that she is a force of evil, a dangerous character that is a peril to the protagonists and other creatures of the novel. The violent nature of the Witch is introduced almost as soon as she is first mentioned. Mr. Tumnus informs Lucy that he is “a kidnapper for her” (118), establishing that the Witch is a character who is willing to employ kidnappers, and one would assume other violent means, in order to reach her goals.

With the introduction of the White Witch in Narnia the author creates suspense for the reader. The violent threat of the Witch makes the story exciting and the reader wonders what will happen next. The threat of the Witch drives the story forwards as it is the harm she might inflict on Mr. Tumnus that drives the children to go searching for him. Thus violence, or at least the threat of violence, functions as a catalyst for the narrative.

Despite the fact that the White Witch seems to be the main threat to the protagonists of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, another violent threat is present long before she is introduced. As mentioned earlier, the novel opens with a short sentence about the air-raids in London, making it clear that the novel takes place sometime during the Second World War. The irony of this is that as the children escape the threat of the war raging in London, they find themselves in another world plagued by war. Although Narnia is not in open war when the children arrive, their coming is a catalyst that throws Narnia into combat. The invasion of Narnia by the intruder Jadis echoes that of the threat of invasion that the children, and with them Britain, were facing from Nazi Germany. Perhaps the eternal winter of Narnia is a forewarning of how England might have ended up should the Nazis have won the war, as a desolate and cold place, where democracy and freedom of speech would be banned.

Although violence is a force that causes destruction, pain and fear, it is by no means limited to the antagonists of the text. The White Witch does indeed show that she is brutal and merciless on several occasions, but Aslan is also an awe-inspiring character. He is described as “good and terrible at the same time” (168), a huge male lion with the ability to kill at will. Aslan is the son of the Emperor beyond the sea, and the way he is described in the novel points to his divine nature. Despite the powers of Aslan, when the wolf Maugrim attacks Susan, Aslan stands back and demands that “the Prince win his spurs” (170). Peter is successful in killing “the monster” (171), and thus seemingly becomes a man in the process. Here violence is used to make Peter a hero rather than a mere boy. He needs to prove himself in order to be a king in Narnia, even though he is predestined to sit on the throne of Cair Paravel. This manhood ritual of killing an enemy is intriguing as it spreads doubt about the initial hypothesis about how violence is a means to an end for the protagonists in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. However, the ritual killing could be read as a means to an end in the sense that it inaugurates Peter into the world of men and soldiers, making it possible for

him to lead an army and a kingdom in the future. Protecting his people from intruders and being able to make decisions about life and death is something a medieval king would have to do.

Another fascinating aspect of the use of violence among the protagonists of the novel is the fact that it is reserved for the men. When Father Christmas presents Peter, Susan and Lucy with their gifts, he gives Peter “shield and a sword” (160), insisting that “they are tools, not toys” (159), whereas Susan’s bow, arrows and ivory horn are to be used “only in great need ... for I do not mean you to fight in the battle” (160). Moreover, Lucy is given a bottle filled with a cordial that has healing powers and “a small dagger. ... And the dagger is to defend yourself at great need. For you also are not to be in the battle” (160). Although both Susan and Lucy are given weapons as part of their presents they are instructed not to use them except for defence, whereas Peter is told that his gifts are tools, suggesting that he is expected to use them for a specific purpose. Lucy tries to convince Father Christmas that she would be brave enough to fight in a battle, but he replies that “battles are ugly when women fight” (160). His reply is intriguing, as one would expect battles to be ugly no matter who fights in them. The message seems to be that women should be healers, and if in danger they should call for help before trying to defend themselves. Thus the future kings of Narnia will fulfil the role of brave warrior heroes, while the future queens will be healers and companions living under the protection of their brothers or male companions.

This contrast between the forces of good and evil in the use of violence in the novel is interesting. The forces of good, being lead by strong patriarchal figures such as Aslan and Father Christmas, try to shield their women from the use of violence and the field of battle, whereas the primary forces of evil in the novel are personified in the shape of a woman. The White Witch is willing to use violence in order to keep her power, and she is not shy about it. This could suggest that when a woman turns evil, she goes all the way. A woman using

violence is something ugly and dangerous that leads to desolation and destruction as seen in Narnia. When men use violence, however, they are noble, brave saviours who restore peace to the land.

This division of gender roles could be based on the gender roles from medieval tales, in which women were protected by brave knights and kings. The world of Narnia is set in something similar to this period. Furthermore, it is important to consider the period the novel was written in. At the time of its publication in 1950, it could have been seen as quite daring to write a book where young girls were encouraged to fight in battles. The tradition of books where young boys go on adventures and fight, goes back much further, with publications like *Treasure Island* (1883) by Robert Louis Stevenson and *With Clive in India: The Beginnings of an Empire* (1884) by G. A. Henty. These novels are examples of stories mainly written for a male audience where the young male protagonists face danger and violence in abundance. Despite the fact that *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* was not written for an exclusively male audience, the tradition of leaving the dangerous tasks to the men seems to have prevailed nearly a hundred years after the Victorian Empire tales.

### **The Violent World of Witches**

The protagonist of Roald Dahl's *The Witches* is a young boy facing grave danger when encountering a group of witches in a seaside hotel in Bournemouth, England. While the fictional universe of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* is divided into two separate worlds where one is magical and the other is not, Dahl's book constructs a universe that is similar to our own world, and yet somehow different in the fact that it contains some magical elements. The most notable of these are the witches that roam the world of the novel. Although they are not the only magical creatures of this world, they are the most notable ones and play an important part in the novel.



Arguably the violence of the novel is strongly linked to the magical element of the witches. The novel is initiated by giving a vivid account of the hatred witches have for children. The narrator of the novel is the young boy. In the introduction of the novel he is describing witches from his own personal experiences with them in his childhood. The “murderous bloodthirsty thoughts” (Dahl 1) of a witch is explained by the fact that “a real witch gets the same pleasure from squelching a child as *you* get from eating a plateful of strawberries and thick cream” (Dahl 2). This suggests that witches take a sadistic pleasure in killing children. Furthermore, it might suggest that the witches of the novel cannot help themselves when it comes to wanting to murder children. They achieve a feeling of enjoyment and delight when they manage to kill a child. Interestingly the witches do not choose to simply get rid of all children at the same time, although they are indeed plotting to cause the deaths of thousands of children later in the novel. Instead, the common strategy of a witch is to remove one child from the safety of his or her family, not necessarily killing the child right away. This indicates that the witches might be sadistic creatures who take great pleasure in inflicting harm and suffering on children and their families alike.

Even though violence is introduced in the novel in connection with witches, this form of violence, although grotesque and at times macabre, is made acceptable for the reader through humour. When witches or other supernatural events are mentioned the tone of the novel is always light and funny. Together with the fact that the witches are mythological creatures and that the language describing them and their actions is somewhat comical, the sadistic witches are made less threatening to the young reader, as discussed in further detail below.

Dahl has no scruples about including the gory details when the violent behaviour of the witches is described, as in the song of the Grand High Witch:

Down with children! Do them in!  
Boil their bones and fry their skin!

Bish them, sqvish them, bash them, mash them!

Brrreak them, shake them, slash them, smash them! (Dahl 79).

On the other hand, when the novel deals with realistic violence, that is, violent events that might occur in the life of a reader, the language is more sober. The car accident that killed the boy's parents is mentioned, but it is not given much space in the story, despite the fact that it is of great significance to the plot of the novel. The death of the boy's parents lets the boy live with his grandmother, and through her he is introduced to the witches. The boy was ignorant of their existence before his grandmother tells him about them. In describing the car accident there is no elaborate description of the violent event, but a matter of fact language explaining that there was an accident: "Our car skidded off the road and went tumbling down into a rocky ravine. My parents were killed" (Dahl 7). Furthermore, the narrator seems to find the death of his parents too traumatic to describe: "I won't go into the horrors of that terrible afternoon. I still get the shivers when I think about it" (Dahl 7), whereas his meeting with the witches, an occurrence that also turned out to be life changing, is not a problem to share. In fact the narrator indicates that it is the reader who might be traumatised by his story: "Things happened to me that will probably make you scream when you read about them. That can't be helped. The truth must be told" (Dahl 6).

As mentioned above, the violence of *The Witches* is very much connected to the magical elements of the novel. Since the boy is the narrator of the novel he is the one to introduce the witches. However, the boy first learns about their existence from his Grandmamma who "was a wonderful story-teller" and the boy "was enthralled by everything she told me" (Dahl 8). The grandmother tells stories in order to forget about the tragic loss the two of them has suffered, and initially they are introduced as fairy stories. But as she remarks "witch stories, unlike most of the others, were not imaginary tales. They were all true. They were the *gospel* truth" (Dahl 8). This shift in the grandmother's storytelling is interesting. The

grandmother comes from a part of the world that is different from that of the boy. She is Norwegian and lives in the mysterious Norway “with its black forests and icy mountains” (6). This part of the novel is possibly based on autobiographical facts. Both of Dahl’s parents were Norwegian and he travelled with his mother to Norway every summer in his youth: “All my summer holidays, from when I was four years old to when I was seventeen (1920 to 1932), were totally idyllic. This, I am certain, was because we always went to the same idyllic place and that place was Norway” (*Boy* 53). Another factor, that supports the assumption that the boy in the novel could be partly autobiographical for Dahl, is that he remains nameless. The boy and his grandmother are not named, and in Quentin Blake’s illustrations that introduce the main characters of the novel, the protagonist is simply stated as Boy. *Boy* (1984) is also the title of Dahl’s autobiography.

One can assume that Dahl knew Norwegian folklore and tales, and they may have had an influence on his own writing. According to Michal Rosen, when the Dahl family went on holiday to Norway:

At night, Roald’s mother told stories – sometimes made up, sometimes myths, legends and fairy tales, sometimes the stories of famous Norwegian writers who wrote about the kind of lonely, difficult lives people and animals had in this landscape of forests, mountains, rivers and fjords. [...] It was fantastic, magical, amazing, weird, scary, exciting stuff. (67)

The boy narrator tells the story of his encounter with the witches as though it were a true story. But one could question his reliability as a narrator. In the novel the boy experiences trauma that is too devastating to share. His sudden insistence that one of his grandmother’s tales is true can seem somewhat suspicious. One possible reading of the novel could be that the boy narrator in fact escapes into a fantasy world where witches and other fantastical creatures exist. His grandmother is unwilling to share the story of her own encounter with

witches: “‘I’m not going to tell you,’ she said. ‘It would frighten you out of your skin and give you bad dreams’” (Dahl, *The Witches* 26). Because of this, the boy is possibly prompted to imagine his own encounters with witches: The boy spends time imagining the possible ways in which his grandmother lost her thumb when meeting a witch: “Maybe the thumb had been twisted off. Or perhaps she had been forced to jam her thumb down the spout of a boiling kettle until it was steamed away. Or did someone pull it out of her hand like a tooth? I couldn’t help trying to guess” (Dahl 30).

If one is to assume that the boy is an unreliable narrator, one can make the argument that much of the violence in the novel is a figment of his imagination, a young boy’s imagination fed by his grandmother’s stories and his own tragic loss. It is interesting that the contact the boy has with witches mainly happens on English ground. Although Norway “is where the first witches came from” (Dahl 6), the boy never encounters any magical beings there.

The fact that the story is narrated by a young boy is interesting in relation to the representation of evil and violence in the novel. The young boy versus the witches could be read as a take on the biblical story David and Goliath in that a small, seemingly powerless character, takes on a formidable force. The boy acts in a very heroic manner when forced to face this great enemy.

The fictional universe of *The Witches* is meant to echo that of the world of the reader. However, there are some discrepancies between the two, most notably the element of magic, as mentioned above. However, the characters of *The Witches* are also somewhat different from what one would expect most people of the world of the reader to be. This is particularly true when it comes to their reaction to magic. When Mr and Mrs Jenkins realise that their son has been turned into a mouse they react with disbelief and shock, as expected. But Mr Jenkins does not question the existence of witches. He instead intends to confront the Great High

Witch and possibly prosecute her. The other human beings of the novel do not seem to be too troubled by magic either. The Norwegians, for example, “are used to that sort of thing” (Dahl 17). Interestingly, when the, to the people of the hotel, nice ladies are turned into mice, no one stops to question the turn of events, but rather “Waiters were attacking the mice with chairs and wine-bottles and anything else that came to hand” (Dahl 179), and “the children in the room were really enjoying it. They all seemed to know instinctively that something good was going on” (Dahl 180). Something good being the slaughter of women, magically transformed into mice, in front of their eyes. This eagerness to kill the mice, which one would assume they all realise used to be women minutes before, suggests that the human beings of the novel share some of the eagerness to act out their violent urges with the witches.

### **Good and Evil in *The Tulip Touch*: Can Someone Be Born Evil?**

*“Satan is glad  
When I am bad  
And hopes that I  
With him shall lie  
In fire and chains  
And awful pains”* (Fine 143).

In *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* and *The Witches* the lines between good and evil are quite clear for the reader. There is hardly any question of who is bad and who is good. When it comes to the *The Tulip Touch*, however, the distinction between good and evil is somewhat more difficult to make out. The novel complicates the relationship between good and evil, and poses the question of whether someone could be born evil. The poem in the epigraph of this sub-chapter is recited when a few of the guests at the Palace are having a discussion about the nature of Tulip and whether or not she is a bad seed, a “spawn of the devil?” (Fine 142). The novel deals with the concept of nature versus nurture. Through its realistic genre it also

describes violence and characters in more realistic manners than the other two novels. Where they can disregard the fact that human characters often are complex rather than then simply good or evil, in *The Tulip Touch* the complicated nature of human beings is more closely looked at. This could be linked to the fact that the genres of the two other novels are connected to fantasy and fairy tales. In these books the characters are built on stock characters and stereotypes due to the connection to the genres mentioned before.

One thing all three novels have in common is the fact that the antagonists in all of them are women. In two of the cases the women are portrayed as witches, and thus perhaps not human women, but they still embody female characteristics. In the cases of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* and *The Witches* the antagonists are quite clearly evil. They wish to control the lives of other characters, kill them, and most definitely scare them. No questions are asked, however, concerning the reasons for this wicked behaviour. In *The Tulip Touch*, however, the situation is different. Firstly there is no clear antagonist in the traditional sense. Tulip could potentially be considered an antagonist in that her behaviour is described as difficult, and the problematic sides of the relationship between Natalie and Tulip are highlighted from the very beginning of the novel. However, to Natalie Tulip takes on the role of a friend rather than an opponent almost to the ending of the novel. It is mainly in hindsight that Natalie to a certain extent antagonises Tulip. In her retelling of the story Natalie also antagonises the adults of the novel to a certain extent. She seems to partly blame them for her difficult relationship with Tulip, as they allowed it to happen. Tulip is portrayed as a young girl with problems that might explain some of her violent behaviour, which means that the novel does not assume that she is simply an evil character without offering any deeper explanation.

One could read Tulip's father as a possible antagonist in the story. He is not present for much of the narrative, but through the subtext of the novel, one can claim him to be

responsible for much of Tulip's behaviour. The reader suspects him of being abusive towards Tulip, and perhaps her mother. He is in the very least neglectful. The situation in her home, undoubtedly affects the character of Tulip as she is portrayed as a damaged child with much need for attention and care.

It is thought-provoking that when she is still a child, Natalie is concerned with Tulip's wellbeing, and offers her some comfort and shelter through her friendship. It is difficult to know how aware Natalie could be of Tulip's situation. However, there are hints that she understands something of what Tulip has to deal with at home. Natalie only visits Tulip at home once, and never goes again. The unkempt surroundings of the house, and Mr. Pierce's uncanny stare frightens her. In addition, there is the incident when Natalie and her father witness Mr. Pierce beating his dog (Fine 58), which indicates that they are both aware of what goes on in Tulip's home. When Natalie grows older, however, she becomes more like the adults of the novel in that she gradually stops interacting with Tulip.

Although the adults of the novel seem to be aware of what is going on, Tulip is allowed to remain with her neglectful, and possibly abusive, parents. Instead of urging someone to help Tulip by telling her parents or some of the teachers at her school about the situation, Natalie gradually distances herself from her former friend. This is interesting in the sense that the novel tries to create understanding for a child such as Tulip. The narrator-character, Natalie actively criticises the adults for not intervening, but when Natalie reaches an age where she is conscious about the problems Tulip has, she prefers to create distance rather than try to help. This could be read as an implicit critique of all those who turn a blind eye to child abuse and neglect.

The critique of the adults in the novel is complicated due to the fact that Natalie is the narrator and a child through most of the novel. The adults might not discuss the matters with Natalie precisely because she is a child, and her ignorance makes her angry. This becomes

clear through a conversation between Natalie and her father that the grown-ups of the novel are well aware of what goes on in Tulip's life: "You really mustn't think that nobody tried. I know for a fact we weren't the only ones to make a few warning phone calls. And both schools were always well aware of Tulip's background. The Pierces have had social workers round there time and again'" (Fine 153).

The reader can sense that Natalie finds the situation difficult as she is a young child without much power to help Tulip: "I wanted to scream at him. 'Yes, but I'm not like you, am I? I've got no power to change things. You lot *have*'" (Fine 154). Natalie's desperation and helplessness in this situation echoes how a real child might react. Her story is clearly coloured by feelings of feelings of guilt for not being able to help Tulip more. Young children do not have the recourses necessary to help in situations like these, and Natalie's helplessness might resonate with the child reader. Arguably Natalie is still a child when retelling the story of her friendship with Tulip, and one could say that the novel aims to help the child reader understand why Tulip acts like she does rather than instructing the reader to help a child in a similar situation. The novel describes the difficulties a child meeting someone like Tulip might be faced with. Therefore, it first and foremost tries to create understanding so the child reader might know and comprehend the nature of a child like Tulip. The novel might also encourage the child reader to take action if he or she encounters a child similar to Tulip, but it seems to make a case for the importance of the actions of adults.

The function of much of the violence in *The Tulip Touch* could be argued to first and foremost be to create sympathy for a violent character such as Tulip. It is clear from early on in the novel that something is a bit off with Tulip. She is first introduced in the novel in an early scene in which the first-person narrator, Natalie, mistakes her for a scarecrow (10). This mistake and the description of Tulip's "unbrushed hair" (11) give the reader some hints of Tulip's unkempt appearance, which suggests that she might not be as well taken care of by



her parents as Natalie is. Furthermore, there is the fact that Natalie is not allowed to visit Tulip's home. This suggests that the adults of the novel know more than they are letting on, and that they do not wish for their children to be around such people as Tulip's parents.

The examples from the novel mentioned above do not contain any violent episodes, but they do hint at the presence of violence in Tulip's life, and they create an uncanny atmosphere around Tulip's background. It is possible to read this as a way of explaining to the reader why Tulip behaves the way she does. Her missing school, her unkempt appearance, her rude remarks and her controlling behaviour with Natalie could all potentially be explained by problems in her home environment. This seems to be the explanation the novel prefers to give, although it does little or nothing to explain why Natalie enjoys Tulip's company so much. Natalie seemed perfectly content to play on her own until she was introduced to Tulip. It is suggested that Tulip holds some kind of magic spell over Natalie, but it is important to remember that Natalie is the narrator of the novel, and she is able to exclude certain factors about her relationship to Tulip that might embarrass her.

Furthermore, the novel raises a question of good and evil through the discussion of Natalie's parents about Tulip. Natalie's mother is convinced that "Tulip is downright *evil*" (145), whereas Natalie's father states that "No one is born evil. No one. And especially not Tulip" (Fine 145). Upon first reading this, one might assume that Natalie's father is saying that Tulip is not evil at all. However, on closer examination it is the first statement that stands: "No one is born evil" (145). The two comments, made by Natalie's parents, serve to introduce the theme of nature versus nurture. Whereas Mrs. Barnes might imply that Tulip has always been evil, and that it is part of her nature, Mr. Barnes is suggesting that her violent behaviour is a result of her upbringing.

Steven Pinker writes about what he refers to as "the myth of pure evil" which suggests that "Evil is the intentional and gratuitous infliction of harm for its own sake, perpetrated by a

villain who is malevolent to the bone, inflicted on a victim who is innocent and good” (Pinker 597). In the novel Natalie would be the “innocent and good victim” while Tulip is “malevolent to the bone.” However, the novel suggests that this is not the case in tune with Pinker’s claims about the myth of pure evil: “The reason that this is a myth (when seen through psychological spectacles) is that evil in fact is perpetrated by people who are mostly ordinary, and who respond to their circumstances, including provocations by the victim, in ways they feel are reasonable and just” (Pinker 597). The myth of pure evil seems to be taken as the truth in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* and *The Witches*. As both novels have fantastical elements and fit in genres where a clear separation between good and evil is necessary this will be expected by the reader. The social realism of *The Tulip Touch*, however, demands a more realistic approach to the potential evil in human beings.

Tulip undoubtedly behaves the way she does in order to react to some of the things that happen to her. One may question if there is something more to Tulip’s nature though, as she seems to take disturbing pleasure in some of her actions. Natalie mentions a few incidents where Tulip’s reaction to someone getting hurt is slightly alarming. At one point in the novel Natalie injures herself, and needs medical attention. Tulip’s subsequent behaviour when her friend is hurt is not to help, but to prance about like a monkey. “She made a stupid face, splaying her hands, tipping her head sideways and sticking out her tongue” (Fine 52). It could be possible that Tulip suffers from some kind of personality disorder, as she has trouble with interacting normally with other human beings. Her only friend is Natalie, and when interacting with the adults of the novel she is either insolent, or unnaturally charming. Tulip is manipulative, has criminal tendencies and seems to lack the sense of moral responsibilities and a social conscience. She is fascinated by the story of the death of a tortoise, and admits to Natalie that she has been known to drown kittens in order to avoid her home becoming “*overrun*”. The latter seems to sadden Tulip, as she explains “He’d [Tulip’s father] just shove

them in a crock of water and slam the lid, and you could hear them scrabbling and pushing at the top. [...] ever since then I've always done it myself. Because it's quicker". The act that ultimately makes the reader really question Tulip's mental health is when she attempts to burn down the Palace. It is filled with people, and one can only assume that she means for them to come to harm in the fire. This act could be read as a desperate attempt to seek attention, and therefore get help, or one could interpret it as a form of revenge over Natalie. Either way, the reader is left questioning Tulip's rationale. It would not be surprising if Tulip had developed some kind of disorder due to the abuse and neglect she has suffered. However, this could also possibly be inherited from her sadistic, and unstable father.

Tulip is clearly the more violent of the two girls, but Natalie does take certain pleasures in their games. When the girls set fire to a shed in Part Two of the novel it is in fact Natalie who is intrigued by their crime, not Tulip:

The only thing I wanted was to stand and watch this great orange dragon leap higher and higher. ... Why take so many risks, then walk away from all the glorious, spell-binding magic you've created? Why miss the fizzing, crackling glory of something so plain and drab exploding into fireballs and shooting stars? (113).

In fact, Natalie seems nearly hypnotized and must be dragged away by Tulip in order to avoid being caught. This hints that although Tulip is the bad seed of the novel, Natalie certainly reveals a tendency to enjoy dangerous and violent behaviour as well. It is also a reminder that no one is completely free of violent behaviour or malevolent feelings no matter how harmonious their background. All humans have a great capacity for, and fascination with violence.

Natalie's attraction to violence makes it somewhat easier for the reader to understand the friendship between the girls. If Natalie was a completely innocent child who was caught young, sucked in, and made to bury her feelings so deep she practically did not have them

(126), as she so eloquently puts it, the sequence mentioned above does not make much sense. Why would Natalie be mesmerised by the flames, and why would she nurture her friendship with Tulip for so long if there was nothing in it for her? One explanation could be that as a young girl Natalie shares some of the attraction to violence that Tulip has. Tulip is a fascinating character for Natalie, she is different, brave in her own way, and Natalie is drawn in by her charms. As Natalie grows older and matures she seems to find her own identity and does not need Tulip anymore. Natalie develops and understands that the games of her past were immature and does not wish to continue with them. Tulip does not seem able to escape her world of violence and acting out, perhaps because of her circumstances.

While the novel poses the question of whether someone is born evil without explicitly answering the question it certainly suggests that Tulip behaves the way she does due to the circumstances of her upbringing. Her violent and abusive father has taught Tulip several of the offensive phrases she uses and probably a thing or two about violence as well.

Both *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* and *The Witches* feature somewhat violent protagonists, but they justify their use of violence with the fact that they are fighting evil. In *Evil and human Agency: Understanding Collective Evildoing* Arne Johan Vetlesen proposes a definition of evil that he characterizes as “commonsensical and minimalist”: “to do evil ... is to *intentionally inflict pain and suffering on another human being, against her will, and causing serious and foreseeable harm to her* (2). Based on Vetlesen’s definition of evil one can claim that the antagonists of all three novels “do evil”, as they knowingly inflict harm on human beings and other creatures. However, one could also claim that the protagonists of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* and *The Witches* “do evil” as they also use violence causing serious foreseeable harm to their enemies. These two novels argue that in some cases it is acceptable to use violence, if it is for the greater good.

Here the fantastical elements of these two novels play an important part. Without them the violent actions of the protagonists would be more problematic. As mentioned before, it is clear to the reader that the novels are portraying magical non-human characters when it comes to the antagonists of the novels. The fantastical elements of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* and *The Witches* have to do with the genres of the two novels, the same can be said for the lack of magical elements in *The Tulip Touch*. The question of genre is important to take into consideration when discussing the representation of violence in the novels. This will therefore be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter.



## Chapter Two

### Violence and Narrative Structures: The Question of Genre

Violence is an essential narrative element in each of the three novels discussed in this thesis. However, it is represented in different manners in each novel. Through the discussion of the different fictional universes and their relationship with violence in the previous chapter, one gets a certain indication about how the texts will be classified with reference to genre. This chapter will deal with how an examination focused on the narrative structures that are typical of a specific genre help identify important aspects of how violence functions as an integral part of the texts. Furthermore, the chapter will examine how the chosen genre of a text determines or influences the way in which violence is represented. In addition, how the genre determines or influences the way in which violence functions in the different novels with reference to the action, plot or central conflicts, will be taken into account.

Violence could be argued to be the catalyst of the plot in at least two of the novels, if not all three. The Pevensie children of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* would never have found the magic wardrobe without the frame narrative of the Second World War. Their escape from the violence of the primary world of the novel enables them to find the wardrobe and through it, the world of Narnia. The narrative of *The Witches* starts in an equally dramatic fashion, as the young boy's parents have been killed in a car crash, forcing him to live with his grandmother, who through storytelling introduces him to witches. Although *The Tulip Touch* does not start out with explicit violent actions, there is a change of scenery from the Queens Arms hotel to the Palace where Natalie meets Tulip. Even though moving is not a violent act in itself, the uprooting from one's surroundings could be argued to be traumatic for a young child. Natalie mentions her discomfort when she is first taken to the Palace to live there: "I felt so strange. I think I must have been dizzy from the ride. I stumbled out of the

car, and suddenly the sky seemed too high above me, the grass too green. And then one of the peacocks let out the most unholy cry, and I was filled with such unease” (Fine 6). Natalie’s feeling of unease forewarns the reader that something uncanny might happen, and creates suspense.

All three novels start with events that force the protagonists to move to new places, places that are not as familiar and safe as one would expect their previous homes to have been. The Professor’s house contains the wardrobe and therefore Narnia – a world filled with conflict, danger and adventure. The Grandmother’s house contains the knowledge of witches, and this seems to introduce them into the life of the boy. He does not mention hearing about them on any previous occasion. The topic of witches is introduced through the telling of stories, something initially done in order to forget about trauma: “The very next day, in order that we might both try to forget our great sadness, my grandmother started telling me stories” (Dahl 8). For Natalie, the move to the Palace introduces Tulip to her life, and with her violence.

### **The Fantasy Genre and Violence: *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe***

C. S Lewis chose to write his story in what he calls a “sub-species” of children’s literature (Lewis, “On Three Ways” 23), namely “fantasy or (in a loose sense of that word) the fairy tale” (23). *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* belongs to the fantasy genre. This is an undeniable fact, even though the definition of the fantasy genre is quite problematic. Edward James and Farah Mendlesohn write in their introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to Fantasy Literature* that: “fantasy literature has proven tremendously difficult to pin down. [...] all agree that fantasy is about the construction of the impossible whereas science fiction may be about the unlikely, but is grounded in the scientifically possible” (1). In his essay “Introduction to Modern Fantasy” (1975) Colin Manlove states that “The character of



‘fantasy’ now outlined is, [...] that of *A fiction evoking wonder and containing a substantial and irreducible element of supernatural or impossible worlds, beings or objects with which the reader or the characters within the story become on at least partly familiar terms*” (165). *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* contains the “impossible” and “supernatural” world of Narnia, and the reader gets familiar with the creatures that inhabit it. However when it comes to defining the fantasy genre James and Mendlesohn state that J.R.R. Tolkien’s essay “On Fairy Stories” and Brian Attebery’s *Strategies of Fantasy* (1992) are the most valuable theoretical texts for taking a definition of fantasy beyond preference and intuition (James and Mendelssohn 1). Accordingly, this chapter will take into account both Tolkien and Attebery in the discussion of fantasy. In his attempt to define fantasy Attebery proposes two different possible definitions:

- I. Fantasy is a form of popular escapist literature that combines stock characters and devices – wizards, dragons, magic swords, and the like – into a predictable plot in which the perennially understaffed forces of good triumph over a monolithic evil.
  
- II. Fantasy is a sophisticated mode of storytelling characterized by stylistic playfulness, self-reflexiveness, and a subversive treatment of established orders of society and thought. Arguably the major fictional mode of the late twentieth century, it draws upon contemporary ideas about sign systems and the indeterminacy of meaning and at the same time recaptures the vitality and freedom of nonmimetic traditional forms such as epic, folktale, romance and myth. (*Strategies* 1)

The first example gives a definition of what is known as formula fantasy, where the writers follow a certain formula to produce works that will normally be categorised as ‘popular’ literature. The formula is often based on the works of writers such as J.R.R. Tolkien, Ursula K. Le Guin and C.S. Lewis. The second example defines the fantastic mode which Attebery

describes as “a vast subject, taking in all literary manifestations of the imagination’s ability to soar above the merely possible” (Attebery, *Strategies* 2).

According to Attebery the genre of fantasy is somewhere in between the fantastic mode and the fantasy formula (2, 10). He claims that “the genre category does seem to be a useful way of designating stories that are more alike than required by the mode, and yet less uniform than dictated by the formula” (11). Attebery spends much time defining the genre of fantasy, but at one point he states that “one way to characterize the genre of fantasy is the set of texts that in some way or other resemble *The Lord of the Rings*” (14). *The Lord of the Rings* (1954-55) by J.R.R. Tolkien has enjoyed great popularity, and according to Attebery it brought a new coherence to the fantasy genre (14).

Although *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* belongs to the fantasy genre, when looked at more closely it more specifically belongs to the subgenre of portal fantasy. Portal fantasy differs from immersive fantasy, where the entire world of the narrative is fantastical, such as Tolkien’s Middle Earth or Le Guin’s Earthsea. In portal fantasy the characters of a novel start out in a primary world, before entering into the secondary fantastical world through a portal (Mendlesohn xix). Mendlesohn states that “The classic portal fantasy is of course *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (1950)” (xix). Interestingly, Lewis chose a wardrobe as the portal between the two worlds in the novel. The word wardrobe is initialised by the word *war*, and as war is played out in both the primary and the secondary worlds of the novel the wardrobe is a fitting gateway between the two.

The fantasy genre has been greatly influenced by fairy tales and folklore traditions. As Attebery mentions in his definition for the fantastic mode, fantasy recaptures “the vitality and freedom of nonmimetic traditional forms” (1). Due to the fact that the fantasy genre is influenced by fairy tale traditions it is natural to take into account the narrative structures of fairy tales. In his essay “On Fairy Stories” (1947) J. R. R. Tolkien states that “Most good

‘fairy stories’ are about the *adventures* of men in the Perilous Realm or upon its shadowy marches” (113). This sentiment is echoed by Jack Zipes to a certain extent. In his book *The Irresistible Fairy Tale: The Cultural and Social History of a Genre* Zipes writes:

Fairy tales are informed by a human disposition to action – to transform the world and make it more adaptable to human needs, while we also try to change and make ourselves fit for the world. Therefore, the focus of fairy tales, whether oral, written or cinematic, has always been on finding magical instruments, extraordinary technologies, or powerful people and animals that will enable protagonists to transform themselves along with their environment, making it more suitable for living in peace and contentment. Fairy tales begin with conflict because we all begin our lives with conflict. (2)

*The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* embody the qualities of the fantasy genre, and is therefore also influenced by fairy tales. In *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* the Pevensie children embark on a journey in order to find Aslan, a powerful animal that will enable them to transform themselves, Edmund in particular, along with Narnia, “making it more suitable for living in peace and contentment” (Zipes 2).

If the typical focus of fairy tales, and therefore to a certain extent also fantasy, is to transform the protagonists and the environment to the better, it is interesting that this often is achieved through the use of violence. Seemingly the best way to improve both characters and the world around them is to let them go through violent and difficult situations. In *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* Edmund needs to go through his ordeal with the Witch in order to reform and become a better human being. He is cast as the difficult sibling, and when faced with the evil, violent behaviour of the White Witch, he repents his former actions and rejoins the side of good and his siblings. Part of Edmund’s improvement happens when he is a witness to the violent behaviour of the White Witch as she turns a party of animals into stone:

“As for you,” said the Witch, giving Edmund a stunning blow on the face as she remounted the sledge, “let that teach you to ask favour for spies and traitors. Drive on!”

And Edmund, for the first time in this story, felt sorry for someone besides himself. It seemed so pitiful to think of those little stone figures sitting there all the silent days and all the dark nights. (Lewis, *The Lion* 163)

Because of Edmund's subsequent repenting after having witnessed the Witch's true nature one can argue that violence here is a necessary narrative tool, since without it Edmund could not understand his fault in choosing the White Witch as a companion. He is also made to understand the danger he has put both himself and his siblings in.

In his essay on "Structuralism" in relation to fantasy Attebery states that "in modern fantasy, typically, the fairy tale structure is not only present but is highlighted by such narrative devices as prophecy and providence. Prophecy says, in effect, 'here's the shape of the story you are about to read'. It subordinates the characters to the roles they are to play" (82). As briefly mentioned in the previous chapter, the narrative device of prophecy is used in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* in the sense that four human beings are pre-destined to rule Narnia:

*When Adam's flesh and Adam's bone  
Sits at Cair Paravel in throne,  
The evil time will be over and done.* (147)

When the Pevensie children enter Narnia there are no human beings there. Their number – four children, two boys and two girls – fit the prophecy perfectly. This makes the reader aware of the most likely outcome of the narrative quite early on. Yet, as in any fairy tale, the reader may wonder if the prophecy can in fact come true when there are so many obstacles to be overcome, and read on in order to find out. In relation to violence, the prophecy as a narrative device is interesting in the sense that the violent battle becomes inevitable. There is an obstacle, the White Witch, who will not stand down without a fight, and therefore the protagonists will have to go into battle. The outcome, however, is secured as a happy one for the heroes of the novel.

In addition to drawing inspiration from the fairy tale tradition, according to Manlove, “Fantasy often draws spiritual nourishment from the past (even when set in the present day, as with Lewis’ or Williams’ fiction), particularly from a medieval and/or Christian world order” (Manlove 163). In *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* the “spiritual nourishment” is drawn from both medieval and Christian world orders. When entering Narnia the Pevensie children enter a world with medieval qualities; moreover much of the novel is an interpretation of Christian narratives. In *C.S. Lewis – A Life: Eccentric Genius, Reluctant Prophet* (2013) Alister McGrath states that:

Lewis’s Chronicles of Narnia are about finding a master story that makes sense of all the other stories – and then embracing that story with delight because of its powers to give meaning and value to life. [...] Yet Lewis did not invent this Narnian narrative. He borrowed and adapted one that he already knew well, and had found to be true and trustworthy – the Christian narrative of Creation, Fall, redemption, and final consummation. (281)

Through the inspiration of a medieval world order and Christian narratives violence is an assured feature in the novel. *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* does not deal with all the parts of the Christian narrative mentioned by McGrath; it is concerned with Fall and redemption, and most importantly the story of salvation given through selfless sacrifice. The Fall and subsequent redemption is, as mentioned before, represented by the story of Edmund’s fall, the sacrifice of Aslan, leading to the salvation of Edmund and the rest of Narnia, which is perhaps the most noticeable Christian narrative of the novel. Here Lewis draws inspiration from the crucifixion of Christ, a violent story where the death and resurrection of Christ is essential. In order for Aslan’s sacrifice to resemble that of Christ he will have to die, which means that the violence of this narrative device is simply inevitable, if the desired effect is to be had.

Manlove states that it is common for the direction of the narrative to be circular (163). This means that a quest begins and ends in the same place. This is observed by Attebery as well. He states that “the characteristic structure of fantasy is comic. It begins with a problem and ends with resolution. Death, despair, horror, and betrayal may enter into a fantasy, but they must not be the final word” (*Strategies* 15). Tolkien called this narrative structure “the Consolation of the Happy Ending” (153) and he found it to be one of the most important structural features of the fairy story:

I would venture to assert that all complete fairy-stories must have it [...] It is the mark of a good fairy-story, of the higher or more complete kind, that however wild its events, however fantastic or terrible the adventures, it can give to child or man that hears it, when the ‘turn’ comes, a catch of the breath, a beat and lifting of the heart, near to (or indeed accompanied by) tears, as keen as that given by any form of literary art, and having peculiar quality. (Tolkien, “On Fairy-Stories” 153-54)

Tolkien coined the term *eucatastrophe*, to embody the meaning of the Consolation of the Happy Ending described above. He stated that, “The *eucatastrophic* tale is the true form of fairy-tale and its highest function” (153).

The circular, comic narrative structure occurs in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. After all their adventures and battles in Narnia, the Pevensie children end up back in the Professor’s house where it all started. According to Manlove it is usual to have a “supernatural interruption followed by a return to normality” (163). This narrative structure, together with the feature of the prophecy, allows the reader to rest easy in the knowledge that all will be well in the end. Because of this the violence in the novel can be said to be more acceptable to the reader, as the reader is aware of the narrative structures of fantasy.

The “return to normality” is in one way true for *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, and in another way not. The protagonists resolve the problems they encounter in

Narnia, but the problem of the World War that is raging in the primary world of the novel is left unsolved. This could have something to do with the fact that the novel was published five years after the Second World War ended. Thus the readers would know that the war in the primary world of the novel would end, and that the Pevensie children would most likely return to their home.

One of the classical elements of fantasy is the quest story where the protagonist(s) go on a journey to resolve a certain task before returning home. *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* is undoubtedly such a story. In a quest story certain elements are expected, among them is the obstacle the protagonist(s) has to overcome, often in the shape of an evil antagonist. When this is expected of the narrative it is difficult to escape violence in the text. However, the violence is often presented in the form of a battle between good and evil, as character building for the protagonist, or as showing the evil characteristics of the villain. This makes the violence of fantasy an important narrative device in itself. The violence of fantasy novels help determine which characters are good and which are bad, and it pushes the narrative forward in that it is often a factor in the major events of a novel.

The narrative structures expected in a quest story can certainly be found in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. The protagonists are faced with the obstacle of the White Witch and with her the threat of violence. An evil antagonist such as the White Witch is common in fantasy. Evil antagonists will traditionally not shun any means to get to their desired goals, goals that often seem to focus on world dominion. Noteworthy examples of such megalomaniacs are: Lord Sauron in *The Lord of the Rings* (1954-55), Lord Voldemort in the Harry Potter books, and indeed the White Witch in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. The fight against antagonists wanting to rule the world in their own wicked manner could be seen as a comment on social and political situations in the world of the reader. Violence is

introduced as a measure to stop such antagonists as those mentioned above, from reaching their goals.

In *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* the White Witch already rules Narnia, and the Pevensie children pose a threat to her rule. Therefore, the main objective of the children is to avoid being killed by her. They also wish to save Lucy's friend Mr Tumnus, and in order to do so they have to face the obstacle of the White Witch. The Witch represents the threat of violence in the beginning of the story, and there is no doubt that she is willing to put this threat into action. The arrest of Mr. Tumnus (Lewis 136) and her turning different creatures into stone (Lewis 163) are only some examples. Thus in the beginning of the story violence creates a separation between good and evil, where the forces of evil are brutal and willing to use violence in order to reach their goals. This is both true for the White Witch in Narnia and for the Nazi regime bombing London in the primary world. However, in order to defeat the evil regimes of both the primary and secondary worlds the people of the novel take up arms and decide to fight. The violence in Narnia can be said to have its origin in the White Witch. Due to the fact that she is the obstacle the protagonists have to overcome in the narrative one could argue that the violence in the story is closely linked to narrative structures.

### **The Burlesque, Fairy Tale-Inspired Violence of *The Witches***

Where *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* easily can be defined as fantasy, *The Witches* is slightly more difficult to categorise. The novel draws upon the features of realism, as it is meant to be set in the universe of the reader. However, as mentioned previously, the novel is heavily influenced by the fairy tale and folklore tradition. Deborah Cogan Thacker writes in her essay "Fairy Tale and Anti-Fairy Tale: Roald Dahl and the Telling Power of Stories" that "throughout his fiction for children, Dahl uses and abuses folk and fairy tale conventions" (15). Despite the fact that Dahl undoubtedly was influenced by fairy tales and folklore



traditions when writing *The Witches* one cannot really claim that the novel belongs to the fairy tale genre. As discussed in the previous chapter the story is placed in a fictional universe that is quite similar to that of the reader, the main difference being that in the universe of *The Witches* magical beings are real. There is very little representation of realistic violence in the novel, except at the very beginning of the narrative when the boy's parents are killed in a car accident. After this the boy is introduced to witches, and with them unrealistic, burlesque violence.

It is difficult to allocate *The Witches* to one specific genre as it is not a work of realism, but neither is it a fairy tale. Arguably the novel is partly a burlesque novel, in the sense that it draws upon traits from other genres and exaggerates them and to a certain extent mocks them. *The Oxford English Dictionary* defines burlesque as: "Of the nature of derisive imitation; ironically bombastic, mock-heroic or mock-pathetic; now chiefly said of literary or oratorical compositions and dramatic representations" ("Burlesque," Def. 2a). M. H. Abrams' *A Glossary of Literary Terms* states that:

burlesque has been succinctly defined as "an incongruous imitation"; that is, it imitates the manner (the form and style) or else the subject matter of a serious literary work or a literary *genre*, in verse or in prose, but makes the imitation amusing by a ridiculous disparity between the manner and the matter. (27)

If the nature of the burlesque is to imitate a serious literary genre then arguably *The Witches* imitates realism, a genre that *The Oxford English Dictionary* defines as "close resemblance to what is real; fidelity of representation, rendering the precise details of the real thing or scene" ("Realism," Def. 4a). *The Witches* does not present "close resemblance to what is real"; instead the novel introduces a fantastical story with clear references to the fairy tale genre.

When it comes to the representation of violence based on the narrative structures of the burlesque and the fairy tale in *The Witches*, the novel does not disappoint. As seen in the definition of burlesque above, the imitation is to be made amusing by a discrepancy between

the manner and the matter of the genre. In this novel the form and style of realism is imitated to a certain degree. It is imitated in the sense that the narrator of the novel wants the reader to believe that the story he is narrating is in fact true. While the novel is set in a universe that is quite similar to that of the reader, the introduction of magical creatures makes it clear to the reader that the world presented in the novel is, in fact, nothing like the world of the reader.

The fairy tale influence on the novel becomes clear when looking at the type of characters present in it. In fairy tales, according to Attebery, “characters are not people, but rather, as Propp put it ‘spheres of action’” (“Structuralism” 83). The characters of *The Witches* are for the most part “spheres of action” due to the fact that they are not particularly round or developed. Throughout the narrative they are either good or bad, and the novel seems interested in how their actions move the story forward, rather than getting to know them intimately. Here the fact that the young boy is a first-person narrator might have to be taken into account, but he does not present much detail about his own feelings, as Natalie does in *The Tulip Touch*. Attebery repeats some of the structuralist categories of characters of in narrative fiction, and mentions the two groups actants and acteurs, and explains: “Examples of the actants include the Hero, the Giver, and the Desired Object” (“Structuralism” 83). The actants stand for characters that play out their oppositions in the story. In *The Witches* both the boy and the witches can be said to be actants: the boy is the hero of the novel while the witches – his antagonists – are the obstacles he has to overcome in the novel. The witches are the embodiment of evil and they do not have any depth to them at all; in this sense they are the perfect manifestation of a fairy tale villain. The witches are evil, unnatural beings that the hero has to defeat in order for there to be a happy ending to the story.

As mentioned above fairy tales often follow a cyclic structure, and this is true for *The Witches* as well. After the boy and his grandmother have successfully transformed all the witches staying at their hotel into mice, they decide to go back to Norway, where the story

started. The circular structure of the fairy tale and the return to the safe environment of home after facing ordeals is a familiar feature to the reader, and creates a sense of safety and closure after the violent ordeals the protagonist had to go through.

Dahl's books for children have often been criticised for the representations of violence in them. In his essay "Dahl's Chickens: Roald Dahl" (1988) David Rees claims that the violence in much of Dahl's writing for children is gratuitous, and about *The Witches* he writes "If you wanted to give children nightmares and thoroughly confuse them about adult behaviour – the behaviour of women in particular – then *The Witches* could well do a first-class job" (147). Here Rees neglects to take into account the genre features of the novel, and how they affect the portrayal of violence. The violence in fairy tales is often quite graphic: Snow White's stepmother orders the murder of her stepdaughter, and commences to eat what she believes to be the heart of Snow White. Little Red Riding Hood and her grandmother are eaten by a wolf, before in some versions of the tale, a hunter kills the wolf and lets them escape. In "Sleeping Beauty" numerous young men are killed when trying to break through the thorny hedge protecting the castle. It should be no surprise therefore, that the violence in a novel influenced by the fairy tale genre and folklore traditions has depictions of quite severe violence. When one takes into account the influence of the burlesque as well, the representation of what Rees refers to as gratuitous violence, becomes quite understandable.

One of the redeeming features of the violence in *The Witches* is the humorous manner in which it is presented. As already mentioned, the humour of Dahl's fiction for children is closely connected with the burlesque. The burlesque dictates a narrative where the manner of the genre it imitates is ridiculed. The realistic novel would never portray violence in the manner seen in *The Witches*, this would not be possible as such a scenario would certainly frighten the child readers far too much for publication. The realistic novel wishes to describe its narrative as realistically as possible, and therefore the surreal violence of Dahl would not

work in such a novel. However, the humour of Dahl makes the violence acceptable and even entertaining. Jackie E. Stallcup claims, in her essay on “Discomfort and Delight: The Role of Humour in Roald Dahl’s Works for Children” (2012), that “Much of Dahl’s humour, as we will see, turns upon cruelty or situations of disgust or debasement and abuse, and (like many a good satire) may make readers laugh out loud and cringe simultaneously” (32). Stallcup makes it clear that Dahl turns to humour in order to make violent and scary situations in the narrative funny for the reader. The point of the burlesque is to make the narrative funny, and this narrative device allows Dahl to literally get away with murder.

### **Realism, Violence and *The Tulip Touch***

Where both *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* and *The Witches* belong to genres that draw on fairy tale and folklore traditions, making the representation of violence in them magical and unrealistic, *The Tulip Touch* belongs to the genre of realism, where no such thing as magic comes into the picture. In her book *Realism* Pam Morris states that realism is difficult to define. However, she writes:

By and large, the development of the realist novel coincided with and aligned itself to the modern secular materialist understanding of reality. Realist plots and characters are constructed in accordance with secular empirical rules. Events and people in the story are explicable in terms of natural causation without resort to the supernatural or divine intervention. (3)

Although this is not formulated as a definition of realism as a genre, it does give some indication as to what is expected of a novel written in the realistic mode. The fictional universe of *The Tulip Touch* is set in a world very similar to that of the reader. Although, as it is fiction, the universe is not a real one, but the creation of its author, Anne Fine, it is difficult to find anything in the narration of the novel that will give this away willingly.

For the purpose of this discussion realism will be understood as defined by Abrams:

to designate a recurrent mode, in various eras and literary forms, of representing human life and experience in literature. [...] realistic fiction is written to give the effect that it represents life and the social world as it seems to the common reader, evoking the sense that its characters might in fact exist, and that such things might well happen. (Abrams 269)

As seen in the quotes above, the realistic novel aims to give the effect that the events taking place in its narrative could happen in the world of the reader. In *The Tulip Touch* Anne Fine aspires to do this. The wish to represent reality necessarily makes the representation of violence as realistic as possible. Where the authors of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* and *The Witches* can make use of narrative devices that make the representation of violence in their novels humorous, surreal, magical, and perhaps ultimately entertaining for the reader, Fine cannot do that. Where the violence of the other two novels can be quite explicit, as expected based on the chosen genre and the narrative devices applied, the violence in *The Tulip Touch* is more moderate.

Realism often deals with subjects that describe the difficult aspects of human life in detail. Morris states that “undeniably realism as a literary form has been associated with an insistence that art cannot turn away from the more sordid and harsh aspects of human existence. The stuff of realism is not selected for its dignity and nobility” (3). *The Tulip Touch* is no exception when it comes to this. In describing Tulip and her difficult situation, the novel tackles the problems of abuse, neglect, and as a possible consequence of this, the difficult behaviour in a child. The fact that realism demands a representation of violence that is as similar as possible to that which might occur in the world of the reader creates an effect of suspense for the reader. Through the fact that the violence is depicted as sombre, yet quite

real, the reader is made to understand that the narrative of the novel could easily take place in his or her own world.

Literary works belonging to the genre of realism often set out to criticise their contemporary society. This can be seen in the works of, for example, Henrik Ibsen and George Eliot. Although these authors were writing in the second half of the nineteenth century, and were elementary in the development of the genre of realism, Anne Fine follows in their footsteps with *The Tulip Touch*. As mentioned above, the novel touches upon the difficult issue of child abuse, and through the narration of Natalie, depicts how a small community deals with this issue. The novel criticises the lack of action in relation to Tulip's troubles, but does not offer a simple solution to how one should react in a similar situation. Instead it encourages the reader to think, and come to his or her own solution.

As seen above, the narrative structures of fairy tales and fantasy novels are often circular this is not the case for most realistic novels, and it is not so for *The Tulip Touch*. The protagonists of the other two novels end up where they first started, Natalie must move on, yet again after the Palace is ruined. Tulip remains behind, left to her own fate. This turn of events is very different to that of the other two novels, where the characters experience quite happy endings. According to Maria Nikolajeva it has been claimed that children's literature is "simple" (222). She states that a "simple" narrative must fulfil certain criteria, such as containing:

concrete and familiar subject matter; clear distinction between genres and text types [...]; one single, clearly delineated plot without digressions or secondary plots; chronological order of events; a limited number of characters who are easy to remember; "flat" characters—that is, characters composed basically of one typical feature to whom can be readily ascribed either the quality "good" or "evil"; closed characters who are easy to understand from their actions and speech; settings familiar to children such as the nursery, home, school, playground, summer camp, etc. (222)

*The Tulip Touch* cannot be classified as a “simple” narrative. Although the novel has a small number of characters, they are far from simple. The novel questions whether someone can simply be good or evil, thus disregarding the norm of portraying “flat” characters. This is in tune with the characteristics of realism as it requires a realistic portrayal of human life. Real human beings are seldom as uncomplicated as portrayed in some literary forms, such as the stock characters found in most fairy tales.

The setting of *The Tulip Touch* is not necessarily a familiar one. The Palace is Natalie’s home, but one would expect few child readers to grow up in a hotel. The Palace functions as an exciting playground for the two girls, but it is quite big, and at times call to mind the houses found in gothic novels: “Before us stood the Palace, vast and imposing, silencing petty complaints” (Fine 5). The hotel setting could also remind the adult reader of horror story unfolding in Stephen King’s *The Shining* (1977), a reference that most likely would be lost on the child reader.

*The Tulip Touch* does belong to the genre of realism, but occasionally it evokes the characteristics of a thriller. The novel creates tension, suspense and excitement around Tulip’s reckless behaviour, and whether or not the girls will be caught when misbehaving. Furthermore, the unpredictable behaviour of Tulip keeps the reader on edge wondering what might come next. Nikolajeva calls using different genre denominations in one novel genre eclecticism, and states that this is “the most prominent feature of postmodern literature” (Nikolajeva 223). Nikolajeva claims that this is becoming more usual in children’s literature. “More and more authors try to break away from clearly-defined genres by writing against them” (Nikolajeva 224). To a certain extent, Anne Fine seems to follow this trend with *The Tulip Touch* – anything but a traditional children’s book.

## The Decisive Influence of Genre

While violence is a necessary narrative structure for all three novels, violence is represented in very different manners. This has to do with the different genres the three novels belong to. In both fairy tale and fantasy the presence of violence is common. Although both Lewis and Dahl undeniably were influenced by the fairy tale tradition, their portrayal of violence in their novels is dissimilar. Where *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* belongs to the fantasy genre and therefore has a more understated presence of violence, *The Witches* draws upon realism, fairy tales and the burlesque in its use of violence. The difference between the two is therefore distinct in several ways as seen in the discussion above.

The social realism of *The Tulip Touch* makes the representation of violence more subdued than in the other two novels. Where the use of violence is allowed to be glorified and to a certain degree magical in the other two novels, the violence in *The Tulip Touch* keeps in line with the restrictions of the genre of social realism. This makes the violence of the novel more realistic, and by doing so it also creates a darker mood than is to be found in the other two. It is clear that genre and the narrative structures typical to the different genres play an important part when it comes to the representation of violence in each novel. As seen in the discussion above the fact that the novels belong to different genres makes a big impact on how violence is portrayed in each of the novels. It is fair to say then, that the different portrayals of violence in the novels is clearly connected to genre and the restrictions these put on the narrative devices allowed in each novel.

There are big differences in how violence features in the three novels, as the discussion above has shown. How can one expect these different manifestations of violence in the novels to function in relation to the child reader? The following chapter will explore and discuss different aspects of how the child reader would be expected to react to the elements of violence in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, *The Witches* and *The Tulip Touch*.



## Chapter Three

### Violence and the Child Reader

The American philosopher Martha Nussbaum writes that “the arts play a vital role, cultivating powers of imagination that are essential to citizenship” (85) and that “in a curriculum for world citizenship, literature, with its ability to represent the specific circumstances and problems of people of many different sorts, makes an especially rich contribution” (86). When seeing this in relation to violence in children’s literature one can make the argument that violence appears in literature for children to cultivate the powers of imagination a child needs in order to become a citizen of the world. Although violence may be declining in modern society it is far from uncommon. Despite the fact that many children are shielded from violence in real life, it is important to create sympathy and understanding for people who are not this fortunate. According to Nussbaum, this can be done through literature. Nussbaum states that through “exploring stories, rhymes and songs – especially in the company of the adults they love – they [children] are led to notice the sufferings of other living creatures with a new keenness” (93). Through reading literature we are able to learn about the lives of others.

A reader potentially develops sympathy with the characters in a story or novel, and thus sympathy with other human beings and their troubles. Because of this one can make the claim that all literature has a didactic element in that it always teaches the reader something. Although all literature can be claimed to be didactic, this is often regarded as especially true for children’s literature. Books written for children are, as mentioned in the introduction, often purchased by a child’s parents, and although the purpose of reading a story for or with a child may be to entertain the child reader, children’s literature also has a long history of aiming to socialise and educate the young reader. According to Deborah Cogan Thacker

“Dahl expressed the view that stories are a part of a process” (16), and that he was motivated by “the relentless need to civilize ‘this thing that when it is born is an animal with no manners, no moral sense at all’” (Dahl, qtd. in Thacker 16). This suggests that Dahl was well aware of the power of books and his own power as an author, and according to Thacker “he at once performs the process and undermines it” (16). Violence is an intrinsic part of human nature, and part of the aim of children’s literature should be to show different sides of human nature. This is important if children’s books are to be didactic as well as entertaining. Learning about different parts of human nature is an important part of the socialisation process of a child.

The specific focus of this chapter will be on how one would expect the child reader to react to the violence in the novels discussed, and why one would have such expectations. This will be addressed in relation to what extent the acceptance or understanding of violence has to do with the genre and the type of universe that is presented and the style, mode and manner of presentation of the violent elements. There will also be a discussion about the dual readership of children’s literature and how this might affect the presentation of violence in the novels.

### **The Dual Readership of Children’s Literature**

Barbra Wall writes: “Writers for children [...] are in fact always speaking to children in the presence of other adults, and always needing to take account of that presence” (13). Because of this one may always talk about a dual readership when it comes to children’s literature. This leads to there being at least two implied readers; the child reader and the adult reader. Furthermore, each reader brings his or her own experiences to the reading of a text. John Stephens states that:

the intrinsic question ‘Who sees?’ is very important to analysis, [...] Within the text it is a focus on the making of meaning, which may not be the same meaning as a reader perceives or makes, and that reader’s perceptions and notions of meaningfulness are in

their turn at least partly determined by the reader's own social context. (Stephens 15-16)

This is interesting when seen in context with Nussbaum's ideas of the young reader developing "essential moral capacities"(89), because although a text may have been intended to give a certain message from the author's point of view, readers inevitably understand texts differently according to their social backgrounds. This would apply to their experience of violence in a text as well. The fact that there is always a dual implied readership when it comes to children's literature makes the reading of the novels interesting when it comes to the violent aspects of the novels.

*The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* is dedicated to Lucy Barfield, C.S. Lewis's goddaughter. According to the dedication, phrased as a letter addressed to the young Lucy Barfield, he has come to realise that "girls grow quicker than books" (110), and that perhaps the story would not be appreciated by the more mature Lucy Barfield. However, he goes on to write: "But some day you will be old enough to start reading fairy tales again. You can then take it down from some upper shelf, dust it, and tell me what you think of it" (110). This suggests that Lewis is aware of how the novel might appeal to readers of several age groups, thus indicating implied readers of different ages.

Peter Hunt believes that the "real interaction (the 'narrative contract') in J. M. Barrie's and C.S. Lewis's children's books is between adult and adult, not adult and child, and he finds it "easy to see" that this is the case (*An Introduction* 14). However, Lewis would presumably disagree with this assumption, since he states that in choosing a children's story as his mode of writing he used "the best art-form for something you have to say" ("On Three Ways" 23). Here Hunt implies that Lewis in fact wrote for an adult audience. This is clearly partly true, but one can also argue that the narrator of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* unmistakably addresses a child narratee. Wall states that, "The narrator-narratee relationship,

rather than that of implied author and implied reader, is the distinctive marker of a children's book" (9). The narrator of the novel continuously makes it clear that he is speaking to a child when using phrases such as "she knew that it is very foolish to shut oneself into any wardrobe" and "she had, of course, left the door open, for she knew that it is a very silly thing to shut oneself into a wardrobe" (Lewis, *The Lion* 113). These short pieces of information about leaving the wardrobe door open seem nonsensical, but they do confirm the existence of a child narratee. Why would they be there if not to tell both the child-narratee and the implied child reader that locking oneself in a wardrobe is not a good idea. Surely this information would be superfluous to an adult. The tone of narration chosen by the unnamed adult narrator is somewhat condescending, but according to Wall "many child readers respond favourably to the sense of security given to them by the familiar voice of the explaining, rather patronising narrator" (18).

Although Lewis is very clear about the fact that he wrote stories for children, there is some ambivalence when it comes to who the implied reader might be. He explains how he himself enjoys reading fairy tales and fantasy at the age of fifty-three ("On Three Ways" 25), and that this also might be the case for many other adults. This brings us back to the fact that most literature for children has a dual readership, which means that although it might be written especially for children, it will also be read by adults. However much an author may intend to write for children, there is no denying the fact that there will also be adult readers, be it editors, publishers or adults purchasing the novel for their children or themselves.

Hunt claims that "children's literature is seen as the last repository of the *dulcis et utile* philosophy: the books may be pleasant, yes, but essentially they have to be *useful*" ("Introduction" 10). If one applies this philosophy to the aspect of the violence of the novels one could make the argument that in the eyes of the child reader the violence of the novels is an aspect of entertainment, whereas for the adult reader it can be seen as a socialising tool.

Thus the books are pleasant enough for the child reader, but the adult reader might see them as useful as well as entertaining. This also coincides with Nussbaum's idea of literature as a tool for developing essential moral capacities, in that the elements of violence in the novels encourage the child's sympathetic emotions, and help them become emotionally developed world citizens.

As mentioned earlier the violence in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* often seems to be a means to an end as far as the protagonists are concerned. In this novel therefore the child reader is told that in certain circumstances the use of violence is justified. When fighting evil, the end apparently justifies the means. This seems to be the general message in *The Witches* as well. In *The Tulip Touch*, however, the violence is less glorified.

Despite the ambivalence referred to above about the works of C.S. Lewis it is clear that *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* is read and enjoyed by many children. No doubt it can be enjoyed by adults as well, particularly as they might pick up on elements of the story that young children may not yet be aware of. For instance, the Christian allegory is something most grown-ups would notice, while for a child this would perhaps not be as obvious:

"Readers, in particular young readers, are not always sensitive to the theological subtext of a book" (Bar-Hillel 147). Thus one can see how *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* can appeal to readers of different age groups. This is true for *The Tulip Touch* as well. The implied violence in Tulip's home is something a young reader might not see right away, whereas a more mature reader would most likely pick up on it very early. This might mean that the effect of the novel is uncanny to the adult in places where this is lost on the child reader. However, one could possibly assume that a young reader who has experienced a situation like that of Tulip would read the violent undertones of the novel with understanding.

The implied violence in *The Tulip Touch* has different layers for the different readers. One can assume that the child reader would realise that Tulip might be abused towards the

end of the novel, but it is questionable whether the child reader would grasp all the subtle hints towards the kinds of abuse Tulip might be faced with. There is a section in the novel that strongly hints that Tulip has been sexually abused by her father:

Tulip was crooning in the rabbit's ear. 'Who's a clever bunny? Who's going to be a good girl? Who's Tulip's special one? She's not going to make a fuss, is she? Oh, no. She isn't going to do that. Because she enjoys it really, doesn't she? And if she starts struggling, she'll get *hurt*.'

She finished up so savagely that I knew I was watching something horrible, nothing to do with the rabbit she was holding, but darker, much darker, and hidden, and coming from deep inside Tulip. (Fine 83)

The language Tulip uses when addressing the bunny suggests that she herself might have been in a similar situation, as one would not expect a child her age to use such phrases if not. In "Borderland Children: Reflections on Narratives of Abjection," Christine Wilkie-Stibbs supports this assumption by writing: "we must assume that, as well as being physically abused by her father, Tulip is being sexually abused by him also" (327).

Natalie understands that this has got to do with something "horrible," but she does not understand what exactly. This Natalie and the child reader would have in common, but an adult reader would be more likely to pick up on the undertones of the sequence and therefore understand more of Tulip's background than the child reader.

When it comes to the dual readership of *The Witches*, a reading of the story as an imaginary tale constructed in the boy narrator's imagination, as mentioned above, is most likely lost on a child reader. One can assume that a child reader would accept the narrator's claim of telling the truth whereas an adult might recognise the signs that imply his story is formed purely in his mind. The constantly repeated insistence about "REAL WITCHES" (Dahl 1) in the first chapter of the novel suggests an over-eager narrator insisting that his story is in fact true.

Another possible reading of *The Witches* is to interpret the novel as a critique of the people who mistreat children. In his essay “‘We have a Great Task Ahead of Us!’: Child-Hate in Roald Dahl’s *The Witches*” James M. Curtis claims that the witches of the novel represent the human beings of the world who hate children and would be willing to harm them: “In his representation of the witches, he [Dahl] is trying to show that child-hatred is not some now-defunct phenomenon, but rather an extant danger in the historical present of childhood, a danger made ever more threatening by its ability to hide under a mask of benevolence” (Curtis 168). In suggesting that Dahl has portrayed the child haters of the world as horrible witches, and therefore being well aware of the dangers a child might be subjected to, Curtis helps identify Dahl as a critic of society and a great satirist. Again, this kind of reading might be lost on the child reader. But an adult reader might pick up on it. The irony of the witches naming their organisation “The Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children – RSPCC” (Dahl 49) would certainly not be lost on the adult reader, perhaps not on the child reader either. Curtis’ reading suggests that Dahl ridicules the need in modern society to protect the child, while willingly turning a blind eye to much of the horrible behaviour that still goes on towards children. Furthermore, Dahl draws inspiration from the fear of strangers and how a child might go away with someone they are not supposed to. The detailed descriptions of how to spot a witch seems to be a way of mocking the ever present fear of a child being grabbed by a stranger and taken away. For the child reader this interpretation of the text might be difficult to spot, but for the adult it might be a portrayal of a very real fear.

### **The Didactic Function of Violence**

Tulip’s background makes the reader sympathise with her, although the protagonist of the novel is Natalie. According to Nussbaum this has do with narrative imagination and how it teaches the reader to position themselves in a character’s situation. Anne Fine manages to

create sympathy for the character of Tulip precisely because she describes Tulip's situation at home, and what that might mean she has to go through. However, it is unclear whether some of the more subtle hints as to what Tulip experiences at home would resonate with a ten-year-old reader who comes from a safe environment. This could not only be said to be difficult for the child reader, but is surely also difficult for Natalie in the novel. Natalie grows up in a safe environment with caring, albeit busy, parents. She has everything she needs and is happy about the family's move to the new hotel. Throughout the novel, Natalie seems to be a content little girl, largely unaware of most of the trouble Tulip must go through at home.

The violence of the novel is described through the eyes of a young adult who is looking back at her experiences as a young child. It is only after Natalie matures that she is able to see the gravity of the situation Tulip was in. Initially, Natalie is happy to make a new acquaintance and friend. Arguably she is young and naive and protected from the horrors of the world. She has no way of fully understanding what Tulip goes through at home, because she has never experienced anything like it herself. This is also true for the child reader who comes from a safe environment. A child reader from a safe environment might miss the somewhat subtle hints of violence, hints a more mature reader would easily pick up on. Therefore one can assume, as mentioned above, that the novel reads in different ways for a child reader and an adult reader.

It is difficult for the adult reader to think of Tulip as purely evil, knowing her situation, and Mrs. Barnes' inclination to do so makes the reader question her capacity to feel compassion. However, Mrs. Barnes might be trying to protect her children against further bad influence from Tulip. Interestingly though, something very dramatic had to happen, such as Tulip setting fire to the Palace, before Mrs. Barnes reacted. Nussbaum uses the ideas of Marcus Aurelius to illustrate the fact that literature is essential when developing what she calls "narrative imagination": "He means that when we are able to imagine why someone has



come to act in a way that might generally provoke an angry response we will be less inclined to demonize the person, to think of him or her as purely evil and alien” (Nussbaum 97).

Tulip’s actions would easily provoke an angry response from someone who does not know the background of her story. As her situation is hinted at, however, some readers might pick up on her unfortunate circumstances and assume that they are to blame for her behaviour.

Therefore one could say that the threat of violence Tulip has to live with acts as a way of creating sympathy for her. This can be seen as the main didactic element of the novel.

Through actively seeking to make the reader sympathetic to Tulip’s situation the novel is attempting to socialise the child reader. It tries to do so in explaining why Tulip’s actions might be the way they are.

Where *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* and *The Witches* both have clear protagonists and antagonists, *The Tulip Touch* is yet again more ambiguous. Natalie is the narrator of the novel, and she is the protagonist that the reader is meant to identify with, but the novel is after all named *The Tulip Touch*, suggesting that Tulip is a very important character in the novel. However, the title might be taken to suggest that although Tulip is an important character, her *touch* is in fact one of the most important factors. Natalie’s father is the one who coins the phrase “the Tulip touch” and it refers to Tulip’s habit of adding a line to an obvious lie or story that makes the listener wonder whether it could be true after all. Natalie is the character who undoubtedly experiences “the Tulip touch” more than anyone else. She hears Tulip’s stories being told both to herself and to others, unable to resist Tulip’s companionship despite the lies. The novel is very much concerned with how Natalie was exposed to the charms of Tulip over a period of time, but eventually outgrew them. When first meeting Tulip, Natalie enjoyed her company immensely: “we did everything. We went everywhere” (Fine 16). The tone of the novel suggests that Natalie is not quite sure about her relationship with Tulip when looking back. Although the events in the novel seem to have

been happy ones, Natalie tends to describe Tulip as someone who seized the attention of Natalie's father when she was around. This seemingly annoyed Natalie and may have been the cause of some resentment towards Tulip. This resentment seems somewhat constructed to the reader, because Natalie must have enjoyed herself with Tulip as they spent much time together, and in the hope that Tulip would appear, Natalie found herself spending "countless hours scuffing around the playground, desperately hoping that she'd show up" (Fine 13).

While the author creates sympathy for Tulip and her situation, it is clear that the character most readers would identify with is Natalie. As already suggested, the novel is didactic in that it is trying to show why some children might behave like Tulip does. Many children experience a child that bullies, is violent or behaves in other ways that are socially unacceptable. For a young child it might be difficult to understand why someone would behave in this way, but Fine's novel tries to come up with a possible reason for such behaviour, and the text thus has the potential to teach the child reader to be sympathetic towards other children when they do not know what lies behind their behaviour. Thus Fine's novel may function as a socialising tool in accordance with Nussbaum's ideas.

Where Anne Fine succeeds in creating sympathy for both Natalie and Tulip, C.S. Lewis and Roald Dahl do no such thing for their antagonists. This might have to do with the different genres of the novels. Novels belonging to the genres of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* and *The Witches* are built upon the clear differentiation between good and evil, whereas the social realism of *The Tulip Touch* tries to echo the more complicated relation between the two in the contemporary world. The violent behaviour of Lewis's White Witch and Dahl's witches only serves to enhance sympathy for the protagonists of the novels. The sympathy is created due to the antagonists being described as characters lacking all redeeming features. They are pure evil, acting only to benefit themselves without any consideration for

the wellbeing of others. Tulip as the potential antagonist of *The Tulip Touch* is a more complex character, and also has good sides in that she is a friend to Natalie.

Although the protagonists in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* and *The Witches* use violence in order to defeat their opponents, the stories are written so that the reader will support them throughout the novels. The violence exercised by the protagonists of both novels could be understood as a necessary means in order to defeat the evil antagonists. The protagonists simply have to resort to violence as the antagonists will not be removed from their situations of power otherwise. If the protagonists of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* and *The Witches* did not overcome evil, the novels would break with the traditions of their respective genres and would have been different novels entirely.

Nussbaum states that, “A child deprived of stories is deprived, as well, of certain ways of viewing other people” (89). Here Nussbaum is referring to the importance of reading stories in order to understand that other people have feelings just as the characters in a novel are portrayed in a manner that shows they have feelings. This is certainly true for *The Tulip Touch* where the reader gets hints of the feelings of both Tulip and Natalie, although the feelings of Natalie are conveyed more clearly than those of Tulip due to the fact that Natalie is the narrator. When it comes to the two other novels however, the inner life of the antagonists is completely ignored. This is interesting when seen in connection with Nussbaum’s idea of a child “acquiring essential moral capacities” when being told stories (89). If these essential moral capacities are the ability to “ascribe to others, and recognize in themselves, not only hope and fear, happiness and distress – attitudes that are ubiquitous, and comprehensible without extensive experience – but also more complex traits such as courage, self restraint, dignity, perseverance, and fairness” (90), one could argue that both *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* and *The Witches* only make it possible to develop such “essential moral capacities” when it comes to the protagonists of the novels. Lewis makes no attempt to

create sympathy for the White Witch, she is pure evil. She shows this when she informs Aslan of her treachery before killing him: “Fool, did you think that by all this you would save the human traitor? Now I will kill you instead of him as our pact was and so the Deep Magic will be appeased. But when you are dead what will prevent me from killing him as well?” (Lewis 181). The White Witch is merciless and leaves the reader with no compassion for her.

In *The Witches*, on the other hand, the grandmother does give the reader one of the reasons for the witches’ hatred towards children, in that she insists that to a witch a child would be “smelling absolutely disgusting.’ [...] ‘to a witch you’d be smelling of *fresh* dogs’ droppings” (Dahl 22). Although not the best reason for wanting to kill all children, and thus potentially eradicating the human race, it is a small insight into the motivation of the witches. However, if the reader thought that the witches might have some redeeming features, the grandmother quickly demonstrates otherwise by stating: “They are demons in human shape. That is why they have claws and bald heads and queer noses and peculiar eyes” (Dahl 24). Arguably, the shape of the witches is semi-human, as the witches of the novel differ somewhat from the standard form and shape of a human being. The detailed description of witches as something other than a human being might be an important factor when considering how they are perceived by the child reader. That the witches are indeed quite different in shape and form from a real woman is another factor that emphasises the fact that this is indeed just a story, and witches are not real. This again makes the extravagant violence bearable, as it is as unreal as the witches.

### **Graphic Violence and the Child Reader**

Of the three novels *The Witches* could be argued to be the most explicitly violent. In terms of the child reader and the possible reaction to violence one could perhaps question this story. The novel contains several descriptions of violence such as the grandmother’s comment that:

“Oh, if only there were a way of telling for sure whether a woman was a witch or not, then we could round them all up and put them in the meat-grinder” (Dahl 5). She also describes the supposed violent behaviour of witches:

‘I’ve known English witches,’ she went on, ‘who have turned children into pheasants and then sneaked the pheasants up into the woods the very day before the pheasant-shooting season opened.’ [...] ‘Of course they get shot,’ she said. ‘And then they get plucked and roasted and eaten for supper.’ (Dahl 31)

While these quotes are undoubtedly disturbing, the child reader may not necessarily be particularly alarmed by them. According to Jonathon Culley, Dahl’s writings for children springs out of the tradition of folklore and fairy tales: “It is clear to the reader of several books by Dahl for children that much of his style is rooted in the highly conventional tradition of folklore” (Culley 63). The fact that Dahl’s writing is rooted in the folklore tradition suggests that the child reader might be used to violent imagery from previously read stories. Culley states that:

The child who comes to Dahl having embraced folklore and fairy tales, or even the child who has simply felt the need for them, can recognise the books’ supposed dangers easily. The violence is familiar. It is violence that is superficially horrific, yet unreal. (63)

Here Culley touches upon an important point. The violence of Dahl’s books – although explicit, shocking and bordering on the vulgar – is exaggerated and not related to the real world of the reader. This could partly be due to the link to the folklore and fairytale tradition where violence is treated in much the same way.

When commenting on the violence in fairy tales Maria Tatar writes: “For many adults, reading through an unexpurgated edition of the Grimms’ collection of tales can be an eye-opening experience. [...] the graphic descriptions of murder, mutilation, cannibalism,

infanticide, and incest that fill the pages of bedtime stories for children” can be surprising (Tatar, *The Hard Facts* 3). Fairy tales such as those by the Grimm brothers have been read to children for decades. Bruno Bettelheim suggests in his *The Uses of Enchantment* that fairy tales offer an insight into how young children may extract meaning relevant to their own existence as the tales suggest that: “a struggle against severe difficulties in life is unavoidable, is an intrinsic part of human existence – but that if one does not shy away, but steadfastly meets unexpected and often unjust hardships, one masters all obstacles and at the end emerges victorious” (Bettelheim 8). The real life struggles Bettelheim refers to could be represented by violence as it is often used in fairy tales to defeat evil and thus overcome the hardships of the story in question.

Due to the link to the tradition of violence in folklore and fairy tale one can argue that although it is graphic, the violence of Dahl is not unsuitable for children. It is important not to underestimate children. Although they might not get as much from a text as an adult, the child reader has most likely experienced other novels before encountering the works of Dahl. This gives the young reader a background in reading that makes it easier to deduct that the violence in a Dahl text is very much an exaggeration of what might happen in real life. The magical elements of the text help this further. Heather Worthington writes: “the veiling of violence in fantasy and the essentially restorative closures of the narratives are, in part, what make the majority of Dahl in fiction for children unthreatening and construct it as acceptable and morally appropriate, so making it ‘suitable’ reading for a child” (125). In addition, a Dahl novel is very careful in making it clear to the young reader that events that might actually happen in the real world and would be scary for the young reader, do not happen in the story being told. As mentioned in chapter one, the closest Dahl gets to describe an incident where actual loss takes place is the car accident of the boy’s parents. Here the narrator, in the form of the young boy, chooses to avoid going into further detail, whereas he does not shy away

from doing this on any other occasion. One could speculate whether his lack of information is due to the fact that he is not an omniscient narrator, but a first-person narrator in the shape of a young boy. He was in the car with his parents during the accident: “while my father and mother and I were driving in icy weather just north of Oslo, that our car skidded off the road and went tumbling down into a rocky ravine. My parents were killed. I was firmly strapped into the back seat and received only a cut on the forehead” (Dahl 7). This suggests that the young boy narrator was an eye witness to the accident. In fact he states that: “I won’t go into the horrors of that terrible afternoon. I still get the shivers when I think about it” (Dahl 7). This may seem out of character for a narrator who does not shy away from describing grotesque violence as far as the witches are concerned. However, the death of the boy’s parents is a personal trauma, while the story of the witches could be read as a fantasy, created in order to escape this trauma. According to this reading the violence that is related to the witches becomes less problematic to describe as it is a figment of the boy’s imagination.

It is also made clear throughout the novel that witches do not do the things normal criminals would do. They would not break into someone’s house and abduct a child from their bed for instance: “‘No,’ my grandmother said. ‘A witch will never do silly things like climbing up drainpipes or breaking into people’s houses. You’ll be quite safe in your bed’” (Dahl 17). This reassurance is not only meant for the young protagonist of the novel, but is also addressed to the young reader. The novel sets out to scare and excite the young reader, but it does not wish to do this outside the protective sphere of the novel. In effect the reader understands that most of the violence represented in the novel could not happen in his or her own world. The reader is told that it will indeed be safe to go to bed after finishing reading the novel. Here Dahl again follows the folklore and fairy tale tradition as the reader is reassured that this is just a story, none of the elements are real. This is in contrast to some of the stories of Astrid Lindgren. Lindgren, a contemporary of Dahl, also includes elements of

magic and folklore tradition in novels such as *Ronia the Robber's Daughter* and *The Brothers Lionheart*, but there is an underlying element of realism in her books that seems to be lacking in those of Dahl. Where Dahl refuses to deal with elements of real trauma, Lindgren goes into this headfirst, describing in *The Brothers Lionheart* a child about to die of a pulmonary disease and in *Ronia the Robber's Daughter* the death of a beloved family member and the grief that follows. Although Lindgren seems to be inspired by some of the same traditions as Dahl, the violence in her novels might seem more realistic to the child reader, and therefore it may be experienced as more frightening. Where Dahl is intentionally exaggerating, Lindgren uses a more realistic language and thus creates a story more in touch with reality than Dahl, despite the inclusion of fantastical elements.

Where the violence of *The Witches* seems deliberately exaggerated, the violence of *The Tulip Touch* is more subdued. Although the threat of violence is always present, and violent actions are hinted at, the reader gets the feeling that there is more going on than what is described in the novel. This may seem logical, not only because of the first-person child narrator, but also when it comes to the genre of the novel. The realism makes the world of the novel familiar to the young reader. The fact that the universe of the novel is meant to echo that of the real world of the reader, might make any descriptions of violence scarier than those in *The Witches* and *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* to the young reader. *The Tulip Touch* has a more realistic plot, compared to the other two novels, and the tone of the novel is far more sombre than the other two. If the violence of *The Tulip Touch* had been as explicit as that of *The Witches* the novel would probably not be suitable for a child reader. *The Witches* is allowed its graphic violence due to the humour and the genre of the novel, but the same would not function in a realistic novel.

How then would one expect the child reader to react to the violence of *The Tulip Touch*? Where the child reader might be familiar with the tradition of folklore and fairy tales



and its relationship with violence, the realistic novel is something quite different. The violence of *The Tulip Touch* might cause unease for the adult reader, but will the child reader pick up on it? A young girl once shared the view that she found *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* and *The Witches* thoroughly enjoyable, but that *The Tulip Touch* was insufferably boring. She found that nothing happened in it compared to the other two. One young girl's opinion, she was ten at the time, might not be representative for an entire readership, but it is intriguing that she as a child reader found the novel somewhat tedious. Discussions with adults about the books addressed in this thesis revealed that they often found *The Tulip Touch* to be the most interesting of the three. This might partly be due to the uncanny tone of the novel and its subject matter. This small sample of opinions about the three novels shows that adult and child readers react very differently to the representation of violence in the novels.

One would possibly expect the violence of *The Tulip Touch* to be the most disturbing to both adult and child readers. This is because it is a type of violence that is very possible in the world of the reader. The realism of the violence and its consequences is what fascinates the reader. However, it is possible that the realism of the novel makes the violence more frightening to the young reader. *The Tulip Touch* does not make any effort to portray the plot as anything but realistic, whereas the violence and the plot of the *The Witches* are anything but realistic. For the young reader the realism of *The Tulip Touch* could possibly render the violence of the novel either too placid or too lifelike. It could be thought of as too placid in that it is not graphic and described in detail as seen in the other novels. The young reader who is used to fast paced literature and film might find this story uninspired. The modern child reader is often used to literature where explicit violence is commonplace, for instance, series such as The Hunger Games trilogy and the Harry Potter books. In *The Tulip Touch* violence does not function in any way as entertainment, but is rather a complex social issue.

## **Protagonists, Violence and Reader Identification**

Each of the three novels have distinct characters that the reader, and in particular the child reader, is invited to identify with. It is interesting to look at these characters and their specific position in the novels in relation to violence. Arguably *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* have four protagonists in Peter, Susan, Edmund and Lucy, and these characters all have different positions as far as violence is concerned.

Lucy, the youngest of the four, is perhaps the main protagonist. She is the one who goes through the wardrobe and discovers Narnia. Lucy is a brave child in that she fearlessly enters Narnia and goes to explore. One could claim that she is somewhat naive in trusting the stranger Mr Tumnus, but arguably she embodies some of the innocence of childhood where she has not yet learnt to be suspicious of strangers. Lucy is described as a trusting, honest, and kind young girl throughout the novel. In relation to violence in the novel, Lucy seems to be a character who is a witness to violence. She is often surrounded by violence, but she very seldom takes an active part in any kind of violent actions. Lucy's somewhat passive position when it comes to violence could be related to both her gender and her young age. As mentioned above, traditionally young females were not portrayed as warriors in fantasy novels. In most of Tolkien's work for example, there are hardly any female characters at all, and those who are featured, although powerful, tend to stay away from violent confrontations. Although Lucy tends to observe the violence rather than take any active part in it, "her own people called her Queen Lucy the Valiant" (Lewis 195). This suggests that one does not necessarily take part in the violent actions in the novel in order to be considered brave. According to Natasha Giardina "Lucy also has a symbolic role in the story: she represents a feminine ideal, one that has its roots in religion through the Virgin Mary as well as on medieval concepts of chivalry through the Lady of Courtly Love" (38).

Susan shares Lucy's position as more of a witness than an active participant when it comes to the violence in the novel. Both girls are present when Aslan goes to sacrifice himself on the stone table, but he instructs them "whatever happens, do not let yourselves be seen" (Lewis 179). In their grief for the dead lion, the girls resemble the women of the Bible grieving over the death of Jesus. Susan and Lucy are undoubtedly important in the novel, but they are helpless in the defence of a loved one. They have been given weapons to defend themselves, and Susan has received "a little ivory horn" (Lewis 160) from Father Christmas that always will bring help when needed. Neither of the girls brought any of their gifts as they followed Aslan. As they do not know what is about to happen, from the perspective of the girls the weapons and the horn might have been helpful, if for nothing else than to help untie Aslan after his death. By leaving their weapons behind the girls remain undefended and helpless, thus being ever dependent on male characters to protect them.

One could claim that the passive stance the girls take to violence may be motivated by the aim of portraying them as good role models to the young female reader. The use of violence as a tool to protect loved ones is reserved for men. When men show that they are willing to defend their loved ones in the novel it is considered both brave and right, but women should only resort to violence at the utmost need. Good women are portrayed as domestic, as in the character of Mrs. Beaver, kind and trusting like Lucy and beautiful and nurturing like Susan. At the end of the novel the physical aspects of Susan and Lucy are described: "Susan grew into a tall and gracious woman with black hair that fell almost to her feet" and "as for Lucy, she was always gay and golden-haired" (Lewis 194-95). Peter is described as "A great warrior" and Edmund is "great in council and judgement" (Lewis 194). The focus on the physical attributes of the women versus the skills of the men creates an image of how women are judged by appearance whereas men are judged on their abilities.

Furthermore, Susan and Lucy are described as desirable spouses for the kings and princes in the neighbouring kingdoms, whereas no such thing is mentioned about Peter or Edmund.

The fact that the worth of the women seems to be closely linked with what one might characterise as traditional feminine traits could be said to teach the young reader that good women should be passive, beautiful and kind. The only violent woman in the novel is the White Witch and she is all evil. Thus the novel seems to suggest that there is a greater danger linked to violent women than there is to violent men. The characters of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* conform to a tradition where the stereotypical views on gender mentioned above are the norm, but this does not make the relationship they have with the violence of the novel any less interesting.

When it comes to the male protagonists of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* Peter is the one who takes part in most of the active violence. He is the oldest of the siblings and has to prove his worth as both a man and a king through fighting. As mentioned above, in order to “win his spurs” (Lewis 170) Peter has to kill the wolf Maugrim in battle. In doing this he does not only defend his sister from a dangerous foe, he also proves he is worthy as a warrior and ultimately as a man.

Where his siblings seem to be constantly good, Edmund is a more complicated character. Upon first arriving at the house of the Professor he is cantankerous and grumpy towards his siblings, especially towards Lucy. He is described as spiteful (Lewis 121) and seemingly takes joy in teasing his younger sister. To the child reader the rivalry between siblings might be quite familiar, and although Edmund is described as somewhat unlikable he is not in any way evil. When he first enters Narnia he has the misfortune to meet the White Witch, and initially she scares him, but she soon draws him in through giving him enchanted food. Through his connection with the evil White Witch, and subsequently his return to his siblings and the side of good, Edmund takes on a role similar to that of the prodigal son. His

connection with evil and the violence of evil is forgiven immediately once he shows regret. Edmund redeems his actions through joining Peter on the battlefield against the army of the White Witch. Interestingly, the violence of the White Witch scares and repulses Edmund, whereas he does not seem to hesitate when it comes to joining Peter in the fight against her. In this one could argue that the novel shows that the use of violence is justified in certain circumstances.

Where some of the protagonists in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* seem to shy away from the use of violence, the young boy in *The Witches* does no such thing. As mentioned above he describes the violence of the witches in quite some detail. Furthermore, he does not shy away from giving the witches a taste of their own medicine when given the opportunity. It is clear that the young boy in the novel is the protagonist and the character the young reader is meant to identify with. As in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* the young boy is facing a foe that is pure evil. The novel portrays the boy's violent actions against the witches as justified and necessary. It would be either the death of the witches or the death of hundreds of children, and in choosing the first the boy acts in a heroic manner according to the novel. The boy's position in relation to violence could be said to be somewhat similar to that of the Pevensie children in that he is initially a witness to violence before he takes an active part in it. However, the young boy shows more interest in violence than the Pevensie children in that he is the narrator of the novel, and therefore is the one to tell the narratee and the implied reader about the violence of the witches. Furthermore, the boy narrator sets the tone of the novel through informing the reader about the dangers of witches in the first chapter of the novel. Here the narrator frames the story by making it clear that witches will be an essential part of it. This introduction to the novel builds suspense for the reader.

Ultimately the protagonists of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* and *The Witches* have somewhat similar positions in relation to violence in that they take part in it when it is

necessary in order to fight evil. In *The Tulip Touch* Natalie has a slightly different position in relation to violence. Where the protagonists of the other novels take part in violent actions in order to protect themselves and fight evil, the relationship Natalie has to violence is somewhat more complicated. In *the Tulip Touch* the potential antagonist is a human being, whereas the other books have non-human antagonists. Violence towards magical non-humans is arguably not as problematic as the inter-human violence of *The Tulip Touch*.

In her friendship with Tulip Natalie is introduced to a world of potentially violent games and language. The girls play games such as “*Fat in the Fire, Road of Bones and Rats in a Firestorm*” (Fine 17-18), games of Tulip’s invention that Natalie undoubtedly enjoys. However, she is frightened of Tulip’s father and says “I hated Tulip’s house” (Fine 21). Through her instinctual fear of Tulip’s home and the violent man living there Natalie shies away from violence. However, it becomes clear throughout the novel that Natalie can be fascinated by violent actions just as much as Tulip. When burning down a shed it is Tulip who has to drag Natalie away: “this time it was Tulip tugging at my arm. ‘Natalie! Natalie!’ I shook her off. The only thing I wanted was to stand and watch this great orange dragon leap higher and higher” (Fine 112). Natalie’s fascination with violent actions such as setting fire to a shed seems in tune with the genre of *The Tulip Touch*.

It seems to be human to be fascinated by violence and violent acts. In his book *Language and ideology in Children’s Fiction* John Stephens writes that:

it is claimed that realism typically illuminates life as it is, presenting social and personal concerns in a context which includes a range of human desires and responses; it reflects society, and in doing so by means of a fictional construct, or representation, can offer its audience new experiences and help children mature intellectually and emotionally by enabling them to experiment with subject positions by engaging with them at one remove from consensus reality. (Stephens 242)

What Stephens claims to be realism is certainly true for *The Tulip Touch*. The novel describes life in a realistic manner, and through this is able to teach the child reader about the difficult situations some human beings find themselves in.

For the reader the violence of a novel, no matter what genre it belongs to, might not be the main reason for enjoyment. Jeffrey Goldstein states that: “The potential of a book, film, or video game to engross one in an imaginary world is one of the most attractive features of entertainment media. For a short time, one becomes totally immersed in an activity” (Goldstein 219). Goldstein believes that the escape from daily life into the imaginary worlds of books and other forms of entertainment helps the reader tolerate and accept that violence might be a part of this experience. This potential acceptance of the existence of violence from the reader would function for all three novels





## Conclusion

Now it is a strange thing, but things that are good to have and days that are good to spend are soon told about, and not much to listen to; while things that are uncomfortable, palpitating, and even gruesome, may make a good tale, and take a deal of telling anyway. (Tolkien, *The Hobbit* 48)

This thesis has explored the manifestations and functions of violence in C. S. Lewis' *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, Roald Dahl's *The Witches* and Anne Fine's *The Tulip Touch* through looking at its role in the different fictional worlds of the novels, the relationship violence has to genre, and how violence affect the child reader.

The examination of the manifestations and functions of violence in the fictional universes of the novels shows that the uses of violence in the novels range from creating suspense to serving as a motivation for action in the different narratives. The different fictional worlds created in the novels are decisive for the distinctive features of the violence in each novel. Each fictional world embodies certain rules for what is possible in them. Therefore the representation of violence in *The Tulip Touch* is naturally quite different from that in *The Witches*, and the violence of *The Witches* is, again, different from that in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*.

Dahl and Lewis have both been criticised for the brutal violence in their novels for children. Lewis has been criticised for his Christian allegories. Dahl's books for children have been named vulgar, violent, sexist, racist and criminal (Worthington 123), and Philip Pullman, one of Lewis's most adamant critics has called Lewis's works misogynistic, racist, vile and dishonest narratives. The lack of criticism on *The Tulip Touch* makes it difficult to include similar comments about that novel, but there are surely those who would find it just as "appalling" as the novels of Lewis and Dahl. The discussion in this thesis has shown that,

although offensive to some, the violence of the novels is necessary for them to function. It has also become clear that one can expect the reader to be familiar with the different genres of the novels and therefore have certain expectations to the representation of violence in them.

The human fascination for violence is interesting, in particular with reference to violent entertainment. Steven Pinker suggests that:

The universal pleasure that people take in violent entertainment, always in the teeth of censorship and moralistic denunciation, suggests that the mind craves information on the conduct of violence. A likely explanation is that in evolutionary history, violence was not so improbable that people could afford not to understand how it works. (584)

If Pinker is right, the violence in literature is part of a biological factor in human nature, but regardless of whether the presence of violence in literature for children has to do with biology, socialisation or entertainment, it is certain that it is there to stay. Violence is an integral part of human life and as observed by the narrator of J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit Or There and Back Again* (1937), cited in the epigraph, the stories containing difficulties, obstacles and violence are those worth telling, and the ones worth listening to. The novels discussed in this thesis all fulfil the criteria mentioned by the narrator of Tolkien's novel, for what constitutes as a tale worth telling. This is partly due to the presence of violence in the novels, since violence is an integral part of all three novels, and without it none of them would be the novels cherished and read by millions of readers.

Furthermore, as Martha C. Nussbaum argues in *Cultivating Humanity: A Classical Defense of Reform in Liberal Education* (1997), literature has the ability to teach the reader, and especially the child reader, to understand, and empathise with other human beings. She writes: "stories can then begin to confront children more plainly with the uneven fortunes of life, convincing them emotionally of their urgency and importance" (Nussbaum 93). This can be said to be true for any work of literature, and it is certainly true for the novels discussed in this thesis. It is of great importance to educate the coming generations about the ways of the

world, and literature is an important tool in doing so. “Let him see, let him feel the human calamities,” Jean-Jacques Rousseau writes of the imagined pupil Emile. “Unsettle and frighten his imagination with the perils by which every man is constantly surrounded. Let him see around him all these abysses and, hearing you describe them, hold on to you for fear of falling into them” (Rousseau 224). The telling of stories is an integral part of being human, and violence is an essential part of many of the stories told.

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