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Matilda Mini Analysis

Most children, at times have disagreements or issues with their families. Many children dream of having special abilities. All children desperately want someone to love them. Matilda, the titular character in Roald Dahl's book wants or has all three. Matilda is a novel about a small girl who comes from a family that cares virtually nothing about her. She wants to learn, go to school, and, to a lesser extent, she has a mind towards revenge. The primary themes are growing up/coming of age, and good triumphing over evil. Secondary themes are acceptance, a fascination with books and learning, and revenge. The revenge however, is generally humorous and justified. At it's face, Matilda is a very sweet growing up story, where the protagonist, with her friends, teacher and a little supernatural help triumphs over all the bad things that have been thrown at her.

The movie Labyrinth has many similar themes: a girl struggling with her family relationships, a desire for acceptance and a fascination with books. There is also a much heavier supernatural theme. In both books, the main character struggles with the relationship with their parents. Matilda, in particular has it very bad, as her parents actively dislike her, and are merely tolerating her until such time as they can be rid of her, as is evidenced by these quotes from the first chapter: "Occasionally one comes across parents who take the opposite line, who show no interest at all in their children...", and "...the parents looked upon Matilda in particular as nothing

more than a scab.” (Dahl, 10). In *Labyrinth*, Sarah’s parents appear apathetic at times, and at other times her step mother appears to have ulterior motives (such as the free babysitting that Sarah represents.) This dysfunction is apparent in similar ways, including the lack of respect for the protagonist’s property. In *Labyrinth*, we see that Sarah’s stepmother has given her favorite stuffed bear to her baby brother. In *Matilda*, this is evidenced when her father tears up a book that Matilda has borrowed from the library.

Another parallel is the desire for acceptance. This is a place where the two stories diverge, but end in similar fashion. Matilda seeks acceptance, but fails to get it from the people that she wants to get it from (her parents), but then goes on to find that acceptance from her teacher. Sarah, however, is offered acceptance into the fantasy that she desired, (as is represented by Jarrod, the goblin king), but finally realizes that she didn’t really want that after all. Instead, she really wants to recover her brother, which represents her ‘true’ or ‘real’ family, and Sarah’s desire for that family to be whole.

Finally, both books have a theme of good triumphing over evil. This is a main theme in *Matilda*, where she actively seeks to champion good, evidenced by her plan to scare Miss Trunchbull into returning all of Miss Honey’s belongings and earnings. In *Labyrinth*, the good vs evil takes place entirely within the fantasy world, and is a much more represented in a fairy-tale setting, with a start good (Sarah and her friends) being pitted against evil (Jarrod, the goblins, and the *Labyrinth* itself.).

Matilda is a book that nearly every child will be able to relate to, on some level. Most children have, or have had difficulties with their families. Most children have one or more teachers that they feel close to, and are encouraged by. Lastly, there are many children who have

fantasized about having one or more supernatural abilities - who among us wouldn't love to have telekinesis, or be able to fly, after all? Finally, Roald Dahl has a fantastic ability to write the character of a child and be able to exactly communicate what that child would be thinking, speaking and doing, in a perfect way. All children will be able to empathize with Matilda and her difficulties, successes, and triumphs.

WORKS CITED:

Dahl, Roald. *Matilda*. Puffin Books, 1990. Print.

Henson, Jim. *Labyrinth*. Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 1999. DVD.