

**BORN TO BE BEWITCHED:  
A STUDY OF EVIL  
IN THE SHORT STORIES OF  
ROALD DAHL**

**THESIS SUBMITTED TO  
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## DECLARATION

I, GEETHA KRISHNANKUTTY, hereby declare that this dissertation, BORN TO BE BEWITCHED: A STUDY OF EVIL IN THE SHORT STORIES OF ROALD DAHL, has not previously formed the basis for the award of any degree, diploma, associateship, fellowship or other similar title or recognition.

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**CERTIFICATE**

This is to certify that this dissertation entitled BORN TO BE BEWITCHED: A STUDY OF EVIL IN THE SHORT STORIES OF ROALD DAHL, is a record of the original studies and research carried out by GEETHA KRISHNANKUTTY, Research Scholar, Department of English, Vimala College, Thrissur 680 009 (Calicut University), under my guidance and supervision and submitted to the University of Calicut in partial fulfilment of the requirements for Ph. D. in English Language and Literature.

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## PREFACE

The power of evil has been, and still is an enigma to me. That is perhaps one of the reasons why I chose the study of the short stories of Roald Dahl for my Ph.D. In every character of Dahl I tried to probe into, I found evil hidden in his deep recesses. The quantity and quality of evil may vary from character to character, from situation to situation, but it is there, definitely there. I have also begun to decipher the same code behind every man, who resorts to evil in the fight for power, for selfish ends and for survival. No man is genuinely bold at heart; he is often afraid of a straight and honest fight; so he has recourse to evil through sly means. However, he does not admit that he is overcome by evil. Moreover as his status in society is dependent upon his forbearance of evil, he prefers to hit the enemy from behind.

I had voraciously read Dahl during my college days, but I could not comprehend the concept of evil lavishly strewn on those pages. Years later, I read the stories again, and I liked them in a different way, because I had had a glimpse of the dark caverns of the human mind. I also found the stories amazingly true to life. Dahl has given shape to a thought-content I had experienced, but could not put down. One of my articles on Dahl entitled “Legendary Stories from Dahl” discussing the same approach towards evil, was published by *The Hindu* on 23 November 2007. My talk “Evil in the Stories of Roald Dahl” focussing on how Dahl’s characters stand helpless before evil, was broadcast by the AIR. As I read Dahl’s stories, his characters came close to my heart and I could fathom their whisper and whimper. I could not disagree with their evil doings. On the contrary, I lived with them and admired their light-hearted view of evil on a par with Dahl’s casual approach to life. They are menacing indeed; and as my dissertation asserts, they are born to be bewitched.

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GEETHA KRISHNANKUTTY

*The first lesson of history is that  
evil is good.*

*Emerson*

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### I

#### **The Short Stories Then and Now**

Everyone, everywhere, tells stories. An individual hears many short stories in daily life. Gossips, jokes, lies and confessions, depending on the performance of the teller, are carefully constructed short stories. Storytelling is, therefore, an art, which transmits, received versions of a tale, told and retold by many. There is no one who does not like hearing a story. The first short stories in European languages were the tales that sailors used to narrate. Their adventures included descriptions of violence, monarchic struggles, supernatural powers and, above all, different forms of evil.

Stories developed further when Africans were imported as slaves to the different parts of the New World. These stories developed, showing different versions of civilization and barbarism. The same topics continued, written and rewritten, with revolutions, science and technology interspersed. Thus the genre became an important part of the twentieth century literature. The publishing of journals and magazines increased the quantity and quality of the short story. Since then, the output has remained unabated.

During the Renaissance and after, writers tried their skill in narrative fiction or novella. Addison, Steele and Voltaire used it as a decorative appendix to essays. The next upsurge came as a part of Romanticism. Germany, France, Russia and America took the initiative. In Germany, during the nineteenth century, the short story became a highly developed form. Theories were charted by Johannes Klein in *Geschichta der Deutschen Novella* and by E. K. Bennett and H. M. Waidson in *A History of the German Novella*. In France, the form was first established between 1829 and 1831, with the magazine publications of Honor de Balzac and Theophile Gautier. Its real development came with the output of Alphonze Daudet's *Lethe de Mon Moulin* (1869), Gustave Flaubert's *Trois Conter* (1877) and the Maupassant collection in the 1880s. In Russia, it was Alexander Pushkin who initiated the form. The stories of Nikolai Gogol, the stories of Ivan Sergeyevich Turgenev and Anton Chekhov were inspired by the ideas of humanism and social justice. Gogol was the first Russian to use satire in short stories.

Among the nineteenth-century-English-language writers, the Americans considered the short story interesting. The history of the development of the form is parallel to the development of the country. It took some time for the short story to be clearly identified in America. The American colouring started with Irving Washington's "Rip Van Winkle" and was taken up by Nathaniel Hawthorne, Edgar Allan Poe and Herman Melville. Poe's works owe much to the

nourishment of the form. He is also called the inventor of the detective stories, "The Murderers in the Rue Morgue" being the first. His concept of a short story is relevant even today. It was with Mark Twain that humour entered the short-story form. Even though his stories were not as well constructed as his novels, they had a topical relevance. Stories like "The Mysterious Stranger" (1916) and "Was it Heaven? Or Hell?" (1902) show an open but shrewd mind, sincerely concerned with man and his dreams. Henry James's stories "The Real Thing," "The Author of Beltraffio," and others, prove that he has taken up the genre with a definite purpose.

There was a time when writers stressed on the truth of characterization in stories. Irving, Melville, Henry James, Hawthorne and others were devoted to it. Poe was an exception. Following him, many writers began to give importance to incidents and the climax in the story. Then emerged O. Henry who effected a great change in the form. He transformed mundane materials to lively stories that enlighten and entertain the readers. With Stephen Crane's short story "The Open Boat," the form took a new direction. Many like Theodore Dreiser, Gertrude Stein, Sherwood Anderson and F. Scott Fitzgerald followed. With William Faulkner and Ernest Hemingway, the short story reached the zenith of its glory. Faulkner had to face controversies because of his preoccupation with the neurotic, the insane and the impotent. His short story "A Rose for Emily" depicted all these characteristics. On the other hand, though Hemingway

violated all conventions in the writing mode, he became a model for the upcoming writers.

The short-story form did not have a steady development in Britain, but the literary world will forever remember the contributions of Katherine Mansfield, Oscar Wilde, Joseph Conrad, Rudyard Kipling, Graham Greene, James Joyce, D. H. Lawrence, Virginia Woolf, George Orwell, Thomas Mann and others. Each stood for different schools in literature and experimented in the form. Conrad's sea stories, Wilde's fairy stories, Kipling's animal stories, Joyce's Dublin stories, Mansfield's autobiographical stories and many other collections added grandeur to the form and the spirit of short stories. The stream-of-consciousness method, psychological approaches, catholic thoughts, aestheticism and several other techniques and ideas were experimented on. But as the writers gave more concentration to novels and plays, short stories had to strive hard for a survival.

Writers in Latin America too began to publish stories. Their history, heroes, national myths, political persecution, religious indoctrination and struggle for independence, became the foundation of their stories. By the second half of the nineteenth century, realist and naturalist topics, and towards the end of the twentieth century, scientific themes began to invade the form. The upcoming writers reflect Latin American literature in the journals that took interest in publishing the short descriptions of various societies and countries. It was with Esteban Echeverria's "The Slaughter House" that the short

story became prominent. Richardo Palma was an influential figure in the development of the style and structure of the form. Horacio Quiroga and Romulo Gallegos were to improve upon the modern stories and the latter was the first to gain international acclaim. Jorge Luis Borges was prominent among Latin American writers because his stories are metaphysical riddles, giving preference to violence. With Gabriel Garcia Marquez, the short story introduced a new trend called Magic Realism.

There are yet others whose names and works find an important place in the history of short stories. Franz Kafka and Albert Camus had great philosophies to declare: modern man's meaningless existence and his fears and loneliness. The German short stories developed considerably after the world wars. The wars taught the short-story writers, truths unheard of. They wrote out of hate and despair towards life. Almost all the famous writers like Henrik Boyle, Else Eishinger and Martin Bower share the aftermath of the wars.

Yet another name that took the short stories to great heights is that of Italo Calvino. The three stories in his collection *Under the Jaguar Sun* concentrate on how the world narrows down to the mouth, nose and ear - to the senses of taste, smell and hearing. John Steinbeck the storyteller of the American Southerners has, to his credit, many famous stories, the best being "Chrysanthemums" which has been placed among the best in English literature. His collection *The Long Valley* (1938) depicts the suffering Americans. Guy de

Maupassant, the master storyteller, is known for his compressed style. As Branden Matthews says in his critical work, *The Philosophy of the Short Story*, “The writer of a short story must be concise, compressed; a vigorous compression is essential ” (22). Maupassant achieved instant fame with his very first story “Boule De Suif.”

Writers of diverse origins and talents also have tried the short story successfully. Frank O’Connor with Irish tales, James Herriot with Yorkshire tales, and William Boyd with African tales, established their names. While Poppy Brite wrote horror stories, the stories of Kate Chopin, Isak Dinesen and Blake Morrison were filled with love and passion. Prominent writers like Dorothy Parker and her collections *Laments for the Living* (1930) and *After Such Pleasures* (1933) and John Updike’s *Pigeon Feathers* (1962), deserve special mention. The trend of Anton Chekhov, Leo Tolstoy and other Russian writers, advocating truthfulness in their stories, was also criticized. Sherwood Anderson says in the epilogue to *An Anthology of Famous American Stories*: “They make their characters eat cabbage soup, just because they themselves eat it” (Burrell and Cerf 1325).

It has been proved over the years that a literary form can seize hold of a country for a considerable period of time. In Elizabethan England it was the verse drama. In the eighteenth century it was the essay. The twentieth century saw America in the grip of the short stories. Among the short-story writers, stands out Roald Dahl who proves that a Norwegian can write short stories to capture the

American audience. It also proves that an American audience can influence a Norwegian to read and write stories to their taste.

## II

### **Roald Dahl: His Life and Works**

Roald Dahl was born to Norwegian parents in 1916. His father, Harold Dahl, having run away from home, spent the rest of his life in Britain. He lived a happy life with his wife and children in Britain for he believed that that was an ideal place for a family. The children knew Norway only through their mother, Sofie, who told them Norse myths, stories of tall giants and fairies and witches. These stories remained in Roald's mind as fantastic word-pictures, even forty years after, when he wrote stories for children. Harold Dahl, a great lover of art and literature, was a great influence on Roald. When his mother, Sofie was pregnant, his father would take her for walks along the countryside. He called them glorious walks for he believed that when a pregnant woman observed the beauty of nature, the tender emotions experienced would get transmitted to the mind of the unborn child, who would grow up to be a lover of beauty. Roald too imbibed this antenatal nourishment. Harold Dahl's irresistible wish was to educate his children in English schools, because he sensed that there was something special in English schools, which had compelled the inhabitants of a small island to become a great nation and a great empire, and to produce the world's greatest literature. However, in

course of time, Roald disagreed with his father's concept, because the school days were for him, the bitterest part of his life. Later he surmised that the strict disciplinary schools supplied nothing special to its children, nor helped them become better human beings.

Young Roald was sent to the boarding of St. Peter's school, Somerset, at the age of nine, and later to Repton Public School near Derby at the age of twelve. His experiences in these schools are described in his autobiography, *Boy*. The narrations are not those of a boy who leaves traces of fearful memories and barrels of tears in his writings. Roald had begun to accept misfortunes as natural events even at a tender age. He knew how to brave life with its unpleasantness and drawbacks, a lesson he learnt from his mother. He remembered the matron of St. Peter's as a giant-like woman who was very cruel to the boys. Miss Trunchbull, the headmistress in his book *Matilda*, was moulded after her. The headmaster at Repton was no better and Roald reminisced with wonder how this man, who used to beat the boys viciously, became the Archbishop of Canterbury. Obviously he lost all faith in teachers and religious leaders, since.

Schoolmates describe Roald as a tall, soft-faced boy, not particularly popular. He used to spend his time reading, and is said to have read the entire works of Dickens, braving the torture of his prefects, during the first winter at Repton. The idea of the fight between the strong and the weak, where the latter had their silent ways of protest, was often depicted in the stories he wrote years

later. The Cadbury's Company the chocolate-eating session offered a memorable incident of his childhood. The Company would bring in their new products and serve them to the boys for their opinion and appreciation. "Too subtle for the common palate," was one of the comments Roald remembers to have written in his autobiography *Boy* (148). He used to dream about the Company's long white rooms, where there were pots of chocolate, fudge and other delicious fillings and people moving about mixing and tasting the products. Thirty-five years later, reproducing these dreams, he wrote *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*.

Not all the teachers were floggers, according to Dahl. One of them introduced him to paintings and photography which he developed and for which he received awards and medals from various photographic societies. This period of education was an eventful phase of his life and a fertile subject for his stories. He could retrace them, without any deep-felt sentiment. It was from school that he got the primary lessons of life and the first themes for his stories. He visualized that schools were meant to civilize and sophisticate people but he realized that behind the sophistication existed evil in an inexplicable measure. He knew that neither formal education nor informal discipline could erase evil from a human mind. Though most of Dahl's characters are sophisticated, they are evil minded. In a mild but ingenious way, he points out that the cultured folks are more fiendish than the native ones.

After school, Dahl joined the RAF as a pilot officer at the age of twenty. Why he joined the Air Force or whether he was forced to, is not known. He could not have been forced to. It was neither patriotism nor an escape from school. It could probably be the desire of a youngster, who took a fancy to flying Hurricanes. At a very early age, he saw life and death, both in the war ground and beyond it. He heard many stories from soldiers who had crash-landed in remote places and learnt that man is the same everywhere. He had some personal experiences, including a Luger being pointed on his head by a German convoy, and his nose being smashed and pulled out. Having been badly wounded, he had to leave the war and go to Washington for recuperation. It was then that the writer C. S. Forester met him to collect some interesting news about the war, for publication in *The Saturday Evening Post*. Dahl jotted down a few points and called it, "A Piece of Cake." Forester published it without changing a word, and wrote to Dahl, "Did you know, you were a writer!" <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roald\\_Dahl](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roald_Dahl)>. Thus Dahl's career as a writer was underway. *Going Solo*, Dahl's second autobiography, narrates his experiences as an RAF pilot. Dahl says: "A life is made up of a great number of small incidents and a small number of great ones" (1). Here, he appears to be a very balanced man, taking life and death with a light heart. His autobiographies are entertaining with non-stop narrations and beautiful illustrations by Quentin Blake. Blake could fathom the depth of Dahl's humour and

so he carried out the illustrations for the stories for children too, with tremendous success.

When Dahl understood that he could handle fiction, he tried writing a novel, *The Gremlins*. The story focuses on the mischievous spirits that cause aircraft-engine failures. Walt Disney made it into a film in 1942. The next to be published was an anthology of war stories, *Over To You: Ten Stories of Flyers and Flying*. Despite the good press, it was a modest seller. It was popularly believed that people did not want to read the stories of a war they had just lived through. Dahl refused to see war as others did. So every piece in the collection was far from the war field and full of fantasy and fiction. He did not call them war stories. The subtitle, *Ten Stories of Flyers and Flying*, was perhaps to cater to the people who could not digest details of a war they already knew.

However, Dahl did not get much acclaim, probably because of his weird ways. He also aroused much controversy with his politically biased opinions. He was accused of anti-Semitism and anti-feminism. He claimed that he had coined the term 'gremlins.' The press tried to establish him as a bragger, who liked doing something to invite public attention. But Dahl did not choose to retreat. Even when Walt Disney got all the attention for *Gremlins*, he was satisfied that Eleanor Roosevelt read the story to her grandchildren. His novel *Some Time Never* is an expanded story about the gremlins, which prophesied the end of the world with a would-be World War IV. Dahl himself did not

consider it a well-written book for he wanted to forget it. He even went to the extent of not numbering it along with his later works.

Dahl had by then moved to New York and at the age of thirty-seven married the young actress, Patricia Neal, on 2 July 1953. The next book to be published was an anthology of short stories titled *Someone Like You*. These eighteen stories gave him a name in the world of letters, though they deal with the dark side of man. This collection is significant for it includes Dahl's masterpiece, "Lamb to the Slaughter." In 1954, the Mystery Writers of America gave him the "Edgar Allan Poe Award" <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roald\\_Dahl](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roald_Dahl)>. In 1955, Patricia gave birth to their first daughter, and in 1957, to their second. In 1960, Knopf published *Kiss Kiss*, Dahl's next anthology of eleven stories. Though the anthology brought him great fame, and the publishers demanded more and more stories, Dahl found himself drained of ideas.

It was at this time that Patricia gave birth to their third child and only son, Theo. It was while making up fanciful stories for his own children that an idea flashed his mind: to write stories for children in general. And out came "James and the Giant Peach," a story he tried and succeeded with his children. It showed the wonderful world inside a peach where James, the hero, stayed with a ladybird, a grasshopper, a centipede and an earthworm. Reviewers focused on the fantasy element in the story and the book was predicted to be a classic. In spite of all the hot debates about the

cruel depiction of James's aunts, millions of copies were sold in the UK alone. So Dahl decided on another story for children, "Charlie and the Chocolate Factory." However, the book was published only in 1964, because his son Theo hit by a taxi car, developed severe brain injuries. Dahl, with the combined efforts of two friends, an engineer and a neurosurgeon, spent several months making a valve for draining out the fluid from Theo's brain. Theo made a surprising recovery. The Dahl-Wade-Till valve was used for many years by doctors, until it was excelled by more sophisticated equipments.

Dahl had to suffer tragedies time and time again. He witnessed a few deaths including his father's suicide. So whenever his wife and children suffered, he had the strength of mind not only to overcome them but also to find out remedies for the same. When his eldest daughter, Olivia, developed an incurable type of measles, he was trying hard to find a remedy. When Patricia suffered three strokes in rapid succession, he set up a programme involving long hours of speech therapy. Dahl could fight misfortune with all his strength because he had witnessed his mother putting up with losses courageously. When his father had died, the burden of the family of five children fell on his mother. She had also lost her daughter almost simultaneously. Dahl could not forgive his father for running away from life, while he admired his mother who, without collapsing, shouldered the responsibility of the family.

*Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* was a tremendous success with its fantastic characters and humorous situations. Nevertheless, it contained the germ of a moral, asking children to shun television and read books instead. This vexed a few personalities like Eleanor Cameron, an author for children. The accusations against him were phoniness, tastelessness, lack of literary value and wishful thinking. But children loved the book as they found in Dahl, a man who stood on his knees so that he could see them better. They were honoured because Dahl considered them more intelligent and sensible than adults. Millions of copies were sold around the world and is still one of the best-selling books. The readers of *The London Times* chose the book as the most popular one for children of all time. It was adapted into a hit movie, by Dahl himself under the title, *Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory* in 1971. He did not write another book for many years. The sequel to *Chocolate Factory* titled, *Charlie and the Great Glass Elevator* was not successful. Dahl decided never to write a sequel again. But as Patricia was ill and under treatment, he needed he needed money, and so wrote the script for the James Bond film, *You Only Live Twice*, and the screenplay for *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang*, adapted from an Ian Fleming story.

In 1974, a new anthology of stories *Switch Bitch* was published. The book contains four long stories, all of which deal with sexuality. These sex-based themes were perhaps meant to attract attention more so, because of the changes in his personal life.

Anyway, by the mid-seventies, that is, in his 40s, his marriage with Patricia was crumbling, because of the trespassing of another woman, Felicity Crossland. Dahl met Felicity in 1970, when Patricia had brought her home for dinner. He was so enthralled by her, that he developed a personal relationship with her excluding Patricia. A journalist describes the situation thus: “Imagine the scene. You meet at work, get on with her rather well and invite her to come home to meet your husband. She and he take one look at each other and WHAM! You are out of the picture” <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roald\\_Dahl](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roald_Dahl)>. Dahl and Felicity got married in 1983, right after his divorce from Patricia. Simultaneously, the press released different opinions about *Switch Bitch* having characters with no morality. The 1980's found Dahl very productive in his writing.

In 1975, Dahl published a book for children, *Danny the Champion of the World*, a continuation of his short story “The Champion of the World.” After *Danny*, Dahl published his collection of six stories, *The Wonderful Story of Henry Sugar and Others* in 1977. There too he had children who were very strong characters, questioning the baseless philosophies of adults. In 1980, he published his full-length novel, *My Uncle Oswald*, a novel ripe with sex and copulation. He wrote another book for children, *George's Marvelous Medicine* which did not gain much popularity, as it was banned on the grounds that it encouraged children to kill relatives. But his book, *The Big Friendly Giant* (BFG), a best seller, received tremendous

applause as it was of a milder tone and full of humorous scenes. Moreover, the bond between the orphan Sofie and the giant was a special attraction for children. *The Witches*, Dahl's next book was very popular though it was controversial. Children loved the boy in it who said: "It didn't matter who you are or what you look like so long as somebody loves you" (190). The story was made into a successful film starring Angelica Houston in 1990.

*Matilda*, which came out in 1988, was again a roaring success. It was Dahl's least fantasy-driven book, and the young girl Matilda with her strange powers went straight into the hearts of children and adults alike. The cruel headmistress, Miss Trunchbull, representing every adult who considers himself right and the children wrong, became the topic of conversation for children. The same year, Dahl won the "Children's Book Award" from the Federation of Children's Book Groups for *Matilda*. The other books of Dahl include *The Magic Finger* (1966), *The Enormous Crocodile* (1978), *The Twits* (1980), *Two Fables* (1983), *Rhyme Stew* (1989), *Esio Trot* (1990) and *The Minipins* (1991) all meant for children. *The Night Digger* (1970) and *The Lightning Bugs* (1971) were the two other screenplays he wrote. His stories are collected under various titles like *Twenty-nine Kisses from Roald Dahl* (1969), *Selected Stories* (1990), *Tales of the Unexpected* (1979), *Taste and Other Tales* (1979), *A Roald Dahl Selection* (1980) and *The Way up to Heaven*

*and Other Stories* (1980). The only stage-play he wrote was *The Honeys*, which was staged in New York in the year 1955.

Dahl believed that it was more strenuous to write for children than for adults because it was a very responsible job. He was keen on making every child a great reader. It was not for entertainment alone that he wrote stories for them, but to develop their reading habit. He was tremendously successful, and even the parents and teachers who accused him of injecting crazy and dangerous ideas in children, agreed that he could hook children into reading. Everyone adored Matilda, who sitting in front of the television, tried to concentrate on *The Red Pony*. They admired Peter in "Swan" who knew a lot about ecology from books. It was a direct telepathy from Dahl to their little brains, that books would help them stand up strong and confident to fight the dirty world. Dahl's astonishing success is linked with his empathy for children. He insisted on seeing the world through children's eyes. The adults, who do not admit that their children are more intelligent, are portrayed as silly and insensitive.

In 1990, Dahl was diagnosed with a rare blood disorder, Myelo-dysplastic Anaemia. He subsequently succumbed to death on 23 November 1990, at the age of 74 while working on *The Vicar of Nibbleswicke*, *The Dahl Diary*, *My Year* and *The Roald Dahl Cookbook*. Cooking was a passion he inherited from his mother. Dahl's stories were initially published in magazines like *New Yorker*, *Saturday Evening Post*, *Harpers* and *The Atlantic Monthly*, before

being collected in book form. Many of his stories were televised for the hugely successful *Tales of the Unexpected*.

Dahl's works *Revolting Rhymes*, a collection of short poems, and *Fantastic Mr. Fox* had inspired musicians to a new orchestral music. They were commissioned to benefit The Roald Dahl Foundation. On 29 May 2000, these works came live together at the Roald Dahl Concert, staged in Cardiff Bay, forming a highlight of the BBC's 24-hour music event. In March 2000, A World Book Day Poll voted Dahl as the UK's favourite author, and in July 2000, the UK librarians, teachers and publishers voted *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, the most significant children's book published between 1960 and 1979.

It is widely accepted that Dahl's stories have influenced J. K. Rowling in writing the Harry Potter series. The Sunday Times acclaims on the blurb of *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, the first of the series, published by Bloomsbury, that the story being full of surprises and jokes could be compared to Dahl. The experiences of the orphan, Harry, his cruel relatives and the realization of his strange magical powers bear close resemblance to Dahl's Matilda. The witches and wizards with their secret meetings, Animagus, Potion making, and so on were seen before in Dahl's controversial and popular book, *The Witches*. Dahl's way of seeing the fantastic world and his way of attributing strange powers to children are there in Rowling too.

Harry Potter, the orphan was treated very cruelly by his relatives and it was at a desperate moment that he breaks the glass in the zoo and lets out the Boa Constrictor. He also understands that he can talk to snakes. Peter in "Swan" and Matilda in *Matilda* come out with their superhuman powers, when they can no longer endure the harassment of their enemies. Matilda moves the glass of water by just looking at it and Peter flies like a swan. The grand meeting of the witches in *The Witches* is also seen in *The Philosopher's Stone*, where the witches and wizards of Hogwarts, School of Witchcraft and Wizardry meet to talk to their students. Hagrid, the half-giant in Harry Potter bears close resemblance to the Giant in *The Big Friendly Giant*. Both are soft hearted and are often found shedding tears. Aragog the Tarantula in the second book *Harry Potter and The Chamber of Secrets* talks as majestically as Miss Spider in "James and the Giant's Peach." In *Harry Potter and The Prisoner of Askaban*, Harry blows up Aunt Marge like a balloon and sends her up flying up in the air. Matilda in a similar way sends Trunchbull, her headmistress flying. There are many such spells used in the sixth book *Harry Potter and the Half Blood Prince* where Harry uses 'Levi-corpus,' the non-verbal spell and makes a man stand upside down. In *The Witches* the Grand High Witch casts a spell and a witch is "cooked like a carrot" (70). Rowling named such spells 'Unforgivable Curses', Avadakedavra being the deadliest. It is with this spell that Voldemort kills Harry's parents (*Philosopher's Stone* 45).

Harry's Godfather Sirius Black is killed with the same spell (*The Order of the Phoenix* 710). Dumbledore, the Headmaster of Hogwarts too meets his end by this spell (*The Half Blood Prince* 556). There are 'Transfiguring Charms' by which Victor Krum, a student is changed to a shark (*The Goblet of Fire* 434). He did it to save his schoolmate. Peter in "Swan" transformed to a swan to save himself. Many others in Rowling transform themselves to animals, and she names it 'Animagus.'

Potion Making is another theme dealt with by Rowling and Dahl. In *The Witches*, Formula 86 Delayed Action Mouse-Maker Potion is prepared and the recipe is explained in detail by the Grand High Witch: "A gruntel's egg, the claw of a craberuncher, the beak of a blabbersnitch, the snout of a groblesquirt, the tongue of a catspringer, a roasted alarm clock, a boiled telescope and the hair of the victim mixed together" (89). The potion changed the boy and his friend to rats. In *The Chamber of Secrets*, Hermione narrates the preparation of Polyjuice Potion. "Lacewing flies, leeches, fluxweed, knotgrass, powdered horn of a Bicorn, shredded skin of a Boomslang and the hair of the victim mixed together" (125). It changed Hermoine to a cat. Many other potions like love potions, sleeping potions, lucky potions, etc. are described in detail by Rowling. In addition, the sixth book *The Half Blood Prince* concentrates mainly on potion making.

Thus Rowling is able to give a different colour to magic and witchcraft, much to the taste of children. Though the diction and style are not as sophisticated as Dahl's Rowling has created in the Harry Potter series, an atmosphere with an undertone of humour as seen in Dahl's stories for children. Both the writers deal with the fight between good and evil and Rowling too shares Dahl's attitude. "There is no good and evil, there is only power. Those who are weak to seek it . . . resort to evil" is the motto of Lord Voldemort (*The Philosopher's Stone* 211). Though Voldemort resorted to evil, he could not find the power he wanted. In the last book of the series, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, he meets his end. But Harry who wins over evil with goodness in him, gives the Dark Lord a final chance to escape from evil: "Think and try for some remorse...it's your one last chance. It's all you have got left. . . try for some remorse"(594). But the power of evil was so overwhelming that Voldemort had to succumb to it. Snape who had both good and evil in him too meets his death, only because he could not keep a balance between them.

Dahl is often clubbed with O. Henry for the twist in his tale. Dahl's "The Landlady" and O. Henry's "The Furnished Room" have a similar narrative, though the tone and frame are different. His twist changes the whole atmosphere and it appears when the reader least expects it. He does it with a word or a sentence. O. Henry's twists are usually moralistic. Dahl's characters are so well moulded and true

to life that, one can never predict the twist. The good are not always rewarded; the bad are not always punished. They leave the scene, as coolly as they entered. Readers admire the ease with which he balances the good and the evil. Ian Reid in his critical work *The Short Story* says: "The short story becomes a distinct genre because of three qualities: makes a single impression on the reader, it does so by concentrating on a crisis, and it makes that crisis pivoted in a controlled plot" (54). Dahl's short stories are typical examples.

Dahl is also yoked together with Poe because both of them want fiction to aspire to the condition of poetry. Like Dahl, Poe was not interested in just telling a story, but in creating the unity of expressions. Both wrote about evil, terror, horror and similar emotions. The difference lies in the way they presented them. Poe wrote about abnormal obsessions, diabolical and insane tortures. His characters have terrifying features and shrill voices. A typical character of Poe sees strange shadows, hears strange sounds and imagines strange things and thus knows that something abnormal is happening to him. On the contrary, Dahl does not use a creaking door or a screeching owl to create an air of terror. His men and women are extraordinarily soft and gentle. His characters are generally good-looking and amiable except those like Miss Trunchbull in *Matilda*. At times, there is too much of the wide-eyed innocence in Dahl's characters that the reader begins to suspect the motive behind. The

backdrop of every story is the pleasant, lighted-up countryside or the warm welcoming hearth of a home.

Dahl's specialty is what the French term *contes cruel* means, minus bloodshed. Though there are homicides and well-planned murders, no blood is spilled. Even the doer is not aware of the evil in him. But when the evil breaks loose its reins, he is not able to control it. Nevertheless, when it reduces the enemy to nothing, he is content to have put down a great burden he had been carrying all along in his heart.

The main difference between Dahl and his native Norwegian writers is that he wrote only in English. In fact his native was Norway but he had very little connection with the Scandinavian kingdom. As James Walter Mcfarlane says in his book, *Ibsen and the Temper of Norwegian Literature*, "the ravages of history and the burdens of geography have left their fingerprints" on the country's culture, its inhabitants and also its literature (11). The people there have for centuries lived in multiple isolation. A strong sense of nationality and hostility to anything foreign prevailed there. These traits are seen in almost all the Norwegian writers like Henrik Ibsen, Ludvig Holberg, Wergeland, Bjornson, Jonas Lie, Sibjorn Obstfelder and Knut Hamsun. Dahl was aware of this, but Norway as a native land did not bother him. All the same, he had in mind the beautiful landscape of Oslo. His stories do not have the backdrop of Norway, or of any place for that matter. His characters do not belong to any nation. They are just

men and women. As Dahl is convinced that men and women are basically the same everywhere, he does not argue especially for the freedom struggle in Norway, or for the Norwegians.

### III

#### **Roald Dahl: From a Phenomenological Angle**

In this study, the short stories of Roald Dahl are analysed from a phenomenological point of view. Dahl's stories are meant to be difficult reading and so they are not grasped at a single reading or a single sitting. A phenomenological approach helps to comprehend the phenomenon of evil hidden in the characters and their actions. Just as one philosophy begets another, one evil begets another evil, which in turn, generates more evil. Thus the phenomenon of evil goes on and on in alarming proportions in the stories of Dahl.

*The New Lexicon Webster's Dictionary* defines "phenomenology" as "a method of arriving at absolute essences through the analysis of living experiences in disregard of scientific knowledge" ("Phenomenology," def.). Since Edmund Husserl employed the term in the early 1900s, phenomenology gained widespread influence as a philosophical perspective and a critical method. In the middle of the nineteenth century 'phenomenon' was considered a descriptive study of the mind. But towards the twentieth century it came to be regarded as the perception of the real and also of illusions and dreams. Now phenomenology has been accepted as a descriptive study that provides with explanations of the phenomena.

In the book, *A Historical Introduction to Phenomenology*, by Seppo Sajama and Matti Kampinen, Husserl attempts to analyse and describe mental phenomena “as they appear to the person who experiences them” (66). Husserl was not just interested in the really existing things in the real world. He tried to analyse human consciousness independently of any prior suppositions. The analysis, he believed should begin with an ‘epoche’ suspending all beliefs and presuppositions about the nature of experience. He called this transcendental suspension ‘bracketing’ or ‘the phenomenological epoche’ or ‘the phenomenological reduction’ as stated in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (“phenomenology,” def.) Phenomenology thus advocates a deeper reading of man’s mind, his power to bestow meaning on what he perceives in the midst of the objective surroundings.

In the 1930s, the Polish theorist Roman Ingarden adapted the phenomenological viewpoint to understand a work of literature. A literary work he says does not have an existence of its own. According to the *Encyclopedia of Literary Critics and Criticism*, a literary work depends on “the intentional acts of both the author and the reader”, for “a work originates in the consciousness of a writer and is reexperienced in the consciousness of the reader” (“Phenomenology,” def.). Through phenomenological criticism, literature has been redefined in terms of reading. It is no longer solely determined by what is written in the text. The reader’s

interpretation, which is considered a phenomenological experience, begins from his consciousness and extends through the author's consciousness. He might agree with the author or arrive at another interpretation. This, according to phenomenologists, is 'reflexive thinking' ("Phenomenology," def. *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*).

Political events in Europe and the shifting winds of doctrine caused the phenomenological movements to lose much of their original momentum after Husserl's death in 1938. The best known contemporary philosophers who used the term in the descriptions of their own work are Martin Heidegger in Germany, Jean Paul Sartre and Maurice Merbau-Ponty in France. Sartre says in his book *Being and Nothingness*: "If the being of phenomena is not resolved in a phenomenon of being . . . then the exact relation which writes the phenomenon of being to the being of the phenomenon must be established" (9). There are many thinkers like Henri Bergson and Prof. Richard Zaner who consider phenomenological reduction as difficult and complex. In *Phenomenology and Philosophical Understanding*, they argue that the method 'does violence' to man's natural way of thinking (129). *The Illustrated Oxford Dictionary, 2006*, defines "phenomenology" as "a philosophical approach concentrating on the study of consciousness and the objects of direct experience" ("Phenomenology," def.). The same dictionary defines "phenomenon" as "a fact or occurrence that appears or is perceived, especially, one of which the cause is in question" ("Phenomenon,"

def.) The phenomenon of evil in Roald Dahl is dealt with in this light. To make it more explicit, this study is a philosophical approach concentrating on Dahl's consciousness and his direct experience of evil, as portrayed in his works.

#### IV

##### **The Chapter Division of the Study**

The study is divided into six chapters. Chapter One "The Introduction" is divided into four sections. The first section "Short Stories Then and Now," traces the short story form down the years. The second section "Roald Dahl: His Life and Works," gives a gist of the life of the author and his works. There is a reference to how Dahl influenced J. K. Rowling in writing the Harry Potter series. The third section, "Roald Dahl: From a Phenomenological Angle," deals briefly with the theory of phenomenology on which the thesis is based. The fourth section "The Chapter Division of the Study" is an outline of the study undertaken.

Chapter Two, "The Evil Beneath," analyses twelve stories that show evil hidden beneath man's exterior. Among them, some stories are grouped together because of their outlook and close similarities. The characters in the stories do not seem to be aware of the presence of evil in them. They are well-mannered social beings who take care to exhibit their best behaviour. Unfortunately the animal instincts hidden beneath their sophistication pop out under pressure. Though

they do not intend to hurt anybody, they do indulge in evil as a last resort. As is the way with evil, it leaves a sting. The characters become victims to the evil of the outside world and they try hard to survive. But the society being too harsh and uncompromising compels them to embrace more evil in order to fight back. Some come out of it successful while others meet their doom. It may also be concluded that it is their greed for power and pleasure that makes them resort to evil. The men and women in the stories try to avoid evil but they are not able to, because of their natural affinity towards it. Thus they become responsible for their own destruction, mental and physical.

Chapter Three, "The Evil Behind," focuses on four long stories in which, evil is hidden behind the knowledge of characters. Evil toes behind and is delineated through sex. The attitude towards sex, exhibited here, is unhealthy, for sexuality is overused, misused and abused. Yet Dahl's stories do not fall under the category of sexual fiction, erotica or pornography, because they do not satisfy any of the conditions laid down by such literature. As seen in his stories, Dahl's characters suffer from uncontrollable sexual desires because the conventions and practices of the society expect them to repress such desires. They find themselves running after the women they wish to ravish, like savages. Hoping to be free men, they look for opportunities to stretch the reins of their mind but this ends up in disaster. Their pent up desires gush out beyond their control. Thus the over-indulgence in sexual whims hastens their doom. The characters

are well-informed persons in certain worldly matters, and are specialized in particular areas of knowledge. But they utilize their erudition only to harm others and to derive secret sexual pleasures.

Chapter Four, "The Evil Beside," analysing thirteen stories, portrays the fight between the strong and the weak. Here the weak win. This is because the weak are clever and strong-minded. When the strong dominate the weak incessantly, the weak become tired of subjugation, and take up arms. Through evil ways they quell the strong. Evil is the weapon they keep beside their apparent existence while waiting secretly for the right time to strike the enemy. They know perfectly well that the weakest moment of the enemy is the right time for attack. A rethinking of the stories reveals that the weak are not really weak, and the strong are not really strong. In short, everyone is weak just as everyone is strong. Dahl seems to say that instead of probing into the weak points in the strong, if the weak had concentrated on the strong points in them, they would have avoided disasters. The wrath of evil would not have caused so much havoc. If the weak win, it is not because they are strong. It is because they are clever, sly and evil. In the survival of the fittest, the fittest is the cleverest of all. So the survival of the weak characters in Dahl can be called the survival of the cleverest.

Chapter Five, "The Evil Beyond," has ten stories of flyers and flying. Though war is the backdrop, the direct presence of war is absent, but its menacing presence is felt throughout. The common

man suffers most during a war. Even beyond the war field, he resorts to evil for power and selfish gains. The war between nations may come to an end, but the war between man and his fellow beings will continue, and the war between man and his own being will persist. War is man's creation in order to gain power over others. But his creation becomes his own enemy and he is dissatisfied. War causes misery in the world, but man is man's most dreaded enemy. His greed engulfs him. The evil he creates expands and goes beyond his intuition and showers misery on his own species.

Chapter Six, Conclusion, "Between Evil and Good" explicates the different kinds of evil and the different ways in which Dahl presents them in his stories. The characters of Dahl are evil in some way or the other, either to take revenge or for selfish gains. Some resort to evil to win in life and others for material benefits. It is a fact that evil cannot make a surprise entry. It ought to have been lurking in man's mind in a dormant state, waiting to pounce upon the enemy at the right time, the ripe moment. The reason for the dormant evil may be thrust on somebody or something, for example, the society. But one point is certain. The characters themselves are responsible for their evil ways. All the pent up evil thoughts form an union in their minds and create a revolutionary impulse which forces itself out at the slightest provocation. Until then, he hides their evil meditations behind masks. When the dormant state of evil is over, the mask is blown off and the hidden evil forces itself out to play havoc.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE EVIL BENEATH

The evil dealt with in this chapter lies beneath the conscious mind of the characters. *The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English 2005* defines 'beneath' as "in or to a lower position than somebody or something, under somebody or something" ("beneath," def.). *The Longman's Dictionary of Contemporary English 2005* defines 'beneath' as "in or to a lower position than something, directly under something" ("beneath," def.). *The Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary 2005* defines the word as, "in or to a lower position than, under" ("beneath," def.). Dahl is aware of the evil that lies concealed under or beneath man's mind. According to him when man is dissatisfied with himself and discontented with his life, and when society is unfair to him, he resorts to evil. A phenomenological study of the stories reveals the logic behind the evil deeds of the characters. Evil does not directly come from outside a person but from beneath his conscious mind. Dahl does not blame evil or the evil doer for he believes that an evildoer is an ordinary being with a natural aptitude for evil and good. The evil hidden beneath man's exterior is discussed in this chapter.

Twelve stories are chosen for the study: "Royal Jelly," "The Hitchhiker," "Man from the South," "The Landlady," "Skin," "Pig,"

“Georgy Porgy,” “The Great Automatic Grammatizor,” “Vengeance is Mine, Inc.,” “Ah Sweet Mystery of Life,” “Edward the Conqueror” and “The Wonderful Stories of Henry Sugar.” Each character is scrutinized from a phenomenological angle. The phenomenon of evil is criticized with reference to the quality of evil, the suppression of evil beneath a person’s mind, and the provocation of the evil. In most cases the result is disastrous. But some of the characters, who do not allow evil to rule them, balance it with their goodness and save themselves from becoming victims.

In “Royal Jelly” evil appears in the form of a jelly. The royal jelly is a glandular secretion produced by nurse bees to feed the larvae, that are destined to become queens and hence the name. The jelly is a substance containing phenols, sterols, glycerils, dextrose and unidentified acids. It is a substance of tremendous nourishing power and so Albert decided to give it to his baby girl. She was born a weak child and had been losing weight ever since she was born because she refused to drink milk. Mabel, Albert’s wife, stood helpless and requested the doctors to find a remedy: “It took us nine years to get this baby. I think it would kill me if anything should happen to her,” Mabel told the doctor (*Kiss Kiss* 104). There was a vacant stare in the baby’s eyes that scared Albert. He knew it would die any moment. That would kill Mabel too. “Oh Albert, I’m tired. I’m so tired I don’t know what I’m doing anymore. I don’t think I can go on. I don’t think I can stand it,” she sobbed (108).

Albert had to do something quickly and it was then that his eyes fell on the article on Royal Jelly. He knew about it, for he was an expert in apiculture. Without informing Mabel, he mixed the jelly with milk and fed the baby. The baby showed a great liking for it and gulped it down. It seemed she had an inborn thirst for the jelly and Albert was pleased: "I'll do all the sterilizing and the mixing of the milk and getting everything ready. That'll help you a bit, anyway," he told Mabel (110). Mabel did not suspect anything. Well knowing that over doses of the jelly might be dangerous Albert continued to feed the baby with it. As a result after two days Mabel found that the baby had grown plump. She questioned Albert about this magic recovery and he had to find various means to convince her. "It's magic. Pure magic . . . And you know this stuff actually costs five hundred dollars a pound jar! It's perfectly harmless; otherwise I would not have done it. It comes from bees," he explained (115). Mabel could not justify Albert's way of putting foreign materials in a newborn baby's milk. But Albert paid no heed. He had just one thing to say: "The point is this. It's done so much good to our little baby just in the last few hours that I think we ought to go right on giving it to her" (116). Amusingly enough, the baby went on yelling for it.

It was then Albert hesitatingly declared that he himself had consumed the jelly to cure his infertility: "Buckets of it I must have swallowed during the last twelve months," he said proudly (130). It was then that Mabel noticed short yellowy-black silky hairs on his neck. He was beginning to look like a bee. In spite of her protests he continued

secretly to add the jelly to the baby's milk. The baby seemed to have turned the corner, but Mabel was not happy. The baby had put on a large amount of flesh and looked like a gigantic grub with the tiny arms and legs that had not grown in proportion. She shockingly realized that her baby too had silky yellowy-brown hairs on its stomach. Albert was pleased and he proudly called her 'queen' (130).

From his childhood days Albert had a strange relationship with bees. He would catch bees with his bare hands and let them crawl about over his cheeks and neck. His father had considered him bewitched, for the bees never stung him. But his mother compared him to St. Francis. This empathy between Albert and the bees continued with the years and by the time he was eighteen, he had established his own business of producing honey in his own hives. He never had to use smoke, wear gloves on his hands or a net over his head, while taking honey from the hives. Thus he could take the royal jelly straight from the hive, without disturbing the bees. Everything connected with bees fascinated him. It had developed into an obsession and so he did not mind his baby changing to a bee. It had been a life-giver to him, when it cured his infertility. But he continued to consume it in large quantities even after Mabel confirmed her pregnancy. After consuming the first two dozes of the jelly, the baby recovered. But he continued feeding it with over dozes of the jelly and as the mark of evil, tufts of hair began to grow on their bodies and they slowly changed to bees. Albert had no regrets about it. On the contrary he was proud about it.

The writer in "The Hitchhiker" was proud of his new car and as he was driving up to London, he decided to stop for hitchhikers: "I know just how it used to feel to be standing on the side of a country road watching the cars go by. I hated the drivers for pretending they didn't see me," he told himself (*The Collected Short Stories* 729). But when he saw the hitchhiker thumbing a lift, he did not know that he was inviting trouble into his car. The hitchhiker looked almost like the devil, with a ratty face, grey tooth, dark quick and clever eyes and slightly pointed ears. The moment he got in, he began to provoke the writer by questioning him about his profession and the new car. The writer answered him. But when he, in turn, enquired about the hitchhiker's profession, he seemed disinterested: "I'm sorry. It is none of my business what you do. The trouble is I'm a writer, and most writers are terribly nosy," the writer said (730).

The talk went on to writers and the hitchhiker called him a successful writer. That pleased the writer and gradually a bond formed between the two men. The hitchhiker very cleverly took the reins and the writer as if in a spell did whatever the man asked him to do. Thus he drove at top speed and was charged by a police officer. The officer noted down their names and address and informed them that serious trouble awaited them. The writer felt humiliated and the thought that he will be put in prison terrified him. But the hitchhiker seemed to be very cool. He took a tin of tobacco and a packet of cigarette papers from his

pocket and rolled a cigar. He did it with such dexterity that the writer was amused. He guessed that the hitchhiker would be a piano player or a conjuror.

However, the stranger proclaimed himself to be a 'finger smith': "I'm a finger smith. It's the name given to them who's risen to the very top of the profession. You've heard of a goldsmith or a silversmith, for instance. They are experts with gold and silver. I'm an expert with my fingers, so I'm a finger smith," he said (738). By that time, he had robbed the writer's driving license, a key ring with four keys on it, some pound notes, a few coins, a letter, a dairy, a pencil, a cigarette lighter, a sapphire ring, a watch, shoelace and a belt. The writer understood that 'finger smith' was a very sophisticated name the man gave for a 'pickpocket.' Anyhow the writer considered him a fantastic fellow. The journey was coming to an end and the writer began to get worried about the punishment awaiting him. But the hitchhiker said: "The cop has lost his book. He's lost both books, the one with my name on it and the one with yours. Easiest job I ever done" (739). He held the two books in his hands. The writer was relieved and at the same time amused that a pickpocket saved him from prison. He called the man 'a genius.'

The hitchhiker represents a human being who is a combination of the good and the evil. Being a criminal, he could cheat the writer easily. But the writer who is adored as the most civilized being, could not resist the man and the freedom he offered. The innate desire to freak out and let loose his life for sometime overpowered him. No wonder, he got the

thrill of his life, when he drove the car at top speed. He knew that he had done the forbidden and was yet thankful to the pickpocket for encouraging him to dare. Thus the evil beneath his sophisticated exterior popped out and found pleasure in breaking the law. Their journey ended at the end of the highway, a symbolic pointer indicating the long journey called life. As the evil and the good sat together driving the car, they had perfect control over each other and the journey ended smoothly. They became an interdependent pair, helping each other. If the writer had been adamant on maintaining his dignity, he would have ended up in prison. The pickpocket too becomes aware of goodness from the disposition of the writer.

If Albert and the hitchhiker have recourse to evil to keep others happy, Carlos in “Man from the South” and the elderly woman in “The Landlady” resort to evil to please themselves. These two characters Carlos and the elderly woman, stand apart in the collection because it is hard to draw a border line separating the sanity and insanity of their minds. They have exceptional ways of finding happiness and as normal people do not engage themselves in such sports, they are kith and kin to abnormality. Carlos found pleasure in cutting off people’s fingers. He had lost a lot of money in betting, but was happy to have won forty-seven fingers in all. For everyone else, he was a loser. It was not the finger he was interested in. He enjoyed the whole process of betting, tying the other’s palm on to the table and

chopping the finger off with a knife. He would be the centre of attraction then and every eye would be fixed on him. He simply enjoyed it.

Carlos had a slow and steady way of tempting people. The method by which he attracted the boy to get involved in the bet showed his calculating mind. The boy was twenty and Carlos found him an easy prey. It all started when the boy, an American cadet, offered Carlos a cigarette. Gradually the conversation focused on the boy's lighter, which he proudly held in his hands and said, "It never fails" (*The Collected Short Stories* 465). Carlos did not like it and kept looking at the boy all the time, for the right time to strike. At last he with his curiously soft, toneless voice said: "Shall we not perhaps make a little bet on that? Shall we not make a little bet on whether your lighter lights?" (465). With an immaculate suit, clear words and perfect actions, he trapped the boy who fell for the Cadillac and agreed to part with his finger. Those who stood around did nothing to stop the cruel sport. Carlos was different from the others, for no human being would want to win fingers on a bet: "Some little thing you can afford to give away, and if you did happen to lose it you would not feel too bad. Such as, perhaps the little finger on your left hand" he told the boy (466). The boy, young as he was, did not sense the danger lurking behind the bet. Moreover he wanted the brand new Cadillac. He agreed to light his lighter ten times without fail.

There was no excitement or panic in Carlos's voice. Without any hesitation he lifted the chopper up in the air and held it two feet above

the boy's finger, ready to chop. Everyone around held their breath and the boy began to light his lighter. But when it had given out the eighth spark, a woman rushed into the room and pulled away the chopper from Carlos's hand. She was his wife who had a lot to say about her husband:

He is a menace. Down where we live at home he has taken altogether forty-seven fingers from different people and has lost eleven cars. In the end they threatened to have him put away somewhere. That is why I brought him up here. For ten minutes I leave him alone to go, he is at it again. He has no car. It's mine. He hasn't anything left to bet with. As a matter of fact I myself won it all from him a long while ago. (472)

It was then the referee noticed that the woman had only one finger and a thumb on her hand. The fact that Carlos did not bet against his own fingers, calls for a re-thinking.

Carlos was evil-minded no doubt, but those who were around watching the scene share the same devilry. Many thoughts passed through the referee's mind: "What if the boy lost? Then we'd have to rush him to the hospital in the Cadillac that he hadn't won. That would be a fine thing. It would be a damn silly unnecessary thing so far as I could see" (469). But he did not attempt to prevent the brutal play. Those around also took pleasure in seeing the fingers chopped. As Nietzsche says: "Every superior human being will instinctively aspire after a secret citadel, where he is set free from the crowd . . . and he may forget the

rule 'man' ” (*Beyond Good and Evil* 57). Carlos appeared very composed when he prepared the scene for the bet. He hammered two nails into the table, six inches apart. He placed the boy's left hand between the nails and tied it with a string: “The nails are only to hold your hands in place. Now please clench the fist, all except for the little finger. You must leave the little finger sticking out, lying on the table,” he said (470).

Evil was hidden in Carlos's mind when he first approached the boy. The boy at first considered the bet only a joke and was ready to forgo a dollar or two for it. But when Carlos mentioned the Cadillac and the small finger, the boy was perhaps apprehensive. Though he stepped back, Carlos lured him again into the bet. Everyone, even the boy knew that it was a vicious trap, but the power of evil temptation was so great that the boy found himself sitting before Carlos allowing him to tie his hands on the table. It did not matter to Carlos whether he won or lost the bet. In his frenzy he would have surely chopped the boy's finger, had not the woman stopped him. The boy would have lost both - the Cadillac and his finger.

Billy Weaver in “The Landlady” had to board somewhere for the night and he chose a boarding house ‘Bread and Breakfast.’ The bold black letters against the white background seemed to invite him. The landlady, a fifty- year old woman, welcomed him with such a warm smile that Billy was tempted to stay there. The boy did not know her evil intention hidden beneath her benign smile. He followed her and found

the place neat and comfortable. He noticed a pretty little Dachshund curled up near the fire and a parrot in the cage. "Animals were usually a good sign in a place like this," Billy told himself (*Kiss Kiss* 10). The well-lit house and the warm hearth and, above all, the encouraging face of the lady seemed to say that everything would be fine. She looked like the mother of a schoolmate who had welcomed him to spend the X-mas holidays. Added to all these, the rate, five and six pence was tantalizing. In short, evil had woven a very fine web to trap him. There were no other hats or coats in the hall. There was no sign of any other customer. However, the woman had her own reasons for that: "The trouble is that I'm just a teeny weeny bit choosy and particular. It is a very great pleasure when now and again I open the door and I see someone standing there who is just 'exactly' right, like you," she told Billy (12). Billy did not sense trouble when her eyes travelled all the way down the length of his body.

The last entry in the guest book was over two years ago. Christopher Mulholland and Gregory Temple, two names that sounded very familiar to him, signed it. Seeing his confusion the landlady very cleverly diverted his attention to the dachshund and the parrot. To his surprise she informed him that they were dead and stuffed: "I stuff all my little pets myself when they pass away," she said (18). The woman continued to talk about Billy's supper and breakfast, but his mind was totally disturbed by the two names Mulholland and Temple. Suddenly he remembered that they were two schoolboys who were reported missing

in the newspapers. The landlady seemed to know them very well:

“Mulholland was seventeen. But I think he was a trifle shorter than you are, and his teeth weren’t quite so white. Temple was twenty-eight. There wasn’t a blemish in his body. His skin was just like a baby’s,” she told Billy (17). Billy was amused that she knew the most personal details of her customers. He did not know that she had killed and stuffed them and that they were kept somewhere in the same building. Little did he realize that he was her next prey.

The landlady had a weird kind of recreation. She killed her pets and customers and stuffed them, in order to preserve them. But she did not kill every person she came across. She selected only the beautiful human beings and animals to exhibit her talent. She did this for company, she said. Her house was full of such dead beings. She had a unique method of killing and stuffing and it was all done with perfect skill. The strange fascination for dead company makes her more horrific than Carlos in “Man from the South.” Even her love for beauty does not sugarcoat her evil instincts. O. Henry’s “The Furnished Room” portrays a similar landlady, Mrs. Purdy, who had such an evil eye on her customers: “Room are furnished for to rent. We has our (sic) living to be making,” says Mrs. Purdy (O. Henry 104). Hence the death of her customer did not shock her at all. It could be a murder or a suicide. Another customer who came in search of the deceased was also taken to the same room. He too killed himself. All this Mrs. Purdy calls, “real sense for business” (104).

Drioli in “Skin” lived in a world of colours art being the be-all and end-all of his life. An expert in the art of tattooing he could tattoo a man’s belly with the most delicate design of flowers. He could also tattoo the picture of a grizzly bear upon the hairy chest of a man. He did it so cleverly that the hair on the chest became the furry coat of the bear. He had tattooed the picture of a lady upon a man’s arm in such a clever position that, when the muscle of the arm was flexed, the lady came to life. Soutine, a young art lover, became Drioli’s friend because he was a painter. One evening, after drinking a lot of wine Drioli declared a desire to have Josie’s face tattooed on his back. It was a crazy idea but Drioli was all for it: “I am the canvas. Already I begin to feel like a canvas,” he exclaimed (*The Collected Short Stories* 524). Though Soutine called it ‘a drunken idea’ he fulfilled Drioli’s wish (522). That was the last Drioli saw of Soutine.

The tattoo remained on Drioli’s back for many years until his skin had shrivelled, and the tattoo had lost its beauty. He had begun to forget about it when one day he accidentally saw an exhibition of the paintings of Soutine who had become very famous. Soutine had died by then but Drioli could easily recognize the boy’s paintings. However, being an old man in tattered clothes, he was not given entrance into the gallery. Terribly enraged, he rushed past the people and ran down the gallery, shouting, “I too, have a picture by this painter. He was my friend and I have a picture, which he gave me. I’ll show you!” (527) He flung off his shirt and turned his naked back towards the people. The clever strokes of

Soutine were quickly recognized and Drioli became the centre of attraction. Eventually, art lovers came up and fixed a price for his back: “Ah! Where will I keep it? It would seem that if I take the picture, I take you also. That is a disadvantage. The picture itself is of no value until you are dead,” one of them said (528). 20,000 francs was a big amount for Drioli and moreover, he was offered food and luxury: “Do you like fine food and wine, a cupboard full of suits and shirts, roast duck, brown and crisp outside and chambertin?” An art-lover from Cannes asked (529). It was too tempting to resist and so within a minute Drioli walked away with his new patron. Weeks later the picture, nicely framed and heavily varnished was hung up for sale. Whether Drioli would live to enjoy the luxury offered, after been skinned to death was nobody’s desideratum.

Drioli’s wish to tattoo a picture on his back demonstrates his blind love for art. Though it is not possible for him to see the tattoo, he had the satisfaction of bearing the masterpiece of a painter on his back. Immortalizing his own art of tattooing also gave him great joy, just like men standing on the edge at times and wishing crazy ideas to become true. Drioli recalls it years later: “That was a mad thing, if ever there was one” (518). It stayed on his back for many years. But when he decided to exhibit it for selfish needs, the painting ceased to be his own. The world interfered, the painting became the property of the public, and the real owner faded out into oblivion. Drioli, a sincere artist, was ignorant of the real world of art where art means money. He had never

planned to sell it or even show it to another person. The painting was priceless for him. He did sense the danger involved, but he could not resist the roast duck and red wine. His innocence, poverty and ignorance were taken advantage of. A sum of 20,000 francs was not a big amount for the painting. For that matter, no amount would have been worth it.

The price fixed for the tattoo snatched away the painting and his life. Drioli got nothing in return. He fell into the chasm of barbaric materialism. Drioli's idea was eccentric and from the very beginning, an overpowering menace was in the air. But everything went well, since his mind was innocuous. Once evil in the form of fame, food, money, luxury and so on began to dominate him, the integrity of his mind weakened and he succumbed wholly to evil. The work of art became just a consumer product and was valued in terms of money. Drioli failed to understand this. When the painting was on his back, it had the richness of the heart and soul of two great artists, who were themselves not bothered about it. But when his skin was framed and exhibited in a shop, the worth of the art was in question. Drioli had not imagined that his art would be at the expense of his life. He ought to have desisted from the heinous act. His readiness to part with his prized possession just for roast duck and wine proves that though he is an artist blessed by God, he is also a human being who cannot forgo the earthly pleasures of life. If art was his boon, enticing food was his need. He longed for it at whatever cost.

Lexington in "Pig" became an orphan when he was twelve days old. From then on, he lived with Aunt Glosspan. She was seventy and

lived a strangely isolated life all by herself in a cottage high up in the mountains. She had her own garden for growing vegetables and fruits, three cows and a dozen hens. Being a strict vegetarian, she brought up Lexington as a strict vegetarian. He was taught that no living creature should be slaughtered. Glosspan did not send him to school because she feared that the teachers there would force him to eat meat. She tried to give him the idea that only ordinary people eat meat: “They cut them up into bits and they cook the bits. They like it best when it’s all red and bloody and sticking to the bones. They love to eat lumps of cow’s flesh with the blood oozing out of it,” she explained (*Kiss Kiss* 190).

Glosspan also taught him to read, write and cook. The boy showed a remarkable talent in the culinary art and at the age of ten, he could cook hundreds of vegetable dishes. By the time he was seventeen, he had noted down nine thousand different recipes in his cookbook. Glosspan died with a peaceful heart and he was once more left alone to face the world. Just as he knew nothing about meat, he was ignorant of the unfriendly world outside his house. He lost his money to rogues and roamed the streets of New York.

Lexington’s delicate olfactory nerves that had till then received only the vegetable aromas, were tortured by the smell of diesel. Hungry and tired, he entered a restaurant and told the waiter there, “I should like a large hominy cutlet please. Do it twenty five seconds each side, in a very hot skillet with sour cream and sprinkle a pinch of lovage on it before serving” (197). The waiter ignored his descriptions and brought

him roast pork and cabbage. Though the food served was all new to him, the aroma fascinated him. "This is absolute heaven. What an aroma! It's tremendous. Never in my life have I smelled anything rich and wonderful as this," he exclaimed (198). He tasted a small piece of the pork and couldn't help appreciating its taste: "This is fantastic! It's a brand-new flavour" (198). He enquired about the recipe and was taken aback to know that it was pig's meat. "But that's impossible. Aunt Glosspan, who knew more about food than anyone else in the world, said that meat of any kind was disgusting. And yet this piece is the most delicious thing that I have ever tasted," he stammered (199). He was even more confused when the waiter told him that sometimes they serve human flesh as pork to the customers: "As a matter of fact, we've been getting an awful lot of human stuff just lately from the butcher's, in place of pork," the cook declared (200). Lexington wanted to know more about the dish and the waiter decided to take advantage of his ignorance.

Lexington was taken to the packinghouse, where meat was packed and sold at wholesale price. There were many people in the waiting room to buy meat. Among them there was a pale woman with long white gloves. His guide there showed how pigs were chained and pulled up by hooks, to be moved along a steel cable into another room where they were killed. The blood and the stench of raw meat did not repel him because he did not know what it was. He had not seen blood oozing out of a dead body before. Like a child seeing the world for the first time, he watched everything with newness. When the pigs were slaughtered, the

breaking of the bones did not frighten him: “Truly a fascinating process. But what was the funny cracking noise it made as it went up?” he asked his guide (203). It looked to him like a recipe similar to cutting vegetables. While he was thus gazing upwards at the pigs, a man approached quietly from behind and looped one end of a chain around his ankle. Lexington was all of a sudden pulled up, upside down and he shockingly realized that he was going to be the next pig to be slaughtered. He cried for help in vain. A man with a knife cut his jugular vein and blood flowed into his eyes and dimmed everything. But he could still see the pigs ahead of him being dropped one by one into boiling water. One of the pigs seemed to be the woman wearing the long white gloves.

Lexington lost his life for a piece of meat. Growing up among vegetables, he believed himself to be the best cook ever. But a peep into the world outside taught him more about the culinary art. His thirst for knowledge proved dangerous, for he bartered his undefiled soul to the meat-eating world. He did not comprehend the meaning of death until his aunt died. The tasting of meat by one who had not eaten even an egg was a revealing experience, and he was urged to go in search of the origin of pork. Lexington’s doom started when he was hooked and taken away with the pigs. When his ignorance gave way to cognisance, he began to scream for help. It was not just a shift from the world of vegetables to the world of meat. It was a transmutation from ignorance to worldly knowledge. Everything happened within a couple of hours. The moment

he set foot on the world unknown to him, he was surrounded by evil on all sides. A mere slaughter pig, he didn't get help from anywhere. He was helpless and could not turn away from the evil instinct in him. But Dahl does not sympathize with him. He does not blame him either, but just passes on from one incident to another, as if it could happen to anyone. Civilization may train a human to become a social being, but it cannot wipe away the animal instincts in him.

In a similar way, a young man is slaughtered like a steer in Roberto Gonzalez Echevarria's short story "The Slaughter House." The scene is nineteenth century Latin America, where the people are suffering from famine due to incessant rain. Almost all the animals die of starvation, and the people who cannot live without eating meat, become desperate. They fight and kill each other like savages for the little meat left in the slaughterhouse. At this moment a young gentleman who passes by is caught by them and slaughtered mercilessly like a steer in the slaughter house: "They tied his feet to the legs of the table and turned his body upside down. A torrent of blood spouted, bubbling from the young man's mouth and nose and flowed freely down the table" (Echevarria 72). Like Echevarria's young man, Lexington and Drioli ("Skin") are victims of barbarism. But they are also victims of ignorance and innocence. The virgin world of art did not teach Drioli particular lessons about life, but the modern world of art in which he is a stranger and misfit did. Lexington too learned hidden facts about life and death from the

carnivorous world. All this happened within a short span of time but during that period they gained the knowledge of a lifetime.

George in “Georgy Porgy” was reduced to a nervous wreck because of his bringing up. If Lexington in “Pig” was not taught what he ought to have been taught, George was taught more than he should have been taught; and that too at the tender age of ten by his mother. When he was still a small child, his mother would make him sit near her in the evenings and share her martini with him. Then she would talk at length about God, religion, money, life and many other subjects that a small child ought not to have been taught. George understood only half of what she said, but he listened with the curiosity of a child overhearing a secret. When he was ten, his mother began her lessons on sex and reproduction. He considered this the biggest secret and so the most enthralling: “Come over here, George, because now I’m going to tell you how you came into this world, right from the very beginning” she said one day (*Kiss Kiss* 135).

George’s father was worried because he believed that exposure to sex at an impressionable age amounted to sex abuse, and he feared that the untimely knowledge would stunt the growth of his son. But he could do nothing to stop his wife. She had a totally different attitude towards the bringing up of children:

I’m not going to have any boy of mine going around  
whispering dirty secrets with other children and having to  
guess about this thing and that. Nothing in the world should

be kept secret from a child. Tell him everything. Show him everything, she declared. (133)

She asked him to choose Mohammedanism as a religion, because Mohammedans do not drink or smoke and hence can keep up their virility and afford a lot of wives. Thus his mother nourished him with aberrated delusions, which further led to practical classes. One night she woke him up to witness a rabbit giving birth to babies. The whole process was thrilling to George but suddenly he noticed that the mother rabbit swallowed one of her babies. Terribly shocked he ran frantically down the street. His mother who ran after him was hit by a vehicle and killed instantly.

The whole incident disturbed him throughout his life. The nightmares he saw was that of his mother's mouth trying to swallow him: ". . . but all I see is the mouth, the huge red mouth opening wider until it is just a great big round gaping hole with a black centre" (138). As he grew up a fear for the opposite sex developed in him. He tried his best to keep away from them. As his mother had suggested, George avoided drinking and smoking, to keep his virility, but life had designed something else for him. He became a priest. He felt safe inside his priestly robe and the four walls of the church. But the women of his parish understood that he secretly liked female company: "What a shy person . . . he is just a trifle nervous, isn't he . . . he needs companionship. We must teach him how to relax," they whispered among themselves (139).

In fact while George tried hard to avoid them, he secretly admired their bare arms and hips and craved for their company. He knew that he was handsome and so he created situations in which he would be the point of attraction for them. The women took advantage of this weakness in him. They vied with each other in molesting him. Miss Elphinstone slid her bare arms through his and whispered, "Are you really so very reverend as you're always pretending to be?" (140) Miss Prattley leaned her body against his and muttered, "Dear me, what a hungry look you have in those eyes of yours" (140). All the women did something painful, which made him a nervous wreck. He read the burial service at a wedding and dipped a baby in water during christening. His hair began to fall and he lost his mental peace.

However hard George tried to help himself, he failed because he knew, he was mad about women: "I could get enormously excited just from watching a girl walk across the room in a tight dress; and I particularly enjoyed the back view of a pair of legs when the feet were in rather high heels" (142). George longed to remain sound in mind and virile in body, but he could not put it to practice. The suppression of sexual desires only increased his mental tension and he could not endure even the touch of a woman's fingers. He entered a nervous state because the incessant advices from his mother to stay virile and the repercussions of his behaviour, mixed and mingled to make him a sex maniac: "Is it me, who is unwittingly responsible for the shameless way

in which these ladies are now behaving? Is it the gleam in my eye, which I cannot control? But they did give me a terrible sense of guilt,” he told himself (142)

At last George decided to clean himself by conducting an experiment with rats. Male and female rats were kept in a big cage, separated by an electric fence. All the female rats he assumed to be the women of his parish and the male rats were he. As he expected, the female rats ran towards the male ones and got killed. Thus he convinced himself that he is innocent. Gaining confidence he attended the party at Miss Mildred Roach's. He sat down comfortably beside her sipping the special drink, fruit cup, which she served: “Fruit cup is only made of fruit. It is only Vitamin C,” she explained (148). However he began to have the feeling that he was floating. Seeing him losing control over himself, Mildred tried to get closer. She tried to kiss him, but all that George saw was a big, red mouth trying to swallow him. He felt himself going down her throat. Frantically he bit her mouth. Minutes later he heard Mildred's screeching voice, “He's damn lucky I didn't kill him the little bastard!” (152) He was branded a sex maniac and sent to a lunatic asylum.

Despite the knowledge of sex and the need for a sexual life, George became a priest. George did not lose control just because he drank the fruit cup. In fact Mildred made several passes at him that provoked him to become violent. By biting off her lips he was taking revenge on every woman including his mother. When Mildred tried to

kiss him he was horrified and called her ‘Mummy’ (151). This terrifying picture of his mother’s mouth trying to swallow him had been always there in his nightmares. But at last he ended up biting the lips of a woman. Whether the fruit cup intoxicated him or not, the incident proved his wishful impulse which was in sharp contrast with the man in the priestly robe. He may not have done such things in the waking mind, as they were incompatible with the moral standards of the priest in him. This may be interpreted in the language of Freud as, “the precipitation of emotional experiences when an event, an incident, an experience, a scene which might slay in the mind, may precipitate during some other time, causing mental problems” (*Five Lectures on Psychoanalysis* 15). It is the result of the fight between the free individual and the masked man that ends him up in an asylum, a comparatively free place for him. The inhabitants there appeared so normal that he did not want to escape from there. In a normal condition, it was hard for him to live. But as an abnormal man, he was less tensed up, free and happy. Yet the fear of the woman’s attack lingered.

The three stories “The Great Automatic Grammatizor,” “Vengeance is Mine, Inc.” and “Ah Sweet Mystery of Life” are grouped together though they narrate three different stories of men, greed and evil. Evil does not pop out all of a sudden. It begins with the story but does not end up with it. It is hidden beneath their minds only to emerge when the clock strikes their subjective time. The characters already scrutinized in this chapter committed evil actions out of utter necessity in order to

save themselves. But in these three stories, Knipe, Claude, George and Rummins choose crooked paths with a definite purpose.

Adolf Knipe, an electrical engineer and a dull man who had no enthusiasm in life was not approved of by his boss Mr. Bohlen, though Knipe was good at his work. But one day Knipe developed an automatic computing machine that made him famous. The machine could provide the correct answer in five seconds to a problem, which could be done only in a month's time by a mathematician. The newspapers praised his brains, but Knipe was not pleased. He was in fact angry about the world for not accepting him as a writer, a long awaited dream: "All I know, is I have the urge, the creative urge," he told Bohlen (*The Collected Short Stories* 597). He had written five hundred and sixty-six stories in all, every one of which was rejected by the publishers. This experience depressed and humiliated him for he considered his stories good, better than those that appeared in magazines. "The sloppy boring stuff that you see in the magazines week after week - it drives me mad" he exclaimed (597). So he did not care when Bohlen was given the credit for the new machine.

Knipe decided to take revenge on the literary circle for not accepting his creative power. He rearranged, certain keys in the machine and produced a new one, which he called the Grammatizor. It gave him an evil pleasure making him smile for the first time in many months: "He was working in a mood of exultation, prowling around the room amidst the littering of paper, rubbing his hands together, talking out loud

to himself; and sometimes, with a sly curl of the nose he would mutter a series of murderous imprecations” (595). If the machine could calculate mathematical problems, then it could also write stories, Knipe surmised, for, English Grammar was governed by rules that are almost mathematical in strictness. The machine did not have brains, but it had memory. Knipe believed that if fed with the right ingredients, it would produce stories that would make him rich. He could convince Bohlen too: “Mr. Bohlen, the market is limited. We’ve got to be able to produce the right stuff, at the right time, whenever we want it. It’s a matter of business, that’s all. I’m looking at it from your point of view - as a commercial proposition” (598).

Bohlen, who had no idea of words or literature, agreed to this theory. He readily financed the project for pure grammatical sentences minus creative imagination. Knipe further explained that like carpets, chains, shoes and bricks, stories too could be produced by machines not to mention the same in large quantities. He believed that the hand-made article had no hope because everything was made by machinery in the modern days. “Stories - they’re just another product and no one cares how you produce them as long as you deliver the goods. We’ll sell them wholesale! We’ll undercut every writer in the country! We’ll corner the market!” he explained to Bohlen (599). By the time Knipe had made that conclusion, he ceased to write and think. He used to spend every minute of his leisure time in writing stories, but bewitched with the deceptive idea he spent all his time building up the machine. With a few extra

fittings his machine could produce a five thousand-word story in thirty seconds.

Plots along with nouns, verbs, adjectives and obscure words were fed to the machine. The first story came out. It was that of a boy who impressed his boss to marry his daughter. Then he impressed the daughter and became the boss. Bohlen called it a sloppy story, but Knipe knew it would sell. In six months, the machine began to deliver thirty stories a week and they appeared in almost all the magazines. Knipe had just to press the buttons and the stories would come out accordingly to the request, be they historical, satirical, romantic, erotic, racial, wild west, memoirs, mystery, Hemingway or Joyce. Then as if adding a plum to it, he would press the button 'passion.' Thus the whole of English literature came to be controlled by a machine. The stories went in Knipe's and Bohlen's name and also a dozen fictitious names. The readers hailed them as promising young writers.

This devilry continued smoothly but Knipe was not satisfied. From short stories, he moved on to novels, which had a greater demand. Money flowed in and Bohlen was all in for upgrading the Grammatizor. Knipe's greed soared still higher. He wanted to buy all the writers in the country by offering them a lifetime contract: "Simply buy them out, and if they won't sell, squeeze them out. All they're really interested is in the money," he said (606). Many yielded and sold their dignity for money. They did not care whether the machine wrote rubbish under their names or not. A few mediocre writers considered the machine better

than them and agreed to the contract. Thus Knipe created a world of evil. Even the narrator of the story was in the fear of being tempted by Knipe's money. His nine starving children were howling and his own hand crept closer and closer to the contract that lay on the table.

Though Knipe and Bohlen disliked each other, they both wanted each other's help and so pretended to be friendly. Bohlen wanted Knipe's brains and Knipe wanted his boss's money. Knipe comprehended how the business-world behind literature and books, unlike Drioli in "Skin." By the time Drioli came to know about the evil business in the world of art, his life was at stake. Knipe was so clever that he persuaded his boss into financing his Grammatizor while Bohlen agreed to finance it because he wanted to be known as a writer among his club mates. Though he was a businessman, he wanted the money and fame he got as a novelist. Knipe, who had an ardent passion for the world of letters, became a man who lived only for money. He spent his energy in manipulating the literary world and took every step cautiously. When the machine produced jumbled up words, Knipe was willing to spend weeks on it, to correct it, while Bohlen was impatient. Knipe sat in the room all alone, with a number of tangled wires all around; his mind and intellect seemed to be much more tangled and intertwined. All the same, he showed immense patience and optimism in working it out, because he had just one aim in mind - to get as many stories as possible published under his name and thus disregard other writers and publishers.

In the story "Vengeance is Mine, Inc.," the motive is revenge. 'Vengeance is Mine' is an epigram to *Anna Karenina*, in which Anna took revenge on those who wronged her. In Dahl's story, two youngsters, Claude and George, who lived in New York with no allowance from parents, longed to lead a luxurious life. At the same time they did not want to work. They decided to help those who wanted to take revenge on their enemies. Journalists attacked many famous personalities, the rich actors and businessmen, in the newspapers, and got them involved in scandals. The victims could not react, for that would expose them even more. This helplessness was taken advantage of by the young friends. To begin with they decided to set up an organization, 'vengeance is mine, Inc.' Claude suggested the name as it had a biblical reference. In The New Testament, Paul referred to the ways of God thus: "Never take revenge my friends, but instead let God's anger do it. For in the scripture, the lord says, I will take revenge. I will pay back" [Rom.12.19]. The friends interpreted "revenge" as God's work and therefore decided to do His work.

Noticing the gossips written by the journalist, Lionel Pantaloon, Claude asked George:

Don't you think Mr. Womborg, the banker would like to see Lionel Pantaloon receive a good hard punch on the nose? Is it not possible that Mr. Womborg would pay a sum of money to someone who would undertake to perform this nose-punching operation? (*The Collected Short Stories* 687)

So they began by printing cards that explained the many methods of revenge adopted by them, like, punching the nose or blacking the eye, or putting rattlesnakes in the car or dumping the journalist in the Fifth Avenue during the rush hour with only his underpants on. Though the printer in the press refused to print it, the friends were very serious about it: "This isn't any joke. There is nothing to laugh at. You are witnessing the birth of a new and powerful organization," Claude said (690). They delivered the letters to a selected few and to their suspense, the customers replied promptly. The victims were ready to pay any amount for they sincerely wished Pantaloon got his punishment. George disguised himself as a Russian and punched Pantaloon on the nose, while he was at his club. The newspapers gave the incident great importance and suddenly George and Claude became the most wanted people in the city of New York. Customers swarmed in and money flowed in great quantities. The two friends became real businessmen. "An order for six thousand one hundred dollars. Six thousand a day . . . it's nearly two million dollars a year, not counting Sundays. A million each," exclaimed Claude (694). They began to think of engaging extra staff.

Slowly it dawned on Claude's mind that if they dealt with the customer's requests in a more practical way, they would not have to labour much: "Three customers with one punch! We only need to punch Pantaloon once and each of the three customers will think it is being done specially for him or her" Claude said (696). Within a week the friends became immensely wealthy that they decided to invest money on

horses. Their dreams soared higher and higher and George said: "We will have a house at Palm Beach. Beautiful socialites will loll around the edge of our swimming pool sipping cool drinks. We will become prominent members of the international set," George added (701). Their greed soared higher still and it reached a stage where they wished their names to be mentioned in the Lionel Pantaloon's Column.

Revenge usually proceeds from a personal pain accompanied by daring. The victims here are cowardly and so they dare not take revenge. They wish to but are weak and do not want to get into further trouble. Claude and George had no personal enmity towards the journalists, but they named the help they offered as 'revenge.' They punched the nose of the columnist in the dark and ran away. This brought them enough money to live on, but they were not satisfied. Going further on and on with their vile ideas, they became more and more greedy for money. Along with the dreams they saw of rich houses and luxurious life, they made wonderful and complicated plans for the development of their organization. They aimed at gaining control over all the columnists so that they could dictate their daily columns to them by telephone, from their office. This was to insult and infuriate the rich ones, so that they would in turn seek the help of the organization. Claude and George would inform Pantaloon about their own plan: "The boys are putting a rattlesnake in your car tonight. The customer will be watching from across the street. So don't forget to act scared when you see it" (693). Pantaloon would have no other option, but to oblige. Thus the friends'

dreams materialized. They made more plans along their path of knavery, multiplying evil all the way. They wished Pantaloon write gossips about them, so that they would have to seek the help of another organization, to punch the nose of the columnist.

In "Ah Sweet Mystery of Life" Rummins a farmer owned the best dairy farm and the best bull in the countryside. People from all over brought their cows to the bull for official mating. They were blessed with whatever issue they wanted - a heifer or a bull. However, they were not told the secret behind the mating which was very special. It also appeared that Rummins did not want to propagate his secret knowledge. As Claude certified: "Rummins does it special. There's nobody in the world does a mating the way Rummins does it" (*The Collected Short Stories* 706). Rummins was not a scientist and his mystery regarding the gender of a new-born animal, was not approved by science, either. Yet he was confident about his secret knowledge. He believed that there is no need for divine intervention to determine the sex of a new arrival. He knew the secret behind it.

The narrator of the story took his cow to Rummins for mating. Examining the cow, he asked, "What is it you want, a heifer calf or a bull? You can choose" (707). He wanted a heifer and the farmer granted the request. He made the cow stand facing the sun. The bull was led towards her and the mating went on as usual. Rummins was very sure that the offspring would be a heifer, because the cow did not jump around. "Some of them get frantic and you can't hold them steady. So

they finish up facing the other way. That's the only time I ever get a bull," he said (709). This did not convince the narrator for he could not believe that the sun could play an important role in deciding the gender of a newborn. Rummins went on to explain the secret, which his old father had told him:

A bull has two different kinds of sperms and when he shoots off his sperm into the cow, a sort of swimming race takes place between the male and the female sperm to see which one can reach the egg first. If the female sperm wins, you get a heifer . . . when you face the cow's head into the sun, then the sperm has also got to travel directly into the sun to reach the egg . . . The sun exerts a pull of some sort on the female sperm and drags them forward. That's why they always win. (710)

The narrator was not sure that the sun which is millions of miles away could do magic inside a cow. Rummins disliking the suspicious look on the narrator's face asked: "Don't the moon exert a pull on the bloody tides of the ocean to make them high and low? So why shouldn't the sun exert a pull on the female sperm?" (711).

The narrator had to agree to the theory. Rummins did not know the exorbitant significance of his great discovery. The narrator informed him that his secret could change the concept of the science of dairy-farming universally and become famous. But Rummins did not bother about things like that. He had the best dairy-herd for miles around and

that was all he cared about. He did not want the newspapers swarming all over his place asking questions. The narrator became still more curious and wanted to know whether the theory was applicable to humans too. A mischievous grin passed Rummins' lips as he said: "I've got four boys of my own ain't I? Ruddy girls ain't no use to me around here," he explained (711).

This simple-minded farmer, who knew only the world around his farmyard, pronounced a great theory, which had a menacing, and destroying element in it. It could cause a drastic imbalance in the human species too. The theory became dangerously evil when Rummins practiced it in his own life. If he passed the secret to his sons, the future generation would produce heifers and ruddy sons, as they wanted. He was not conscious that his weird theory was capable of terminating life on earth. In Nietzsche's book *Zarathustra's Discourses*, Zarathustra explains the growth of man, "Man is like a tree; as the tree rises more and more into heights and light, the more determinedly do its roots strive earthwards, downwards into the darkness, into the depths, into evil" (41). Knipe in "The Great Automatic Grammatizor," Claude and George in "Vengeance is Mine, Inc" and Rummins, arbitrarily manipulated their ways towards evil. Rummins also ruminated on evil for vicarious pleasure, like his counterparts in the other stories. They reached great heights in life. For example, Knipe became a popular writer, Claude and George became rich and Rummins got as many heifers and ruddy sons as

he wanted. But because of the devilish path they trod on to achieve their goal, they had to indulge in the evil in them.

The short story “Edward the Conqueror” has no historical background, and whether Edward is a conqueror is a matter for the reader to decide. Edward and his wife Louisa led a quiet life until a silver grey cat appeared from the fire and smoke while Edward was burning some brambles in the garden. It had a queer look and kept staring at the couple. Though Edward tried to send it away, it stayed close to Louisa entered their kitchen, and sat on the chair between Edward and Louisa during lunchtime. Irritated, Edward wanted to throw it away, but Louisa had begun to like it. Louisa usually played the piano after lunch making each day a concert day. But the concert that day brought a great change in their lives. While the cat was sleeping on a sofa, she prepared a programme and began to play Vivaldi, Schumann, Liszt, Schumann and Brahms. But when she began her Vivaldi, the cat stood up as if shocked. It’s attitude was not one of fear but a kind of eagerness “. . . something of a mixture between surprise and shock. As the music swelled, a strange look that amounted almost to ecstasy began to settle upon the creature’s face. The animal was actually appreciating the work” (*Kiss Kiss* 168). When Louisa stopped the music, the cat blinked and behaved as a human would. It gave the woman a curious and at the same time, an agitated feeling. She tried to reason out the cat’s behaviour. “After all, if you can charm a snake with music, then why not a cat?” She asked herself (169).

Next, in order to make sure that the cat appreciated music, she decided to play a very difficult, classical piece by Liszt. As she began to play it, the cat got up and walked up to her and stood near the piano listening to the music. After Liszt's sonnet, she returned to Schumann. But then the cat walked back to the sofa, as if not interested: "What's the matter? What's wrong with Schumann? What's so marvellous about Liszt?" she asked the cat (171). She felt that it wanted to hear more of Liszt and so played another piece. Again the cat got up and sat near her on a stool. Louisa was terribly excited and explained to Edward the weird behaviour of the cat: "This is a musical cat. It can appreciate music. We are sitting in the presence of Franz Liszt himself. It really looks as though this might be some sort of a reincarnation," (172). But Edward would have none of that. "You are not ill, are you Louisa?" he asked (173).

However Louisa became more and more hysterical about the cat. She began to talk to it as if it were Liszt, totally avoiding Edward. "This evening, we might have a little Chopin. You adore Chopin. You used to be great friends with him, didn't you darling?" Louisa addressed the cat (174). She kept talking to the cat, kissing and fondling it and Edward began to feel more and more neglected. Later that day Louisa went to the library and read books on reincarnation and Liszt. She got all sorts of odd information, like, King Alfred was reborn as Queen Victoria, Cicero as Gladstone, and Epictetus as Emerson and so on. Books on Liszt said that he had warts on his face, and she in turn began to search

for warts on the cat's face. She was trying hard to find reasons to convince Edward. It was then that she found one of Chopin's works, the Scherzo that Liszt hated. Much to the surprise of Edward, the cat walked out of the room when she played it. He became nervous for the first time. Louisa was sure that the cat was the reincarnation of Liszt. "I'm holding Wagner's father in law in my arms!" she exclaimed (174) She forgot all about Edward and spent her time playing music and cooking for the cat.

Edward's presence became less felt in the house. He decided that he had to act quickly or he would lose his wife forever. When Louisa came back from the kitchen with food for the cat, she found it missing. She knew it would not have walked out by itself. The bonfire outside was burning in all fury and Edward entered from outside. Louisa suspected him, when she saw the long, thin scratch that ran across the back of his hand from the knuckle to the wrist. Edward tried to convince her that brambles made the scratch. But Louisa losing control over her emotions, screamed. She became so hysterical that Edward found it hard to control her.

In fact Edward disliked the cat from the moment he spied it sitting near the fire. Merely looking at it he smelt danger and recognized evil entering his quiet household. The cat too, threw a look of contempt at him and in no time they became enemies. He tried every way to throw it out, but he failed, for it had already become Louisa's pet. With contempt in his eyes, he realized that it was no ordinary cat that one

would like to keep home. He feared it is the Devil that came to separate Louisa from him. He could not prove his fears, but whatever the cat did, irritated him. Possessive by nature, he became insecure as the cat conquered Louisa. She was totally under the spell of the cat. Edward could neither compromise nor accept his wife addressing the cat as 'he.' She was slowly losing her normal thinking power and he feared that in her frenzy, she might forget him too. He had to stop her and that was possible only by killing the cat. Even though he was amused by the cat's interest in music, he took care not to be carried away. Though he called the cat tricky, he had a spooky feeling that it was an evil spirit. When Louisa declared that the cat was more important to her than Edward, he decided to pull out his fangs. The evil in Edward was aroused. The fight between equal powers ended up by Edward throwing the cat back to the fire. Edward is no conqueror, for the cat left a scar, the mark of evil, on his arm. For him it was not just a cat that he burnt; it was a burial of his fears and anxieties.

In "The Wonderful Stories of Henry Sugar" yoga and meditation play an important role in the life of Henry Sugar, the protagonist. They denote goodness as opposed to the evil beneath Henry's mind. Henry, a wealthy man, who had not done a single day's work in his whole life, had inherited immense wealth. As wealthy people aspire to make more and more money. Henry too wanted to increase his fortune. It was at this phase of his life that he came across a blue exercise book in his library.

He was not in the habit of reading books, but this one fascinated him, for it was handwritten, and included an interview with a man, Imhrat Khan from India, who could see without his eyes. Khan worked in a travelling theatre, where he was the star performer. He narrated thus:

Whenever our theatre arrives in a new town, I myself go straight to the largest hospital and I ask the doctors there to bandage my eyes. Then, when I am fully bandaged, I go out into the streets and I do something that is extremely dangerous. (*The Wonderful Story of Henry Sugar and Other Stories* 91)

The doctor who bandaged him could not believe his eyes when Khan with his bandaged eyes threw knives all around a boy without hurting him. He shot down a tin can kept on the boy's head. He could even thread a needle. The doctor became very curious and persuaded Khan to reveal his secret. Khan admitted that he had an uncontrollable passion for magic in his childhood days and wanted to learn it. He learned a few tricks but was not satisfied. He longed to find out about the strange power called yoga. He knew that he had to find out a yogi who was willing to let become his disciple.

“I am what you would call a bit of a cheat. I wanted to acquire yoga powers purely for selfish reasons. I wanted to use these powers to get fame and fortune,” Khan admitted (100). He also learned that the art was to be treated as a religious service and not to be performed in public; and that anyone who misused it would die an early and sudden

death. But Khan did not believe all these and went in search of a well-known yogi who would teach him how to meditate.

Khan practiced yoga so hard that after three years he could concentrate on an object for a minute and a half. He felt that something strange was happening to him as if an innate power was engulfing him. To convince himself that he was on the way to becoming a yogi, he walked over burning charcoal successfully. Yet he did not stop practicing, for he aspired for more and more power. He wanted to see through things that only a very powerful yogi could. Looking at a candle flame he began to concentrate his mind. His hard work bore fruit and after four years he could read a book right through. As Khan stopped his story, the doctor was astounded. He felt that some danger lingered around Khan. The next day news reached the doctor that Khan had died in his sleep. The doctor had expected that, because Khan had broken all rules of yoga, by performing the art for money and disclosing the secret to an outsider.

The story of Imhrat Khan fascinated Henry. Suddenly a fancy took hold of him. "This is a terrific piece of information. It could change my life," he said (117). He too wanted to learn the art of looking through things so that he could read through playing cards while in a casino, and win every single game. He decided to meditate, concentrating on the candle flame. For months he could not focus on the flame, for his mind would wander to the gambling casinos and the money he would probably win. He had no other face to concentrate on, for he loved only himself. But his determination was very great and after constant effort he could

concentrate upon his own face, for three minutes without break. He remembered reading the yogi's words that on extremely rare occasions a special person comes along to develop the power of yoga. "That's me! I'm the one-in-a-million person who is gifted with the ability to acquire yoga powers at incredible speed! I will break every Casino in Europe and America!" Henry cried (120). Yet he showed unusual patience. He waited for a year and when he was able to concentrate for five minutes, he switched on to cards. After rigorous practice, he could visualize the reverse side of the card.

The success made him fanatical. He never left his flat and all day and night crouched over the cards trying to reduce the time he took to see through them. At last after three years of concentrated work, he could read a card within four seconds. Thus feeling very confident, he went off to the casinos. He swept away a lot of money. But all the time he felt that a change was coming over him. He had started looking with distaste upon the gambling persons. Until then he had regarded them as companions. But gradually they seemed vulgar to him. He wondered whether the yoga powers he had acquired over the last three years had altered him. He didn't feel excited at all. There was no thrill, no suspense, no danger of losing and he knew that he could make millions with ease. He hated the money he had won that day. He walked to his balcony and threw every single note out, one by one. People swarmed down his balcony to collect them and for the first time in his life Henry knew the joy of giving.

By the time a commotion had developed in the street and a policeman got very angry. "Why didn't you give it where it would do some good? There's orphanages all over the country that hardly have enough money to buy the kids a present even for X'mas!" the policeman yelled (136). But those words spoken in genuine fury, threw light into Henry's eyes. He decided to set up orphanages in every country with the money he won. His accountant John told him that he could become the richest man in the world. "I don't want to be the richest man on earth. Not any more," Henry said (139). He continued visiting Casinos, but made sure he did not visit the same place twice. Even then, the Casino owners began to notice this man who never lost.

Henry had to change his ways. He employed a dressing man, Max and with his help went to all the casinos in the world in disguise. He sent all the money he won to John, to distribute among orphanages. By the time Henry was sixty-three, he had visited three hundred and seventy-one major casinos in twenty-one different countries and had never lost. He built orphanages in all these countries and spent every single penny on them. After his death, Max and John had many great things to tell of Henry: "He was a great man. He never thought about himself. He never kept a penny of the money he won for himself," Max explained (145). Till his death Henry carried with him the blue exercise book of Imhrat Khan.

Henry was not interested in the divinity of yoga or how it could change a man's life, when he read Khan's book. His only aim was to win

in casinos. Even after knowing that Khan had to pay with his life for the evil he had done, Henry ardently practiced yoga to see through cards. He was aware that he did not have a clean mind to imbibe the powers of yoga. But he believed in his strong mental power. With all evil intentions, he practiced yoga and became a yogi within three years. It was the sheer reward of hard work and a tremendous success for a felon like Henry. But even without his knowledge yoga had changed him. All the years he had kept himself clean of body and mind. He did not drink or wager bets. He had not visited a single casino. Yoga purified him; goodness gained over the evil in him. But evil did not desert him completely. He never forgot his aim all through the years and on the very day he knew he could see through cards, he walked to the nearest casino. There was the fight between good and evil in Henry and for the first time, he was ashamed of himself. His love for money had elapsed and painfully he recognized that he had nothing more to do in life. He felt impure and wanted to wash away the evil in him, so as to preserve the rectitude that yoga gave him. He gave away his money but that did not satisfy him.

Henry decided to use his evil for good. So he chose the evil path of cheating others again, but with a difference. It was for a noble cause. The disguise that he put on while visiting casinos was that of the Devil. But he took care to keep the inner self, pure. As in *Zarathustra's Discourses*, Zarathustra says: "Evil causes from the conflict of your virtues. But this evil is necessary; envy and mistrust and calumny among

your virtues is necessary” (Nietzsche 34). Zarathustra’s words justify the vice done by Henry. Thus evil and benevolence put their seal on him. Through virulence, he came to know of goodness and purity of the mind. He cleverly balanced them to use evil for the good of others. Gambling put on the garb of righteousness and that he had been cheating people for twenty years did not surface at all when his secretaries spoke of him. When Henry knew that he was in the wrong, he repented. If he had stopped gambling, he could have kept away from vice, in which case his peace of mind would have been questionable. In fact it was not yoga that purified him; it was the recognition of the evil in him that made him a good man.

All the characters in these twelve stories became victims of evil power, either because they are forced to do evil deeds or are swallowed up wholly by it. For some, evil proved a real boon, but some others fell victim to it. Those who considered it a boon, won in life. But evil left a dark mark on them too. Anyhow the characters have their own justifications for their actions. Dahl was probably aware that man is just a puppet in the hands of the evil world. When the whole world around him is putrid and rotten, there is no other way but to move along with the tide. A quick reading gives the reader the idea that Dahl’s characters had learned to compromise on ideals for success. But an in-depth surveillance suggests a different notion. At the end of every story, the characters are found knee deep in infamy. Evil cannot contaminate so many, if they did not really have a mind to accept it. It leads to the fact

that the characters themselves had a part in their fall. It was not just the evil outside, but also the evil beneath their conscious minds that tempted them towards more and more evil.

Evil does not trap Dahl's characters all of a sudden. The evil, which was suppressed and repressed, get discharged at the slightest provocation and prompt more evil. Dahl seems to say that man may wish to stand on the razor's edge and perform dangerous tricks that would give him immense pleasure or gain even if it is dangerous to him and others. Under normal conditions it is difficult to fulfil such a wish. So he resorts to the evil, which is already hidden in him. Once he starts, nothing else matters for him. He is blinded by tremendous enthusiasm and determination to dare the impossible. Dahl neither delves deep into the demoniac deeds of his characters nor lists their flaws. He is concerned only with what provokes them towards bringing out the evil in them. The main reason is that they are not content with life and so they seek out ways, ethical or unethical. And once they achieve what they wanted, greed for more catches hold of them. It is because the power of evil beneath their minds has gained control over them. Dahl does not forget that human beings have the elements of both God and the animal in them. He is also of the opinion that they should not be ashamed of the animal element. Those who try to balance evil with good become successful. Thus Dahl lets his characters live their lives, without drawing prescriptive lines for them. Most of them are social animals who do not flaunt the conventional rules of the society. C.S. Lewis in his book *The*

*Abolition of Man* calls the social man 'a man without chest' (7-20). Francis Fukuyama in his work *The End of History and the Last Man* explains these men without chests as "those composed entirely of desire and reason, but lacking that self-assertiveness that was there in them, from his early days" (188). Some of Dahl's characters do not live. They merely adjust to surroundings. They are the products of the civilization given to them by their society in general and the institutions determining their social status in particular. The smile on their faces does not wipe away the fact that they have the animal in them. But there comes a moment in their lives, when they need the evil in them to win in life. Whether they win or not, the result is fatal, for they are not able to control it. They do not aim to hurt anybody deliberately, but evil does leave a sting.

Dahl's characters might have been successful in reasoning out their deeds, however devilish they are. Life and society might have wronged them. The evil around them might have been too powerful to resist. But it is the evil beneath their exterior that forces them to plunge into deeper evil, from where they cannot save themselves. All through their lives they had suppressed this evil, afraid and ashamed to exhibit it. Being human beings, they cannot thoroughly wipe away the evil instinct. Dahl suggests that the evil in man can be balanced with the good, for true success in life.

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE EVIL BEHIND

The evil dealt with in this chapter focuses on how man can avail of the evil hidden in the subconscious for personal and selfish gains. *The Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary 2005* defines the word 'behind' as "at the back of" ("behind," def.). *The Longman's Dictionary of Contemporary English 2005* defines 'behind' as "at or towards the back of a thing or person" ("behind," def.). *The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English 2005* explains the word as "at or towards the back of somebody or something, and often hidden by it or them" ("behind," def.). A phenomenological study of Dahl's stories reveals that the characters bring forth the evil hidden behind their erudite minds, in order to fulfil their evil desires. They select innocent victims and inflict the evil on them for their sadistic pleasure. The victims may or may not get hurt and at times the evil rebounds on the evildoer. Dahl's stories also point out that when man is confined to a society, he has to suppress his animal desires. This culminates in an unhealthy zest for sex. The stories also show how sex is used as a deadly weapon.

Dahl's book *Switch Bitch* is a collection of four long short stories namely "The Visitor," "Bitch," "The Great Switcheroo" and "The Last Act." The study is a revelation that evil behind true knowledge can

cause great trouble and fatal results in man's life. The study concludes that neither the tyrant nor the tyrannized can be the winner, for the tyrant is not always punished and the tyrannized does not always escape the wrath of evil. Dahl does not consider himself a judge or a casuist to pronounce judgment on the iniquity of the characters. As they are well aware of their actions and casualties, he considers it decorous that they become their own judges. For the characters could, if they wished, prevent the evil hidden behind their knowledge from inflicting pain on others.

In his autobiography *Boy*, Dahl says about his uncle Oswald, who ran away from home at the age of sixteen, and the family had not heard of him ever since. Oswald is the protagonist of three of Dahl's works - his short stories "The Visitor" and "Bitch" and his novel *My Uncle Oswald*. In the novel, Oswald a boy of sixteen goes out into the world in search of adventure. He heard of the tremendous aphrodisiac effect of the Sudanese Beetle and decided to go to Sudan. There he secured five pounds of the beetle in powdered form and returned to Paris. He believed that one drop of the powder would send a healthy man reeling after women. Thus Oswald very secretly sold it to rich men and made a lot of money. Later when he met Woresley, a scientist who knew the method of preserving sperms, another evil idea hit him. He sought the help of a very beautiful woman, Yasmin, who agreed to help him in seducing all the great and famous men of the world. She gave the men the powder mixed into whisky and when they reached frenzy, collected

their sperms and took them to Woresley. This was to be sold to rich women who wished to beget offsprings of celebrities. Yasmin succeeded in collecting the sperms of King Alphonso, Renoir, Monet, Picasso, Matisse, Stravinsky, Proust, James Joyce, Freud, Einstein and many others. Woresley preserved them all, while Oswald dreamed of the money it would fetch him. But one day Yasmin and Woresley disappeared with all the preserved sperms, and Oswald was cheated. Yet he said, "I am unashamedly proud of my contribution to the happiness of the human race" (204).

The first story in Dahl's collection *Switch Bitch* is "The Visitor," in which Uncle Oswald sent his diaries, comprising twenty-eight volumes in all, to Dahl. A wealthy bachelor with glamorous habits, Uncle Oswald had travelled a lot and lived somewhere in France. When Dahl began to read the diaries, he understood that they were no ordinary ones. They were hilarious, exciting and exotic descriptions of the man's amorous adventures. His interests ranged from spiders, music, porcelain and walking sticks to women. The women always came first and wherever he went he had an endless trail of females behind him. Dahl wanted to publish the entries, but Oswald's letter prevented him. It said:

I am sending you my private diaries. They cover the best years of my life and it will do you no harm to read them. If you publish them, then that would be the end of both you and your publisher. For you must understand that thousands of the heroines whom I mention in the diaries are still only

half dead, and they will have your head on a salver in two seconds. (*The Collected Short Stories* 328)

Dahl did not lose hope. He read all the volumes and found a social dynamite in every page. However he came across some incidents, which he believed would cause less trouble, if published. One such incident was 'The Sinai Desert Episode.' Oswald was fifty years old at the time of the episode. But before going into the details of the incident, Dahl found it apt to bring into light the weird whims and fancies of his uncle, which would help the readers to understand the man. The first half of the story is dedicated to a detailed introduction of Oswald.

Decently dressed with clear blue eyes, a soft voice, and courteous behaviour, Oswald was a gentleman at the very first sight. He did not marry because he could not confine his attention to one woman for more than a day. He also despised the other men who settled down on a bit of land with just one woman, until the end of their lives: "And always with the same woman! I cannot believe that any man in his senses would put up with just one female day after day and year after year," he said (336).

Oswald was always seen in the company of rich and beautiful women. He would talk to them cleverly and wittily, and the females circled around him as if in a spell. He believed that his nose was the chief organ that fascinated them. His nostrils would quiver and enlarge revealing the bright red skin inside, and its effect on the women was

electric. Unlike other men of the rich class, Oswald could talk about anything under the sun. He would begin his session on Italian Opera and list out all the important mistresses the musicians had. That would lead to a talk on the relationship between creative and carnal passion. He would proceed on to Chinese porcelain and the blue vases of the Tchin-Hoa period. He would proudly exhibit his exquisite collection.

One of his favourite topics was based on his knowledge of the hundreds of species of Arachnida. He would explain that spider's silk was superior in quality to that spun by silk worms and would show the ladies his neck ties made of spider's silk. He would invite them to his ghastly glasshouse where he bred thousands of spiders and scorpions. The women would consider the invitation rather disgusting but he would very cleverly lure them back by comparing them to the tiny crab spider, which is so dangerously passionate that her lover would have to tie her down before he dared to embrace her. "Oh stop it, Oswald, this very minute," the women would cry, their eyes shining (332).

The women, mesmerized, would further listen to Oswald's talk on walking sticks. He had a wonderful collection of over a hundred sticks which belonged to many famous men like Dickens, Milton, Robespierre, Puccini, Roosevelt, Tolstoy, Goethe and so on. Oswald would demonstrate how each man leaned on his stick in his own special way. Nobody ever found it dull to be in his company. While the women orbited like satellites around him, the men looked on with jealousy. Yet no husband, no father suspected him. Another quality that made Oswald

unique was his acute sense of cleanliness. He wore immaculate clothes, drank water boiled for eight minutes, ate fruits with thick skin like watermelon and orange, sterilized his mouth often with whisky and took care to breathe pure air. He also nurtured the notion that only the rich were clean. He blindly respected the rich and took care not to mingle with lesser citizens. "There is a powerful brotherhood existing among people who own very costly automobiles. They respect one another automatically," he explained (348).

The next part of the story dedicated to the Sinai desert episode show how all the weird notions and beliefs of Oswald failed him. He was on his way to Cairo in his Lagonda and had succeeded in getting hold of a Moorish lady, Isabella, the mistress of a royal parsonage, to spend the night with. The woman had sneaked out of the palace because he had promised to take her to the apex of a pyramid and show her the full moon. But while standing on top of the pyramid they saw royal soldiers approaching. Oswald did not want to get into trouble and so he left Isabella to the soldiers and got away in his car. She showered a torrent of filthy language on him and he was shocked. "I cannot abide bad manners in a pretty girl," he said (335). He fled to the Sinai desert and boarded a hotel, but he found the place very dirty. "The sheets and blanket on the bed looked as though they had been slept in by twenty-five unwashed Egyptians on twenty-five consecutive nights, and I tore them off with my own hands, which I scrubbed immediately afterwards with antiseptic soap" he said (337).

For breakfast Oswald ordered poached egg. He could not eat it for he found a black human hair lying on the yolk. "Undoubtedly, it was the cook's hair infested with purulent seborrhoeic impetigo and was therefore swarming with millions of pathogenic cocci," he thought (338). He had earlier found a coffee-coloured lip mark on the rim of his teacup. The whole place was repulsive. He fled the place and stopped at the next hotel. But the proprietor there had Trachoma. Down the desert he had to stop at a gasoline pump. The Arab there came limping to him and Oswald was sure that he was suffering from Ataxis, a degeneration of the posterior columns of the spinal cord. The man had ulcerated gums too and Oswald feared that he might inhale germs. While the man filled the gasoline tank, he sterilized his mouth with whisky. Meanwhile the man took out the fan belt of the Lagonda. Oswald suspected that the Arab had cut it, but could not prove it. The man who called himself Omar promised help and phoned to the agents in Cairo for a new fan belt. The agents informed that it would arrive the next morning and so he had to spend the night in the desert.

Oswald did not know what to do and stood confused. It was then that a rich Syrian named Aziz, came by driving a Rolls Royce. Oswald was very pleased to notice that Aziz wore a very clean white satin shirt and spoke perfect English. Aziz invited him to his house in the desert and Oswald was suspicious. But the Rolls Royce smiled at the Lagonda and all suspicions vanished. He wanted to know why Aziz had built a castle in the middle of the desert. "I have a wife and daughter, both of

them, very beautiful. My daughter is just eighteen and I see the men hanging around her like wolves waiting to pounce. I live in the desert to protect my lovely child,” Aziz explained (352). He wanted to know whether Oswald had a family. Oswald quickly made up a story of how he had loved and lost a woman. Aziz was secretly happy to know that Oswald was not a homosexual.

The castle was a huge one, with towers and spires and gardens all around. Oswald was amazed seeing the luxury, richness and cleanliness. He was introduced to Mrs. Aziz and Diana the daughter, who were exquisitely beautiful. They had a diabolic perfume on their body, which made Oswald sniff like a dog. He immediately decided to ravish both the women. He imagined them to be the Queen and the Princess who were held captives in a castle faraway from men, watched over by the jealous Aziz. He himself would become a knight to save them. He began his usual ways of seducing them. Both the women laughed at his jokes and gave him the idea that they liked him. In fact, Oswald was completely under their spell and was found gaping at ‘the line of tiny soft golden hairs growing all the way up their lovely vertebrae’ (358). All through dinner the women kept him close to them with their seducing ways. And so at midnight, when he heard his door open, he guessed that it would be either of the two women. In the dark he could not see the face, and she did not allow him to light the matches too. In no time the woman ‘transported him to great extremes of ecstasy’ (360).

Oswald succeeded in making a mark on the left side of her neck, so that he could recognize the person in daylight. But the women were too clever for him. The next morning both of them tied scarves around their necks, and fooled Oswald. He tried many tricks but failed to understand the woman with the mark. It was time for him to go back, for the fan belt had arrived. On the way to the Lagonda, Aziz had something more to tell him about the mysterious castle. He had another daughter living there, who never came out before strangers. She stayed away from visitors because she was affected by the worst kind of leprosy - anaesthetic leprosy. So when a visitor came to the house, she kept to her own apartment. Guessing Oswald's fear Aziz explained: "It is not a very contagious disease. You have to have the most intimate contact with the person in order to catch it" (366). Oswald was so terribly shocked that he felt himself shaking violently. Left all alone in the desert, he made good his escape. What happened to him or where he went to, is not known, for there wasn't any entry made in the diary after the incident.

Oswald knew many theories about women and their sexuality. He believed that with his special charms he could bring any woman under his control. He had a vast knowledge about diseases, their symptoms and the precautions he ought to take. He had lofty ideas about cleanliness and the scientific ways to keep himself clean. He also had the blind belief that all the rich and beautiful people in the world were clean. He used all this information to satisfy his sadistic pleasures. He flirted with the women in front of their husbands only to prove that he was in every

way a successful and superior male. He found evil pleasure when the men's faces twitched with jealousy. He stole Isabella from the palace to prove that he was no less than the royal parsonage, whose mistress she was. At the castle in the desert, he freely flirted with Aziz's wife and daughter and made sure that a gleam of displeasure passed through the man's eyes. His wishful thought was that the jealous husband would come with a dagger to stab him at night. It was also his fear, for he knew that the Syrian was no match for him.

Oswald kept the information he had about diseases and the precautions to be taken all to himself. He did not share it with anyone else, to help them. He scorned those who were victims of chronic diseases. So there was evil lurking behind all the knowledge he had. He wore clean clothes, ate clean food, breathed clean air, but forgot about the cleanliness of the mind. Since he did not choose the righteous path of knowledge, it failed him. The fantastic stories and lies he told, might have fascinated the 'cuckolds' in Paris, but not Aziz the schemer. He pretended to be impressed, but kept his distance. He was silently wearing a web to trap Oswald who was very confident of his talents. The women in the city swarmed around him, but the women in the castle were too clever for him.

Oswald had always toyed with women, as if they were his slaves. He held up his 'royal rule' that he never slept with a woman twice. He was proud that it was because of his masculine powers that he managed to get a new woman every night. He made sure that the woman was rich

and beautiful too. It was this false belief that trapped him in the castle. The women there fooled him by making him believe that they lusted him. They kept dribbling him like a ball between their legs and led him to the bed of a female leper. With all the forte and finesse he could not get out of their spell. He usually made an estimate of the human beings he came across, and tried to be a kingpin among them. But in the end he became just another visitor to the castle, offered as a sacrifice to a sex-starved woman. The richness and cleanliness of the castle betrayed him and gave him the dirtiest disease. In spite of his deep knowledge of diseases and symptoms, he could not recognize a leper lying beside him.

After publishing the Sinai episode Dahl waited six years for the results. Since nobody came forward with any complaint, he decided to publish another incident from the diaries, which he named "Bitch." Oswald met an olfactory chemist, Henri Biotte, at Province. He was a small dark man with hairs all over his body, especially thick tufts of it sprouting from his nostrils. He also had a running nose and at the very first sight Oswald disliked him. But the chemist was keen on maintaining a friendship with him, so that he could explain to him what was special about himself and his nose: "It is a smelling organ of phenomenal sensitivity. With two sniffs it can detect the presence of a single drop of macroylic musk in a gallon of geranium oil," (*The Collected Short Stories* 416).

The chemist had made many perfumes, but his dream was to make a dangerous one, that would change the history of the world. All he

wanted was a wealthy man who would back him. He gave Oswald a long lecture on the sexual drive of a dog that loses self-control at the smell of a bitch. He added that man's sexual appetite had nothing to do with smell. "All those expensive scents in small bottles have no aphrodisiac effect at all upon a man. Perfume was never intended for that purpose," Henri said (417). But smell had an effect on man during his primal days, when he, like apes, ran after the right smelling female. When civilization dawned on him, this ability in him was suppressed and completely forgotten. Man has receptor cells in his nose, which can distinguish seven pure primary odours. But there is an eighth, the sexual stimulant that even the scientists are not aware of.

Thus, Henri continued his speech with all that he knew about the odours, but Oswald was not interested. The chemist believed that the mechanism of the sexual stimulant is still there in man, but he had lost the ability, to use it properly. Henri said he knew the formula for a perfume that would reactivate these dormant cells. "What I intend to do is to produce a perfume which will have the same electrifying effect upon a man as the scent of a bitch in heat has upon a dog," he said (418). The idea was a very dirty one, but much to the taste of Oswald. He readily agreed to spend his money on it and Henri was very happy. "We shall control mankind! We will be the Gods of the earth!" he cried (422).

Henri began his work and Oswald who was interested only in quick results, dropped in once a month. He was more interested in

Henri's female assistants. After three years Henri informed him that he had blended the perfume. They were to experiment it on a professional boxer, who would have enough strength to withstand its power. According to Henri the strong perfume could kill a man with average health. So the boxer and Henri's secretary Simone were taken into a room, where the woman was sprayed a drop of the perfume. When the scent hit the boxer's nose, he snorted and grunted and rushed at the woman. The ferocity of the man was astonishing and the woman was too weak to resist. Everything ended within minutes and Henri was wild with happiness. What remained was to write down the formula. Oswald named the perfume 'Bitch' and firmly believed that it would 'cure impotency and send marriages on the rocks' (431). He wanted his share of the perfume, but Henri could give him only one cc of it, for the fear that Oswald would misuse it. Oswald made a capsule and preserved the precious drop of 'Bitch' in it. Meanwhile Simone sprayed the rest of the perfume on her body and sneaked behind Henri. He inhaled it and being a heart patient, died on the spot.

Henry's death did not bother Oswald, but the fact that he had not written down the formula defeated him. All that was left was his single drop of 'Bitch.' However he wanted to make the best use of it. It was then that an evil idea passed his mind. "There is the President of the USA who pursued evil policies. He is a humourless and unattractive creature. So why don't I remove him from office?" (431). The President was expected to speak at the dinner to be given in his honour by the

Daughters of the American Revolution. The programme would be telecast throughout the country. Mrs. Ponsonby, the chief of the Daughters, would introduce him. Oswald immediately planned to smear the 'Bitch' on her hoping that, "The President would sniff, his eyes would bulge, his nostrils would flare, and would snort like a stallion. Then suddenly he would turn and grab hold of Mrs. Ponsonby and would leap on top of her," (434).

Subsequently, he bought a corsage of three massive orchid blooms and hid the capsule containing 'Bitch' among them. Mrs. Ponsonby who seemed to be an enormous female was decked in a colourful dress strewn with the stars and stripes of the American flag. Oswald had just to say a lie that the flowers were sent by the President than the woman enthusiastically seized the orchids and pinned them to her bosom. Before Oswald could prevent her, the pin punctured the capsule and the smell of the 'Bitch' hit him. His heart began to thump hard and the room together with the stars and stripes of America revolved around him. He began to sing dirty songs and the woman who liked the sudden change in him, shared his ecstasy. After a few minutes Oswald regained consciousness and found himself standing naked before the woman. He was ashamed and embarrassed for he had not dreamt of standing threadbare before an ugly woman. He grabbed his clothes, dressed himself in thirty seconds and ran out of the room. Mrs. Ponsonby was lying behind an upturned table: "I don't know who you are young man but you've certainly done me a power of good," she said (438). Oswald was thoroughly humiliated and shattered.

Henri, the intelligent olfactory chemist, with his knowledge could detect every single odour from complex mixtures. He knew the formula to various perfumes, a knowledge that made many manufacturers rich. There was no other chemist to replace him as far as his profound knowledge was concerned. With the keen insight he had about smells and aromas, money and fame would have come easily to him. But he was interested in the evil behind his erudition. And so was Oswald. Together they gave life to the perfume, which would have sent the world mad. Henri had done considerable research on human olfactory cells, and explained to Oswald about the receivers, receptors, special receptor sites, complex odours, the molecular structure of the olfactory nerve and many other things. Though Oswald felt insignificant before him, he was fascinated by the evil perfume Henri had in mind. Even the name 'Bitch' insinuated that men are like dogs, sniffing after every bitch. And truly, it made men behave like animals. Henri and Oswald did not want to use the perfume for their own sexual pleasures. Henri, being a heart patient, feared it and Oswald considered it below his masculine power to depend on a stimulating perfume. While Henri hoped to sell it to rich women, Oswald decided to send the U.S. President crazy.

In fact, Oswald did not have any personal enmity towards the President, except that he envied him. The President had been many times accused of immoral behaviour, but every time he managed to put the blame on someone else. Oswald hated the man's guts and luck. So he did not want to lose a chance in making the President run after a pack of

girls. Twenty million viewers across the country would see it telecast and the press would be only happy to reveal the President's secrets to the nation. Oswald wanted to see him impeached. It was because he did not want a man to enjoy life as much as he did. Henri was killed by the evil element behind his scholarship. It was passed on to Oswald who added more evil to it. The capsule with the perfume would have made a wreck of Mrs. Ponsonby's life, but contrary to Oswald's plans, the woman obtained maximum pleasure. Oswald was terribly humiliated and defeated that he was not in a position to declare whether he enjoyed being with the woman or not. He had always considered himself a man who had immense self-control. And till the moment he had not broken the rule of having sex only with beautiful women. He felt ashamed of having unveiled himself. With Henri's knowledge both the men dreamed of ruling the world. But too much of evil in them recoiled, and both of them lost everything.

"The Great Switcheroo" is a story that revolves around two friends, Vic and Jerry, and a switcheroo, which was not 'great' but wicked. It was wicked because the men decided to 'switch' or exchange their wives for a night, just to sport sexual pleasure, and that too, without the knowledge of the women. The story begins with a cocktail party at Jerry's. Jerry drunk, lay on the sofa. Samantha, his wife and Mary, Vic's wife, were with the guests. Vic was prowling among the women, studying their special features. He was especially interested in their lower lips. He believed that the lower lip was a great revealer of

sexual attitudes in a woman and he had visualized a theory based on it. A tiny crest of skin visible at the top centre of the lower lip of a woman proved that she was a nymphomaniac. Vic had noticed that Samantha, Jerry's wife, had it. He lusted her but had not dared to approach her. She was a nymphomaniac as he had imagined, but a monogamous nymphomaniac and would not therefore betray Jerry. Moreover she was Mary's best friend. They shared dark female secrets.

Vic hit upon a vicious plan and approached Jerry with a made up story of two men who fancied each other's wives. "What happened was that these two randy sods cooked up a plan which made it possible for each of them to ravish the other's wife without the wives ever knowing it," Vic explained (*The Collected Short Stories* 370). Jerry was in a drunken mood, but the dirty idea hit him like a dart. He wanted to hear more of it. Vic again made up stories of the preparation and rehearsals the two men did. He said that the men exchanged even the most intimate details about their personal lives and one Saturday night walked into each other's bedrooms and fulfilled their wishes. Jerry heard everything with deep interest. Vic understood that he had fallen into his trap, for Jerry's eyes travelled across the room to where Mary stood and rested on her bosom. Vic gave a silent consent. The next day Jerry approached Vic. "What would you think if I suggested you and I have a go at that thing your friend told you about?" he asked (376). Though he was very much thrilled at hearing it, Vic tried to pretend that he had not even thought of



it. He pretended to agree to the switcheroo only for Jerry's sake. He said that he was not at all interested in Samantha.

The days that followed were a period of high conspiracy for both the men. They had to keep away the secret from their wives and so held secret meetings in bars and restaurants. They told each other all the details about their personal traits and habits. Vic gave up cigarettes and like Jerry, took to a pipe. He used the same hair oil and after-shave lotion as Jerry to 'smell' the same. Then followed many days of rehearsals. They blindfolded themselves and walked in each other's house, so as to familiarize the place. All this happened when the wives went to church. Vic did it very well: "I had to go blindfold all the way from the front door through the hall, up the stairs, into Samantha's room as silently as a thief" (378). Jerry learned faster than Vic and within an hour, passed the blindfold test. Next came the most important part of the training. Both of them had to describe in every detail the procedure they adopted when making love to their wives. Thus both understood each other's ways and kept in mind the important details: Jerry was slow as a snail and Vic was fast as 'an express train whizzing through the country station' (379).

A day was fixed to execute the plan and as usual, the wives went to bed after dinner. At midnight both the men slipped out of their houses and entered each other's bedrooms. Vic went straight to Samantha's bed and laid down beside her, holding his breath. He was so excited that he forgot to follow Jerry's ways of lovemaking. At first, when Samantha did

not react, a ghastly thought rushed through his mind. He feared that she was noticing the difference. He began to sweat out of fear, but surprisingly enough, she reacted all of a sudden in a queer way:

Like a bomb whose slow fuse had finally reached the dynamite, she exploded to life. She grabbed me in her arms and went for me with such incredible ferocity, I felt I was being set upon by a tiger . . . I myself could not contribute. How could I? I was helpless I was the lamb in the claws of the tiger. I collapsed I crumpled up like a drained wineskin. (384)

Samantha went to sleep as if nothing had happened.

Totally shaken and defeated, Vic walked out of the house only to see a triumphant Jerry walking towards him. The real blow came to Vic the next morning when Mary declared that she had not enjoyed sex in her whole life as she did the previous night. "Thank you very much for last night. Now that you have discovered what it is I need, everything is going to be marvellous from now on!" she cried (387). Vic was shocked. It meant that he would have to let Jerry sleep with Mary every night from then on. It also meant that he would have to succumb to Samantha's fierce gestures every night. He lost with both the women. Looking through his window, he noticed Jerry running happily up the steps, two at a time.

Vic liked to spend his time watching women and their features, especially their mouth and lips. He made theories to establish that the lower lip revealed the character of a person. He had found out that the

lips gave away more than the eyes, because like the eyes, lips cannot hide secrets. Many had wrinkles on their lips - some parallel and some that radiated outward. He believed that the police could catch a criminal if they had his lip print on file, for no two people had the same wrinkles. The lower lip clearly signalled any trait of arrogance, rapacity, gluttony and lasciviousness. The bulging lower lip is supposed to show sensuality, but Vic believed that it is untrue with both men and women. A woman whose lip is like a narrow blade with a sharply delineated bottom edge will be very sensuous, and those who have a crest of skin at the top centre of the lower lip will be nymphomaniacs. Thus the theories of Vic were all connected with women and their sexuality and evil was hidden behind them all. The theories were not formulated with a scientific eye, but with the sole purpose of trapping women into his fold. The evil took the form of the switcheroo with which he hooked Jerry. He was even willing to barter his wife Mary to attain his sexual pleasures.

The evil became even more unpardonable when the two women who were very true wives, were forcibly pushed into the wicked plan. Vic called Jerry his best friend but was secretly cheating him. He assumed that Samantha, Jerry's wife was not happy with Jerry. He firmly believed that he could give Samantha all the pleasures of the world more than Jerry could. But the evil fired back and he became a double loser. He had planned to use Jerry as a tool, but in fact Jerry kept away many secrets from Vic. He did not mention the weird ways of Samantha and thus put Vic in deep trouble. Once inside Mary's bedroom, he broke his

promise to Vic and kept to his own slow ways of making love to her. Thus Mary preferred him to Vic. Vic was totally fooled. His pride did not allow him to disclose his helplessness to Jerry. Moreover the man in him was hurt when he knew that Mary had not enjoyed sex with him all through their married life. He had been proud that he excelled in making love to women and had not expected his wife to disregard him. Thus the evil he kept hidden behind all that he knew about women, fell back on him and he retired a defeated man.

Anna Greenwood in "The Last Act" is a mourning widow, who had chosen to be a martyr. She married Ed Cooper, when they were both eighteen. Their love deepened with the years and so when after twenty-three years, Ed died in an accident, Anna lost her senses. She screamed and yelled out to her dead husband, that she did not desire to live in a world where he did not exist. Her children and friends talked to her about the sinfulness in killing oneself, but Anna continued to be hysterical. She was put under sedation and when after four months she was pronounced 'moderately safe' by the doctors, her three children decided to leave her and seek their fortune. Loneliness began to trouble Anna and she developed the habit of imagining things: "A sudden panicky feeling that all the four walls of the room have begun creeping in upon you" (*The Collected Short Stories* 391). She realized that her friends and her children were gently but firmly pushing her to the background. She became restless. She would wander around the house fingering things that used to belong to Ed. She would put her hand into his shoes

and feel the little dents that his toes had made upon the sole. She would take out a shirt, a tie, and a suit, all ready for him to wear.

Dr. Jacobs, Anna's psychiatrist, prescribed a second marriage, to which she did not agree. She began to think of suicide again. She kept Ed's razor blade ready in the bathroom cupboard and chose September 23rd, which was Ed's birthday, for killing herself. She marked the date on the calendar for fear that she might forget the date. There was much to be done - bills had to be paid, a will had to be written, the house had to be tidied up and letters had to be written to the children. When these elaborate preparations were going on, Anna's friend Liz came in with a request that completely changed her life. Liz wanted Anna's help in her office, and before Anna could reject the offer, Liz took her away and placed her among files and telephones, which kept ringing all day. The work kept Anna busy and as weeks went by, she forgot all about the razor blade. After one year she found it difficult to picture her husband's face in her mind's eye. The sound of his voice became less easy to recall. She began to take special interest in her hair and the clothes she wore. She returned to using lipstick and learned to smile frequently. Altogether, she enjoyed being alive.

It was at this point that another turn came to Anna's life. She had to visit Dallas on business. The place reminded her of Ed and it brought all the loneliness back. In a very desperate condition, she suddenly remembered Conrad Kreuger her school mate, who lived in Dallas. Conrad who had become a gynaecologist by then was happy to hear her

voice over the phone. Conrad and Anna had in their school days loved each other and had vowed to get married. But Ed Cooper dashed into her life and Conrad was forgotten, ‘ and had it not been for the fact that Ed was a super-nice, super-goodman, she was sure she would have married Conrad Kreuger’ (397). Conrad came up to her hotel and Anna felt relieved. She confessed to him that she badly needed a friend. Conrad understood her helplessness and agreed to be one. But he had other plans in his mind. He had never forgiven Anna for what she did to him years before. His life and dreams had crumpled then.

After Anna married Ed, Conrad married another girl, but the marriage did not last long. Conrad firmly believed that Anna was the sole reason behind his failure in life. So when he saw her after twenty-five years, he thought only of taking revenge. However he convinced her that he was the same old loving friend, and seemed to be immensely concerned about her. Henry cleverly gathered news from her that she kept a razor blade ready in the bathroom. He decided to torture her to death, by pulling down her spirits. Like a very dutiful doctor-friend he began to point out that she was forty and no longer young. When she drank gin he said: “Gin is not good for females. It contains a certain amount of juniper oil, which has a direct inflammatory effect upon the uterus” (401). Anna had been drinking gin for twenty years and the information worried her. Next, Conrad commented on her mentholated cigarettes. “Menthol is a well-known anti-aphrodisiac,” he said (404).

Thus with each and every information he kept reminding her that she had grown old. It was unnerving and Anna began to lose the confidence she had attained in the last two years. She kept drinking gin and reached a state where she found herself floating in the air. Conrad took her to her room pretending to be a very protective friend. Naturally, she longed to be held in his arms. But then Conrad stroked her hair and said, "What do I see on your scalp. It looks like androgenic alopecia, an inflammation of the hair follicles that causes baldness, quite common in women in their later years" (409). Anna tried not to hear it, but Conrad could sense her restlessness. Like a leopard with stealthy movements he treaded softly towards her and played with her like a prey. But Anna did not suspect him for she had reached a frenzy and was waiting for the final act. Then she heard his voice: "You have senile atrophic vaginitis. It comes with age, Anna. There's not much one can do" (413). Anna broke down completely. "Go away! Leave me alone, Conrad. I beg you," she cried like a hysterical child (412). But he refused to let her go, and continued with his explanations of how dry her uterus was. Suddenly Anna shrieked out in terribly agonized screams. Conrad pushed her away with force and she fell on to the floor. Slowly she staggered into the bathroom sobbing and Conrad heard the metallic chick of the cupboard being opened. He guessed that Anna was searching for the razor blade. That was exactly what he wanted. He dressed up quickly and quietly walked out of the room.

A gynaecologist and obstetrician, Conrad used medical terms to torture Anna. When he and Anna began their conversation over a martini, Conrad explained that gin and menthol were anti-aphrodisiacs, which suggested that Anna had no sexual desire. He found an infection on her scalp, which he said would cause baldness. It was a terrible blow to Anna who considered her hair 'gorgeous.' Finally he declared that her uterus was dry because the mucosa was not producing any fluid, an unsolved problem seen in elderly women. This was enough for a weak-minded woman like Anna to collapse. Though not a psychiatrist, Conrad knew the mental vagaries of a lonely widow. He was sure that it was not just a friend she needed but also the sexual pleasure, which she was deprived of. He also managed to extract from her the details of her suicidal tendencies and understood that a slight depression would send her to the razor blade in the cupboard. Conrad succeeded in bringing up her spirits by praising her good looks. He became a protective and responsible friend and gained her credence. Then he told her about how crest fallen he had become when she left him years back. If she had married him, life would have been very pleasant. He added that he still loved her and that there was 'a bit of unfinished business' left between them (406). Anna, who had been waiting for such a suggestion from Conrad, fell into his arms. Little did she know that Conrad's 'unfinished business' had an evil meaning behind it. He kindled her sexual desires to an extreme and then suddenly let her down by declaring that she was old and not fit to lead a sexual life. All her hopes shattered and she killed herself. It was a

very clever way of slow torturing. Conrad could do it with the evil insinuation behind his medical knowledge. Yet his revenge did not culminate in a murder; he cleverly made her kill herself. He had lost his girl friend, his wife and son and in order to hide his inefficiency, put the whole blame on Anna. She did not have the slightest idea of the avenging motive in Conrad, and so walked into his snare. After twenty-five years, Conrad found Anna a very submissive and crushed woman. She was in no position to be taken revenge on. If he had suggested a remarriage, Anna would have gladly consented. He could have stopped her from running for the razor blade. Being a totally clinical man, he undressed and dressed before Anna similar to how a surgeon would, before and after a surgery. Having done his operation successfully, he walked out with contentment.

The characters in the four stories know a lot about life and they are proud of it too. But they use the knowledge only to satisfy their secret cravings and in the process they hurt everyone involved. They are aware of the evil behind their learning and know that it will prove to be dangerous. But they do not wish to stay back from their endeavour. They think about their own safety regardless of whether others are sacrificed or not. As discussed in Chapter II, evil cannot all of a sudden encircle a person. It traps him only because he had thought about it for a long time and has a mind to accept it. Only the quantity and the quality differ. Oswald in "The Visitor" could not have walked into the white, clean castle and managed to bring the two women into his fold, if they were

not prone to evil. Similarly the women in the city and Isabella were not forced to submit themselves before Oswald. It was their wish for more pleasure that made them his victims. Oswald in "Bitch" was equally interested in the evil idea of the Bitch, or else Henri would not have been able to make him sponsor it. Simone agreed to the experiment very well knowing its consequences. Mrs. Ponsonby who was a mere victim enjoyed the sex-satiating situation into which the perfume had put her in. She preferred it to the dinner with the President.

Anna in "The Last Act" pretended to be a mourning widow and shunned all the suggestions of her doctor who prescribed remarriage for her. She told him point blank that sex was banned for a widow. But her innate desire for sex lead her to Conrad. By letting Conrad make love to her, she was in a way deceiving Ed, her family and herself. In "The Great Switcheroo" it was Vic who lured Jerry into the evil plan, but Jerry cannot be called a mere victim. He too had the same evil thought about Vic's wife, Mary. The only characters who appear innocent are the two wives, Samantha and Mary. But there too an atom of suspicion remains. The women were friends who shared their dark secrets. It was possible for them to have talked about each other's husbands and their ways of lovemaking. So there was a chance that they might have known the man lying near them and might have secretly and silently enjoyed the experience with a difference.

While describing the tyrant and the tyrannized Dahl does not care to give fair justice. The wrong are not always punished and some

instances prove that those with lesser sins are punished more, as it is in life. There isn't a fair play in his stories. In "The Visitor" Oswald got punished very cruelly, but Aziz and his family did not. The women in the city, who flirted with Oswald, moved away safely, while Isabella who had done the same crime was thrown to the dogs. Aziz and his family cheated their visitor, but gained whatever they had wished for. All the four with Omar, smiled triumphantly while Oswald fell half dead in the desert. Henri in "Bitch" was in a way less venomous than Oswald for he had only a scientific eye while mixing the perfume and moreover he did not misuse it on an innocent. Yet he died without getting any gains. Oswald was humiliated alright, but that would have caused only less damage to his spirits. He enjoyed the greatest pleasure, which he had secretly wished for, with the help of the Bitch.

In "The Great Switcheroo" like Vic, Jerry too cheated his wife and friend. But he came out a successful man while Vic lost everything. In "The Last Act" Conrad was evil to the core, taking on a helpless woman who had put her faith in him. But he safely walked out of the evil he had created, and let Anna die. Dahl believed that man's action cannot be predicted and an impartial judgment is often impossible. His characters cannot be strictly branded as good or bad; for each, has his own reasons. It would be better if they became their own judge. They are hypocritical and do not view their virtues and vices alike. They sugar coat their vices with virtues, as seen in the stories, and end up in deep trouble. Nothing is sure with them and so they cannot expect justice too. All the

characters presented have thoughts that brim with sexual undertones and overtones. Many are well informed and have deep knowledge in specialized fields. But all of them prefer to use the evil hidden behind it. Dahl does not stay with one and scorn the other. The oppressor and the oppressed get hurt and the winner cannot be predicted. Dahl keeps this attitude of detachment throughout his stories.

In the stories, sex takes a different turn. The characters have their minds and hearts in it, but in an evil way. They use it as a weapon, to conquer forbidden worlds of pleasure and in the procedure hurt many. It might be an outlet for their suppressed sexual desires, which they were not allowed to express being social beings. It might be to win in life. Altogether it is beyond doubt, their uncontrollable inclination towards evil. By not punishing Aziz in "The Visitor," Oswald in "Bitch," Conrad in "The Last Act" and Jerry in "The Great Switcheroo" Dahl does not mean to encourage man to free himself from all social bondages and run madly after the woman he likes. He understands that a social man has his limitations. But he does not approve of man's hypocrisy in hiding this animal behaviour in him. It is this blank denial that leads even the scholar to give an evil dimension to his knowledge. Blake Morrison in his short story "Camp Cuba" says, "This is the way the world goes, the men running out on the women, running out before the women" (16). In Dahl's stories the world takes a change. It is the women who often get the better of the men. Camille Paglia, Professor of Humanities, in her book *Sex and Violence* also agrees to it: "Man justifiably fears being

devoured by woman” (23). Simone de Beauvoir in her book *The Second Sex* too refers to this fear in man:

Man has always known that though he wants to be the conqueror, he can never possess woman. True she subdues to him . . .but still the man feels that, there is something, which remains to be possessed. He secretly understands that she was in fact making him his prey, all the time. (195)

This unpossessed evil mystery in a woman plays a great part in man’s sexual life, as seen in the characters in “The Evil Behind.”

The men and women in the stories acquire better living conditions and success in many fields. But their insatiate sexual needs remain behind their aching minds. Henri in “Bitch” says, “I went completely wild! I was like a wild beast, an animal! I was not human! The civilizing influences of centuries simply dropped away! I was Neolithic!” (424). This innate wish to go back to their primal stage, and bring out the animal in them is felt by most of the characters in the stories. They secretly crave for that forbidden freedom. The more ‘civilized’ they become, the more they have to obey restrictions. The suppressed need increases their evil. In *Switch Bitch*, Dahl presents a world of secret sexual pleasures, where his characters bring out their evil, hidden behind their knowledge of sex. It is very specific in the stories that sex is not accompanied by love. It is only a physical assault meant to harass the partner and thus pacify the animal in the self. Dahl is not lamenting on the fall of personal relationships in the society. Yet he has the optimistic

view that the men and women in his stories can if they want, control their minds and divert it from great sins. For when evil is done purposely to maul others, it takes very dark dimensions. Their actions might rebound from unexpected corners and they might fall.

The stories discussed are about the uncontrollable sexual attitudes in the characters. Nevertheless, it is significant that Dahl does not attempt to insult sex or the vital human relationships. Neither is human nudity exploited nor sexual acts degraded. Obscene words and language are not used. There are no gross or vulgar expressions and the sexual themes are combined with good humour. There are situations where sexual plays and copulation become the most important element of the plot. Through them Dahl suggests that although sex is a very important element in man's life, over indulgence in unhealthy sexual affairs might make it very nefarious. In short, it could be said that the stories do not come under the category of pornography.

Michael Perkins in the introduction to Maurice Charney's *Sexual Fiction* suggests three criteria for sexual fiction. The work can be violent critical attacks on sex, mainly its abuse. The work can be seductive, which takes the reader to a different world. It can also have a philosophical approach that gives lessons on morality and uprighteousness. Dahl is not critical in his approach. The men are not always potent and the women are not full of lust. The language too does not in any manner enhance seduction. The stories do not preach

adherence to social morality. They do not shock a reader to awareness. Dahl's approach is such that the reader recognizes himself in the characters. He understands that the crazy ideas are in his mind too, too cowardly to come out. He readily agrees with the presence of evil in him. Sex is a theme and Dahl's interests lie in how the instinct, when accompanied by the evil hidden behind man's knowledge, plays havoc in life.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE EVIL BESIDE

The evil dealt with in this chapter concentrates on the fight between the weak and the strong characters in the stories of Dahl, and how the winner resorts to the evil beside his existence. *The Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary 2005* defines the word 'beside' as "at the side of, next to" ("beside," def.). *The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English 2005* defines the word as "next to or at the side of somebody or something" ("beside," def.). *The Longman's Dictionary of Contemporary English 2005* explains 'beside' as "next to or very close to the side of someone or something" ("beside," def.).

A phenomenological study of the stories reveals that evil is hidden beside the apparent existence of the characters. The weak characters are two-faced: the first is when they pretend to be weaklings, hiding their mental strength; and the second when their real evil self is kept beside their weak and complaisant self. The strong too are two-faced: the first when they rule over the weak with the evil hidden beside their revelling minds, and the second when they recognize their weakness and fall. Thus the evil beside the apparent existence of the weak help them to win over the strong. The strong fall because of the over indulgence of the evil beside their apparent existence for power and

selfish gains. Thus every weak character is shown as mentally strong, and every strong character as mentally weak. And no character is away from evil. Dahl shows how the evil beside their masked existence can become a deadly weapon. He concludes that it is not the survival of the fittest or the strongest but the cleverest, the most astute. Twelve short stories namely "William and Mary," "The Way up to Heaven," "Neck," "Lamb to the Slaughter," "Swan," "Nunc Dimittis," "The Book Seller," "The Champion of the World," "Dip in the Pool," "The Mildenhall Treasure," "Mrs. Bixby and the Colonel's Coat" and "My Lady Love, My Dove" are dealt with in this chapter. "Matilda" which is not a short, but a long story is included, considering the evil beside the innocent existence of a five-year-old child.

In "William and Mary," William the husband died leaving his will and a very personal letter for his wife, Mary. She expected it to be very stiff and formal as usual with the dos and don'ts that he might have forgotten to tell her while alive. They had spent thirty years together and William had never talked to her with love. His small, cold eyes always followed her: "They used to glint at you, stabbing into your brain, seeing right through you and they always knew at once what you were up to and even what you were thinking" (*Kiss Kiss* 43). Even after his death Mary felt the eyes watching her. William, a teacher of philosophy at Oxford, had lived a life full of facts and data. He did not approve of children, and so they never had one.

In his later years, William was bedridden with cancer. It was then that Landy, a neurosurgeon, visited him. His weird interests in the subject had fascinated William too. That day he had come with a strange proposition, which was very evil and unholy. "I am really serious about it, William. You have a great deal to gain especially when you are dead," Landy explained (24). He had seen a short medical film that encouraged him to make an experiment on man. In the film, a dog's head was severed from its body. But with the normal blood supply maintained, the head was kept alive. The brain functioned and the eyes moved. Landy wanted to remove William's brain after his death and keep it alive for an unlimited period of time. He would cut open his neck and connect the four arteries to an artificial heart. After that he would use a saw to take out the brain from the skull and would peel out the coverings like an orange. The brain would then be placed in a basin filled with Ringer's solution. The eyes would be placed separately in a plastic case in the basin. An instrument that would help to receive the thoughts of the brain was also kept ready. It would produce a graph that could be deciphered into words.

Landy continued to explain the details of the brain in scientific terms but William seemed to be disinterested. Landy encouraged him: "You'd be living in an extra-ordinarily pure and detached world. No worries, fears, pains, hunger or thirst. Great thoughts might come to you, great ideas that would revolutionize our way of life!" (34) Landy left William in a disturbed state of mind. William was very proud of his

brain which had innumerable data and dates stored. He wished to preserve it: "I am rather proud of my brain. It contains a prodigious store of information and is still capable of producing imaginative and original theories", he thought (36). He agreed to Landy's proposition. The letter ended there but there was a postscript, which ordered Mary not to drink cocktails, waste money, smoke, eat pastry, use lipstick and buy a television.

After reading the letter Mary took out a cigarette from her bag, lighted it and prepared to watch the brand new television, she had bought. The letter disturbed her in a way but she was relieved that William was dead. It was out of curiosity that she called Landy. Landy told her that William's brain was alive and the eye was reading the newspaper. She went to Landy's laboratory and found William's eye lying in the basin in a very ridiculous manner, blinking at her. Her avenging mind took a new turn. She decided to take the brain and eye back home. She would do everything to provoke William's helpless eye. She convinced Landy that she was concerned about her husband's well being. "From now on Mary is going to look after you all by herself and you've nothing to worry about in the world," she told William's eye (44). Landy considered her a bit crazy but could do nothing. He sensed a menacing evil in her words but Mary was all in for it. She had made a detailed plan in her mind. "No arguments and criticisms, no constant admonitions, no rules to obey, no cold disapproving eyes watching me over the top of a book in the evenings," she thought (43). Landy was surprised to see her looking

pleasantly at her husband in a basin. He walked out. Mary immediately took a cigarette and lighted and sent out the clouds of smoke before William's eye. It instantly flashed showing terrible fury. Mary felt immense pleasure seeing it's helplessness. "Don't look so cross, William. It isn't any good looking cross. Because from now on you're going to do just exactly what I tell you," she whispered softly (45).

Mary suffered neglect and humiliation when William was alive. He did not allow her to live as she wished and restricted her in every way. He prevented her from smoking cigarettes. It was not because he feared she might catch cancer. It was simply because he did not want her to take any pleasure from it. So Mary was forced to smoke behind his back. When William knew about it, he stopped her allowances. But she had by then managed to save six pounds from previous allowances. Thus when William continued to become more and more a dictator, Mary became more and more rebellious. William was unaware of this development in her and blindly believed that he could order her around even after his death. A terrible hatred had developed in Mary through the years and she found it hard to suppress the evil beside her meek and obedient exterior. When William laid bed ridden with cancer, she left him to death. She knew that he did not love her, but expected a soft tender message in the last letter, thanking her for 'ironing a million shirts and cooking a million meals and making a million beds' (20). She hoped that William might have changed at the time of death. But neither did the cancer in his pancreas, nor his death change his wooden attitude towards life. The

letter made her hate him all the more. Within six days of William's death, she managed to take revenge on him by doing everything he had prohibited. He had asked her to visit Landy and so decided to visit the laboratory. It was more because she could not all of a sudden shake off the sense of duty to which she was a slave for many years. She did not reveal any emotion when she saw her husband in a basin. Landy expected a nervous breakdown, for no woman would like to see her husband in such a repulsive state. But Mary was not shocked and showed neither hatred nor sympathy. She was as cool as the scientist himself and asked him to give William's eye a newspaper. "He hates the *Mirror*. Give him *The Times*," she said (39). She did not want Landy to call the eye 'it.' "Call 'Him'," she ordered (39). Landy thought her a queer woman. Mary on her part did the role of a mourning widow very well. She talked to the eye very lovingly and informed Landy that she was taking 'William' home because she could not live without him. "I'm suddenly getting to feel the most enormous affection for him," she told Landy (44). Her revenge had taken a new turn and she decided to spend the rest of her life torturing him. The evil in her had come forth.

Mrs. Foster in "The Way up to Heaven" had a pathological fear of being late. It could be the train or the plane or a boat or even a film in the theatre. Her heartbeats would speed up and a nerve near her eye would twitch and pulsate with incredible speed. This would continue until she had caught the train or plane. She was well aware of this problem in her and so to avoid the pathetic condition, she would get ready before

time and unable to sit, would walk to and fro. Her husband Mr. Foster would watch the whole drama, but would do nothing to help her. He would purposely dress up late and add agony to her nerves. All the years of their marriage, he had been doing this and the helpless woman bore it all with patience. She did not ask him to hurry. She never dared to disobey him. On some occasions his sadism had driven her into hysterics. But she was a very loving and dutiful wife who had served him for thirty years without complaint. They lived in a large six-storey house that had a lift. It was a gloomy place for no one visited them. After months of persuasion Mrs. Foster succeeded in getting her husband's permission to visit her daughter and grand children in Paris. She had not seen the children and wished very much to stay with them. It was a six weeks vacation and Mr. Foster had agreed to it only because he could stay in his club, for a change.

The day came and as usual Mrs. Foster got ready with her luggage an hour before and fidgeted about the house. "My plane leaves at eleven. I have to be there half an hour beforehand for the formalities. I shall be late. I know I'm going to be late," she cried (*Kiss Kiss* 49). Mr. Foster dressed up very slowly. At last when he came out of his room, he saw his wife in an agitated mood. To make things worse, he went in once again. "I'll be with you in a moment. I'm just going to wash my hands," he said (50). When they reached the airport, the flight had been postponed temporarily for some hours due to foggy weather. Mr. Foster who had wished for it seemed happy. Mrs. Foster decided to wait at the

airport but later it was announced that the flight was postponed till eleven o'clock the next morning. Though she did not wish to go back to her husband, she had to, because she was terribly exhausted. The next day again Mrs. Foster's nerves twitched, but her husband came down twenty minutes late. When the chauffeur started the engine of the car, Mr. Foster suddenly cried out: "Just a moment. I had a little present I wanted you to take to Ellen. Now, where is it? I had it in my hand as I came down" (56). Mrs. Foster searched with him in the car for the present. Time moved on and her nerves began to twitch. Suddenly the man remembered that he had kept the box in his room. He wanted to go and take it. "Oh please! We haven't got time! Please leave it! You can mail it. It's only one of those silly combs anyway," the woman cried (56). This enraged Mr. Foster. He ordered the woman to wait for him and went into the house. Mrs. Foster almost collapsed, but then she saw the box in the car. She tried to run after him but suddenly heard a sound inside the house and stopped. She listened very intently and decided to walk back to the car. She asked the chauffeur to drive her to the airport.

Within hours she reached Paris and completely forgot New York. But she did not forget to write letters to her husband every week. They were nice chatty letters, full of news about the children. After six weeks she came back to her house. She rang the doorbell and when no one answered it, opened the door with her key. There was a disgusting odour in the house, but the woman seemed to be pleased. She saw her letters along with other mail lying untouched on the floor. She quickly went to

the back of the hall to where the lift was. After seconds she returned with a grin on her face. She had left her husband stuck in the lift, six weeks before. After making sure that he was still there, she telephoned the agency to send a man to repair the lift.

Mrs. Foster was not a nervous woman, but her mental deficiency caused by her fear of being late, made her behave in a queer way. It was strange that a simple thing in life like catching a plane could destroy a person's mental peace. But her nerves twitched mainly because of her husband's cruelty. She lived in his shadow and did not have an existence of her own. Even her Christian name is not mentioned in the story. The more her nerves twitched the more enthusiastic the man became in torturing her. For the first few years after their marriage, she was too timid and simple-minded to understand her husband's evil intention. But later on she began to suspect his deliberately late preparations. Many a time she had noticed him looking keenly at her twitching nerve. She had no options but surrender to his cruel ways. Although she did not love him, she did not show her displeasure. The evil in her apparently calm nature wanted to avenge. She had always longed to live with her daughter and grandchildren. Nevertheless, she considered it morally wrong to desert her husband. Mr. Foster allowed her to go to Paris but did not like the joy and excitement in her eyes. He wished for something bad to happen and Mrs. Foster could see it in his face. When the flight was postponed she did not want to return home for fear that her husband would find some reason or the other to cancel the trip. It is evident that

she heard the lift getting stuck and her husband calling out for help. But if she had stopped to save him she would not have been able to go to Paris. Moreover she was only happy to get rid of him. The chauffeur noticed the change on her face - the soft, silly look had changed to a new look of authority. She did nothing to help her husband and walked away as if nothing had happened.

For six weeks no thoughts of regret or guilt passed her mind. She knew that her husband's corpse was stuck somewhere between the second and third floor. She didn't bother to climb the steps and verify it. She knew that the lift operator would announce with shock that a man is stuck in the lift. She would then pretend to be shocked. Thus the evil in her culminated in a cold-blooded murder.

Sir Basil Turton in "Neck" was a forty-year old bachelor, mild and simple. He had no other interests in life except his collection of modern paintings and sculptures. His garden that spread over a vast area of land had many famous sculptures. He had always kept away from people and no woman had ever entered his solitude. When his father died, he inherited the Turton Press and became a millionaire overnight. From then on he knew no peace. Parents of young girls flocked around him, but he escaped from their clutches like an eel. Years passed and the girls got tired. But then a woman named Natalia swept in from somewhere and before Basil knew what was happening, she had married him. Six years went by and the narrator of the story who is a journalist met Natalia at a dinner party. By the time she had taken control of the press and Basil

too. She had the air of a queen and knew how to take the people by force. The hair was black, and she had a pale, oval, innocent fifteenth-century Flemish face. "I got a closer look and saw that except for the outline and colouring it wasn't really a Madonna at all - far, far from it," the journalist said (*The Collected Short Stories* 546). She was clearly conscious of her success and it showed in her stride and manners.

Anyhow the journalist managed to get an invitation to Sir Basil's house - a great grey stone house that proclaimed the glory of the early English Renaissance. But on arriving there he felt the atmosphere unpleasant and very uncomfortable: "The place smelled wrong. There was the faint desiccated whiff of something troublesome in the air," he thought (549). He met the butler Jelks, who seemed to be a very different servant. He had great respect for his master Sir Basil, but when he pronounced the name of 'His ladyship,' a sneer passed his lips. There was another guest in the house who was hated equally by Jelks and Basil. He was Major Haddock, who was always seen with Natalia. It was obvious that he was in love with her. Natalia too flirted with him, although he was not the kind of man she would prefer to be with. She did it to pester Basil, who did not join them and engaged himself in reading books. All through the evening, Natalia bullied him. Every now and then she would call her husband to fetch her something. Each time Jelks fetched them, and did not let Basil do the menial work of a servant. At dinnertime Natalia did not sit with Basil and he felt uneasy when her hand rested on the Major's arm. Anyhow he tried to divert his attention by entering into a

discussion on sculptures with the journalist. Natalia was enraged and continued to flirt with the Major. Basil seemed to be dangerously calm: “He glanced at his wife and his eyes had a sort of supplicating look that was piteous beyond words. He was mild and passive in every way and there was no anger in him, no danger, no chance of an explosion,” the journalist thought (553).

The next morning Basil took the journalist around the garden. He was feeling less tensed than the previous night and talked voraciously on the various sculptures in his garden. But suddenly he saw Natalia and the Major cavorting at the farther end of the garden. They were pointing at a Henry Moore sculpture in a sort of mocking way, laughing and making jokes about it. It was a beautiful sculpture, thin and smooth, done in wood with three holes in it. The journalist could hear Basil’s heart thumping at tremendous speed. He had stopped talking and was watching the two people. The Major had a camera and Natalia in order to pose for a picture, pushed her head into one of the holes in the sculpture. ‘The man had taken the photograph, but the woman still had her head through the hole. He bent forward so his face was close to hers and gave her a few kisses’ (556). Her laughter fell on Basil’s ears like bomb blasts. But the giggling stopped all of a sudden. Natalia was trying to pull out her head, which had got stuck in the hole. The Major was trying hard to help her out. There was a lot of panic, but Basil viewed the scene silently. He walked with the journalist to the spot. Natalia was in all rage. “Basil! Don’t be such a damn fool! Do something, can’t you!” she shouted

(558). The Major suggested that the sculpture be cut into two. But Basil's reaction was totally different. "Oh dear, what a terrible pity. My beautiful Henry Moore!" he cried (558). Hearing this Natalia began to abuse her husband in a very disgusting manner that made Jelks and the rest of the people come out of the house. Basil asked Jelks to bring a saw. But curiously enough the butler returned with a saw and an axe. The journalist noticed an evil suggestion in his eyes when he offered Basil the axe. "I saw the hand that was carrying the axe came forward an extra fraction of an inch towards Sir Basil. It was so slight a movement it was barely noticeable - a little offer, a little coaxing offer" (559). Basil got the message and in a dreamy sort of way accepted the axe. But suddenly he became aware of the people around him. The axe would surely kill Natalia, for the wood of the sculpture near her neck was very thin, but he will be accused of the murder. If it were the saw, the crime will be brushed aside as a mistake. And moreover it would be slow torturing and the thought added extra pleasure to Basil. 'Two little warm roses of colour appeared on his cheeks' (560). Natalia had by then read Basil's mind and her face had turned grey.

From the day Natalia came into his life, Basil had known no peace. She flirted with men right before his eyes. She squandered his money, and scandalized his name. Within six years she became the most talked about person in town. Basil who had always lead a quiet life could do nothing. She had made him her slave and he merely obeyed her. She was in no way a partner of his choice. Natalia had a haughty look in her

eyes while Basil had ‘a lovely warm smile and a touch of friendship in his fingers’ (551). He hated her because she made fun of his interest in paintings and sculptures. But he was not bold enough to put an end to her atrocities. The humiliation he had to suffer, filled his mind with revenging thoughts. The journalist sensed a menace in Basil’s apparent calmness, but Natalia was not aware of the evil thoughts lurking beside his bruised heart. She was not very beautiful and had nothing to be proud of. All that she had, belonged to Basil. Yet she knew to use it as her own to keep others under control. She assumed herself to be a very powerful person and the men looked at her with awe. Basil who had none of these equipments mildly surrendered to her. But Basil waited patiently for revenge and it was by ill luck that Natalia put her neck into the Moore sculpture. Basil seized the chance and his butler too sensed it. But Basil was too clever to own a murder. So he took the saw and pretended to cut the wood near Natalia’s neck slowly and carefully. The twinkle in his eye said that Natalia’s neck was in danger. “I got my fist caught in a jar of boiled sweets once, and I couldn’t get it out. I broke the jar with a hammer and told my mother I’d knocked it off the shelf by mistake,” he said (558). He was precisely planning to do the same but with a difference. He would saw the neck and save the Henry Moore and said that it happened by mistake. Natalia had recognized the evil in his tenacious mind, but it was too late.

Mary Maloney in “Lamb to the Slaughter” loved her husband as much as she loved herself. She thought only about him during the long

hours she spent at home alone. There was a grace and calm about everything she did and moreover it was her sixth month with child. Patrick Maloney, her husband was a detective, soft and silent like her. Every evening at five o'clock he would come home and they would have a drink together. He would sit quietly in a rocking chair and Mary would sit opposite to him. She knew he didn't want to speak much until the first drink was finished and she was content to sit quietly, enjoying his company after the long hours alone in the house:

She loved to luxuriate in the presence of this man, and to feel that warm male glow that came out of him to her when they were alone together. She loved him for the way he sat loosely in a chair, for the way he came in by the door, or moved slowly across the room with long strides. She loved the intent, far look in his eyes when they rested on her. (*The Collected Short Stories* 454)

But one evening things took a very deep turn. After taking his usual drink Patrick had to say a shocking news to Mary. He said he was going to leave her. "I know it's kind of a bad time to be telling you. Of course I'll see you're looked after" he added (456). She heard every word silently and watched him with horror in her eyes. At first she could not believe it. She got up as if in a trance and walked to the kitchen. She felt a slight nausea and a desire to vomit. Somehow she managed to go to the cellar and get a leg of lamb from the freezer. Patrick was hungry and she desperately tried to believe that his decision would change after supper. While going to the kitchen she saw him standing by the window

looking out. "For God's sake, don't make supper for me. I'm going out," she heard him say (457). At that point as if by instinct, she walked towards him and hit him hard on his head with the frozen leg. He fell down dead on the carpet. The violence of the crash and the noise of the upturned table helped her regain her senses. She was at first shocked but she was glad that she had killed him. Various thoughts filled her mind: "What about the child? What were the laws about murderers with unborn children? Did they kill them both mother and child? Or did they wait until the tenth month?" (457)

Mary was not prepared to take chances. She turned on the oven and shoved the frozen leg inside. Sitting before the mirror, she tidied herself and put a smile on her face. Feeling quite confident, she walked out through the back door to the nearest grocery shop. "I want some potatoes please, Sam. And a can of peas. Patrick's decided he's tired and doesn't want to eat out tonight. I've got meat. I got a nice leg of lamb, from the freezer," she told the grocer (458). While walking back home she decided to act naturally on seeing Patrick's dead body. She would become frantic with grief and horror. As decided she entered the house calling out to Patrick. Seeing him lying dead on the floor, she ran to him, knelt down beside him and began to cry. She did it well and a few minutes afterwards, phoned the police. Two detectives who were friends of Patrick came to collect evidence. A doctor, newspapermen, photographers and finger print experts followed them. The detectives asked Mary many questions to which she answered without hesitation.

One of them went to the grocer's and got enough proof to believe that she did not commit the murder. While sobbing, Mary overheard a few whispered phrases: “. . . acted quite normal . . . very cheerful . . . wanted to give him a good supper . . . impossible that she . . .” (460). They concluded that Patrick was hit by a heavy blunt instrument similar to that of a heavy piece of metal. They ransacked the whole house for big spanners and heavy metal vases. It was then that the leg of lamb in the oven began to sizzle. Mary told the policemen: “You all are good friends of dear Patrick, helping to catch the man who killed him . . . Why don't you eat up that lamb that's in the oven?” (461). The policemen who were starving pounced on the meat and ate it hastily. One of them belched and another said: “That's a hell of a big club the guy must have used to hit poor Patrick . . . Personally I think its right under our very noses” (462). Mary who was sitting in the other room giggled.

Unlike Mary in “William and Mary,” Mrs. Foster in “The Way up to Heaven” and Basil in “Neck,” Mary Maloney did not wait her whole life for a chance to take revenge. Patrick gave her a sudden shock and she reacted quickly. The grief and agony in her heart came out in a gush and she found herself hitting Patrick on the head. All through the years Mary had been a submissive, timid wife. Whatever she did, was to please him. Whatever she thought was through him. Whatever she was, it was for him. She silently admired him and was proud to be his wife. But suddenly she realized that he had been thinking only of himself. When Patrick declared his decision without any hesitation, he expected an

outburst or a sob. On the contrary, she put on a discreet silence. Though she was shocked, she did not cry or argue, or try to find out the reason behind such a decision. Her silence irritated him. When he said that he did not want supper, she lost control of her mind. She realized that her love and devotion had been taken advantage of. The animal in her that had been suppressed in her mind till then broke loose and he fell down dead. It was a cold-blooded murder. It was not Mary's physical strength that killed Patrick. He received the blow when he least expected it. In fact he would have never expected such a reaction from her. The evil in her showed its real self when her love was thwarted.

The second half of the story shows a totally different woman who turned out to be a scheming, cunning and dangerous person. The warm smile on her face suddenly changed to a devilish grin. Very quickly she made a plan to save herself. As she said, there was no acting. "Do everything right and natural. Keep things absolutely natural and there'll be no need for any acting at all," she told herself (458). So it is clear that it was a mask that Mary had put on, as a timid woman. The real self is the woman seen in the second half of the story. Nothing is said in the story about why Patrick decided to leave Mary. There is the possibility of another woman. Or it could be due to some flaw in Mary. From Patrick's way of speaking it is specific that he had had enough of Mary's over enthusiasm in looking after him. Mary did not ask him the reason because she probably knew the reply and she did not want to hear it on the face. The evil beside her masked exterior helped her to put an end to everything.

In “Swan” evil takes a different manifestation. Ernie and Raymond were friends. Both were fifteen but their manners and physique were that of ruffians. Ernie’s father was a truck driver and a drunkard too. It was Ernie who bought ale for him. Physical violence was a daily occurrence in the house and the boys spent their time bullying younger boys in the village while they came back from school. They would twist the children’s arms and make them say filthy words about their parents and enjoyed seeing them wriggle with pain. It was Ernie’s fifteenth birthday and his father had presented him a .22 rifle. He wanted his son to bring home a rabbit.

Both the boys walked down the street aiming at bull finches and sparrows. It was then that they saw Peter standing under a tree, looking at a woodpecker through his binoculars. The boys hated Peter, for he was everything that they were not. He was a brilliant pupil in the senior class at school, though he was only thirteen. He played the piano and read a lot of books. He was quiet and polite, wore clean clothes and moreover his father worked in a bank. The confidence seen in his eyes was what the boys feared most. Seeing him all alone, they decided to tease him. Snatching the binoculars they pointed the gun at him. Peter raised his arms, because he knew that it would be of no use resisting them: “All he could do would be to turn and run, and that was pointless. They would catch him in seconds. And if he shouted for help, there was no one to hear him. All he could do therefore was to keep calm” (*The Wonderful Story of Henry Sugar and Other Stories* 69). The boys did not

understand why he watched birds. For them birds were only to be killed. “It’s fun watching birds. It is a lot more fun than shooting them,” Peter said (69). That made the boys angry. They threatened to shoot him. “Go ahead and shoot. Then they’ll send you to Borstal. That’s prison,” Peter said (70). But that provoked the boys more. They took out two strings from their pockets, tied together Peter’s wrists and legs and dragged him to the nearby railway line. They laid the boy lengthwise between the lines. The boys discussed about how the train would scrape away Peter’s face. Peter lay helpless between the rails. He understood that unless he did something quickly, he would be in danger. So he wriggled his head from side to side and borrowed it two inches down the gravel. He tried to concentrate on keeping his body stiff. To keep his mind off the tragedy that was going to happen, he played a game that his father had taught him. It was to look for strange faces in the clouds.

After a few seconds the train came whizzing over him. The sound was deafening and the wind choked him. But he escaped harmless. “It missed him. What a pity,” the boys cried (74). They untied Peter’s legs, but not the wrist. As if leading a prisoner, they took him to a lake nearby. Peter decided to be passive and not to aggravate them in any way for he hoped that they might get bored and leave him. They planned to throw him into the lake. Peter trying to keep his voice very calm, and asked: “Did you ever take on somebody, your own size?”(76). But the moment he said that, he knew it was the greatest mistake he ever did. It was then by chance that a swan appeared on the lake and Ernie ran after

it with his gun. Peter protested and cautioned them about shooting an endangered species, which would send them to prison. The boys would hear none of it. They shot the bird and made Peter fetch it. It was more than Peter could endure. He burst out in fury: "It's you who ought to be dead instead of the swan! You're not fit to be alive!" (79).

Ernie was taken aback, but a devilish grin appeared on his lips. Peter foresaw a great danger. Ernie cut the enormous wings of the swan and tied them to Peter's arms. Then he asked Peter to climb a willow, spread the wings, and fly in the air like a swan. "He's terribly clever at school, and he's top of the class and everything else that's lovely, but let's see just exactly how clever he's when he's at the top of the tree" Ernie said (82). Peter felt that he would be safer at the top of the tree. He had not climbed a tree before, but nothing was going to stop him from climbing the willow and go far away from the hooligans. He climbed fifty feet but felt no fear. He heard the boys shouting out to him to fly. He did not move. But suddenly a bullet hit his thigh. He felt no pain, but fell down on the branch. The indomitable spirit in him did not give up. He scrabbled to prevent himself from falling. Suddenly he saw a brilliant light over the lake that seemed to beckon him and ask him to fly. He dived towards the light and spread his wings. Many people reported seeing a great white swan circling over the village.

Ernie and Raymond feared Peter, even though he was only half their size. They secretly feared that his education and decent bringing up had helped him in gaining a power much more than their physical

strength. They knew they were on the wrong side of life but could do nothing about it. So they hurt every boy who had attained a status they could not. They considered Peter a strong enemy and looking at his dauntless eyes behind the thick lenses, they felt themselves shrinking. They were not brave enough to hit him before others and they did not have the guts to kill him by laying him across the railway lines. They wanted to scare him to death, but seeing that the train had not bent Peter's spirits, they decided to throw him into the lake. While the boys became more and more savage, Peter gained more and more mental strength. In fact the boys were getting weaker each time Peter survived their torture. Many a time Peter had suffered humiliation and physical torture from the boys. He wanted to put an end to their tyranny, but knew that it could not be done with physical strength.

Peter's anger suppressed beside him was strong enough to lash the boys at the right time. It had an evil dimension that was stronger than the boy's devilish plans. When the boys killed the swan he could not keep it under control. It came out in a gush, which surprised the boys. They had not seen such a power in Peter before. However they tried to oppress it by tying the wings of the swan to his arms. They did not expect Peter to climb the tree. Defeated, they tried to hurt him with the bullet. But Peter had reached a stage where physical pain did not count. The bright light gave him a super human, if not supernatural, power that helped him to fly. He flew like a swan, bewitched by the spirit of the dead swan. It came to him

as a last resort. Once free from the cruel clutches of the boys, the power left him.

*Matilda* is a long story of a small girl who like Peter in “Swan” fought her enemies with her special powers. Matilda, an extraordinary child, brilliant and sensitive unlike any girl of her age was born to Mrs and Mr Wormwood, both of whom failed to notice anything special in her. Her speech was perfect and at the age of four she began to read newspapers pretty well. She wanted a book, but her father said, “We’ve got a lovely telly with a twelve inch screen and now you’re asking for a book! You’re getting spoiled my girl!” (*Matilda* 12). So she began to visit the library, very secretly. She read every book in the children’s shelf and the librarian was more than surprised when she said: “I would like a really good one that grown-ups read” (15). Within six months she had read fourteen books by Dickens, Austen, Hardy, Kipling, Hemmingway, Faulkner, Steinbeck, Greene and Orwell, all of which transported her to new worlds and new experiences. Though she did not understand many words said in the books, she ‘sat back and allowed the words to wash around her like music’ (19). She knew that her father was a cheat who sold old cars as new. Her mother cared only for make-up and was a bingo dancer. Matilda was ashamed of her family and moreover she hated them because they called her stupid. At an early age of five, revenge and anger grew up in her. She had read in one of the books about Napoleon’s policy in life: when you are attacked, counter attack. So she put glue in her father’s hat and he had to cut away a good amount of his hair. The

rest of his hair turned dirty platinum grey because she mixed her mother's hair dye in his. She borrowed her friend's parrot, which said, "Rattle my bones!" and hid the cage in the chimney. Hearing it parents shivered with fright, while Matilda had the joy of winning a war.

Matilda was lucky to have a very gentle teacher Miss Jennifer Honey. But Miss Trunchbull the headmistress who was a giant of a woman became her staunch enemy. She once threw hammer in the Olympics for Britain and to commemorate it at school, she caught the children by their hair and threw them out through the window. She hated little girls and when she heard Miss Honey calling Matilda a genius, she barked out: "A bad girl is a far more dangerous creature than a bad boy. They're much harder to squash. Nasty dirty things, little girls are" (85). All she wanted was to 'roast Matilda's bottom' with her belt (89). She had another way of punishing students - by locking them inside a tall, narrow cupboard. A child could barely stand inside it for all the four walls of the cupboard had glass pieces and nails sticking out. Miss Honey tried her best to keep Matilda away from Trunchbull's evil clutches. Hortensia, a senior girl, described: "It's like a war. We are the crusaders. The Trunchbull is the Prince of Darkness, the Foul serpent, the Fiery Dragon. It's tough life; we all try to support each other" (109). Thus all the students stood together without betraying each other.

The first time Trunchbull visited Matilda's class, a very strange thing happened. Trunchbull as usual began her reign of terror by pulling the children's hair and ears. One of the students had put a newt in the

water jug on the table. Trunchbull yelled seeing it and put the blame on Matilda who trembled with anger. At the same time, she felt something queer happening to her: “There began to creep over her a most extraordinary and peculiar feeling. A kind of electricity, a sense of power, was brewing in those eyes of hers; a feeling of great strength was settling itself deep inside her eyes” (165). With this power she could tilt the glass of water on the table and make the newt jump on Trunchbull. It dawned on Matilda that she had the power to move objects with her eyes. She decided to make use of this power to win over Trunchbull. By that time she had understood that Trunchbull was Miss Honey’s aunt, and that she had treacherously killed Miss Honey’s father, Magnus, and had confiscated all his property. Miss Honey too had begun to put great confidence in Matilda and her superhuman power.

The next time when Trunchbull visited her class Matilda with her special powers, lifted a chalk by merely looking at it and made it write on the board: “Agatha, this is Magnus. Give my Jenny the house. If you don’t I’ll come and get you, like how you got me” (223). Trunchbull had the fright of her life seeing her first name on the board written by an invisible hand. She fled the place leaving everything to Miss Honey. At home Matilda’s parents were trying to flee the place from the police, but she wished to stay back with Miss Honey. The parents were too glad to get rid of her. It did not surprise her, but something else did. She found that she could no longer move anything with her eyes. But it did not matter to her any longer. “I’m glad it happened. I wouldn’t want to go

through life as a miracle-worker,” she told Miss Honey who had become her guardian by then (230).

*Matilda* suggests that a child can be an orphan, if the parents are silly and fail to recognize the special qualities in their children. Matilda proves that little girls are not always content with dolls and lollipops. Her parents believed that a girl child would not, in any way add to the family income. Her father never bought her a book and preferred girls who watched television. Matilda did not protest for she knew how to sit in front of the blaring screen and read a book. In fact, she had trained herself to block her ears to the ghastly sound of the dreaded box, a point that infuriated the father. His anger may have been intensified as he watched her getting pleasure from something that was beyond his reach.

Trunchbull hated little girls because she thought they were weak, ‘a bunch of nauseating little warts’ she called them (141). Matilda proved that both these notions were false. She could overthrow the strong Trunchbull and also restore Miss Honey’s properties to her. It was obvious that her enemies were jealous of her, for she had a silent way of fighting them. The way she took revenge on her parents and Trunchbull, without unveiling herself, shows the evil instinct in her. As the anger in her boiled she decided that every time her father or her mother was beastly to her, she would take revenge in some way or another. Small victories would help her to tolerate their idiocies and prevent herself from going crazy. The same happened with Trunchbull too. Matilda could not stand the woman calling her a liar. All the anger accumulated to a

diabolic evil power. Matilda was proud of it whereas Miss Honey was scared: "We are playing with mysterious forces, that we know nothing about. I do not think they are evil. They may be good. They may even be divine," she told Matilda (179). Miss Honey was a weak woman who endured the torture of Trunchbull without protest. So Matilda's superhuman power was a divine boon to her. But such a destructive force in a small girl, which took its birth from terrible anger, can in no way be called divine. It was out of utter necessity that the evil in her proud heart gushed forth to banish all those who wronged her. It was her desperate struggle for survival. Once she completed her mission, the power left her.

"Nunc Dimittis" also published, as "The Dubious Bachelor" or "The Connoisseur's Revenge" is the account of Lionel, a connoisseur who owned an exquisite collection of paintings and porcelain. He talked to friends and acquaintances on painting, the painter and his style. Though he was a respected man in town he had a way of looking down on people who did not understand or appreciate him. He was a wealthy, middle-aged bachelor, but did not seem to be interested in women. There was of course a woman in his life, Janet whom he loved. One evening while going home after a dinner party, Lionel had to get down at Gladys's house. A short, middle-aged widow, whose pastime was to create and spread rumours all over the town, Gladys showed Lionel her new portrait done by Royden. Though a pretty piece of art, Lionel did not appreciate its craft because Royden was a mediocre painter, who had

become the most sought after painter in town, all of a sudden. Every woman wanted to have her portrait done by Royden. Gladys said that she knew the secret behind it: "A woman's secret known to about thirty or forty women altogether. And not a single man. Except him of course - John Royden," (*The Collected Short Stories* 577).

Lionel thought this to be Gladys's cheap gossip and he did not show curiosity. He knew she would not leave him alone for her serpentine eyes were still watching him in a mischievous, canny way. He had a strong feeling that the woman was hatching out some further scandal. When she persuaded him to examine the portrait, he noted that the paint of the dress was raised from the rest of the picture. He again brushed it aside as a cheap trick. But Gladys continued with her secret, that Royden preferred to paint women in the nude. "And when I've done you like that, we'll have to wait a few weeks for the paint to dry. Then you come back and I paint on your under clothing. And when that's dry. I paint on the dress," Royden had told Gladys (578). Lionel could not help calling him a cheat, but Gladys said that Royden was a gentleman who kept the secret even from the husbands of the woman concerned. She added: "It's the same with medicine. You wouldn't refuse to undress before your doctor. Will you?" (579). But Lionel was still not convinced. He called Royden a 'bounder' who played tricks on the wealthy indolent women, who wanted to do something out of the ordinary to relieve their boredom.

Seeing that Lionel had no interest in Royden's secrets, Gladys moved on to her next gossip: "Janet is a wonderful person in every way. Except that she does say some rather peculiar things occasionally. About you" (580). That aroused Lionel's curiosity. Gladys seized the occasion and said that Janet had called him 'a crashing bore' because he speaks of pictures and porcelain for hours (580). Hearing this Lionel swooned and he was driven home. The next day he began to think of murder as revenge. "But mere killing, I decided, was too good for this women and far too crude for my own taste. So I began looking for a superior alternative" (582).

Lionel approached Royden and told him that he loved a woman and wished to own her portrait. At the same time he did not want the lady to know that he had commissioned it. But for that Royden would have to convince her that she was the sort of model he had been looking for. Royden hesitated but Lionel promised to pay him double. He was sure that the painter would surely use his special technique to paint Janet. After four months Royden delivered the painting at Lionel's house. With all enthusiasm Lionel began to work on the portrait. He dipped a wad of cotton wool in a mixture of turpentine and alcohol and gently wiped away the dress. She was very patient and industrious and within a day he was able to remove the black paint of the dress, which revealed the pink undergarments. Lionel found that Janet did not have a beautiful shape as he had thought. She was bow- legged and plump too. He felt a cruel joy inside.

To take revenge, he immediately sent invitations to his friends and well-wishers to a candlelight dinner at his house. Janet was also invited. The most distinguished and influential men and women in the town assembled in the hall and enjoyed the obscurity. But in the middle of the dinner, Lionel switched on the lights, and walked out of the hall leaving the guests to stare at the portrait kept across the table. Janet gave a scream seeing herself in undergarments. There was a great confusion in the hall and amidst it Janet fell unconscious. Lionel fled the place to his country house, ninety miles away. He stayed there for two days relishing the whole incident.

The third day Gladys informed him over the phone that Lionel was no more a hero in town, but an outcast. His friends do not care to speak to him any more. In the evening came the crushing blow in the form of a very loving letter from Janet saying that she had forgiven him. Lionel felt very bad and regretted his action. She had also send a half-pound jar of fresh caviare, Lionel's favourite food. Before finishing the letter he ate quite a spoonful of the stuff and suddenly he felt ill. It could be because he felt very small before Janet's magnanimity. It could also be that Janet poisoned the caviare, in order to take revenge on him.

Lionel called himself a gentleman but at heart he was petty, sly, wicked and unable to entertain woman. Janet calling him a 'crushing bore' was not news to him because he knew it was true. Moreover he was frustrated, discontented and slightly aberrated. He was aware that Gladys was a vainglorious woman and instead of trusting her words, he

could have asked Janet for an explanation. His pride was hurt and his recreant mind persuaded Royden to lure Janet to pose as a model. Janet who was no different from the other women in town posed for a nude painting. Royden was a professional painter who gave more importance to the money his paintings fetched. But Lionel who was respected as a connoisseur degraded art by indulging in cheap tricks for personal gain. Though he called it revenge, it was mere chicanery and cowardice. The way he arranged the dinner party showed his scheming mind. The guests could not at first see the portrait kept in the room. The candles were too thin and small, specially chosen by Lionel for the occasion. When Lionel switched on the light, the portrait came as a shock to everyone. He wanted Janet to fall down unconscious out of terrible humiliation. Lionel's evil character was hidden by the connoisseur's mark. He knew his drawbacks and instead of accepting it, tried to hide it. Evil ideas came out one by one and more than the joy of winning, he had the joy of destroying. The interest and concentration, with which he undid the painting layer by layer, showed the evil beside his socially acclaimed status. He expected Janet to collapse but she returned a fatal blow.

'Nunc Dimittis,' also known as the Song of Simeon, is a canticle from the New Testament, named after its first words in Latin (Luke 2: 29-32). Simeon was a devout Jew who was promised by the Holy Ghost that he would not die until he had seen the saviour. When Mary and Joseph brought baby Jesus to the temple in Jerusalem for the ceremony of the consecration of the first-born son, Simeon took Jesus in his arms

and declared that he had waited for this moment all his life. Now that his life has been accomplished, he could die in peace. In the story there is an ironical comparison between Simeon and Lionel who had waited for the moment when Janet would be humiliated before everyone. Lionel thought his life was gratified when Janet swooned out of shame. But he did not want to die, but live in peace. Dahl brings a surprise ending here, by killing Lionel.

The story of "The Mildenhall Treasure" is based on Dahl's experience when he was thirty years old. The unearthing of the treasure from Mildenhall, a village, in Britain, had created a lot of rumours in 1946 about who the real founder was. Later it was reported that part of the silver was missing while being taken to the museum. After reading the newspaper reports Dahl went to meet the farmer who first saw the treasure. The short story is based on his report. Butcher, a skilled ploughman, who owned a tractor took orders to till land. Being a simple-minded farmer with no malice or greed, his thoughts were only about his family. One day Butcher drove his tractor to Mildenhall where he had promised to till the field of another ploughman, Ford. After having ploughed the field, ten or twelve inches deep for a whole day something strange happened. The peg of Butcher's tractor hit something hard in the soil and broke. He got down from his tractor and dug the earth, and to his amazement found a piece of metal deep in the ground. Farmers in Mildenhall had many a time found such buried metal in their land. They were sure to be Roman Pottery or implements. But Butcher seeing the

blue-green crust of an ancient metal immediately drew back. Some strange impulse made him stop digging. That little patch of greenish blue made him conscious of danger: "The moment he touched it with his fingers, something electric went through his body, and there came to him a powerful premonition that this was a thing that could destroy the peace and happiness of many people" (48).

Butcher decided to inform Ford, a very cunning man who had 'the air about him of an old crafty fox from the woods' (49). Wild with excitement, Ford did not want Butcher to discern the truth behind it. The villagers knew that Ford collected old stuff like arrowheads and old stones from people and secretly sold them to customers. Cursing the cold weather outside he walked towards the field with Butcher. Ford knew a secret that Butcher did not. Years back an archaeologist who had been excavating in the place had unearthed the foundations of a Roman villa. He had expected to find more of the remains. Ford wished that what Butcher had seen was part of such remains. Both the farmers dug very deep and at last came upon an enormous plate twenty-four inches in diameter, which weighed about eighteen pounds. Ford at once knew the metal to be a costly stuff. "His hands began to shake. A tremendous and almost unbearable excitement started boiling up inside him and it was not easy for him to hide it. But he did his best" (51). Braving the blizzard, the two men continued to dig and within an hour they excavated thirty-four pieces including plates, bowls, dishes and spoons. Butcher was almost frozen and his feet and hands had become numb. He wished to get back home.

In the meanwhile, Ford was thinking of how to possess the treasure all for himself. In England, the law states that dugout treasure if it is gold or silver, belongs to the government and should not be concealed. The person who discovers it will receive the full amount of the market value of the treasure. Ford knew that the treasure belonged to Butcher, the real finder. All that remained was to convince him that the metal was useless stuff. "Well Butcher, I don't suppose you want any of this old stuff" Ford remarked (55). It was not a question, but a statement and he did not want Butcher to answer it. He acted as if he was not particular about the metal pieces, which he had by then gathered in a sack. "I just might leave it here and come back for it another time. Rusty old stuff," Ford said casually (55). Butcher understood that there was some importance in the pieces of metal from the excitement seen in Ford. "Jumpy as jack rabbit Ford was," he told his wife later (56). Anyhow he did not bother much about it.

Ford carried the treasure home. He understood that the metal was pure silver and the covering was the green crust of oxidization. He decided to spend the rest of his life cleaning the silver. It took him nearly six months to clean the plate. Its beauty, being covered with wonderful patterns of animals and men, astounded him. He took out the remaining thirty-three pieces and laid them out on the table in a dazzling array of silver. He worked desperately to clean all of them. Thus after two years he had cleaned every single piece to sparkling brilliance. He did not speak about it or show it to anyone. He kept everything locked

inside a cupboard. On one side, Butcher had forgotten the whole incident, on the other, Ford waited for a dealer who would buy the silver from him without anyone knowing it.

One day, Dr. Fawcett the archaeologist visited Ford for old stones and arrowheads and happened to see two silver spoons lying on the mantel. Ford tried to hide them but Dr. Fawcett was keen on having a look. "It is pewter. Just a couple of old pewter spoons," he said (60). But the archaeologist was no fool. "Pewter! You call this pewter? These spoons, my friend, are made of solid silver! Solid Roman Silver!" he cried in excitement (60). He wanted Ford to report it immediately to the museum. Ford tried very hard to divert Fawcett's attention but the archaeologist was wild with excitement. He wanted to know where the treasure was found and who found it. Many more questions were asked and Ford knew that the game was up. He had to show the whole treasure to Fawcett who reported it to the government. The museum authorities proclaimed it as the finest Roman silver ever found in the British Isles. It was of enormous value. Ford was summoned before the Coroner. He kept saying that he mistook the metal as pewter.

Butcher narrated his part of the story. The court's verdict was surprising for it did not blame the farmers. No one was declared the real finder of the treasure because the find was not declared at once. Butcher was given the credit and both of them got compensations of a thousand pounds each. Butcher was very happy to receive so much money. Little did he know that if he had reported the find the same day he had seen it,

he would have walked away with a million pounds. Though Ford was relieved that he was not accused, he was shattered by the loss of his treasure. He never forgave himself for having kept the spoons outside for Fawcett to see. Though Butcher did not get much but did not regret not informing the museum. In fact he was happy that he could stand away from the problems created by the treasure.

Butcher was not foolish, as Ford had imagined. He knew that the metal was no ordinary one and the green colour on it was not rust. But when Ford declared that it was 'green rust' he kept quiet only to end the discussion. In fact, he was not bothered about the value of the metal. Moreover, he felt that it would take away his peace of mind and so wanted to get rid of it. He helped Ford to dig out everything and did not claim anything. Ford was wrong to think that Butcher was "too simple-minded a fellow, too artless, too trusting too unselfish to give the matter much thought" (55). Butcher lived with a peaceful heart while Ford led a very tensed life because he knew that his life would end up in prison if anyone happened to see it. Yet he did not want to forgo it. War was going on and almost all the men folk were forcibly send to join the army. Only the farmers were left behind to continue the supply of food materials. But Ford had done no other work than cleaning and polishing the metal pieces. He lived alone in his house for four years, all the time scraping the green covering from the metal. He kept it closed in a cupboard, blindly believing that the silver belonged to him.

As years went by, Ford's fear lessened, which is one reason why the two silver spoons were kept carelessly on the mantel. All the labour, energy and hopes were wasted. The guilt beside his calm and casual manner made him a maniac. He became engrossed in the glittering of the silver that nothing else in life mattered to him. The more the silver glittered, the more he dreamed of money. The beautiful picture of Neptune, the Sea God with dolphins on his hair and sea nymphs gliding all over on the plate, fascinated him. He knew, that meant a fortune, got by cheating Butcher, a weak victim, who could be swindled and taken advantage of. After four years of hard work when he had really begun to admire its beauty, he had to hand over everything to the court. Moreover Butcher's name entered the records in the museum as the one who found the treasure whereas Ford was miserably forgotten.

"The Book Seller" is the story of William Buggage who sold rare books in his shop at Charing Cross Road. The walls of the shop were lined with books from ceiling to floor, and usually one or two customers were seen behind the shelves. Buggage sat with his secretary Miss Muriel Tottle at the back of the shop. He did not bother to see the customers at all. He did not mind even if someone stole a book because there was not a single valuable first edition in the whole shop. He did not care about the business that went about in the shop. It was what went on in the back room that counted. Buggage had all the newspapers and a current edition of Who's Who on his table. He ransacked every paper in the morning to list out the people who have died. The richest among them became his victims.

The next step was to refer to Who's Who. All the details about the man's family, the hobbies, habits and clubs were taken down. He then made an invoice with the list of books, which the deceased would have liked to read in his lifetime. Buggage knew that there were many "dirty" books men liked to read but could not take them home and so had to read them secretly. It was probable that a man had bought such books from his shop and had died before paying for it. This was the picture that Buggage wanted to portray before the widow. The invoice was sent to her a week after her husband had died. Buggage never had a protest or an angry reply for none of the widows dared to challenge the invoice or make an enquiry because they were not absolutely sure about their husbands not being lecherous. In many cases the cheques came very fast which proved that the women knew their husband's too well. Buggage always attacked the aristocracy and the cheques came in promptly. The widow would have a second shock seeing the invoice. In order to save the family name she would immediately send a cheque to Buggage, without pausing to enquire about the credibility of the bill.

Buggage was shrewd in his manipulations. If the deceased was a sixty-year old millionaire, and his hobby was fishing, then the list of books in the invoice would begin with *The Complete Angler* by Isaak Walton. The next would be *Sexual Secrets*, which would be followed by *How to Pleasure Young Girls When You Are Over Sixty and Why Teenagers Prefer Old Men*. Buggage made sure that the list contained erotica and banned books. He would decide the amount to be fixed with

each client: £900 for an industrialist, £420 for an army man, £537 for a bishop and so on. Muriel would compile the list of books for each client with the targeted bill in mind. She had done it with thousands of letters over the years and had become an expert. She had an index card file which she called 'Bible,' in which were recorded the names and addresses of all the clients. This was to prevent the possible danger of sending the same invoice or sending two invoices to the same family. Muriel had also developed an instinct for perfection and the 'Bible' assisted her.

Day after day the letters went out and the cheques came in smoothly. The psychology behind it as Buggage said was, "Strike a widow at the height of her grief, strike her with something that is unbearably awful, something she wants to forget about, something she wants nobody else to discover" (725). Buggage and Muriel had swindled a lot of money and had eighty-eight separate accounts in different banks. He did not care for interest. It was only because he did not want 'raised eyebrows' (716). When money heaped up Buggage thought of going for a holiday. So they closed the shop for ten days and went to Jamaica. They ate rich food there and stayed in the best hotel. They laid on the beach and looked at the rich men and women walking by: "Them's our bread and butter. Every one of 'em's likely to be a future customer," Buggage said (72). He could not enjoy the vacation and wanted Muriel to type some letters and invoices. He had brought with him the writing pads and had secured a typewriter and a Who's Who from the hotel manager.

Muriel unwillingly agreed to it because a quarter of the cheque that the invoices would fetch would go to her accounts.

Life was going on as Buggage and Muriel wished. An unexpected turn came when a young man and his mother Mrs Northcote visited their shop one day. Muriel immediately recognized the name as one of their clients. The woman wanted to know whether Buggage had made a mistake with the invoice. After telling Mrs Northcote that he knew her husband very well, Buggage continued: "Men will be men. They all have their little bit of fun now and again and there's no 'arm in that, is there, madam?" (728). He wanted to settle the affair quickly because there were two other customers in the shop. But the mother and son would not leave. "These curious books you list in your invoice, do they print them in Braille?" the woman asked (728). Buggage had not heard the word 'Braille' before. It was made known to them that Mr Northcote had lost his eyesight in a war, and could not read. Buggage and Muriel froze. The two customers who were standing behind the shelves turned out to be policemen who had come to help Mrs Northcote. As Muriel had no time to hide her accounts, she was caught unawares.

Buggage and Muriel together made a dangerous pair. Muriel helped Buggage in all his vile methods and kept all the accounts hand written in a book which she had named 'My Old Arithmetic Book From School.' This she considered a clever ploy, for no one would look at the book with suspicion. Buggage had not read a book in his life, and had nothing to do with words or literature. His language was crude and

manners, rude. Muriel did most of the work for him. With evil and the bookselling combined, he worked out his ways with the rich and the aristocracy. He chose the books so aptly that the widows were almost sure their husbands have bought them. The invoice they sent to the Bishop's palace too was accepted. Buggage also worked out crooked ways with banks and accounts. He had accounts in three big banks and all their branches and considered it safe because he knew that one branch does not disclose its secrets to another. Moreover no bank staff would take any notice of current accounts.

While in Jamaica he heard two women calling each other - Mrs. Smith-Swithin and Lady Hedgecock. The names sounded familiar to him because they were his clients. This was the first time he saw his clients in flesh. Muriel was alarmed for she feared that the women would talk to each other about the invoices. But Buggage was definite that, "Neither of 'em's even goin' to say a word. That's the beauty of it" (722). Many of his clients belonged to the same club and were likely to meet each other often. But no relatives or widows of the deceased would disclose the obscene side of their family. Buggage called rich men rogues and 'twits': "The bigger the title, the bigger the twit. In fact, anyone's got a title on 'is name is almost certain to be a twit," he said (714). He knew that he was vulgar, and not acceptable to the society. This grieved him because he knew that the rich were also overtly vulgar. Yet they had a place in the society. So he decided to amass wealth more than any other rich man. All the same, he reminded Muriel of the secret of his success:

'never be too greedy' (723). By 'too greedy' he meant that the invoices should not go beyond £1000. Thus with the evil force beside his shopkeeping, he cheated many and made unaccountable money. Even when his lockers brimmed with money, he did not intend to put an end to his vile business. "What do we want to retire for? We got the best business in London goin' for us and personally I find that very enjoyable," he told Muriel (719).

"Dip in the Pool," narrates an incident in a ship, which began its journey in good weather. Slowly the climate began to change and the ocean began to roll and rock the ship. For two days the crew had to stay inside their cabins, until the sky became clear again. Botibol, one of the passengers, disbelieving the initial calmness expected another storm on the way. The captain would make an estimate every afternoon on the day's run. He would fix on a number - the distance the ship would travel within twenty-four hours. It depended on the weather and the travellers would have to guess a number and buy the tickets. The winner would get the money fixed in the auction pool. If the traveller felt that the ship would cover less distance than that suggested by the captain, he could take a low-field ticket. In a similar way there was the high-field ticket too. Every evening the crew assembled in the smoking hall and the auction would be held. The highest bidders were given the tickets.

One day the crew was very worried because the sea had become turbulent again. They wished for good weather so that the journey would be safe. But Botibol was worried about the weather because he could not

predict the ships run and thus win the auction money. He was ready to spend all the money he had in his bank to buy the ticket. But he wanted to make sure that he won. He had already begun to dream about a Lincoln convertible. He would pick it on the way from the ship and drive it home just for the pleasure of seeing his wife, Ethel's face brightened up. He tried to bribe the purser in the ship to get information on the captain's estimate of the day. The purser did not say much about it. Botibol then asked the elevator man about the speed of the ship. "Oh yes, we slackened off considerable, since this started. You got to slacken off speed in weather like this," he said (497). As the answer was not convincing he went to the auction hall to foresee the weather. The captain had estimated the ship's run for twenty-four hours at a range of five hundred and five miles to five hundred and twenty-five miles. Those who presume that the ship would travel less than five hundred and five miles could take the low-field ticket and those who were certain that the ship would go faster than estimated, could take the high-field ticket. As the travellers were not very sure of the weather, no one bid for a high amount. But Botibol being very confident that the ship would have to fight against a rough sea and will not cover much in twenty-four hours bought a low-field ticket for £200. If he won he would get £6000. Happy and confident he went to his cabin to sleep.

The next morning Botibol got up and to his shock found the sea as smooth as glass. There was no gale and the ship was moving faster to

make up for the lost time. Fear took hold of him. He was sure that one of the higher numbers would win. He thought about how angry Ethel would be because he had spent two years' savings on the ticket. Then there were the monthly instalments on the television set and the Encyclopaedia Britannica. He could not go home without the money, and there was nothing much to do. The ship was sure to reach the shore before time. There was a slight chance of winning only if the ship went backwards.

Suddenly, an idea struck him and he jumped up from the bed, terribly excited. He decided to jump off the board to stop the ship. Someone would see him and shout for help. The ship would stop and lower a boat to rescue him. After the whole process the ship would be late by at least one hour. He did not know how to swim, but was not alarmed, as the sea was calm. He would dress in sports clothes to convince others that he had gone up to play tennis and had slipped and fell into the sea. Botibol was both frightened and excited when he went up to the deck. He shivered at the thought of jumping from a height of a thousand miles. There was an elderly woman standing on the deck looking at the sea. She might see him jump and cry for help. But Botibol, being a very cautious man, thought: "She might be deaf and blind. It was not very probable, but on the other hand it might be so and why take a chance" (501). He also feared that she might be one of the owners of the high-field tickets. In that case, she would not want the ship to stop.

However Botibol decided to talk to the lady: "Tell me, what do you think of the auction last night?" (501). The woman had not even heard of the auction and so he decided that the woman would be the perfect witness. He climbed on to the wide wooden top-nail and stood there poised, balancing for three terrifying seconds. Then he leaped shouting, "Help!" (502). The woman looked around and saw him sailing past her. She was not sure of what had happened and so she leaned on the rail and looked down. "A tiny head appeared in the foam, an arm raised above it; vigorously waving and a small faraway voice was heard calling something that was difficult to understand" (502). Just then another woman came to the deck in search of the elderly woman. "Don't you ever go wandering about on deck alone like this again" she said (503). It seemed that the elderly woman was mentally ill. She tried to explain about how a man had dived overboard into the sea to take a swimming exercise. But the other woman would not believe her. She led the elderly woman away from the deck unaware that Botibol was gasping for breath in the sea.

Botibol became a loser because he thought himself cleverer than everyone else in the ship. He considered the rest of the crew fools, because they knew nothing about a rough sea. This over confidence made him bid for £200. The others did not go for a higher bid only because they did not want to take a risk. After taking all possible precautions, he approached the purser and the elevator man. He surmised that a gale will not end in a day. The next day when he saw that the sea was calm, the

first evil thought that entered his mind was to bribe the captain by offering him ten per cent of the profits. But then he himself would have nothing left. So the next evil idea was to jump overboard. For that Botibol took a lot of precautions. He wanted to wear light clothes in case he had to swim. He was particular that people should not suspect him and so in order to give the impression that he slipped and fell, he wore sports clothes. He had his own suspicions about the elderly woman. So he talked to her and made sure whether she would be a perfect witness or not.

Just before jumping another fear gripped Botibol. He feared that he will be caught in the propeller. But then, he decided to jump out far enough to clear the propeller. The next problem was how to jump: "He might hurt himself if he hit the water flat and split his stomach open. He must jump straight and land feet first" (502). Finally he gave the woman the impression that he was going to take his daily exercise. So when he gasped for breath in the sea, the woman thought he was taking a swimming exercise. When he cried for help, she could not hear it, and seeing him waving his hand for help, she mistook it as a friendly gesture. "Such a nice man. He waved to me," she told the other woman (503). She did not have a normal mental sensibility to recognize that he was drowning. By that time the ship had moved a long way.

The evil hidden in him enhanced his greed. He took too many precautions and believed that a smart man like him would not go wrong. From the beginning he tried to fool everyone in the ship. No one fell

into his evil trap, but he considered himself very intelligent. But as he realized that he had been fooled all the while, he was panic-stricken. The elderly woman was his last resort but she too failed him. Thus with the evil beside his apparent decency, he made plans to fool others and make easy money. But one by one they failed him and he was left in the sea fighting for life. As the title suggests the dip in the auction pool ended with his dip in the sea.

In "The Champion of the World" Claud and Gordon ran a gasoline pump. Claud, the owner had little concern for his business because his interest was in poaching, which he inherited from his father. "He was a great poacher. Possibly the greatest there's ever been in the history of England. "My dad studied poaching like a scientist," he told Gordon (*Kiss Kiss* 210). Every evening Claud would go out from his shop and wander along a nearby wood. The wood belonging to Victor Hazel, the richest man in town, stretched for miles and was full of pheasants and other birds. Gordon did not know what Claud did near the woods, for he was not allowed to enter it. But at night he would return with a pheasant or a brace of partridges for them to eat. Gordon understood that Claud knew some vile trick to catch the protected birds, but he never bothered to tell anyone. One day Claud asked Gordon to accompany him to the woods. Gordon knew that poaching in the woods could send them to prison. Claud gave Gordon a detailed discourse on how poaching could be done scientifically, a secret he learned from his father and had not disclosed to anyone. "It'll be a milestone in the history of poaching. But

if this ever leaked out we'd have every bloody fool in the district doing the same thing and there wouldn't be a pheasant left," he said (208).

Claud's father knew three ways of catching pheasants. The first is to soak raisins in water and pierce half an inch of horsehair into the middle of the raisin in such a manner that a little of the hair is stuck out on either side. Then the raisins are scattered near the pheasants. When the pheasant eats one of the raisins, it is not able to move its feet again. Rooted to the spot, it stands there pumping its silly neck up and down. Anyone can pick up the bird. The second method is to bait a fishing line's hook with a raisin and show it before a pheasant, which easily gets hooked. "The only trouble is, it's rather noisy. The pheasant squawks like hell as you haul it in, and then every keeper in the woods comes running," he said (212). The last method was the best according to him. Little holes are dug in the ground. A piece of paper is twisted into the shape of a cone and fit into the hole, hollow and upward, like a cup. The inside of the paper cup is smeared with birdlime and a few raisins are dropped into it. When a pheasant pops its head inside to gobble the raisins, the paper hat gets stuck over its eyes and it is not able to see anything.

Gordon was fascinated by the three methods and called Claud's father a genius. But he considered the methods rather crude. He had by then formulated another idea using raisins and sleeping pills. A tiny slit should be made in the soaked raisins. The powder from the capsule should be poured into it and the raisin must be sewed up with needle and

cotton. The raisins should be dropped here and there in the woods. After half an hour the birds would fall unconscious. "They'd be dropping out of the trees like apples, and all we'd have to do is walk around picking them up!" Gordon explained (214). Claud considered the idea the best. Gordon had forty-nine sleeping pills with him. But Claud, overcome by greed, wanted to catch two hundred pheasants at one sweep. Gordon tried to dissuade him because the kill would become so obvious that they would be caught. But Claud would go for nothing less than two hundred. As it was impossible to get more capsules he decided that a quarter of a pill would be enough for one pheasant. They spent the whole day soaking, cutting, filling and sewing.

At nightfall, Claud and Gordon crept into the woods and threw the raisins among the birds. The birds gobbled all the hundred and ninety-six raisins. One of the guards seemed suspicious and Gordon preferred going back to the pump. But Claud very confidently explained to him that if the guards became suspicious, they do not wait in the woods but near your house to catch you when you go out in the dark. Gordon understood that Claud had studied the ways of the guards too in detail. When all the guards had gone for supper they sneaked into the woods once again. Suddenly they heard a voice as though a bag of sand had been dropped. Again and again they heard it and Gordon knew it to be the drugged pheasants, falling from the trees. They began rushing around madly in the dark trying to collect the birds in a heap. Claud was standing on the edge of the clearing with a bunch of pheasants in each

hand and was staring around him like a child who has just discovered that the whole world is made of chocolate. When the heap became a big one Gordon wanted to stop. "I don't like it. It's too many. Don't you think we ought to get out while the going's good?" he asked (226).

Immersed in picking up the birds, Claud was in an ecstasy. He did not want to leave behind even one bird. He stood there in the middle of the woods counting the birds. Gordon who was shivering with fright hid behind a tree, safe from the guards. There were a hundred and twenty birds in all. "It's an all-time record!" Claud said. "You're the champion of the world" Gordon exclaimed (227). They collected the birds in two sacks and dragged them outside the woods. Charlie, another crook who helped Claud waited with a taxi. Soon they headed for the village and Claud informed that the sacks were to be kept at Bessie Organ's. Gordon was shocked, for Bessie was the vicar's wife. "Always choose a respectable woman to deliver your game," Claud announced (229). No one came out of the vicarage, but as decided earlier Claud dumped the sacks in the coal shed. The next morning Bessie Organ was seen coming towards their pump, pushing a pram with her baby in it. Sixty pheasants were kept hidden beneath the baby. But suddenly the baby screamed. Then a pheasant flew out and fell unconsciously on the street. More and more flew out and fell on the streets. Bessie very quickly reached the pump and took the screaming baby in her arms. It had been pecked all over by the birds. With the weight of the baby suddenly lifted away, a great cloud of pheasants rose up out of the pram and unable to fly up

due to drowsiness, fell down all over the pumping station. People down the street were watching the scene and Gordon expected Hazel to turn up any moment. Claud immediately ordered Gordon to close the shop for they had to flee the place to save themselves.

Claud did not consider poaching a very grave crime because his father had done it so often and he used to assist him. Victor Hazel and his friends too killed the pheasants, and called it hunting and sport. Hazel spent a lot of money to raise each pheasant only to hunt it down. Claud did not understand why he was called a criminal and Hazel was not. At first Claud used to go out only once a week to catch birds. But gradually it reached a tempo where he went out five nights a week. Gordon who had been watching the change found it awkward and mysterious. The evil habit practiced from childhood became a way of life for him. He remembered that when he went with his father to 'nip' birds he never came back empty-handed. But very often while poaching, the guards would shoot his father, and his mother would dig the grapeshots out of his buttocks with a potato knife. His father was considered a champion among poachers because he had the greatest number of shots. Gordon at first was not for it, but hearing Claud's father's heroic deeds, he was fascinated. When Claud proudly said that he had 'inherited poaching' from his father, Gordon too wanted to become a part of the heroic act. He learned many new things within one day, and was awe-struck to see that Claud was not afraid of the guards. He was more shocked when he knew that the Vicar and his wife had a part in the evil game. Gordon

admired the casual ways of Claud, but did not approve of his greed. Though Claud had planned to freeze all the pheasants and store them for winter, he did not get even one bird. His evil thoughts made him blind before the guards and guns and all his labour was wasted.

“Mrs Bixby and the Colonel’s Coat” is the usual story heard in American clubs, of the husband, the wife and the ‘dirty dog,’ Dahl’s name for the wife’s secret lover. Mr Cyril Bixby, a dentist with an average income and a very quiet man, was limited to his clinic and home. Mrs Bixby, a big, vigorous woman who loved public life used to visit Aunt Maude in Baltimore once a month on a Friday. Although Cyril did not accompany her he did not find anything wrong in his wife spending a night with her aunt. The truth was that Aunt Maude was a convenient alibi for Mrs Bixby’s lover, a wealthy Colonel who had a big house and no family. She loved the Colonel’s company and longed for it because there was a long wait between the meetings. Every meeting became an exciting reunion. “Tally-ho! My dear, I’d almost forgotten how ravishing you looked. Let’s go to earth,” the Colonel would cry each time they met (*Kiss Kiss* 88). Her husband looked at her like another patient and her life would have been dull and boring without the Colonel. Eight years went by without Cyril suspecting anything.

On a Saturday afternoon, when Mrs Bixby was waiting for her New York train at the Baltimore station after her usual visit, the Colonel’s groom came up to her and gave a large cardboard box. It was from the Colonel and she was excited seeing it: “I’ll bet it’s a dress. It

might even be two dresses. Or it might be a whole lot of beautiful underclothes” she said aloud (89). She opened the box and found that it was a mink – a wild Labrador mink -, which would have cost more than six thousand dollars. It looked so wonderful that she began to pant. She tried it on in the ladies room and it gave her such a sense of power that she wanted to wear it before all her friends and amaze them. It was then that she saw a letter in the box. It was the Colonel’s farewell letter: “For my own personal reasons. I shall not be able to see you any more” (90). It was a shock for her. But now that she had the mink she did not mind his leave-taking: “What you lose on the swings you get back on the roundabouts,” she told herself (90). She folded the letter to tear it up but then she noticed the postscript: “Just tell them that nice generous aunt of yours gave it to you for Christmas” (90). For a moment she was relieved; then she was enlightened: The Colonel knew perfectly well that Aunt Maude didn’t have enough money to buy it. “I think that goddamn Colonel has done this on purpose just to torture me. He knew I wouldn’t be able to keep it,” she thought(91).

For two and a half hours she sat in the train weaving plans to fool Cyril. Without much strain she fixed upon one. Accordingly she went straight to a pawnbroker’s, and made up a story that she had lost her purse and was in need of money. The banks were all closed and so she was forced to pawn something. The broker looked suspiciously at her. She pawned the coat for fifty dollars but refused to give her name and address. The man was amused and said, “You’d better not lose this ticket,

then. You realize that anyone who gets hold of it can come in and claim the article” (93). With just a number and without writing down even the description of the mink, Mrs Bixby took the ticket home. While sipping her martini, she casually took out the ticket out of her bag and said, “Oh look! I found it just now on the seat of my taxi. I thought it might be a lottery ticket, so I kept it” (96). Cyril examined the ticket and told her that it was a pawn ticket. “A what?” she asked him bringing all possible innocence to her eyes (96). He explained what a pawn ticket really meant and added, “There’s a lot of things you don’t know my dear” (97).

Cyril, with his wife, began to guess what he would get from the pawnbroker’s if he produced the ticket as his own. At last it was decided that if it were a female-item he would give it to her as a Christmas present, but if it were entirely masculine then she would present it to him. Mrs Bixby was happy that everything went out well, but unexpectedly Cyril announced that he would go to the pawnbroker’s. However hard she tried, he would not let her go. At the same time, she could not accompany him for fear that the pawnbroker might recognize her. The next morning Cyril phoned from the clinic, “I got it! It’s fantastic. You wait till you get your eyes on this! You’ll swoon” (99). And swoon she did when Cyril showed her a little fur neck piece which he claimed to have got from the pawnbroker’s. Seeing a cheap ridiculous fur instead of her gorgeous mink, she almost lost her senses. Cyril was all praise for the fur but the woman could hardly hear anything. She walked out vowing that she would kill the

pawnbroker. Just then Miss Putney, Cyril's secretary, came by. Mrs Bixby could not believe what she saw, for the secretary, looked like a queen, just exactly like a queen in the beautiful black mink coat that the Colonel had given her.

Dahl begins the story with a brief narration of how American women become richer through divorces. The younger generation of men did not learn any lesson from this and they in turn 'marry like mice' (86). To make both ends meet they work like slaves and become tired and disillusioned. Suddenly the story takes a twist and the husband becomes a beast. The wife is defeated. The story of Mrs Bixby is one such. It is narrated from the male point of view and so the fact that Mr Bixby was a dull, boring man was stressed upon adequately. Mrs Bixby did not that her husband had another woman in his life for he never talked about Miss Putney in a positive way. So Mrs Bixby was under the impression that Cyril worked too hard in the clinic and so stayed behind in the evenings. In fact she was so engrossed in the monthly meetings with the Colonel that she failed to recognize anything amiss. She did not love the Colonel too but only his money and his flamboyant ways. The expensive mink was more important to her and very quickly the eight-year old affair was forgotten. She considered herself very clever when she kept away her address from the pawnbroker. The evil in her mind helped her to act the part of the innocent woman who did not know what a pawn ticket was. Thus she cheated her husband with the belief that he was ignorant of all that she did.

In the same way Cyril too cheated her. His apparent gentlemanly mask covered up his evil. Even while cheating his wife with the neckpiece, he could tell her: "Feast your eyes on that! Magnificent quality, fine colour too. They'll all think we are millionaires" (102). Mrs Bixby could not say a single word of protest for fear of being caught red-handed. She then recollected that Cyril always greeted female patients with his white coat unbuttoned, to exhibit his hairy chest. She compared his action to 'the strutting of an ageing peacock with only half his feathers left' (95). She also thought of him as a dandelion flower that was sub sexual. Its bright yellow petals are just a decoration, a masquerade. But she was wrong for Cyril had been enjoying life in his own way. When she made up false stories about Aunt Maude, he too had his pretended stories about Miss Putney. Of the two Mrs Bixby is the greater loser, though both are evil-minded. Along with the Colonel and the mink she lost her peace of mind too. But Cyril who was not aware of what was happening around would continue with his silent affair.

Arthur and Pamela Beauchamp in "My Lady Love, My Dove" were waiting for their guests, Henry and Sally Snape. Arthur, a radio engineer, was a quiet man who would like to spend his weekends cuddled up in a chair in the living room with a book in his hands. Pamela, on the other hand was a noisy woman who never stopped pestering Arthur. She was rich and from a titled family and their big house belonged to her. She was tall and bigger than Arthur and altogether he felt like a dwarf before

her: "I don't want to give the impression that I do not love her. All I am trying to say is that she can be a trifle irritating at times" (*The Collected Short Stories* 483). Whenever Arthur felt he wanted a spirit of freedom, he would go to his library where he kept his collection of butterflies. He would concentrate on his latest essay, 'The Relation Between Colour Pattern and Framework of Wings.'

It was a Friday afternoon and Pamela was restless. The Snapes would come in any minute. She had invited them herself because they played Bridge at a decent stake. But she declared that she did not like them. Arthur did not understand why Pamela kept swearing at the Snapes. Her problem was that she did not like the couple behave like love crazed sparrows. Arthur was the least bothered about the Snapes. But Pamela would not leave him alone. She wanted him to make a microphone and hide it in the guest room. "That's about the nastiest trick I ever heard of. It's like listening at keyholes or reading letters, only far far worse" Arthur exclaimed (484). Pamela did not like that. She accused him of pretending to be 'a pompous hypocrite' (484). Yet Arthur did not think it decent and refused to do anything of the sort. Pamela kept quiet and stared at him. He knew that it was a danger signal and that she would explode any moment like a bomb. He got up and quietly walked to his workshop. By the time the Snapes arrived, he had placed the microphone inside the sofa in the guest room and led the wire under the carpet to the door and along the corridor to their own bedroom, where it was connected to the radio.

The Snapes arrived and Arthur found them a pleasant couple. He feared that Pamela had made a mistake in judging them. Henry seemed to be very much in love with his wife who was a soft and lovely woman. In fact, Arthur felt bad to have fixed the microphone in their bedroom. They began to play the much-awaited bridge. Both the women seemed to be very much disturbed. Pamela could not concentrate because her mind was fixed on the microphone. But Arthur did not understand why Sally was agitated. All through the evening the Snapes played well and Sally made only one mistake. It completely upset her but the husband forgave her and asked her not to worry. Pamela played all wrong and lost a lot of money. She was not bothered about it for she already had enough of it.

They stopped the game at midnight and went to their own bedrooms. Pamela was very anxious to hear the microphone. But she heard something, which she did not expect at all. It was Henry's voice: "You're just a godamn little fool! The whole bloody evening wasted! Eight hundred points - that's eight pounds between us!" (491). His voice was harsh and unpleasant. The Beauchamps were shocked. Sally was heard crying. "I promise, I promise I won't do it again" (491). Henry would hear none of it. He sat down to practice the game. But it was a queer way of practicing without cards. Henry would say 'one club' with a stress on 'one.' It was a code. Sally would understand the other cards he had in his hands. There were five hundred such codes. Pamela quickly understood that it was a bidding code, a secret language with which the Snapes had robbed her money. Arthur was petrified and did not know

what to do next. But Pamela had made a decision. “Why Arthur, this is a marvellous idea. Do you think we could learn to do it?” she asked (493). Before Arthur could protest, Pamela had ordered him to fetch a deck of cards, to practice the bidding code.

Arthur had over the years cultivated the habit of obeying Pamela. It was not fear but out of a respect for her aggressive personality. She was the ‘captain’ and whether Arthur liked it or not, agreed with all her decisions. It was a rule with him not to provoke her. In his mind he knew that he did not possess the power to win over her. So he did not stubbornly adhere to his personal opinions and gladly succumbed to her. Being a radio engineer he ought not to have misused his knowledge. Pamela pointed out that he had indulged in such indecent practices before, like taking Mary Probert’s personal letters from her purse and reading it. Arthur did not deny it, but said that he did not want to do any such thing again. Later evil took the better of him and he was seen looking at his product with amusement: “No longer a silly box but an evil little creature that crouched on the table top reaching out secretly into a forbidden place far away” (487). He could have destroyed it, but the evil in him prevented him from doing it. He also looked forward to the dirty fun.

Arthur was puzzled by the change in him. He could not reason it out. But Pamela explained it very clearly: “Arthur, I’m a nasty person and so are you - in a secret sort of way. That’s why we get along together” (485). Arthur had to agree to it but did not want to give in easily. But

Pamela knew him better for his face was all pink and excited at the very prospect. Arthur knew she was right. Finally he made one more futile attempt. "How would you like it if someone did it to you?" he asked her. "How could I mind if I didn't know it was being done?" she answered (485). She was not ashamed to call herself a 'stinker' because she thought that everyone stinks in one way or the other. In spite of the elite manners and high talk of the Snapes, she knew the evil in them. Pamela wanted to be a better crook than the Snapes. Thus when Pamela made a final decision to practice the bidding code, Arthur again hesitated. But his protests did not have much force for the evil in him tempted him to learn the secret. The Snapes needed money to live and so played cheap tricks. For the Beauchamps, it was sheer evil that made them follow the baser path.

When the thirteen stories are viewed from a phenomenological view, it is obvious that there is the fight between the strong and the weak, and the weak gaining power with the help of the evil residing in their humiliated and wounded minds. The characters who appear to be strong, rule over their vassals who are meek and obliging. The weak ones wait patiently and the evil in them help them to win over their cruel oppressors. In the first four stories namely "William and Mary," "The Way up to Heaven," "Neck" and "Lamb to the Slaughter," Mary, Mrs Foster, Basil and Mary Maloney respectively, were harassed, tortured and humiliated by their spouses who were seemingly strong and aggressive. They were denied freedom in their lives but they suffered it patiently.

With hearts full of hatred and revenge, and yet afraid to strike, they waited for a chance to counter attack. They knew the deficiencies and limitations of their enemies. They were also conscious that they will not get a second chance, so waited patiently for the weak moment of the enemy in order to strike hard and sure. Mary in “William and Mary” left William to death when he was bedridden with cancer. But when he came back half-dead the evil kept veiled in her bruised mind rose up and found a chance to avenge. She took advantage of his helpless condition. Mrs. Foster in “The Way up to Heaven” knew that the only way to save herself from her husband was to leave him in the lift and go to her daughter. The evil hidden by her soft and gentle nature made her seize the opportunity to destroy him. She left him to die. Basil in “Neck” could not raise a finger against the atrocities of Natalia, but he was always on the prowl waiting for a chance to pounce on her. At last when she got herself stuck in the sculpture, the evil in him took up the saw. Mary Maloney in “Lamb to the Slaughter” killed Patrick in a trance, which was the result of the terrible shock he gave her. But her raving mind was not satisfied. The evil in her made her a cold-blooded murderer. Moreover she could make the detectives devour the murder weapon. These four characters resorted to evil out of utter desperation. They were weak and so it was not the physical strength that helped them. The long suffering that had strengthened their mental power forced it to attack.

The weak are the victors in “Swan” and *Matilda*. Peter in “Swan” though weak had a dauntless spirit, which his enemies did not have. It

was to survive from the clutches of the rogues that he climbed the tree. Later an indomitable spirit in him helped him to overcome his enemies and fly like a swan. The headmistress and the parents in *Matilda* failed to recognize Matilda's talents. But when she was wrongly accused and humiliated before the whole class, the evil in her came up as a power from somewhere to eliminate her enemy. The power, which was superhuman, was evil, as Miss Honey said. Anyhow the power came as a rescue to Peter and Matilda at a crucial moment of their lives and left them when they did not need it. Anyway, they do not give much pain to their enemies. Lionel in "Nunc Dimittis" was sly and so did not go for a straight fight with Janet. In order to hide his drawback, he took on Janet, through indecent ways of revenge. The evil beside his socially acclaimed existence was exposed when he undid the portrait layer by layer and left Janet in undergarments. He fell from grace and nothing could have been a better punishment. But the evil in the humiliated mind of Janet could not be pacified. She took revenge by poisoning him. Though Lionel considered her weak, she turned out to be stronger than expected.

There is no straight fight between the weak and the strong in "The Book Seller," "The Champion of the World," "Dip in the Pool" and "The Mildenhall Treasure." The protagonists are strong and they gain over those who are weak and ignorant. But the weak do not rise up to counter attack. It is the weak point in the strong that lead to their doom. They are cunning, scheming and greedy too. It was their greed for more and

easy money that made them fall weak. Buggage in “The Book Seller” knew a lot about the rich, and the books they read. He had been a bookseller for years but he did not know about Braille, a point that proved to be his Achilles heel. He considered the rich people dunces and made a lot of money by sending them false invoices. Thus with the evil hidden in him he bribed many but in the end lost everything because a customer turned to be cleverer than him. Claud in “The Champion of the World” knew scientific methods of poaching but did not know the effect of a sleeping pill on a bird. His greed for a big catch left him with nothing. Botibol in “Dip in the Pool” believed that he knew everything about the weather and the sea and considered the crew imbeciles. But his over-confidence failed him and he was left in the sea, all alone, fighting for life. Ford in “The Mildenhall Treasure” cheated Butcher the real owner of the treasure by taking advantage of the farmer’s ignorance in matters of law. In the end he lost everything, wasting four years of his life and hard work.

Mrs Bixby in “Mrs Bixby and the Colonel’s Coat” considered her husband a weakling and believed that she had cheated him for eight years. But the husband was so cunning that he would outwit her. He and the Colonel cheated Mrs Bixby in the end. Cyril had a double gain. Pamela and Arthur in “My Lady Love, My Dove” thought themselves very clever when they invited the Snapes. Arthur stooped to do a disgraceful deed, bugging his guests’ bedroom. But the guests turned out to be born crooks and the hosts were fooled. Arthur regretted but Pamela’s evil

mind would not agree to his morality. Winning was all that mattered to her and she did not mind being dominated by evil.

In the stories the weak win over the strong or the strong lose over the weak. History of man and the world have proved the prominence of the strong over the weak. Charles Darwin explains this survival of the strong in the seventh chapter of his thesis, *The Origin of Species*. He calls it an instinct in beings: “. . . they use it for their advancement . . . let the strongest live and the weakest die” (170). History is this long story of the survival of the fittest. It may be a general rule that the power of the muscles always wins. But there is no mention of the mental strength of living beings in Darwin. For example, the lion may be the king of the forest, and the others fear him. But it is the scheming fox that often helps the lion. It cannot be proved that the lion is not mentally strong. It is that he does not make use of it. He is already the ruler with his physical strength, and the brain maintains a low profile. Though the lion-fox theory is a fairy tale, it is true with human beings. Darwin is concerned with the struggle to exist, but Nietzsche calls it the struggle for power, in his work *Twilight of the Idols*:

The weak possess more mind - mind that meant foresight, patience dissimulation and great self-control. A closer look into the history of man, unpopular to the world, shows a different picture. It tells of the defeat of the strongest, the most privileged and the fortunate exceptions. The weaker dominate the strong again and again - the reason being, they are the great majority and they are cleverer. (86, 87)

It is this sublimated will to power that Dahl has adopted in his stories. In many of the stories, men are strong and hence dominate and torture the women. But at the end of the stories, the women emerge strong and victorious. The weakness seen in men is as explained by Dr Julian Hafner in *The End of Marriage*: “The need for men to have a woman dependent on them comes from their suppression of the weakness within, which is frightening. He will do almost anything to avoid it” (33). That is how he often uses violence or threats to keep the woman.

Edgar Allan Poe has dealt with many strong and weak characters in his stories, says Philip Van Doren Sterne in his work *The Portable Poe*. He explains how the weak and the strong are in constant conflict with each other: “As a strong man exults in his physical ability, a weak man comes out with the power innate in him” (64). When they fight, this hidden strength comes out with added vigour. The weak one is forever planning and waiting for a chance to attack the strong. He is sure of his enemy’s strength and knows when and where and how to attack. But the strong is unaware of the evil power in the weak. His pride and over-confidence prevent him from assessing it. When he gets a hit it is with great force and he falls. He gropes in the dark but he is not able to catch the weak, for their movements are unique, stealthy and unpredictable.

Similar characters are seen in Dahl too. The people who are meek and gentle suddenly turn out to be murderers and cutthroats. They win

over the strong but are not the strongest. They win because they are the cleverest. Hence it is the survival of the cleverest. And more than survival it is for power. At the desperate moment when one has to choose between life and death no good or evil exists. It is only power - the power to win, to rule, to do anything according to one's own will. Even when power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely (Lord Acton), man craves for more and more power. And it is this greed that fails him. Sri Aurobindo in his book *The Life Divine* says, "Power in itself may be dreaded as a temptation by the aspirant to perfection, because power can abase as well as elevate; nothing is more liable to misuse" (1043). When the whole world runs greedily after power and selfish gains, no one wants to lag behind. He does not look back to learn from his faults. Right or wrong, he only wants to win in life.

At the end of the fight between the weak and the strong, no character is weak or strong. The strong are weak and the weak are strong in their own ways. The strength in them varies according to the quality and quantity of evil in them. And no character is away from evil. If the weak, instead of waiting for the weakest point in the strong, and the strong, instead of accepting defeat seeing the strength of the weak, had looked into themselves, they would have been able to balance the evil and the goodness in them, thus bringing about harmony in their lives. Evil would not have become so dangerously uncontrollable.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### THE EVIL BEYOND

The stories dealt with in this chapter contemplate on the evil caused by war, the power of which goes beyond the intuition of man, its creator. *The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English 2005* and *The Longman's Dictionary of Contemporary English 2005* defines the word 'beyond' as "on or to the further side of something" ("beyond," def.). *The Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary 2005* explains the word as "outside or after, further away in the distance" ("beyond," def.). A phenomenological study of the war stories of Dahl throws light on the truth that the evil of war has spread further into the minds of man and has left him soulless. The phenomenon of evil has gone beyond the power and intuition of man. There is no one who is not the victim of the evil of war. Dahl focuses on this aftermath of war, which has far reaching consequences than the murders and wounds caused in the war field. It fills the world with darkness and the human mind loses its light. The pilots are not mere fighters but are presented as the victims of war. Every story has war as its backdrop whether present directly or not. Some happen in the war ground right amidst the hurricanes and bombers. Some happen in faraway lands where war had left its mark. There are stories narrated

by pilots who had crash-landed in nobody's land. Their stories appear crazy and incredible, but the truth remains that they had seen life and death right before their eyes.

The ten stories discussed in this chapter, highlight flyers and flying in the collection *Over To You*. They are "Death of an Old Old Man," "A Piece of Cake," "They shall not grow old," "Someone Like You," "Only This," "Katina," "Yesterday was Beautiful," "Beware of the Day," "Madame Rosette" and "An African Story." Dahl has gathered together people from different parts of the world, all victims of war, to recreate the aftermath of war, the evil beyond war.

In "Death of an Old Old Man", Charlie the fighter pilot, fifty, but young at heart, had his own dreams to fulfil. But that day when he got the message from his officer that he was the one to go up next in the spitfire, to keep watch over the enemy camp, he felt a fear grip him. But it did not shock him, for he knew he would be the next: "As if I didn't know that I was next up. As if I didn't know it last night when I went to bed, and at midnight when I was still awake," he said to himself (*Over to You* 11). He tried to take it casually but he could not swallow a mouthful of the pudding kept in front of him. Still he tried to act brave. "Thank God for that. I'm tired of sitting around here picking my nose," he told the other pilots in the camp (12).

Four years ago when the war began, going up in a spitfire was a wonderful experience for him. He enjoyed being up in the sky. But as years went by, fear began to grip him. Many a time he had escaped death

by mere luck. "No one knows that. They all say Charlie is a great pilot, Charlie is a born flyer and Charlie is terrific," he said to himself (12). He felt fear creep upon him. It touched him gently on the shoulders and whispered to him that he should be careful or else 'you will just be a charred corpse' (13). First the fear gripped him only at night. But gradually he began to hear the whisper all through the day. "I'm the only one that's going to get killed. I don't want to die. Oh God I don't want to die," he cried (13). He didn't mind his leg or arm burnt off.

Four years ago when the war began, there was no hope that any one would survive to see the war end. But now the war was going to end and it gave new hopes of life. He did not want to die and lose fifty years of life. He wanted to go home to the woman he loved, take a walk in the woods, take a drink and stay alive every minute. He did not want to miss anything. But as Charlie was a fearless fighter he had never turned back from danger or death. "I would prefer to have to fight that than to have to fight this fear" (15). So he decided to fight the enemy. He kept looking cautiously all around him. The enemy might come up any moment. There were only two places to hide in the sky. One in the cloud and the other was in the flashing light of the sun. He kept away his dreams and became a pilot again.

Suddenly a German plane spotted him. "As a sleeper who opens his eyes in the morning and forgets his dream, so this man had seen the enemy and had forgotten that he was frightened" (16). Charlie who was an expert with his spitfire turned and swirled in the sky to dodge the

German. The German pilot in the Focke Wulf was also an expert flyer and there followed a series of rolling and diving and zooming, each waiting for a gap to shoot the other. Charlie controlled his spitfire not with just the tip of his fingers but with his whole body. The spitfire was not just a plane, but a part of his own body. The two planes flew towards each other. Charlie squeezed his thumb on the fire button and the Focke Wulf caught fire. The angry German dashed at the spitfire and it caught fire too. Charlie jumped down with his parachute and so did the German.

It was then that Charlie remembered that he might land in the same field with the German. It was German territory and he could be killed or taken prisoner. Though he was filled with fear, he did not lose hope. Charlie realized that he was going to land in a pond that looked like a black hole for him. He fell on the water and sank deep into the bottom of the pond. It was muddy and his feet got stuck in the mud. Fear began to engulf him. Standing up with the water up to his shoulders, Charlie tried to remove the tangled mass of cords of the parachute around his neck. He could not see where the German soldier was, because the cloth of the parachute had completely covered his head. But he heard footsteps on the grass and a splash on the water.

The German caught hold of Charlie's neck and pushed him down into the mud. He began to struggle and saw bubbles rising slowly upwards. Watching them, his mind became calm and he stopped struggling. He released his body: "I was a fool to have struggled so much and for so long. You cannot walk struggling. You cannot sleep struggling.

You cannot live struggling” (22). The German pulled out Charlie’s limp body and lay on the grass. He searched the pockets but got nothing.

Charlie felt that the soldier was a fool to get excited so much. He asked the German to relax. The pilot jumped and looked scared when he heard the cold body speaking. Terribly frightened, he started to run. Charlie decided not to disturb him.

Charlie fought the war only because he was a fighter pilot. In the beginning, he fought blindly expecting death before him. But as years went by he began to cling on to his dreams that he was forced to forget. The war gave him hope that he would live to fulfil his dreams. But when he was asked to go up into the sky at the last moment, he experienced a sudden fear. Charlie had a dream which kept him optimistic “I think the reason I do not want to die is because of the things I hope will happen” he said (14). But this clinging on was like hanging over the edge of a cliff. He had been hanging too long and his fingers had begun to ache. He was desperately trying to get a foothold along the side of the cliff. Once up in the sky, loneliness disturbed him. He was forced to forget his dreams and fight like a soldier. His mind was totally blank and bleak. He eased the throttle, pulled the stick and flew his aircraft with the tip of his fingers. He fought for his dreams and not for his life. He decided that if he lived he would live with his dreams. He could not dream struggling so he relaxed and allowed himself to be sucked in by death.

Up in the sky, while sitting in his cockpit, his only thought was to kill the enemy. His right hand would automatically move the stick and

his left hand, the throttle. By the force of habit, his head would move from side to side searching for the enemy in the sky. He would look down for a second and record with his eyes that everything was in tact - his oil pressure, his petrol, his oxygen, and his airspeed. The next moment he would look up for the enemy. He would keep his thumb ready upon the trigger button and his left foot upon the rudder bar. He would not take his eyes from the enemy even for a moment. The spitfire became his body: "For the body of the spitfire was the body of the pilot, and there was no difference between the one and other" (18). The war had made him a machine and in between killing the enemy and saving his life, he did not have the time and mind to nurture pleasant dreams. The war did not expect its men to dream. It always came as a shocking whisper: "It whispers to you about how your corpse will look when it is charred how black it will be and how it will be twisted and brittle, with the face black and the fingers black" (13). The war wants its soldier to fill their minds with this black dream so that they would fight like mad for their lives. The whispers killed Charlie's pleasant dreams. The only option left before him was to fight for his life. But when finally he understood that his life would be devoid of his dreams, he did not wish for it.

"A Piece of Cake" the first story Dahl wrote was published as "Shot down at Libya." The story is about a desperate fighter pilot, who tried to consider the war 'a piece of cake.' As he was getting ready to take off in his Gladiator to Mersah Matruh, where the Italian army was

fighting, everyone in the camp was quiet, trying to hold themselves together. The war had not left behind many pilots. As a result, the remaining ones had to go up to the sky very often, for there were no replacements. That meant facing death too often. The airman who helped the pilot with the straps in the cockpit said, "Be careful. There isn't any sense not being careful" (40). But the pilot tried to brush it away by calling the war 'a piece of cake.' He flew over the troubled area and all of a sudden the Gladiator began to dive down. He could not control it and moreover he had lost his senses. He felt hotness in his legs, which spread to the whole body. It took some moments for him to register that the plane had caught fire. He wanted to unbuckle his seat belt, but his hands had gone numb. He tried to unbuckle his parachute and was somehow successful. By that time the burning Gladiator had almost reached the ground. By mere luck the pilot rolled and fell from the cockpit on the sand, far away from the plane, which crashed down simultaneously. He vaguely heard his plane cracking and burning: "My face hurt. Slowly I put a hand to feel it. It was sticky. My nose didn't seem to be there"(43). He lost his consciousness.

Many scenes passed the pilot's mind. There was Peter, his friend who was dancing around, happy to see him alive. The pilot had lost his nose and blood filled his mouth. But he felt no pain. The cigarette Peter gave him got wet with the blood. He could not see anything and Peter said it was night. The soldiers around were painting funny pictures on their planes. "The German pilots will all laugh when they see them;

they'll shake so with their laughing that they won't be able to shoot straight," they said (44). Peter began to laugh seeing it. His laughter grew quickly to a belly-roar and he laughed slapping his thighs with both hands. All the soldiers around were amused. They felt happy too. Another soldier was writing a story on the fuselage of his plane. It was a funny story for the Germans to read and laugh. But the wounded pilot was not amused. "You're mad. You're madder than hell. You're crazier than hell," he cried to Peter (46).

Minutes later the Germans encircled them. The pilot too felt for a moment that the Germans were singing and dancing in a circle. It was his wishful thinking. Suddenly bullets hit the wings of his plane. At first he did not take it seriously. But when more and more bullets came up, the pilot got angry. "You fools, look at the funny pictures. Look at the one on my tail; look at the story on my fuselage. Please look at them," he cried (47). But the bullets went on coming. Some hit his body and he went into a spin. He went down faster and faster. He saw the sea below. His plane was galloping madly like a horse, riderless and uncontrollable. Together they crashed in the water. When he woke up, he heard the voice of a doctor and a nurse near him. "Where am I?" he asked. "You're missing, believed killed," someone answered (48).

The pilot lost his consciousness again and his mind began to wander. He was in a greenfield and he was running. It was darkness all over and he went on falling. He kept his eyes open and watched the darkness going from grey-black to black from black to jet-black and

from jet black to pure liquid blackness, which he could not touch with his hands. He went on falling and nothing could be done. Suddenly he came back to his senses. But he could not see anything “We’ve put a bandage around your eyes for a bit. You’re very lucky, you know” a nurse said (50). He wanted to know that was wrong with his face. But the nurse did not reply. He looked around for Peter. He was not there.

The pilot knew that it was no use fearing the war. So he considered it a ‘piece of cake.’ When he lost his consciousness, he reached a world that his mind had always wished for. There he was not alone and always had his friend with him. Everyone was happily singing and dancing and laughing. He was so much engrossed in the merrymaking that the enemy bullets did not pain him. Everything around was pleasant and glowing with a hopeful light. His mind kept running to his mother who was picking mushrooms in the meadow. He ran all through the green meadow and did not stop even when his mind wanted to. But when he woke from his dream to face the real world, he understood that his life was filled with darkness.

Not a drop of light that he had seen in his dreams had entered his life. The war had taken away everything. He had lost his nose and his face was completely distorted. He realized that all that he had seen were dreams, which could not be fulfilled. Peter was a dream. The laughter was a dream. The light was a dream. The only reality was the war. He had lost everything except his life. The nurse called him lucky to have lived, but his mind was totally blank. He breathed consciously to test whether

he was alive or not. The war, which he had considered 'a piece of cake,' had left him just - a lump of flesh. He dreamed of a world where there were no enemies to dread. Everyone - the English, the Germans, the Italians stood together, singing and dancing. In fact that was a world every soldier wished for. But the war would suddenly intrude into these dreams and shower death on them. They could see love, happiness and light only in their dreams. Real life was filled with hatred, enmity, smoke and darkness. The music they heard was not pleasant; it was the sound made by the planes and the swishing of the bullets. The pilot left alone in the hospital wished to die so that he could live in his dream world of peace.

"They Shall Not Grow Old" also relates the weird dreams of a pilot. Fin, the fighter pilot, had gone with his hurricane and not returned. The other pilots were waiting in the aerodrome for their turn. It was a very hot day and the sweat was tickling down their bodies. But every eye was on the sky looking for Fin. They were in Palestine fighting the Vichy French of Alliere in Syria. The pilots began to suspect that Fin was shot down or captured. The pilots could not believe that Fin had died. He had always been a pleasant man, full of laughter. He was planning to get married to Nikki, the cabaret girl. "Cabaret girls are never unfaithful. There is no novelty for them in being unfaithful; that would be like going back to the old job," Fin said (115). It was two days since he had gone. Paddy, Stag and other pilots sat down outside the camp waiting for orders. Each had something good to say about Fin.

Suddenly Fin's hurricane appeared in the sky and slowly landed near them. The pilots were very happy and crowded around him to know where he had been for two days. But Fin was surprised to see their anxiety. "I left only five minutes ago. Don't be a lot of damn fools," he told the others and walked away (118). Everyone was surprised. They did not understand what Fin meant, but knew that he had been serious when he spoke. The officer did not know what to do. He had reported to the headquarters that Fin was missing. But now that he had returned, the headquarters wanted to know where he had been. But Fin could remember nothing. He was totally confused but the other pilots understood him. They were certain that something serious had happened to Fin.

A week later Paddy's hurricane caught fire. Seeing the fire and smoke, Fin suddenly remembered what had happened to him. Down in the camp, everyone assembled around Fin to hear his story. When he was up in the sky, he suddenly flew into a cloud, which was thick and dense. A moment before, the sky was clear and there was not a cloud anywhere. He tried to go down and down but the cloud was still around him. Suddenly a pleasant blue light blinded him. Slowly it became clear and Fin could see a long thin line of aircraft flying across the sky. "I knew that these were the pilots and aircrews who had been killed in battle, who now in their own aircraft were making their last flight, their last journey," he said (124). There were English, Germans, Italians and French fighter planes and they all moved together. Fin felt that he was

being sucked into their midst and he too began to fly with them. He was not flying his plane and he knew that all his instruments in the plane were dead. He flew on. He felt no fear and was not worried of anything. He was happy at seeing the wonderful light and the beautiful colour. The pilots in the planes were all waving to each other like friends. They moved towards a plain where there was white light all around.

Upon the plain Fin saw numerous aircrafts spread like a carpet. They belonged to the pilots who had died in the war. The pilots who were with him had begun to land their planes on the ground, but he could not. The harder he tried the faster the plane went up. Fin wanted very much to go towards the white light and join the dead pilots. When he saw that it was impossible, he tried to kill myself by diving the aircraft into the ground or jumping out of the cockpit. But something held him down. He tried to bang his head against the sides of the cockpit, but it made no difference and he sat there fighting with his machine. Suddenly he noticed that he was in a cloud - the same thick white cloud.

Fin woke up from the trance and suddenly remembered that he was ordered to spy the two French destroyers and send the message to his squadron. After doing that he came back to his camp. Fin added that once he was pulled up towards the sky into the cloud, he forgot everything that he had seen. But when he saw Paddy's aircraft burning he found himself calling out, "You lucky bastard! You lucky, lucky bastard" (128). It flashed through his mind that Paddy too would be sucked in by the white light to join the dead pilots in a world filled with peace and

happiness. Everyone heard the story in perfect silence. No one said anything about it. Their campaign was coming to an end. It was one of their last flights and Fin had to fly once more over the enemy territory. The enemy shot him and his aircraft caught fire. The other pilots asked him to jump out, but Fin refused to do anything. As his plane dived down with a thick trail of black smoke, Fin's voice came over the radio, "I'm a lucky bastard. A lucky, lucky bastard" (130).

Every pilot knew that once he is up in the sky, it is death before him. If a fighter pilot did not return in due time, he was considered to be killed. As Fin had nowhere else to go and was bound to his duty, there were only two options in his life - either return after killing his enemy or be killed by the enemy. In between he could not settle himself to see pleasant dreams about Nikki and his home. So Fin preferred seeing dreams of peaceful death. He dreamed of a place, bright and calm, with no smoke or fire, far from the fears and panics of the war ground where there would be no difference between the English and the Germans and everyone would look at each other with love. Fin wished to remain there because he believed that the pilots who had reached the place were lucky. So when his aircraft caught fire he made no attempt to escape. He wanted to go to the place of his dreams. All the pilots who heard his story knew that it was his dream. But no one disbelieved him. Deep in their hearts they experienced a fear and a joy that one day the white cloud might suck them in too.

“Someone Like You” is the story of two fighter pilots who were in the war. One of them met his friend after five years. Before the war, the friend was young and bouncing, but after the war he had become old and wise and gentle - gentle like a wounded child. He had changed so much that at first it was embarrassing for both of them to converse with each other. The war had brought changes in the pilot too. He looked like a tired, defeated man who had nothing to expect from life. Together they sat in the pub with a glass of beer each in front of them. Feeling awkward they did not speak for a while. Drawing lines on the dew of the cold beer-glass with his finger, the friend was pretending to concentrate upon what he was doing. But it was very clear that he had something to say, but yet he did not know how to say it.

At last the friend began to speak about his experiences in the war. He had bombed and killed many without ever noticing who the victims were. “It would just be a gentle pressure with my foot upon the rudder-bar; a pressure so slight that I would hardly know that I was doing it. And then I kill a different lot of people,” he said (152). He complained that his mind was filled with the thought of whom to kill and when to kill. He was very sad when he said this. Five years of constant bombing had made him a machine. His feet always throbbed for the rudder-bar, to give it a push. He felt disgusted at his own past and lamented. “Oh God, I wish I was a waiter or a whore or something” (152). Anything was better than becoming a soldier.

The pilot ordered whisky and tried to divert the attention of his friend to something pleasant, pointing to a beautiful woman sitting in the pub. On the other hand, his friend had slipped on to another incident and was deep in thought about a pilot Stinker who had a dog, Smith. The dog and Stinker loved each other very much and Stinker took his dog to all the camps. It would wait outside the camp when he flew up in his hurricane till he returned. One day the squadron got orders to fly to Egypt and the pilots got ready. But Smith was not to be found. Though Stinker searched for it everywhere, he had to leave the camp without it. Days went by and Smith was still not to be found. Having gone mad without the dog, he went into every pub and club and called out to it. At last he died in a bomb blast without seeing Smith.

The pilot felt uneasy hearing the story and by the time the story had finished, both of them had drunk a lot of whisky. Now it was the pilot's turn to tell his story. "I always do car-waiting. Just as you're going to drive off, you sit back and count twenty. It's a wonderful way to avoid accidents," he explained (156). The friend did not understand the idea of counting twenty. The pilot explained that if someone had stepped off the kerb, the car would not have hit him, because, it had started later. It was delayed because the driver was counting twenty. The friend liked the idea of saving lives. As both of them drank themselves stupid, they promised to follow the 'marvellous idea.' But strangely enough their conversation slipped back to war again. "I've killed more people than there are in this room. Wouldn't there be a bloody row if it happened

here?" the friend asked (158). The pilot felt uneasy at the thought of killing people again. He hated the place for bringing back cruel ideas. They got up and left the pub, to forget the war. They hoped that whisky might help them forget their sorrows.

The meeting of the two friends was not like the usual meeting of two friends who meet after a long time. The pilot and his friend did not show any sign of joy on their face. They sat sullen on either side of the table. They did not know whether they were happy, seeing each other alive. Anyhow they did not like to talk about war, but unfortunately whatever they talked about, would finally culminate in war. They had not seen life these five years. It was only war over their heads and they did nothing else but bombing and killing. They began their conversation by numbering the people they had killed and felt sad that none of them were their personal enemies. They had been doing it as a routine - a slight pressure of the foot on the rudder bar to shower bombs, and there was no emotion left in their minds for the victims. They tried to deviate from the war to Stinker and his dog, but there again the story ended in bombing and killing. The story also taught them that there is no place for love in war.

Five years of war had taught them more about life than they could learn in a lifetime. They repent for what they had done and therefore wish to save lives. Though the car-waiting idea was a drunken one, they got immense relief from it. They were happy that they could save at least one life. But how much ever they tried, war remained in their mind

and brain. Seeing the beautiful woman, the pilot remembered that he had killed many beautiful women. The friend suddenly wished to bomb the pub and kill the mob. Thus everything reminded them of the war. Disgusted with their own evil thoughts, they tried to run away from it. They drank and drank to forget it. But the evil of war had gone far beyond the war field, into their minds and killed them too.

In "Only This" a mother waits for her son who has gone to the war. She waited all alone in her cottage, which stood in the corner of a big field. The field was not ploughed because of the war. Like all the other villagers, the mother stayed inside her cottage all day, fearing that the warplanes might fly past any time and shower bombs. The night was calm and the mother slipped off to sleep. Then from far away, there came a deep, gentle rumble, which grew louder until the sky filled with a great noise, which did not stop. The mother had been even in her sleep expecting this noise. She opened her eyes and waited. The rumbling came near and the sound shook the whole village. The villagers shivered, for they knew that soon there would be a battle and bombs would be showered on them. Everyone stopped in order to listen. The mother had gone pale with fright. She thought she heard her son's voice calling out to her from the farm. She walked to the window and looked at the sky. "Oh dear, God keep you safe," she said aloud (145).

The mother and son had lived a quiet life in the farm. The son would work in the farm all day and call out to her for supper. While having his food he would talk to her about what he had been doing all

day. The mother would sit near him lovingly watching him eat. But then the war came. The son joined the force and the mother was left alone in the cottage. He had sent her a photograph in uniform with a pair of wings on the left side of his tunic. It was a smiling photograph that one would like to send to one's mother. But the mother could not find solace looking at it. She feared the danger lurking behind it. She realized that it was not easy having one child. "The knowing all the time that something might happen. And that if something did happen, then you too would be dead" (146).

The night did not look beautiful to her any more. Her fear became stronger and she felt that she must see her son. As she sat down in her armchair and closed her eyes, she saw her son sitting in the cockpit. Twice she called to him, but there was no answer. Then the longing welled up within her and she could stand it no longer. He heard her call and smiled. She was relieved that he was safe near her but suddenly the sky filled with searchlights and bombers and through the thick smoke she saw her son's aircraft catching fire. He was sitting calmly, concentrating on his machine. Then came the explosion with a blinding white flash and flames devoured the whole aircraft. The mother became panicky because her son was still sitting in the cockpit. She ran to him braving the flame, took him by the shoulders and asked him to get out quickly.

The boy's head had fallen upon his chest and he was unconscious. The mother tried to pull him out of the seat. But his legs were tangled around the wheel and there were bundles around him, which she could

not undo. “Suddenly all the strength drained out of her body. She fell down on top of him and began to cry as she had never cried before” (149). At last both of them were thrown into the fire. The vision ended. The mother was sitting in the armchair with her eyes closed. Then from the south a rumbling noise came. The planes were coming back from the south and the air was filled with the noise and the singing of the pilots. But the mother did not move. She had been dead for some time. The mother was like many others who had lost their sons to the war. For long years, they would wait for their sons and then intuitively realize that those who have gone to the wars never come back alive. The bombers flying past her house told her time and again that her son would not come back. As the end of the story suggests, there might be her son among the singing pilots who were coming back after the war. But if he came back alive, it would be his turn to find his family and dreams shattered.

“Katina” is the story of a group of RAF pilots and their effete struggle to save a young Greek girl. The pilots were camped in Greece and the small Greek village was getting ready for the spring. Suddenly one afternoon the Germans rushed in and bombed the village. Many people lost their houses and ran helter skelter pouring water over the fire. Amidst the fire and smoke one of the pilots, Peter, the pilot saw a small girl sitting on a heap of ruins. She was staring vacantly ahead with blood oozing out from the left side of her face. Peter and Fin took her to the doctor in their camp. After two days the girl, Katina, nine years

old, could talk but the pilots needed an interpreter to translate her Greek. She said that her family was there under the ruins on which she was found sitting. Now she had no one left.

Gradually Katina became a member of the camp. Fin tried teaching her English words: "I don't know whether he made much progress, but I do know that once he made her laugh and that was a wonderful thing for him to have done," the narrator of the story recollected (87). The next day there was a terrible fighting and one of the planes with Sandy the pilot in it was bombed. The pilots returned to their camps and Katina who was waiting outside the tent began to count the planes. She had counted them when they took off and now she tried to ask about the missing one. At that moment the sky suddenly filled with German messerschmitts and the pilots ran to the trenches. Fin caught hold of Katina and dashed. She fought like a tiger all the way to the trench and when Fin let her go, she ran back to the field. Katina stood right in the middle of the field, with her legs astride, looking up at the Germans as they dived past. She was shouting at them, but the noise was great and one could hear nothing at all except the engines and the guns of the aeroplanes. All were taken aback. "I would not have done that, ever; not even if I was crazy," Fin said (89). That evening Katina became a member of the Squadron.

Shortly afterwards the pilots had to move to Athens and Katina went with them. Fin had managed to get her a dress. For the next three days nothing happened but news reached the camp that the Germans were

preparing for an attack. The next day German messerschmitts circled overhead and the RAF pilots went up in eight hurricanes. They were asked to fly every available hurricane over the city of Athens in order to show the inhabitants how strong the RAF was so that they could stay without fear from the enemy. One of them stayed with Katina in the camp. Eighteen hurricanes flew above the roofs of the houses and the streets. Some people looked up but none of them waved because they were already resigned to their fate. The pilots went back to their hangars and minutes later German planes swarmed down and shelled out bullets. The pilots who were inside found no place to hide and so dived under a wooden table. "I don't feel safe unless I'm under a table," Paddy said. But Fin answered, "I never feel safe" (94).

After a brief fight, all the messerschmitts went back except one, which had crash-landed. When the RAF pilots caught the German pilot a small boy who shivered with fright, Katina stood close by, looking at the face of the German with hatred in her eyes. The Germans continued to bomb and the RAF lost many hurricanes. One day they lost Peter too. He was the only man who laughed and cracked jokes in the camp. The pilot who shared the tent with Peter felt his presence that night. In the meanwhile, the fighting had become tough and the RAF knew they would lose. They had only fifteen hurricanes and were to fight against two hundred German bombers. Back in the camp, the remaining pilots were standing around counting the loss.

Katina sat down with tears rolling down her cheeks. But she was not crying. Fin tried to talk to her gently and quietly forgetting that she did not understand English. The next day the pilots had to move to a little field ten miles away to hide their remaining hurricanes in an Olive grove. Two rollers for the planes to land had flattened the field. In the morning the Greeks from the nearby villages came to the field in groups and gathered the heather and bracken and scattered it in the field. The pilots understood that the villagers were trying to help them by camouflaging the field so that the Germans would not spot the camp easily. The villagers were showing their gratitude to the pilots who were trying to save Athens. But orders came to the camp to leave the Olive grove. The pilots were also asked to destroy the rollers so that the Germans would not get them. The two huge rollers were charged towards each other across the field and the army men jumped aside before they collided. There was a great crash and the Greeks who were scattering heather stopped their work and looked up. They trembled with fright and everyone ran back to the village. The pilots were helpless. They wanted to tell them that they were sorry. But it was no use. Bewildered and frightened they ran back to their homes.

The camp moved on to another olive grove and Katina went with them. She kept them hopeful. At night Fin wrapped up the child in a large flying suit and gave her a flying helmet for a pillow. The pilots watched her while she slept. She seemed to them the only light in their camp. They did not want to lose it. The next day they were asked to take

their hurricanes to protect an important shipping move. All of them were near the olive grove taking out their planes and Katina was inside the camp. Suddenly as if from nowhere a great number of Messerschmitts circled overhead and began to bomb. The pilots left their Hurricanes and ran to the trenches. The Germans then began to concentrate on the Hurricanes and one by one the planes were set to fire. The noise was terrible and bullets splattered everywhere.

Hearing the noise Katina came out of the tent. She ran towards the mass of blazing aircrafts. She stood in the field and looking up raised her fists at the planes that flew past her. One of the German pilots saw her and turned towards her. spurts of flame came from his gun and the child fell down. Forgetting the danger, the pilots swarmed out of their trenches and like a crazy mob ran towards the little girl who lay motionless in the middle of the field. Fin and another pilot carried her quickly to the trenches. Her leg was soaked in blood and blood spurted out from her chest to her white dress. "Her face was white as the snow on top of Olympus" (106). Katina had left the pilot friends forever. They stood silent. The hurricanes were still burning and the pilot saw the burning hearts of Greece in the deep red flames. As he stared into the flame, the brightness diffused and in the soft yellow light Katina's face appeared. She was standing calm and quiet looking up into the clear, blue sky. The front of her dress was stained red with blood.

Katina was the only solace of the pilots. She did not know their language but their silent communication was one of love and sincerity.

Within a few days she became close to their hearts. She waited for those who went up in their aircrafts and it was a very different experience for the pilots. No one had ever waited for them in the camp and no one expected them to come back. So more than saving their lives, each of the pilots made it a point to go back safely to the camp to Katina. She had come like a glowworm into their camp and the little light and warmth she gave was enough to keep them alive. Unlike the pilots she exhibited her anger and protests boldly. The pilots felt that her blazing eyes had more heat and fire than their bombs. They could not help but admire her valour. They secretly agreed that she did something, which they could not. But they could not save her life. She had done so much for them and in fact her final act was a sacrifice.

Everyone in the camp felt sad but was not bold enough to protest. They had seen many deaths and were forced to accept Katina's death as fate. When the pilots flew up, no one was sure that they would return. Peter's hurricane was bombed. He was forgotten. Paddy was killed and no one lamented. They had trained their minds not to pine over the dead. Thus Katina also had to be forgotten. The pilots felt sad that they had unknowingly frightened the Greek villagers. The simple folk had seen too much of the atrocities of war that they did not know what to believe and what not to. Every sound frightened them. The rains poured down mercilessly and the mountains looked mockingly down on the puny creatures who fight and fight forever, all the time knowing that they were the losers. "I had a feeling that they were laughing at us, laughing at the

smallness of our numbers and at the hopeless courage of the pilots” the pilot said (87). All the pilots secretly believed that every night the mountains crept forward towards them and one day they would push the camp into the sea. Fear had filled their minds and they could not eat their food. They had a hollow feeling in their stomach, but they brushed it aside saying that it was good for the bowels. But the fear stayed.

Bull the pilot shot down five German planes but he was proud that he had not shot a single pilot. He let them all escape in parachutes. But a few days later when he went on patrol, the enemy did not show the same consideration. He was shot down but no one in the camp was shocked. They never expected love and gratitude from the war. Each one waited for his turn to face death. Katina who did not know the philosophy behind life and death fought with all innocence and sincerity. She did what she could for her friends. The evil that had spread beyond the boundaries of the war field laid its fiery hands on Katina. The enemies did not consider her a child. To them she was their enemy. The RAF pilots who tried to curtail this evil intention were pathetically defeated. They could not gain the confidence of the villagers or thank them for their help. They could not save Katina too. A small Greek child offered Fin a flower and he did not know what to do with it. The evil of war had drained them of tender feelings. But Katina taught them a lesson. They saw her face looking into the clear sky for a bright tomorrow. There was no hatred in her eyes then and the pilots seemed to be reminded of the saviour with his sacred heart spreading peace to the

world, when he saw the vision of Katina with blood stains on her chest.

“Yesterday was Beautiful” is the story narrated by a pilot who crash landed in a remote island in Greece. Having sprained his ankle, he looked around for help but could not find anyone around. The buildings and houses were all devastated by the German bombers. There was no noise anywhere, which made it seem as though the place had been dead for a thousand years. It was then that he saw an old man sitting near a water trough. When the pilot called out to him, the old man looked up with eyes that were as vacant as that of a blind man. It was the aftermath of the terrible bombing the Germans had done the previous day. The villagers were terribly shocked and the pilot felt that he should prove his innocence. “I am Inglese - I am an aviator who has been shot down and jumped out by the parachute. I am Inglese,” (109). The pilot was not sure the old man had heard him. The poor man seemed to be talking to himself. “The Germamanoi, they come over all the time. They will come again today. I do not understand why they came to us” (109).

The pilot tried to avoid the question, because he himself did not know the answer. He wanted to know if any villager owned a boat, which would take him across to the main land. “Joannis is the one here who has a boat,” the man said (109). The pilot wanted to meet Joannis but the old man did not answer him for a long time. At last he said Joannis was living in the house nearest to the water. But his house was not there any more. The Germans had destroyed it. The old man suddenly lost himself into thoughts and murmured. “Ever since he was a boy, Joannis had a

boat. His boat is white with a blue line around the top” (110). The pilot was impatient and the old man pointed out to a house nearby where Joannis’s wife Anna lived. He also added that Anna had lost her daughter in the bombing.

The pilot knocked at the door of the house and a woman opened it. She had the same expressionless face as that of the old man. She led him to Anna. The pilot was taken aback seeing the fire in Anna’s eyes. Revenge for the Germans burned in her eyes and she cried out:

Soon they will be here. Perhaps tomorrow they will be here. But I do not care. Do you hear me Inglesus. I do not care when they came in there will be nothing new. They have already been here. Every day they have been here. Every day they came over and they bom bom bom and you shut your eyes and you open them again and you get up and you go outside and the houses are just dust - and the people. (111)

The pilot stood there listening to everything. Anna wanted to know how many people the pilot had killed, but he could not answer the question. “Kill them all. Go and kill every man and every woman and every baby,” she said softly (112). The hidden menace in her voice disturbed the pilot. She promised that she would kill the first German she saw. The pilot did not know how to react. He confessed that he and his force could do very little to lessen their agony. He reminded her that he had come to meet Joannis. She got up and led the pilot to the door. She pointed to the old man he had met, sitting near the water trough. ‘There he is. That’s him, Joannis,’ she said (112).

As the title suggests, yesterday was beautiful for Joannis and Anna. They had a house, a boat and a daughter. They lost everything in one day and the evil of war left different emotions in them. Joannis was very proud of his boat and without it he considered himself lost. He had lost his mind and the hope to live. He did not want to be the Joannis without a boat. He was left with no emotion, no anger for the enemy, even unable to face his wife's rage. He sat on the stone outside the house as if waiting for the German bomber to kill him. On the contrary, Anna did not choose defeat. She would not rest until she had killed at least one German soldier. She hated the Germans not because she knew anything about the war that was going on above her head. She was aware of only her personal loss, and she could not understand why the Germans chose her village. She was too simple-minded to know that she was one among the millions of sufferers and victims of war. Her anger had reached a dangerous level and her small weak body shivered with rage. The pilot felt himself insignificant before her. He had killed many and will continue to do so. But he could not promise Anna to kill a German for her. Even though he wanted to help, Anna knew that any other force was helpless before the Germans. The evil of war had killed the man in him long before, and so he could not say a word of solace to the woman. The evil of war, which is far beyond the intuition of man, had killed every soul in the village. The old man in Ernest Hemingway's short story "Old Man at the Bridge" is as desperate as Joannis, because he had to cross a bridge to get away from the artillery, which had

camped in his village. His simple-minded agony was to leave behind two goats, a cat and four pairs of pigeons. In the same vein he wondered why a war should ever perturb his peace for, "I was only taking care of animals" (*The First Forty-nine Stories* 78).

"Beware of the Dog" is about the heroic effort of a pilot to save his squadron from his enemies. The pilot was flying his spitfire well, with his right hand on the stick and his left leg on the rudder bar. "I'll be there in half an hour when I land I shall switch off my engine and say, help me to get out," he said to himself (131). He needed help to get out because he had lost his right leg in a bomb blast. The canon shell had taken him on the thigh just above the knee. The amputated piece was in the cockpit below his seat and when he saw it, he felt as though it was something that did not belong to him. But he felt no pain or fear, and decided not to bother about it. He wanted to present it very casually to his girlfriend Bluey. "I've got a surprise for you. I lost a leg today," he would say (132). He ensured himself that he would continue to do everything that he had done till then. He would drive and cut wood and take walks.

While he was thus trying to put energy into himself, he felt sick and giddy. His head kept falling on to his chest, but he did not forget that he was flying the spitfire. He tried to read his altimeter but the dial blurred and he could not see the needle. He knew he had to land quickly before he lost consciousness. He decided to jump out of the plane. Below he saw a vast white sea of cloud and thought it to be the English

Channel. Unfastening his belts, he jumped out. He fell faster and faster and the world reeled around him: "The whole world was white and there was nothing in it. It was so white that sometimes it looked black and after a time it was either white or black" (133). Slowly he dozed off and when he awoke, he was in a room, lying on a bed. The medicines on the table told him that it was a hospital. He tried to recollect what had happened to him and suddenly remembered his lost leg. He touched his right knee and found that it was bandaged. A nurse came in and told him that he was in Brighton, all safe and sound. Though he had lost his leg, she said that the doctor would fix him another.

A little later the doctor came and informed him that they had sent messages to his squadron and they would arrive any moment. The pilot was relieved and lay on his bed trying to listen to the various sounds outside. He heard the noise of an aeroplane in the distance. He lay listening to the sound: "Suddenly he jerked his head sharply to one side. Anyone who has been bombed can tell the noise of a Junker 88" (136). He was puzzled. A German pilot would not have the nerve to fly his plane over Brighton alone in daylight. He rang the emergency bell near his table. When the nurse rushed in, he frantically told her that German bombers were encircling the place. She tried to look surprised and said that she did not hear them.

In the evening, he once again heard the same sound. It worried him greatly. "Perhaps I am very ill. Perhaps I am imagining things. Perhaps I am a little delirious. I simply do not know what to think,"

(137). He tried to clarify himself by telling the nurse once more about his doubt. She cleverly brushed away his question and told him about her brother in the RAF. She was rubbing him with soap and in between exclaimed that the water in Brighton was very hard and the soap did not lather. The pilot was not ready to believe it. He remembered the baths, which he used to take at school in Brighton. He remembered how the water was so soft that it was very difficult to get all the soap off the body. They had to take a shower afterwards to clean it off. But he did not say anything about it to the nurse. That night he could not sleep and lay awake thinking of the J 88s and the hardness of the water.

In the morning his suspicions deepened and he looked around the room for some clue. The room appeared bare, cold, quiet, uncomfortable and unfriendly. He sat up and slowly bent down his body to touch the floor, and kneel on the carpet. He felt a terrible pain in the knee, but knew that he had to go on. He crawled towards the window and managed to stand up. Outside he saw a garden with a hedge. There was a board on which some letters were written in white paint. He could not read the board clearly but understood it to be French - Garde au Chien. Shuffling the words in his mind, he captured the meaning too - beware of the dog. He looked around and saw that it was a garden with a cottage and a ploughing field. He shuddered to know that he was in Vichy France and not in Brighton. In an enemy camp, he realized that the doctors and nurses were spies who were trying to keep him alive only to extract information.

The next time when the nurse came he looked at her face closely. She seemed uneasy, and her eyes moved too quickly from one place to another in the room. Her movements also were too sharp and nervous to go well with the casual manner in which she spoke. She informed him that an officer from the Air Ministry was coming to see him and to collect some report about the accident. The pilot smelt danger and did not answer her. He had already decided about what to do when questioned by the officer. He remembered the words of his Intelligence Officer: "If they get you, don't forget, just your name, rank and number. Nothing else" (142). The officer came dressed in the RAF uniform and asked many questions about the pilot's squadron. But the pilot had only one answer: "My name is Peter Williamson. My rank is Squadron leader. My number is 972457" and nothing else (143).

Peter Williamson glorified the name of every soldier. Even when he could not save himself, he saved his squadron. The evil of war had taught him so much about life that he suspected even the friendly air that enwrapped him. He did not dread the bombs, but the smile on the doctor's face. He knew that it was not out of love that they saved his life. The words on the board disturbed his peace. Nothing was said about the officer who arrived in RAF uniform. The pilot's doubts lead to the conclusion that the officer was an enemy in a friend's outfit. The evil of war had spread beyond the boundaries into the hearts of men to the extent that they could not distinguish between a friend and a foe. Suspicion and fear lingered in the air but the pilot braved it for he had

nothing more to lose in life. He knew that he would be tortured to death, but was not willing to yield. The war gradually becomes an evil beyond man's intuition. The plot of the story had been put twice to film, first in the feature *36 Hours* (1961) and later in the TV movie *Breaking Point* (1989).

“Madame Rosette” has Cairo for its backdrop. Whenever the soldiers who had camped in the desert get a break, they visit the city for mental and physical refreshment. But in the story the RAF pilots have a totally different experience. The pilots Stag and Stuffy were in Libya fighting the Italians. There were not many pilots and so one remained for long periods in the desert. They had a tough time there, living the strange unnatural life of the desert, picking flies out of one's tea and out of one's food, having dysentery and desert sores. So the pilots flew to Cairo just for a bath and some drinks. As they had not taken a bath for five months, they enjoyed lying in the warm water in the bathtub. After that they went shopping in the city, walked along the road crowded with Egyptians and Arabs and small boys with bare feet begging money from the foreigners. There was a rare, pungent, nauseating smell, which came from the gutters, houses, shops, food, people, drains, and things in the shops and from almost everything in the city.

In the meanwhile, Stuffy noticed a dark slim girl in a shop took a fancy to her and wanted to take her out that night. Stag informed him that Madame Rosette, an old Syrian Jewess, would arrange that for him because she runs the biggest brothel in the world and can get him any

girl in Cairo, provided he gives her an accurate description of the girl. Stuffy who was only nineteen, and seven years younger than Stag, had the reputation of being the finest pilot in the squadron. He was very quick with his plane, ready for any number of hours of flying and fighting. His score was fourteen Italians, confirmed destroyed. But now his concentration was only on the dark girl. To help him Stag called Rosette and introduced himself as a Colonel. The woman was pleased to get a rich customer and agreed to spot the girl out. She would send one of her pimps to locate the girl. He would offer her a big amount of money and the girl would be tempted. The customer would pay three times the money to Rosette from which only ten percent would go to the girl. Once the girl fell into her clutches, Rosette would not let her escape. Hearing all this information from Stag, Stuffy felt bad for having paved the way for a girl's ruin. But Rosette had by the time found out that the pilots were not officers and she feared that she might not get the money she demanded. She called them a few bad names over the phone and dismissed them.

To forget the unhappy incident the pilots wandered outside, visited pubs and towards the evening ended up in a place where a stage show was going on. The room was full of Egyptians sitting on crude wooden furniture. There were two fat girls on the stage dressed in shiny silver pants and silver brassieres wagging their bottom and bosom in time to the music. The Egyptians kept giving her a big hand. The three pilots were drunk and got excited seeing the merrymaking crowd. William

wanted to know why the Egyptians liked fat women. "It comes from the days when there used to be lots of famines here, and all the poor people were thin and all the rich people were well fed and fat," said Stag (64). The Egyptians sitting nearby did not agree: "No no no. Look those girls up there. Very fat; very poor. Look Queen of Egypt. Queen Farida. Very thin; very rich" (67). By the time the music had changed on the stage and one of the girls came out with a totally vulgar feat. The pilots applauded with the others because they were in a mood to enjoy anything that would help them forget their dreadful life in the desert camp.

When the programme ended the pilots did not want to leave. They reminded of Rosette, and Stuffy wanted to rescue all the girls there. Rosette's brothel was a three-storied concrete house with a hefty Egyptian standing on guard. The pilots found that she had all the characteristics of a brothel-keeper who could run a successful business. Suddenly they heard a girl's yell from an adjacent room. A door opened and a girl rushed out. Seeing Rosette, she stopped. Rosette raised her right hand and hit the girl hard on her cheek, twice. Then she came back to the pilots as if nothing had happened and began to talk about business. The pilots, unable to control their anger called her 'a filthy old Syrian Jewess' and 'a lousy old bitch' (74). She was used to trouble-making customers, but it used to be about the girls or the money. This was the first time that her customer called her names and she did not like it. She yelled the words out of her small fish mouth in one long unbroken high-pitched stream. The three pilots caught hold of her and gave her a violent

push with such force, that she could not counter attack. They ran out locking the door behind. The girls were told that they were military officers who came to register their names. Though puzzled, the girls followed them out of the house. The watchman too could not resist them and together with the fourteen girls the pilots marched out triumphant. After walking for about fifty yards the girls were informed that they were free. They bought the girls drinks and volunteered to take them home. One of the girls went up to Stag and whispered, "You are such goddam crazy people" (82). Stag felt warmth inside him.

The pilots had believed that they were the victims of war. But after seeing the pitiable condition of the city dwellers, they began to feel otherwise. In the desert, it was so fearful, lonely and disgusting that it was difficult to know what to do when they were not flying. Some pilots caught scorpions and made them fight. Some even bred them and gave them names. In the afternoons during their free time some pilots and airmen would stand around in a circle on the sand and bend down to watch the scorpions fight, exhorting them and shouting at them as people shout at boxers or wrestlers in a ring. The pilots knew that it was being savage, but out in the desert, fighting the sand storm inside and outside the camp and all the while waiting for death, one would care little for sophistication. When the pilots reached Cairo, they were stunned to see the aftermath of the war in the inhabitants. Small boys had fresh wounds in their eyes and flies buzzed around the inflammation. The pilots came to know that it was because their mothers had done something terrible

to their eyes so that they would not be eligible for military conscription.

The boys came up to the pilots and begged for money. Terribly shocked, the pilots drank to forget the agony. But they could not get rid of the putrid smell, which was spread everywhere. It was the smell of the evil of war. They tried to enjoy the vulgar dance in the pub but did not feel happy. The women folk including girls had to do the meanest work, for the wages had come down tremendously and unemployment was a great problem. So the girls were tempted by Rosette's money. The evil of war had pervaded the city beyond the control of the people. As a result the women are forced to sell their body and soul for a living. Rosette was the only person who was happy with the war. Soldiers, who had not seen a woman since the war began, flocked into her den. She added misery to their already miserable lives. War is not present directly in the story for there are no Hurricanes, no Spitfires, no bombs and not even a camp in sight. But the evil insinuation of war is always there. The pilots thought they knew all about the war, but the desperation in the boys' wounded eyes and the helplessness seen in Rosette's den seemed to be the evil of war beyond their intuition. They were not sure that the girls in their utter helplessness would not go back to Rosette's brothel. Nevertheless, they felt proud of the help they could give them and called it the 'Chivalry of the military' (81).

"An African Story" is the story of a story told by an old man to a pilot who wrote it but could not publish it himself as he was killed in

the war. Later his friends found the story in his box and they published it.

It was wartime. In East Africa, a young man heard about the war and reported to the RAF that he wanted to become a pilot because he was interested in flying. After five weeks of training he took his plane to Nakuru to view the wild life there. He crash-landed in a remote place in Kenya. There was only a little shack there and no other habitation in sight. An old man lived in it with a few chicken and a black cow. He was happy to see another human being and he began to talk of the lonely life, the lions that came in the night, the rogue elephant that lived over the hills, the hotness of the days and the silence and the coldness at midnight. Then he told the pilots a strange story that he had been waiting to tell some one. The pilot listened with awe and it seemed that the old man had unburdened his soul.

The story was about the old man, a young white man, a black cow and a black mamba. The old man and the white man, Judson, lived in two close by huts. The old man, over seventy limped while he walked. Judson feared the old man because he was strong. The old man had a dog and a cow and Judson hated them because they made noises that irritated him. One day he broke the backbone of the dog to stop it from licking its paw. "I couldn't stand the noise it made. You know I can't stand noises like that, licking, licking, licking, so I beat him," he told the old man (28). The old man got angry and patted the dog, which looked at him with tears in its eyes. He had no options but to kill it and relieve it from

pain. He wanted to hit Judson but the young man knowing the other's strength crouched to a corner. The old man vowing to take revenge on Judson walked out to talk to his cow under the acacia tree.

The old man often spent his time with the cow whispering to it the secrets he would not tell a human being. Judson hated the cow too for she made a crunchy noise while chewing her cud. "Crunchy noise like she was chewing pebbles She goes on and on crunching, crunching, crunching. Noise goes right into my head," he complained (29). The old man knew that Judson would not hurt the cow because she gave him plenty of milk everyday. The next day when Judson went to milk the cow, he was shocked. The cow had no milk. He reported it to the old man, who was not ready to believe Judson. "You lousy bastard, you stole it. I'll beat the hell out of you for this," he shouted (30). Judson was perplexed but was relieved when the cow gave him milk in the evening. But in the morning, the cow was again short of milk and it continued for a couple of days. At last the old man decided to keep watch during the night. He stationed himself at a window in his shack, with a gun and waited for the thief.

At midnight, the old man heard a sound. It was a rustling in the grass right underneath the window where he was sitting. Then he saw a large black snake, a mamba, eight feet long and as thick as a man's arm was gliding through the wet grass, heading straight for the cow. He watched and feared that the snake would strike the cow. Instead it lifted its head and then raised the front part of its body into the air under the

udder of the cow and began to drink the milk. The strangest thing that the old man noticed was that the cow did not panic. After half an hour the mamba gently lowered itself to the ground and slid back to where it came from. The old man sat there at the window unable to believe what he had seen.

The next morning Judson came to milk the cow as usual. The old man, hearing him curse the cow and the tribes for having stolen the milk, walked up to him and said, "I think it was a Kikuyu boy. I couldn't shoot because the cow was in the way. I'll wait for him tonight" (32). That night the mamba came again for the milk and the old man watched the whole scene amused. The next morning he told Judson that he could not shoot from the window and so it would be better if Judson kept watch near the cow: "You will dig a shallow trench right beside the cow. If you lie in it and if I cover you over with hay and grass, the thief won't notice you until he's right alongside" (33). Judson agreed to it but knew that he would not be able to stand the irritating sound of the cow chewing her cud. But since he had no other choice, he decided to keep watch. They sat in the shack till midnight and drank tea. The old man made a loud sucking noise as he drank his tea and Judson wriggled as if in pain for the noise irritated him. At midnight Judson laid in the trench alone awhile the old man promised to keep watch from his window.

Throughout the night Judson had a terrible time because he could not stand the cow chewing her cud. He got hysterical and prepared to jump out of the trench. But the old man's voice came from the window:

“I’ll shoot you if you get up” (36). Judson who was frightened of the old man’s gun lay there, murmuring with a gasping sound, “Please let me move” (36). At midnight the old man heard the rustling noise in the grass. When the mamba was five yards away from the trench, he called out to Judson. Judson lifted his head and was shocked to see the mamba. The snake stopped, drew back and took him in the chest. ‘Judson screamed a long high-pitched scream. He tried to stand up, but the poison threw him to the ground. He no longer made any noise’ (37). All the while the old man sat quietly at the open window witnessing the whole scene. The mamba slowly moved towards the cow and began to drink its milk. “You can have his share. We don’t mind you having his share,” the old man said quietly looking at the mamba (38).

“An African Story” is the only story in *Over to You* where animals play an important role. The story focuses on the war between two men. Though the old man had the physical handicaps of old age he had a gun to support himself. Judson shuddered before his aggressive nature. Both men hated each other and waited for a chance to pounce on one another. Judson had a phobia for sounds and hated the sound made by the dog. So he broke its bone. He hated the cow too for making a noise, but could do nothing to it because he needed milk. He wanted to kill the old man for making the irritating noise while drinking tea, but feared his gun. The old man also stayed cautious, for he did not believe Judson. Hence a fear lingered in the atmosphere. Compared to the men, the animals did not fear each other. The gentle cow willingly gave her

milk to the snake. The snake in return took care not to hurt the cow. It seemed that it had kept its poison for the human being. Unlike the harmonious existence of the animals, there was fear and enmity between the men. When the most gentle and the deadliest animal could coexist peacefully, it was a pity that human beings could not. There is an implied suggestion that the black people with their virtues and vices would have lived in peace, if the whites had not interfered. It also implies that the black could, if they tried to, wipe away their enemies. The evil of war had passed on to the hearts of men and they fight with each other. Ernest Hemingway's short story "An African Story" is about elephant hunting. David tells his father of a bull elephant with large tusks in the forest. The father hunts the animal and kills it and David regrets telling his father about it. Dahl's "An African Story" also concludes that war makes men lesser beings than animals.

War is a pervading agony in all the stories. A phenomenological study shows that it is not the war, but the evil of war that is the greater influence. The pilots presented are not mere fighters but victims of the war of which they are part and parcel. Up in the air, they become dutiful servants of the RAF and fight. In fact, they fight for their lives. They throw a few bombs on people they do not know, and come back to their camps, shed their uniforms and forget the day's work. Very reluctantly they open up their hearts to share their hopes and dreams with one another. They do not cherish great dreams and their minds do not travel beyond a comfortable home and a peaceful life.

In “Death of an Old Old Man” Charlie does not want to struggle in life to fulfil his dreams. If war would not give him a life of his dreams, he does not want a life at all. In “A Piece of Cake” the pilot dreams of a warless world where he could laugh and joke with the Germans. The war does not approve of it and he is left behind, a mere lump of flesh, forced to forget his dreams. Fin in “They Shall Not Grow Old” dreams of a peaceful death, which is forbidden to a soldier. He does not want to end up his life in fire and smoke. So strives to reach that serene world of death that he sees in his dreams. These three pilots see war as a joke, or ‘a piece of cake.’ Though they are merry, they realize that they have to fight alone for life. War has taken away the souls of the two friends in “Someone Like You.” They find themselves mere bombing machines, who have no emotion left in their hearts. Disgusted, they run away from themselves. They desire to do something fruitful to mankind, without great expectation though, for the war does not nurture blithe spirits. It lays its icy hands on everything pleasant.

The mother in “Only This” lives with the hope that she would see her son alive one day. But as the war she saw in her dreams, did not spare anyone, she became crestfallen. The mother in “Yesterday was Beautiful” has a revengeful attitude towards war. She would die only after killing at least one enemy. The mothers in “Madame Rosette” had to succumb to the cruelties of war. They preferred their sons becoming blind to seeing them dead in the war. If war has erased a whole village in “Yesterday was Beautiful” it has retarded the growth

of a whole generation in “Madame Rosette.” There are life-giving, fiery spirits like the little girl in “Katina” who came like a glowworm into the desolate life of the pilots. But they could not save her life and like cowards they accepted their fate. The pilot in “Beware of the Dog” was disabled in the war physically, but he would not let the war defeat his powerful mind.

“An African Story” points out allegorically that just as Judson, the white man, took on the black cow, the Europeans dominated the dark country. War thus cast its evil shadows on man beyond the war field. Like a mouse between the paws of a cat, man could escape from the torture of war only through death. Even when men survived the war, it was only by bartering their souls to it. In “Madame Rosette” the pilots noted that every thing in Cairo had a putrid smell, which they called the smell of war. The backdrop of war is as harmful as the evil power of war that goes beyond the war. The stories show not only an amputated world of dead bodies, wounds and blood, but also a world where men have lost their identity. Their minds are filled with selfishness, cruelty, frustration and helplessness. The war leaves the world a barren place, where no tender emotions remain. Dahl describes a similar situation in his novel *Sometimes Never*. The Gremlins who went underground during World War IV came up after the war. But they found the earth a completely devastated place not fit for living. In *Over To You* the evil of war leaves man without dreams, their souls without hope and their eyes without sparkle.

The stories of Dahl hint that in spite of all this, war will go on. When one ends, another begins and men suffer its consequences. They did not complain because war was man's creation. The war mentioned in the stories is perhaps the Second World War. But Dahl is not interested in the nature of the war or who fought the war. Like him, none of the characters comment on the war or complain about it. They fight because they are pilots. Dahl had been a RAF pilot and he had seen the war both as a pilot and as an ordinary being. He concludes that there is not much of a difference because both suffer the consequences simultaneously and equally. Similarly he does not find any difference between the RAF pilots and the German bombers. Both live and die for war. More than the casualties in the war field, Dahl concentrates on the after-effects of war in the human minds. Those who were in the war suffer, those who have not seen or heard about the war suffer, and those who know nothing about the war also suffer. It appears that there is no power greater than war – a power that could save them. The pilots at first feared the war and the killing. But gradually bombing became an everyday affair and they killed without hesitation.

War kindled the animal instinct in the pilots and they found a barbaric pleasure in killing animals and their own species. In "Madame Rosette" The pilots bred scorpions and enjoyed seeing them fight till death. When the pilot in "Someone Like You" sees a crowd, his first instinct is to bomb and kill the lot. Similar is the case with the German pilot who kills the little girl Katina. Dahl says that war is man's craving

for unbeatable power, the evil of which does not limit itself to war fields but goes beyond and spreads throughout the earth. It dwells in the hearts of men and makes them inhuman. Even while standing on the edge of the abyss, man fights for power. As time goes on as seen in the stories, evil grips him tightly and he becomes totally powerless. He retreats, a defeated man. This fall is heart-rending. Man's attitude to war is rightly stated by Francis Fukuyama in his book, *The End of History and The Last Man*: "At first the weakness of the weaker states were taken advantage of, then the weakness of the stronger states were taken advantage of" (58). Dahl shows the same attitude of man in his war stories. The weak and the innocent victims suffer and so do the strong and those involved directly in the war. Whether engaged in war or far away from it, man is always at war with one another. In the end, he finds that he has gained nothing and his losses are irrecoverable. Dahl proves that the evil beyond war is man's own contribution. Hemingway's short stories based on his experiences in the Second World War are full of violence and bloodshed and show how war puts a ban on personal relationships. Having experienced the direct impact of the war, he believes that war causes deep wounds in the human heart that can never be healed.

*Over To You* was not received well by readers, and critics were of the opinion that people did not want to read stories of a war they had just seen and dreaded. The book was published in 1945 and by then every human mind had been shattered by the war. In his stories, Dahl had

mixed humour with bombing and killing and the readers could not comprehend it. A casual tone is prevalent in the stories. Through his characters he states that man is no more shocked and he has learned to recognize war as an unavoidable fact of life. The stories reveal the truth that man is at war with himself and his fellowmen ever since his birth. Many things have happened to him and many changes have come over him and yet he continues to fight, disturbing his peace of mind. There has not been a good war and no war had ended in happiness. There is no justification for the terrible loss incurred. Dahl does not stand aloof like a seer to predict man's future. His stories are not lamentations on war. They are not odes on the death of mankind. They present the predicament of man, constantly preaching pacifism, and while carrying on negotiations to stop war, silently plan for another.

## CHAPTER SIX

### CONCLUSION: BETWEEN EVIL AND GOOD

“Things are not what they seem; they cannot be what they seem and yet with Roald Dahl they are. If your taste is for the macabre, the sick, the outrageous the unexpected, the horrifying, Dahl will give you orgiastic delight”(*Kiss Kiss*). This blurb of Dahl’s book *Kiss Kiss* published by Penguin Books indicates that evil has been his favourite theme and man loitering between good and evil is the motif of most of his stories. Evil is the hero, the villain, the tyrant and the tyrannized. But his stories are not shadowed by darkness and gloom. It is always the pleasant countryside or the warm hearth of a cottage that forms the backdrop of the stories. The characters are amiable and intelligent and not bitter pill. They have soft voices and do not engage in physical violence. Yet they are evil to the core.

The main attraction of his stories is their readability. His short stories are classics of the storyteller’s craft. They begin abruptly but gradually the strain increases as the evil hidden precipitates. The reader is mesmerized and moves along with the force. There is the fight between the weak and the strong, the good and the bad and he does not understand whether the oppressed or the oppressor will win in the end. He decides upon a conclusion but the final twist of the story completely

shocks him. At the end of the story it is found that every character is knee deep in infamy. The readability of the stories owes much to the humour in them. Dahl is neither satirical nor sarcastic. Though the stories have the elements of black humour, the tone is not pessimistic. The characters are culled from all walks of life: the painter, the doctor, the teacher, the farmer, the husband, the wife, the connoisseur, the priest, the rogue, all have evil in them. It is only the quality and quantity that differ. It is the unrivalled treatment of evil in his stories that makes Dahl's stories popular.

Evil has been a fertile subject for men of letters and it has taken various manifestations down the ages, and moulded and remoulded to fit into several frames. Dahl like any other writer is fascinated by its dark and hideous nature. The word 'evil' is the subject of extensive theological and philosophical speculations. Many theories have tried to answer its riddle by regarding evil as being a kind of good in an imperfect or immature way. Dahl has experimented with the different phases of evil in his stories. Though he does not specifically point out to any theory that had influenced him, the evil in his stories have far fetching connections. Zoroastrians of Persia called the evil element 'Ahriman' and believe that there is a struggle between the powers of light and darkness with neither having supremacy. This idea is seen in Dahl's stories, where the characters struggle between the powers of good and evil in them, and with the outside world. The winner cannot be predicted and everyone seems to win and lose in his or her own way.

In contradiction to the dualistic theory stand the monistic theory of Brahmanism as described in the Kena Upanishad, which Aurobindo points out in his work *The Upanishads*. It explains that the good and bad in the phenomenal world come from one original being 'Brahman.' Aurobindo again says in his book *The Life Divine Book II Part II* that according to the law of 'Karma' the two values 'good' and 'evil' are supposed to have an equation between them (812). Dahl considers good and evil as two values in man, and points out through his characters that the balance between good and evil in the self makes a person successful in life. Leibnitz in his Theodicee says that "evil is only evil because it is not seen in relation to the rest of the universe. When evil is looked at this point of view nothing is evil, but good" (*Encyclopedia Americana* "Evil" def.) Dahl's stories support this theory, for it is hard to distinguish between good and evil in his stories. His idea of evil goes in tune with what the Holy Bible and the Holy Koran have to say about evil. After the great flood God says. "Never again will I put the world under a curse . . . I know that from the time he is young his thoughts are evil" (Genesis 8:21). In the Koran evil is 'Iblis' the obsessor who tempts mankind towards it. Dahl shows through his characters that man himself being evil is tempted towards more evil, because of his selfishness and greed for power. Evil does not come from anywhere outside. It is innate in man. Thomas Aquinas of the Dominican school says that evil is an opponent superior in power and intelligence. It cannot be wiped away

from the world because it will prove to be “a violent interference with the laws of nature” (*Encyclopedia Britannica* “Evil” def.). Dahl through his stories agrees to this theory and adds that man will not destroy evil because he himself has a strong affinity towards it. He is trying to fathom the depths of evil and his beliefs are in tune with Georges Bataille, who in his book *Literature and Evil* says: “Evil seems to be understandable but only to the extent in which Good is the key to it. If the luminous intensity of Good did not give the night of evil its blackness, Evil would lose its appeal” (119).

Evil is found in varying degrees in all the stories of Dahl. Bringing together thirty-nine short stories, evil in the characters is studied with a phenomenological view. Evil is dissected and the stories are distributed under four banners, according to the evil in the characters: The Evil Beneath, The Evil Behind, The Evil Beside and The Evil Beyond.

The Evil dealt with in the second chapter “The Evil Beneath” lies beneath the conscious mind of the characters. When man is dissatisfied with himself and discontented with his life, he resorts to evil to win in life. There are specific reasons for how evil was kept suppressed beneath his exterior mind and what provoked him to bring it out. Usually it is not aimed at hurting anybody but as evil is evil, the result is often disastrous. Albert in “Royal Jelly” gave his baby girl the royal jelly produced by bees in order to save her from death. But instead of giving her a small doze, he gave huge quantities of the jelly and the baby gradually turned

into a bee. It was out of desperation that he did it, but it was also because of his devilish love for bees. The baby which had refused to take in a drop of milk, as if fascinated by the evil, gulped down the jelly and yelled for more. Albert who himself had consumed a large quantity of the jelly was transforming into a bee.

The writer in "The Hitch hiker" gave a stranger a lift in his car, without foreseeing the danger. The hitchhiker who was evil incarnated led the writer into trouble. The writer was very much under the spell of the evil man that he did not resist. At the end of the journey the writer had learned how to affect a balance between evil and good. The hitchhiker too could moderate his evil by accepting goodness. Drioli in "Skin" tattooed his wife's face on his back only because he loved his art and wanted to immortalize it. It stayed on his back and in his heart for years and he was very happy. But when evil came up in the form of good food and luxury, he decided to sell it. He did not know that by doing it he was sacrificing his life too. Lexington in "Pig" was ignorant of the meat-eating world. Though he was a vegetarian, the evil instinct in him made him crave for meat, which dragged him to the slaughterhouse. When he was slaughtered like a pig he learned the worth of life. In a way, it was the taste of pork that led him from ignorance to experience and he learned a lot about life in an hour.

George in "Georgy Porgy" had understood many things about sex and virility at a very early age. But he had to become a priest when he grew up. The secret craving for female company and the pressure of the

priestly robe suffocated him. He had to fight the evil outside and inside him. At last, defeated, he was branded a sex maniac and taken to a lunatic asylum. The elderly woman in “The Landlady” killed animals and men and stuffed them for company. Billy who was unfortunately lured into her ghastly boarding house became her victim. Even though he had other options he was tempted by the boarding house, which looked very hospitable. He did not know that it was filled with dead bodies. Carlos in “Man from the South” always offered a Cadillac to those who bet with him. Instead he demanded the little finger of the person. The young American who was fascinated by this evil barter was destined to lose both the Cadillac and his little finger. He did not know that Carlos did not even own a Cadillac and whether he won or lost, he would surely chop off the other’s finger.

Knipe in “The Great Automatic Grammatizor” resorted to evil ways to become a famous writer and a powerful figure in the literary world. He did it with the help of his newly assembled machine, Grammatizor. His greed for power made him buy all the writers and contaminate the whole world of literature. Claude and George in “Vengeance is Mine, Inc.” played the role of rogues for money. They made money by baser ways of bravery like punching the nose of the columnists and putting rattle snake in their cars, and so on. As their greed for money increased, the evil they did too increased in degrees and kind.

Rummins in “Ah, sweet Mystery of Life” knew the secret of birth, which he practised in his farmyard. He knew how to produce heifers by making the cow stand facing the sun while mating. It became even more evil when he practised it in his own life. He wanted only sons and he knew how to make use of knowledge for the same. Edward in “Edward the Conqueror” killed a cat for the fear that it would become a member of his family. His wife Louisa believing that the cat was the re-incarnation of Lizst, the musician, was immersed in attending to it. Jealous and possessive, Edward wanted to get rid of the cat, but the evil one left its mark all the same. Henry Sugar in “The Wonderful Story of Henry Sugar” though basically evil minded, practised yoga to learn the secret of seeing through a solid matter. He wanted to use it to read through the playing cards in a casino and make money. But yoga changed the texture of his evil mind. He repented, but not by putting an end to his felony. He visited every casino in the world, and made money by looking through the cards and cheating people. With the money he got, he established orphanages all over the world.

The characters seen in the twelve stories resorted to evil out of helplessness. When the world around is evil to the core, they are tempted to abide by such ways to succeed in life. They had learned to compromise on ideals for success. Some did it out of utter desperation. Some others did it to fulfil their crazy cravings. Yet others did it to satisfy their greed for power, money and fame. Anyway all of them had the pleasure of winning at least once in their lives. And they realized that

only evil could help their endeavour. At the end of each story no character appears free from evil. They are content and do not regret the evil ways they came through. It was not just the evil world outside, but the evil instinct within them, which was kept hidden beneath their conscious minds, that tempted them to evil. It was in them from the very beginning, kept beneath their exterior lives. It was success that mattered and they embraced evil to harm others without knowing that it would harm them too.

The chapter, "The Evil Behind" analyses the unhealthy zest for sex in Dahl's stories. This chapter includes four long stories with sexual themes from the collection *Switch Bitch*. Sex is used as a deadly weapon to inflict pain on innocent victims. Oswald in "The Visitor", a flamboyant, amorous and adventurous middle-aged bachelor, had weird fancies like collecting porcelain, walking sticks and various species of arachnida. He could talk about anything under the sun in a very fascinating way. He could give lectures on music composers and their mistresses. He could explain the sexual passions of women and talk on their creative and carnal passion. He could speak about diseases and their symptoms; and women of all ages flocked around him. Each night he would chose a woman and spends a night with her. He did not marry because he could not confine his attention to just one woman. He was confident that he could recognize the symptoms of any disease, but unfortunately he failed to detect the leper woman who shared his bed. In spite of a deep knowledge of women and their ways, he fell into the

neatly woven trap laid by three of them. His blind belief that all rich women are beautiful and clean failed him. He was left all alone in the Sinai desert with the symptoms of the dirtiest disease given to him by a rich and beautiful woman.

Oswald, the protagonist of the story "Bitch," met an olfactory chemist, Henri, who knew the formula of a perfume that would trigger men reeling after women. Henri wanted to make money out of this knowledge while Oswald was fascinated by the idea of the evil behind it. They named the perfume Bitch which when sprayed on a woman would make the man inhaling it become a beast and go out of control and ravish the woman on the spot. Henri prepared 10 cc of the perfume and the experiment was done successfully on a boxer and Henri's female secretary. She, in a wild passion, poured the whole bottle on her body and Henri inhaling it died on the spot. Oswald decided to trick the president of the U.S.A with the last drop left. But it rebounded and Oswald inhaling it found himself standing stark naked before a giant like woman thus humiliating himself.

Vic, in "The Great Switcheroo," studying the features of women made a theory that a woman with a tiny crest of skin at the top of the lower lip is a nymphomaniac. Thus he noticed that his friend Jerry's wife Samantha belonged to the group. He had a lecherous eye for Samantha but did not have the courage to approach her. At last he lured Jerry into a switcheroo, and exchanged their wives for a night. After a lot of planning and rehearsals one night they entered each other's bedrooms

without arousing suspicion in the women. Jerry who had always fallen a victim to Samantha's fierce ways was happy with Mary. But Vic was the loser because Samantha pounced on him like a tigress and he could do nothing. The real shock came to Vic when Mary his wife declared that she had not enjoyed sex till the previous night and that she wanted it every night.

Anna Greenwood in "The Last Act" had gone out of her senses when her husband Ed died. Her doctor prescribed another marriage but Anna was against a widow enjoying sex. She kept a razor ready in the bathroom cupboard to kill herself. Her friend forced her into a job and Anna came back to normal life. But loneliness haunted her and it was then that Conrad entered her mind. She was in love with Conrad during her school days but had left him for Ed. Conrad had not forgotten what Anna had done to him twenty-five years ago and blamed her for all his failures in life thereafter. However he gave her the hope that he would stay by her. Anna who was not aware of the revenging attitude in Conrad believed him and was willing to have sex with him. On the other hand he kindled her sexual desires step by step with the idea of torturing her. He rudely reminded her that she was not young enough and had the symptoms of a sterile woman. Anna who had been eagerly waiting for the sexual finale collapsed, and ran for the razor. Conrad walked away as if nothing had happened. He was immensely pleased that he had used his aberrated knowledge of gynaecology to destroy her.

The characters in the four stories are well informed and are specialized in certain areas of knowledge. They are proud of their knowledge but do not utilize it for the well being of anyone. They use it to satisfy their dubious and evil desires and do not care if it hurts anyone. In the case of many characters, evil rebounded and hurt them. Yet some like Conrad in “The Last Act” and the family of Aziz in “The Visitor” escape the wrath of the evil they commit. Dahl concludes that an impartial judgment of man and his actions is often impossible. No character is branded as definitely good or bad; everyone has his share of evil and good in him. The thoughts of the characters are brimmed with sexual undertones and their unhealthy enthusiasm for sexual fulfillment brings their doom. Sex here is not accompanied with love. It is a deadly weapon that proves fatal to both the tyrant and the tyrannized. The sinner is not always punished and the virtuous not always rewarded. The innate wish to go back to their primal stage to surface their animal instincts and live a free life is seen in most of the characters in spite of their sophistication.

The evil dealt with in the fourth chapter “The Evil Beside” concentrates on the fight between the weak and the strong in thirteen stories of Dahl. The winner resorts to the evil hidden beside his apparent existence. The weak ones may be physically weak but their strong mental calibre is veiled. On the other hand the strong hope to rule over the weak but their over indulgence in evil and desire for power and selfish gains make them weak and thus bring their downfall. In “William and

Mary,” Mary who had been a submissive wife for thirty years, decided to take revenge when she found the letter William left. William had died leaving his brain and eyes alive in a basin, which was preserved in a neurosurgeon’s lab. Mary decided to avenge the helpless ‘William’ lying in the basin. Mrs. Foster in “The Way up to Heaven” had a pathological fear about being late, a reason that would often culminate in hysterics. When her husband pestered her for the same reason it added to her agony. She suffered it for thirty years but one day when she noticed that he had got stuck in a lift, she left him there to die. Basil in “Neck” was content with his sculptures and paintings until Natalia came into his life. She pestered and humiliated him and he bore it with patience. She flirted with other men before his eyes. On one such occasion, when she happened to squeeze her head through the hole of a wooden Henry Moore sculpture, he seized the chance, took a saw and began to cut the wooden sculpture. No one suspected whether it was an accident or not.

Mary Maloney in “Lamb to the Slaughter” had lived only for her husband. One day Patrick told her that he was going to leave her. It was a shock and a pain for her and more so because she was with child. Impulsively she killed him with a frozen leg of lamb. Next she put on the role of a grieving widow and called for the police. While they were searching for the murder weapon, she cooked the leg of lamb and served it to them. In “Swan” Peter, a frail boy with a dauntless spirit excelled the hooligans, Ernie and Raymond in many knowledgeable matters. So

they decided to harass him physically but Peter survived their torture with incredible determination. At last out of utter desperation, and as if helped by an evil spirit, he flew like a swan. The five-year-old girl in *Matilda* had read voraciously and knew more than any adult would have known in a lifetime. But her parents and her headmistress Trunchbull considered her stupid and she was forced to take revenge on them. Some unseen power came to her aid and she could move objects with her eyes. With it she eliminated all her enemies.

Lionel in “Nunc Dimittis” was a connoisseur of art. He heard the rumour that his girl friend Janet had called him a big bore, which he knew he was. Instead of a straight fight, he sought the help of another painter, Royden, to humiliate her. Royden in his special way of painting female portraits, first in the nude and then with the dress, painted Janet and gave it to Lionel. Lionel scraped away the dress and exhibited Janet in her under garments. She was shocked but very treacherously took revenge by sending him poisoned food. In “The Mildenhall Treasure” Butcher unearthed ancient Roman silver worth millions of dollars from a farmland. According to the British law the treasure belonged to him, but another farmer Ford, in the pretext of collecting relics, managed to keep every bit of the treasure in his custody. He spent many years on the silver polishing and cleaning it, but was caught red-handed by an archeologist. Ford could convince the court that he was innocent and so was exempted from punishment. But he got nothing in compensation for the treasure.

Buggage in “The Book Seller” had a rare bookshop of his own but made money by sending false invoices to unknown customers. When the obituary of a rich man appeared in the newspaper, Buggage would immediately send an invoice to the widow listing all the books the man had bought but had not paid. The list usually contained banned books and erotica and the woman, to save the family name from stains, would immediately send a cheque. One such invoice came back and with it came the widow and the police. The deceased had lost his eyesight in a war and could read only in Braille. The irony of the situation worsened when Buggage stood wonderstruck at the word ‘Braille,’ a word he had not even heard of. Botibol in “Dip in the Pool” noticing that the sea was rough knew that the ship in which he was travelling would reach its destination late. So he bid at a higher rate in the auction pool. But when the sea became calm the next day he knew that he would lose the auction. He wanted to win, and the only way he could think of was making the ship go back. The only method was to jump overboard into the sea and prevent the ship from sailing. Unfortunately his evil calculations did not work because the woman who was the sole witness to the fall thought that Botibol was taking a swimming exercise. He was left in the sea gasping for breath.

Claude in “The Champion of the World” was a poacher who knew various tricks in poaching. But when his friend Gorden suggested drowsing the pheasants with sleeping pills, Claude became greedy. With the forty-one pills he had, he caught a hundred and twenty pheasants,

hiding a quarter of a pill in raisins for the birds to eat. But very soon the pills gave away and the pheasants flew away. Mrs. Bixby in “Mrs Bixby and the Colonel’s coat” met her lover every month, without her husband’s knowledge. It went on for eight years. One day the lover left her for good leaving her a costly mink. As she could not take it home she left it at a pawnbrokers’ without leaving her address for the sake of secrecy. The next day Mrs. Bixby was embarrassed to find that her husband was given a neckpiece from the same pawnbrokers. She was more shocked when she saw her mink worn by her husband’s secretary. Arthur and Pamela Beauchamp in “My Lady Love, My Dove” planned to bug their guests, the Snapes, who were to come down to their place to play bridge. Pamela made Arthur make a microphone and hide it in the guest bedroom. That night Pamela lost her money in the game but she was shocked when she heard the Snapes talk about a secret code. They had used the code while playing the game to cheat her. Pamela immediately decided to learn the code.

In the thirteen stories there is obviously the fight between the weak and the strong. In the first six stories, the weak are harassed, tortured and humiliated by their strong enemies. They waited patiently with their hearts full of revenge for the right time to strike. The strong ones who were not aware of the intention of the weak were not cautious. The evil beside the calm existence of the weak characters help them like a weapon to strike their oppressors. For the two children, evil comes in the form of super human powers and help them fight their enemies. The

focus of the next seven stories is on the strong ones who meet their doom because of their greed for power and money. They are proud of their crooked minds and use the evil beside their apparent decent existence. One by one they fall, when the oppressed ones attack them from unexpected corners. The weak ones are mentally strong, with stealthy movements and predictable dash. Though they win cannot be called the strongest. They are clever and so it is the survival of the cleverest. The strong are weak and the weak are strong in their own way and the strength in them vary according to the quality and quantity of evil kept beside their minds.

The ten stories dealt with in the fifth chapter "The Evil Beyond" contemplates on the evil caused by war. The evil here does not limit itself to the war ground but goes beyond the intuition of man, into his mind and leaves him soulless. More than the wounds inflicted on the body, the evil of war leaves deep wounds in the heart of man. Wars end, but the wounds never heal. The fighter pilots in the stories are presented as ordinary human beings who are victims of the war. Nobody escapes from the wrath of war. It fills the world with darkness and the human mind loses its light. In "Death of an Old Old Man," Charlie the fighter pilot sees dreams of a peaceful life after the war. Years before when the war had begun, he was afraid to see dreams. But when the war had come to an end, he thought more and more about his hopes and wishes. He went up in his Spitfire, but was shot down by the enemies. He crash-landed in a muddy pond. He did not struggle to survive because he knew

that even if he survived death, his dream would not be fulfilled because the enemy would catch him.

In "A Piece of Cake" the pilot tried to view war as a piece of cake. He flew over a troubled area in his Gladiator and was bombed. He fell down in a desert and lost his consciousness. Many visions of a peaceful life passed his mind. In one of the visions he thought that he was leading a very harmonious and peaceful life with his enemy pilots. The RAF pilots were painting their planes with funny pictures and jokes for the German pilots to see. They hoped that the Germans would laugh at the pictures and forget about bombing. When his visions ended, the pilot found himself in a hospital. His face was completely distorted and covered with bandages. He could see nothing around and understood that what he saw was a dream that could never be fulfilled. In "They Shall Not Grow Old" Fin, the pilot saw weird dreams of death - peaceful death, the thought of which was beyond the dreams of a pilot. Yet he fancied that he was taken into a world where everything was peaceful and bright. The place was filled with soldiers who had died in the war. Fin thought that the soldiers there were lucky and he too wished to stay there. So after some days when his Hurricane caught fire he did nothing to save himself. He wanted to reach his dreamland of peaceful death.

In "Someone like you" two friends who met had been in the war, met after five years. But they were not happy to have survived. The war had made them lifeless machines. Whenever they tried to talk about something pleasant, the conversation ended up in war. Sadly they

recognized that they could not escape from it. To forget their woes they drank and tried to do something for the benefit of mankind. In “Only This” a mother waits for her son, who had gone to the wars. She had forgotten to live since he went. Long years of waiting had almost killed her. At last she died broken-hearted. In “Katina” a small girl who was saved by the RAF pilots became the light of their squadron. She gave them the urge to live. She hated the German planes that had left her an orphan. She showed her protests and the pilots noticed it with awe. But however hard they tried, they could not save her from the enemy.

In “Yesterday was Beautiful” a pilot crash-landed in a Greek village to find that the war had left the place lifeless. The few people who were left behind, were half-dead. Joanis had lost his boat and was completely lost. Anna who was saved at the war pledged to kill the enemy. The pilot who was helpless viewed the war with indifference. In “Beware of the Dog” a pilot lost one of his legs, while the enemy bombed his spitfire. He lost control and crash-landed. When he regained his consciousness, he was in a hospital. The doctor and nurse were very kind and informed him that the place was Brighton. But the sound of German planes aroused suspicions in him. He dragged himself to the window and looked out and saw a French board. Immediately he understood that he was in Vichy French, in enemy camp. The officers tried to get information from him but he would only say his name and number and nothing else. Thus he saved his squadron from the enemies though his life was in danger.

In "Madame Rosette," two pilots Stuffy and Stag went to Cairo to take a bath and drink whisky. There Stag saw a girl and desired to go out for dinner with her for which he had to seek the help of Rosette, a Jewish woman, who was running a brothel. Rosette made money during wartime by supplying girls to the soldiers. The girls who fell into her trap could not escape. Seeing this Stuffy and Stag are disillusioned, and they decide to free all the girls from Rosette's brothel. In "An African Story" a pilot writes the strange story that occurred in a remote part of Kenya. An old man loved animals while Judson hated them because, they according to him made an irritating noise which disturbed his nerves. So he killed a dog they owned and that vexed the old man. Both the men hated each other but they were afraid to strike each other. One day the old man found out that a mamba drank his cows milk every night, straight from the udder. The old man took this as an opportunity to kill Judson, and asked him to hide near the cow so as to catch the milk-thief. Judson did so not knowing that the milk-thief is a mamba. Obviously, the mamba bit him and then went to the cow and drank her milk. Judson died on the spot.

War is present as a persuading agony in all the stories. But it is not the war but the evil of war that is significant in the stories. The pilots presented are not mere fighters but victims of the war of which they were part and parcel. The evil of war kills them, chokes their dreams, and suffocates those who wait for them in far away places. Those who are active in the war suffer, those who are aware of the war

also suffer and those who are unaware of the war also suffer its impact. The stories do not show an amputated world of dead bodies, wound and blood, but a world where men have lost their identity. The war leaves the world a barren place where no tender emotions remain. In spite of the dreaded experience, wars go on. When one war ends another commences and men continue to contribute their services. Men do not complain because war is their own creation. As seen in the stories, war is man's craving for unbeatable power, the evil of which does not limit itself to war fields but goes beyond and spreads throughout the earth.

A phenomenological study of evil in the stories proves that it is an all-pervading force that exists in the minds of the characters. It is this instinct that rules and moulds them. But a reflexive thinking shows that the evil does not come from outside. The 'reduction' and 'bracketing' of evil can be categorized thus: the evil beneath, the evil behind, the evil beside and the evil beyond the minds of the characters. The characters are bewitched by the spell cast by evil. They are aware of this instinct in them and use it to succeed in life. There is no one who is free from it. Only the quality and the quantity differ in each. Thus evil is a reality, which has a strong power over them. Consequently, they unleash the evil in themselves and in the end meet with their doom. The Buddha explains the evil in man in the book *Buddha's Teachings*: "As a man who has no wound on his hand cannot be hurt by the poison he may carry in his hand, since poison hurts not where there is no wound, the man who has no evil cannot be hurt by evil" (Marcaro, Juan 25). Some balance the

evil with the good and manage to lead a safe life. Yet others, who are evil to the core, surprisingly leave the scene without any harm. So, Dahl is not trying to differentiate between the evil and the good, because he knows that there is no character who is purely evil or purely good. There is a combination of both in every one. He does not sort out the evil in order to punish them. It is a rule of the world that vice should be punished and the virtues rewarded. But in Dahl's stories, this does not happen. He suggests that the evil men and the women in his stories should recognize their evil and amend their ways. It is better for a person to become his own judge. He proves through his stories that no man can run away or erase his own evil. Many characters put on the mark of good social beings. But they cannot pretend forever. Many happenings and failures in their lives make them bring out their real evil self. They realize that the only short cut to success is to resort to evil.

Whether the end does justify the means or not, is not Dahl's concern. He is aware that some human actions are intrinsically evil, and some actions are intrinsically good. As a matter of fact the overwhelming majority of human actions are neither good nor bad, but morally neutral. However a number of people are evil and they can emerge from a hidden existence as and when necessary. *The Encyclopedia of Forbidden Knowledge: A Journey Through the Occult World* states:

‘Dark gods’ was a phrase popularized by the novelist D.H.Lawrence. By its use he intended to suggest that

powerful forces lurked in the unconscious mind of each and every human being. These dark gods, said Lawrence, had been, in a sense, buried – but they still lived on. They have been banished from the awareness of everyday consciousness by the rational scientific mode of looking at the world, which characterizes western society. But they still exist, said Lawrence, and are capable of erupting into activity with terrifying suddenness. (8)

Similarly many of Dahl's characters wish to stand on the razor's edge and do crazy things. He places them in certain situations and watches their reactions. They are restless and are not pleased with the life they lead. They have the pressure of the society, family and other institutions, which are keen in moulding a good citizen. The animal instincts with which they are born are pushed back to some dark corners of their mind. Too much suppression increases the pressure in their mind. A sudden urge to free themselves from all bondage seizes them and a chance happening in their lives brings out all the fear, anger, hatred, revenge and such emotions in great force. Many are branded abnormal because they cross the borderline of accepted culture and sophistication. The characters have a boundless zest for life that the conventions and mandates of society fail to control them. They are appalled by the power of evil in themselves, and often get burnt in its fury. They understand that evil is the strongest power. They fear it for it proves to be a force beyond their control. In Sophocles's *Oedipus Rex*

the chorus tells Oedipus, “What evil spirit leaped upon your life . . . A leap beyond man’s strength” (*The Complete Greek Tragedies* 80). But there are characters in Dahl’s stories who balance their evil with the good in themselves. So instead of trying to keep away from evil in vain, the characters temper it with virtue and lead a harmonious life. This Dahl considers the most successful way to follow in life since they are born to be bewitched.

There is the fight for survival and power in almost all the stories. There are no straight fights and the weaker victims resort to shy, clever and evil ways. They win not because they are physically strong but because they are clever. They focus on the weak point of the strong and strike hard. The blow comes from unexpected corners at the least expected moment. So the victims fall. It is not the survival of the strongest but the survival of the cleverest. So the fittest is the cleverest of all. Dahl’s characters come from all walks of life, but there is no specific difference between them. The hero, the villain, the wife, the husband the painter, the farmer, the hitchhiker, the rich, the poor, the saint, the juggler, all have their share of evil. The evil in them is so dense and venomous that the reader is liable to suspect whether man can be so diabolic. But as the stories proceed thoughts mature with reasoning and the readers understand that the characters who represent mankind can become the devil when the need arises.

Dahl a great reader of human minds is also a great observer. He makes his character do things that he could believe they would. He

neither stays with them nor discards them. All the time he remembers that he is a member of the group called homosapien. The stories have no ghoulish scenes or murders done in the dark that might repel the reader. He sees his own truth in the characters. There is something dubious in all the men and women and when the mystery unveils, some abnormality is found in the most normal person is. This is exactly what Aurobindo says about man's transformation: "The crust of the outer nature cracks, walls of the inner separation breaks, the real mind begins to unveil itself. It reaches its full stature and becomes strong for him to hold. It comes all armed, with extra strength and force and destroys everything around" (*The Life Divine, Book II Part II 847*).

Dahl points out that his characters are hypocrites who pretend to be virtuous. They have to be viciously clever to succeed in life and be powerful. In this mad run for success, the evil is not always punished. The good do not always get applause. In fact, in the stories, evil and good are too interconnected that one cannot be differentiated from the other. Evil for one can be good for another:

What we call dark or evil, seems to have a truth of its own and to be entirely content in its own type, because it has a sense of a satisfying power of its own being, a complete adaptation of all its circumstances to its principle of existence. It enjoys its own consciousness, its own self power and its own delight of being, says Aurobindo. (*The Life Divine Book II Part II 782*)

Dahl's themes are unique. Moreover he makes the motif so full of fantasy that it becomes confusing. The readers fail to believe the story as an established truth or a fictitious truth. Themes like tattooing, poaching, painting, music, reproduction, knavery, yoga, neurosurgery, gynaecology, apiculture, psychology, cooking, olfactory and sex theories show the phenomenon of evil balancing between truth and fiction. Whatever the theme, he is adept at it, taking care not to annoy or bore his reader. They appear weird and precarious but the book is not set aside until the last twist in the story is completely read. Almost all his characters are crazy, but the queer whims and fancies of his farmers, painters, scientists and teachers make the reader laugh and think. After the final sinister twist, the reader recognizes a world, which he too hoped to reach, but was afraid to. A good observer and a good listener, Dahl notices everything around and his eyes rest on things that a normal eye would not have even noticed. He has a wide range of acquaintances with people belonging to the different strata in a society and has a fancy for the queer mannerisms in them. He has at length explained diseases, their scientific names, symptoms and remedies. He talks about arachnida, bees, bulls and cats. He discusses gynaecology, psychology, neurosurgery and the olfactory cells. He knows the merits and demerits of sex education and can mould theories pertaining to the connection between sex and the lower lips of women. Thus, there is no topic Dahl has not dealt with except love.

Concepts of true love as a selfless and sacrificing emotion is not present anywhere in Dahl's stories. He might have purposely kept away his characters from the world of love, to show mankind what they lacked. The darkness in their lives, he proves, is due to the absence of love in them. Evil rules over good because his characters do not let the brightness of love enter their soul. They are afraid of it, for love is truth and light. They do not want to appear in the light and reveal themselves. In the mad run for power and survival, they do not realize the loss of this emotion called love. They are well aware that it needs a lot of courage and greatness of mind to preserve it and as seen in the stories, the characters have neither of these. They have become dangerously practical-minded and have concluded that nothing can be gained by love. The men and women in the stories are content with their material benefits and success, and they do not bother about what their soul lacks. No good relationship is shown in the stories like the one between a husband and wife or between two friends or between neighbours. All the characters are confined to their own compartments, and they purposely stay away from relationships and responsibilities.

Dahl highlights themes of fear, revenge and sexual violence. Fear is there in almost all the characters. In *Over To You*, the fear of an unknown disaster going to befall them grips the victims. The weak-hearted characters fear losing their fight with the strong. In the strong, it is the fear of losing power. Some do not know what they fear. Nevertheless, the constant fear of something is seen in the characters,

and they find solutions through evil means like revenge. Here revenge is opposed to valour and truthfulness. Neither villains nor murderers with dangerous weapons wait in the dark. Hefty figures, dark shadows, frightening sounds and shrieks do not accompany the scenes. Sex, leaves behind the strong impression of man having perverted attitudes. As Henri points out in "Bitch," "Man still retains the ape-like characteristic of jumping on any right-smelling female he runs across" (*The Collected Short Stories* 418). Kautilya in *Arthashastra* strictly says that a man should be punished if he has a sexual relationship with a woman without her consent, even if she were a prostitute (487). In the Bible, Moses declares: "If a man is caught having intercourse with another man's wife, both of them are to be put to death. In this way you will get rid of this evil" (Deut. 22.22). In Dahl, two men consent to sleep with each other's wives, without the women knowing it. The characters hoped to break the conventions that bind them from running after the women of their choice. But Dahl does not give them equal justice.

Oswald in "The Visitor" who needs a woman every night meets his doom. But George in "Georgy Porgy" who has not slept with a single woman also meets with disaster. Henri in "Bitch" who did not think of having sex using his improvised perfume died, without getting the final award. But Oswald who misused it came out unharmed. Conrad in "The Last Act" leads Anna to a forbidden world of sex and yet he walks away a victor, while Anna had to kill herself. Dahl does not evaluate the immoral and amoral traits in the characters in order to arrive at a moral

truth. He presents the true condition of a human mind, and in a humorous way insinuates that sex without love will hasten man's fall.

Dahl deals with the negative qualities of man. All the same, his stories are not repulsive. He has an intelligent and healthy sense of humour that balances a trivial situation with the philosophy it implies. Stephen Potter in *The Sense of Humour* suggests that humour should be cultivated through one's individuality, so that he can see things in a lighter way. It should be closely associated with wit. Thus Potter divides humour into unconscious humour, which is a remark to think, not speak and conscious humour, which deliberately criticizes (63). Even though Dahl's chief concern is man he does not criticize him through his characters, but helps him to recognize himself.

The stories have close similarities to black humour but there is no lamentation that all hopes are lost. There is always a suggestive tone, that, if the characters wanted to, they could mend their ways for a promising tomorrow. His stories help those who struggle with low self-esteem. Like Dahl, his characters too do not run away from life. Even under extreme conditions of life, they try to come out of it successfully. They do not kill themselves. One exception is Anna Greenwood in "The Last Act." But more than a suicide it was a well-planned homicide.

Dahl does not belong to any school or does not follow any theory or doctrine. No special techniques are used in the stories except the final twist in the tales. They are not morals. The flow of the story suddenly takes a deep turn and all the calculations of the reader prove to

be wrong. A word or a sentence may completely astonish his predictions. Dahl's craft is at his best here and his humour finds its grand finale in the twists. When he tends to explain grave topics at length, he does it in the form of dialogues without hindering the enthusiasm of the reader. He does not have any psychological approach towards his characters. They are left to lead their lives as they please. Dahl also has the reader in his mind. He knows when his reader would frown, and raise his eyebrows. He is always ready with an answer. He takes the reader along with him in his stories to give him a better understanding. Dahl does not strain with his story. His publishers forever found him full of ideas. If he were given a surprise denouement, he would make a story leading to it. It might be strange, yet true to life.

Another peculiarity in Dahl is that he is not particular about the names of his characters and the titles of his stories. There are many characters named Mary, George, Claude and Peter. Though they have different stories to tell Dahl does not seem to see much difference in them. He paid very little heed to their apparent differences. He at times omits their Christian names too. Usually catchy titles play an important role in making the story popular and appealing. Dahl does not seem to be very particular about his titles and most of them are prosaic and take the reader straight to the story. But there are some titles that show the professional writer in Dahl like, "The Way Up to Heaven," "Nunc Dimittis," "Dip in the Pool," and "Ah Sweet Mystery of Life." The titles in *Over To You* like "Yesterday was Beautiful" and "Someone Like You"

have the tragedy of the war in them. Though men and women are considered equal in the stories, children are special in Dahl. He respects them, as he believes them to be more intelligent and compromising than adults. Almost all his children are orphans, who suffer from flogging teachers and ignorant guardians.

Dahl can be accused of having a cynical approach towards humanity. But the Observer says, "This repeated serving right of villains never quite softens the hard boiled even cynical strain in Dahl's version of humanity, and it is that ruthless unsentimentation that is Dahl's greatest attraction" <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roald\\_Dahl](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roald_Dahl)>. Dahl does not try to change the world. He understands that the world had been thus from time immemorial and its inhabitants cannot be forcibly changed. Like his characters, man is well aware of what he is, and does not want to change, as long as he is successful in life. He swirls in the whirlpool of uncontrollable sexual desires, runs madly after unattainable power and is never tired of betraying his own species. He might reach higher realms of civilization but always carries the secret wish to discard his sophisticated attires. He can give vent to his emotions, so that it need not be forcibly suppressed. Dahl's stories suggest that evil is not a vice and goodness not a virtue. At times man has to do evil, to be good and be good for evil intentions. "To make an immoral intention successful, some of its weapons must be moral," says Tagore in *Sadhana* (59). Dahl does not conclude with a moral. The appeal for love and brotherhood is a pacifist Utopia and he does not give the hope that the world will

become a better place to live in. Every individual is given a chance to exhibit his emotion in Dahl's stories. Dahl is with them throughout, never resisting them, never encouraging them and never criticizing them. He mixes evil and good according to his own formula and pours the mixture into the stories. Thus the stories turn out very true to life. The readers are not allowed to stay outside and peep into the stories, instead, they are taken into it to experience the essence of life. While a smile passes their lips, a punch follows from behind, sending a shudder down their spine. Dahl does not unveil man. Something is always left unsaid. Like his characters, man is unfathomable for he has the power of evil in him. He is not Evil; he is Human, born to be bewitched by evil, which is unpredictable, unavoidable, uncontrollable.

Dahl's approach towards evil is unique and he lets his evil characters lead their lives as they please. The object of Dahl's experience may be in question. The fancy or imagination surrounding the objects of his experience may also be in question. The perception of his experience is definitely in question. However, the fact remains that he is conscious of evil everywhere – beneath man's exterior, behind man's knowledge, beside man's existence and beyond man's intuition.

*We are different from other animals -  
thanks to God and Devil.*

*Nietzsche*

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