

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.