

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>. 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.