CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

I

The Short Stories Then and Now

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

Stories developed further when Africans were imported as slaves to the different parts of the New World. These stories developed, showing different versions of civilization and barbarism. The same topics continued, written and rewritten, with revolutions, science and technology interspersed. Thus the genre became an important part of the twentieth century literature. The publishing of journals and magazines increased the quantity and quality of the short story. Since then, the output has remained unabated.
During the Renaissance and after, writers tried their skill in narrative fiction or novella. Addison, Steele and Voltaire used it as a decorative appendix to essays. The next upsurge came as a part of Romanticism. Germany, France, Russia and America took the initiative. In Germany, during the nineteenth century, the short story became a highly developed form. Theories were charted by Johannes Klein in *Geschichta der Deutschen Novella* and by E. K. Bennett and H. M. Waidson in *A History of the German Novella*. In France, the form was first established between 1829 and 1831, with the magazine publications of Honor de Balzac and Theophile Gautier. Its real development came with the output of Alphonze Daudet’s *Lethe de Mon Moulin* (1869), Gustave Flaubert’s *Trois Contes* (1877) and the Maupassant collection in the 1880s. In Russia, it was Alexander Pushkin who initiated the form. The stories of Nikolai Gogol, the stories of Ivan Sergeyevich Turgenev and Anton Chekhov were inspired by the ideas of humanism and social justice. Gogol was the first Russian to use satire in short stories.

Among the nineteenth-century-English-language writers, the Americans considered the short story interesting. The history of the development of the form is parallel to the development of the country. It took some time for the short story to be clearly identified in America. The American colouring started with Irving Washington’s “Rip Van Winkle” and was taken up by Nathaniel Hawthorne, Edgar Allan Poe and Herman Melville. Poe’s works owe much to the
nourishment of the form. He is also called the inventor of the
detective stories, "The Murderers in the Rue Morgue" being the first.
His concept of a short story is relevant even today. It was with Mark
Twain that humour entered the short-story form. Even though his
stories were not as well constructed as his novels, they had a topical
relevance. Stories like "The Mysterious Stranger" (1916) and "Was it
Heaven? Or Hell?" (1902) show an open but shrewd mind, sincerely
concerned with man and his dreams. Henry James's stories "The Real
Thing," "The Author of Beltraffio," and others, prove that he has taken
up the genre with a definite purpose.

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

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

Writers in Latin America too began to publish stories. Their history, heroes, national myths, political persecution, religious indoctrination and struggle for independence, became the foundation of their stories. By the second half of the nineteenth century, realist and naturalist topics, and towards the end of the twentieth century, scientific themes began to invade the form. The upcoming writers reflect Latin American literature in the journals that took interest in publishing the short descriptions of various societies and countries. It was with Esteban Echeverria’s “The Slaughter House” that the short
story became prominent. Ricardo Palma was an influential figure in the development of the style and structure of the form. Horacio Quiroga and Romulo Gallegos were to improve upon the modern stories and the latter was the first to gain international acclaim. Jorge Luis Borges was prominent among Latin American writers because his stories are metaphysical riddles, giving preference to violence. With Gabriel Garcia Marquez, the short story introduced a new trend called Magic Realism.

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

Yet another name that took the short stories to great heights is that of Italo Calvino. The three stories in his collection *Under the Jaguar Sun* concentrate on how the world narrows down to the mouth, nose and ear - to the senses of taste, smell and hearing. John Steinbeck the storyteller of the American Southerners has, to his credit, many famous stories, the best being “Chrysanthemums” which has been placed among the best in English literature. His collection *The Long Valley* (1938) depicts the suffering Americans. Guy de
Maupassant, the master storyteller, is known for his compressed style. As Branden Matthews says in his critical work, *The Philosophy of the Short Story*, “The writer of a short story must be concise, compressed; a vigorous compression is essential” (22). Maupassant achieved instant fame with his very first story “Boule De Suif.”

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

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

II

Roald Dahl: His Life and Works

Roald Dahl was born to Norwegian parents in 1916. His father, Harold Dahl, having run away from home, spent the rest of his life in Britain. He lived a happy life with his wife and children in Britain for he believed that that was an ideal place for a family. The children knew Norway only through their mother, Sofie, who told them Norse myths, stories of tall giants and fairies and witches. These stories remained in Roald’s mind as fantastic word-pictures, even forty years after, when he wrote stories for children. Harold Dahl, a great lover of art and literature, was a great influence on Roald. When his mother, Sofie was pregnant, his father would take her for walks along the countryside. He called them glorious walks for he believed that when a pregnant woman observed the beauty of nature, the tender emotions experienced would get transmitted to the mind of the unborn child, who would grow up to be a lover of beauty. Roald too imbibed this antenatal nourishment. Harold Dahl’s irresistible wish was to educate his children in English schools, because he sensed that there was something special in English schools, which had compelled the inhabitants of a small island to become a great nation and a great empire, and to produce the world’s greatest literature. However, in
course of time, Roald disagreed with his father’s concept, because the school days were for him, the bitterest part of his life. Later he surmised that the strict disciplinary schools supplied nothing special to its children, nor helped them become better human beings.

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

Schoolmates describe Roald as a tall, soft-faced boy, not particularly popular. He used to spend his time reading, and is said to have read the entire works of Dickens, braving the torture of his prefects, during the first winter at Repton. The idea of the fight between the strong and the weak, where the latter had their silent ways of protest, was often depicted in the stories he wrote years
later. The Cadbury’s Company the chocolate-eating session offered a memorable incident of his childhood. The Company would bring in their new products and serve them to the boys for their opinion and appreciation. “Too subtle for the common palate,” was one of the comments Roald remembers to have written in his autobiography Boy (148). He used to dream about the Company’s long white rooms, where there were pots of chocolate, fudge and other delicious fillings and people moving about mixing and tasting the products. Thirty-five years later, reproducing these dreams, he wrote Charlie and the Chocolate Factory.

Not all the teachers were floggers, according to Dahl. One of them introduced him to paintings and photography which he developed and for which he received awards and medals from various photographic societies. This period of education was an eventful phase of his life and a fertile subject for his stories. He could retrace them, without any deep-felt sentiment. It was from school that he got the primary lessons of life and the first themes for his stories. He visualized that schools were meant to civilize and sophisticate people but he realized that behind the sophistication existed evil in an inexplicable measure. He knew that neither formal education nor informal discipline could erase evil from a human mind. Though most of Dahl’s characters are sophisticated, they are evil minded. In a mild but ingenious way, he points out that the cultured folks are more fiendish than the native ones.
After school, Dahl joined the RAF as a pilot officer at the age of twenty. Why he joined the Air Force or whether he was forced to, is not known. He could not have been forced to. It was neither patriotism nor an escape from school. It could probably be the desire of a youngster, who took a fancy to flying Hurricanes. At a very early age, he saw life and death, both in the war ground and beyond it. He heard many stories from soldiers who had crash-landed in remote places and learnt that man is the same everywhere. He had some personal experiences, including a Luger being pointed on his head by a German convoy, and his nose being smashed and pulled out. Having been badly wounded, he had to leave the war and go to Washington for recuperation. It was then that the writer C. S. Forester met him to collect some interesting news about the war, for publication in *The Saturday Evening Post*. Dahl jotted down a few points and called it, “A Piece of Cake.” Forester published it without changing a word, and wrote to Dahl, “Did you know, you were a writer!” <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roald_Dahl>. Thus Dahl’s career as a writer was underway. *Going Solo*, Dahl’s second autobiography, narrates his experiences as an RAF pilot. Dahl says: “A life is made up of a great number of small incidents and a small number of great ones” (1). Here, he appears to be a very balanced man, taking life and death with a light heart. His autobiographies are entertaining with non-stop narrations and beautiful illustrations by Quentin Blake. Blake could fathom the depth of Dahl’s humour and
so he carried out the illustrations for the stories for children too, with tremendous success.

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

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

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

It was at this time that Patricia gave birth to their third child and only son, Theo. It was while making up fanciful stories for his own children that an idea flashed his mind: to write stories for children in general. And out came “James and the Giant Peach,” a story he tried and succeeded with his children. It showed the wonderful world inside a peach where James, the hero, stayed with a ladybird, a grasshopper, a centipede and an earthworm. Reviewers focused on the fantasy element in the story and the book was predicted to be a classic. In spite of all the hot debates about the
cruel depiction of James's aunts, millions of copies were sold in the UK alone. So Dahl decided on another story for children, "Charlie and the Chocolate Factory." However, the book was published only in 1964, because his son Theo hit by a taxi car, developed severe brain injuries. Dahl, with the combined efforts of two friends, an engineer and a neurosurgeon, spent several months making a valve for draining out the fluid from Theo's brain. Theo made a surprising recovery. The Dahl-Wade-Till valve was used for many years by doctors, until it was excelled by more sophisticated equipments.

Dahl had to suffer tragedies time and time again. He witnessed a few deaths including his father's suicide. So whenever his wife and children suffered, he had the strength of mind not only to overcome them but also to find out remedies for the same. When his eldest daughter, Olivia, developed an incurable type of measles, he was trying hard to find a remedy. When Patricia suffered three strokes in rapid succession, he set up a programme involving long hours of speech therapy. Dahl could fight misfortune with all his strength because he had witnessed his mother putting up with losses courageously. When his father had died, the burden of the family of five children fell on his mother. She had also lost her daughter almost simultaneously. Dahl could not forgive his father for running away from life, while he admired his mother who, without collapsing, shouldered the responsibility of the family.
Charlie and the Chocolate Factory was a tremendous success with its fantastic characters and humorous situations. Nevertheless, it contained the germ of a moral, asking children to shun television and read books instead. This vexed a few personalities like Eleanor Cameron, an author for children. The accusations against him were phoniness, tastelessness, lack of literary value and wishful thinking. But children loved the book as they found in Dahl, a man who stood on his knees so that he could see them better. They were honoured because Dahl considered them more intelligent and sensible than adults. Millions of copies were sold around the world and is still one of the best-selling books. The readers of The London Times chose the book as the most popular one for children of all time. It was adapted into a hit movie, by Dahl himself under the title, Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory in 1971. He did not write another book for many years. The sequel to Chocolate Factory titled, Charlie and the Great Glass Elevator was not successful. Dahl decided never to write a sequel again. But as Patricia was ill and under treatment, he needed money, and so wrote the script for the James Bond film, You Only Live Twice, and the screenplay for Chitty Chitty Bang Bang, adapted from an Ian Fleming story.

In 1974, a new anthology of stories Switch Bitch was published. The book contains four long stories, all of which deal with sexuality. These sex-based themes were perhaps meant to attract attention more so, because of the changes in his personal life.
Anyway, by the mid-seventies, that is, in his 40s, his marriage with Patricia was crumbling, because of the trespassing of another woman, Felicity Crossland. Dahl met Felicity in 1970, when Patricia had brought her home for dinner. He was so enthralled by her, that he developed a personal relationship with her excluding Patricia. A journalist describes the situation thus: “Imagine the scene. You meet at work, get on with her rather well and invite her to come home to meet your husband. She and he take one look at each other and WHAM! You are out of the picture” <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roald_Dahl>. Dahl and Felicity got married in 1983, right after his divorce from Patricia. Simultaneously, the press released different opinions about Switch Bitch having characters with no morality. The 1980’s found Dahl very productive in his writing.

In 1975, Dahl published a book for children, Danny the Champion of the World, a continuation of his short story “The Champion of the World.” After Danny, Dahl published his collection of six stories, The Wonderful Story of Henry Sugar and Others in 1977. There too he had children who were very strong characters, questioning the baseless philosophies of adults. In 1980, he published his full-length novel, My Uncle Oswald, a novel ripe with sex and copulation. He wrote another book for children, George’s Marvelous Medicine which did not gain much popularity, as it was banned on the grounds that it encouraged children to kill relatives. But his book, The Big Friendly Giant (BFG), a best seller, received tremendous
applause as it was of a milder tone and full of humorous scenes. Moreover, the bond between the orphan Sofie and the giant was a special attraction for children. The Witches, Dahl’s next book was very popular though it was controversial. Children loved the boy in it who said: “It didn’t matter who you are or what you look like so long as somebody loves you” (190). The story was made into a successful film starring Angelica Houston in 1990.

Matilda, which came out in 1988, was again a roaring success. It was Dahl’s least fantasy-driven book, and the young girl Matilda with her strange powers went straight into the hearts of children and adults alike. The cruel headmistress, Miss Trunchbull, representing every adult who considers himself right and the children wrong, became the topic of conversation for children. The same year, Dahl won the “Children’s Book Award” from the Federation of Children’s Book Groups for Matilda. The other books of Dahl include The Magic Finger (1966), The Enormous Crocodile (1978), The Twits (1980), Two Fables (1983), Rhyme Stew (1989), Esio Trot (1990) and The Minipins (1991) all meant for children. The Night Digger (1970) and The Lightning Bugs (1971) were the two other screenplays he wrote. His stories are collected under various titles like Twenty-nine Kisses from Roald Dahl (1969), Selected Stories (1990), Tales of the Unexpected (1979), Taste and Other Tales (1979), A Roald Dahl Selection (1980) and The Way up to Heaven
and Other Stories (1980). The only stage-play he wrote was The Honeys, which was staged in New York in the year 1955.

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

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

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

It is widely accepted that Dahl’s stories have influenced J. K. Rowling in writing the Harry Potter series. The Sunday Times acclaims on the blurb of *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone*, the first of the series, published by Bloomsbury, that the story being full of surprises and jokes could be compared to Dahl. The experiences of the orphan, Harry, his cruel relatives and the realization of his strange magical powers bear close resemblance to Dahl’s *Matilda*. The witches and wizards with their secret meetings, Animagus, Potion making, and so on were seen before in Dahl’s controversial and popular book, *The Witches*. Dahl’s way of seeing the fantastic world and his way of attributing strange powers to children are there in Rowling too.
Harry Potter, the orphan was treated very cruelly by his relatives and it was at a desperate moment that he breaks the glass in the zoo and lets out the Boa Constrictor. He also understands that he can talk to snakes. Peter in “Swan” and Matilda in *Matilda* come out with their superhuman powers, when they can no longer endure the harassment of their enemies. Matilda moves the glass of water by just looking at it and Peter flies like a swan. The grand meeting of the witches in *The Witches* is also seen in *The Philosopher’s Stone*, where the witches and wizards of Hogwarts, School of Witchcraft and Wizardry meet to talk to their students. Hagrid, the half-giant in Harry Potter bears close resemblance to the Giant in *The Big Friendly Giant*. Both are soft hearted and are often found shedding tears. 

Aragog the Tarantula in the second book *Harry Potter and The Chamber of Secrets* talks as majestically as Miss Spider in “James and the Giant’s Peach.” In *Harry Potter and The Prisoner of Askaban*, Harry blows up Aunt Marge like a balloon and sends her up flying up in the air. Matilda in a similar way sends Trunchbull, her headmistress flying. There are many such spells used in the sixth book *Harry Potter and the Half Blood Prince* where Harry uses ‘Levi-corpus,’ the non-verbal spell and makes a man stand upside down. In *The Witches* the Grand High Witch casts a spell and a witch is “cooked like a carrot” (70). Rowling named such spells ‘Unforgivable Curses’, Avadakedavra being the deadliest. It is with this spell that Voldemort kills Harry’s parents (*Philosopher’s Stone* 45).
Harry’s Godfather Sirius Black is killed with the same spell (The Order of the Phoenix 710). Dumbledore, the Headmaster of Hogwarts too meets his end by this spell (The Half Blood Prince 556). There are ‘Transfiguring Charms’ by which Victor Krum, a student is changed to a shark (The Goblet of Fire 434). He did it to save his schoolmate. Peter in “Swan” transformed to a swan to save himself. Many others in Rowling transform themselves to animals, and she names it ‘Animagus.’

Potion Making is another theme dealt with by Rowling and Dahl. In The Witches, Formula 86 Delayed Action Mouse-Maker Potion is prepared and the recipe is explained in detail by the Grand High Witch: “A gruntel’s egg, the claw of a cruberuncher, the beak of a blabbersnitch, the snout of a groblesquirt, the tongue of a catspringer, a roasted alarm clock, a boiled telescope and the hair of the victim mixed together” (89). The potion changed the boy and his friend to rats. In The Chamber of Secrets, Hermione narrates the preparation of Polyjuice Potion. “Lacewing flies, leeches, fluxweed, knotgrass, powdered horn of a Bicorn, shredded skin of a Boomslang and the hair of the victim mixed together” (125). It changed Hermoine to a cat. Many other potions like love potions, sleeping potions, lucky potions, etc. are described in detail by Rowling. In addition, the sixth book The Half Blood Prince concentrates mainly on potion making.
Thus Rowling is able to give a different colour to magic and witchcraft, much to the taste of children. Though the diction and style are not as sophisticated as Dahl’s Rowling has created in the Harry Potter series, an atmosphere with an undertone of humour as seen in Dahl’s stories for children. Both the writers deal with the fight between good and evil and Rowling too shares Dahl’s attitude. “There is no good and evil, there is only power. Those who are weak to seek it . . . resort to evil” is the motto of Lord Voldemort (The Philosopher’s Stone 211). Though Voldemort resorted to evil, he could not find the power he wanted. In the last book of the series, Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows, he meets his end. But Harry who wins over evil with goodness in him, gives the Dark Lord a final chance to escape from evil: “Think and try for some remorse...it’s your one last chance. It’s all you have got left. . . try for some remorse”(594). But the power of evil was so overwhelming that Voldemort had to succumb to it. Snape who had both good and evil in him too meets his death, only because he could not keep a balance between them.

Dahl is often clubbed with O. Henry for the twist in his tale. Dahl’s “The Landlady” and O. Henry’s “The Furnished Room” have a similar narrative, though the tone and frame are different. His twist changes the whole atmosphere and it appears when the reader least expects it. He does it with a word or a sentence. O. Henry’s twists are usually moralistic. Dahl’s characters are so well moulded and true
to life that, one can never predict the twist. The good are not always rewarded; the bad are not always punished. They leave the scene, as coolly as they entered. Readers admire the ease with which he balances the good and the evil. Ian Reid in his critical work *The Short Story* says: “The short story becomes a distinct genre because of three qualities: makes a single impression on the reader, it does so by concentrating on a crisis, and it makes that crisis pivoted in a controlled plot” (54). Dahl’s short stories are typical examples.

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

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

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

III

Roald Dahl: From a Phenomenological Angle

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

The New Lexicon Webster’s Dictionary defines “phenomenology” as “a method of arriving at absolute essences through the analysis of living experiences in disregard of scientific knowledge” (“Phenomenology,” def.). Since Edmund Husserl employed the term in the early 1900s, phenomenology gained widespread influence as a philosophical perspective and a critical method. In the middle of the nineteenth century ‘phenomenon’ was considered a descriptive study of the mind. But towards the twentieth century it came to be regarded as the perception of the real and also of illusions and dreams. Now phenomenology has been accepted as a descriptive study that provides with explanations of the phenomena.
In the book, *A Historical Introduction to Phenomenology*, by Seppo Sajama and Matti Kampinnen, Husserl attempts to analyse and describe mental phenomena "as they appear to the person who experiences them" (66). Husserl was not just interested in the really existing things in the real world. He tried to analyse human consciousness independently of any prior suppositions. The analysis, he believed should begin with an 'epoche' suspending all beliefs and presuppositions about the nature of experience. He called this transcendental suspension 'bracketing' or 'the phenomenological epoche' or 'the phenomenological reduction' as stated in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* ("phenomenology," def.) Phenomenology thus advocates a deeper reading of man's mind, his power to bestow meaning on what he perceives in the midst of the objective surroundings.

In the 1930s, the Polish theorist Roman Ingarden adapted the phenomenological viewpoint to understand a work of literature. A literary work he says does not have an existence of its own. According to the *Encyclopedia of Literary Critics and Criticism*, a literary work depends on "the intentional acts of both the author and the reader", for "a work originates in the consciousness of a writer and is reexperienced in the consciousness of the reader" ("Phenomenology," def.). Through phenomenological criticism, literature has been redefined in terms of reading. It is no longer solely determined by what is written in the text. The reader's
interpretation, which is considered a phenomenological experience, begins from his consciousness and extends through the author’s consciousness. He might agree with the author or arrive at another interpretation. This, according to phenomenologists, is ‘reflexive thinking’ ("Phenomenology," def. *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*).

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

IV

The Chapter Division of the Study

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

Chapter Two, "The Evil Beneath," analyses twelve stories that show evil hidden beneath man's exterior. Among them, some stories are grouped together because of their outlook and close similarities. The characters in the stories do not seem to be aware of the presence of evil in them. They are well-mannered social beings who take care to exhibit their best behaviour. Unfortunately the animal instincts hidden beneath their sophistication pop out under pressure. Though
they do not intend to hurt anybody, they do indulge in evil as a last resort. As is the way with evil, it leaves a sting. The characters become victims to the evil of the outside world and they try hard to survive. But the society being too harsh and uncompromising compels them to embrace more evil in order to fight back. Some come out of it successful while others meet their doom. It may also be concluded that it is their greed for power and pleasure that makes them resort to evil. The men and women in the stories try to avoid evil but they are not able to, because of their natural affinity towards it. Thus they become responsible for their own destruction, mental and physical.

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

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

Chapter Five, "The Evil Beyond," has ten stories of flyers and flying. Though war is the backdrop, the direct presence of war is absent, but its menacing presence is felt throughout. The common
man suffers most during a war. Even beyond the war field, he resorts to evil for power and selfish gains. The war between nations may come to an end, but the war between man and his fellow beings will continue, and the war between man and his own being will persist. War is man's creation in order to gain power over others. But his creation becomes his own enemy and he is dissatisfied. War causes misery in the world, but man is man's most dreaded enemy. His greed engulfs him. The evil he creates expands and goes beyond his intuition and showers misery on his own species.

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