



Collected Short Stories of Roald Dahl

By Roald Dahl

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(Book Jacket Status: Jacketed)

The only hardcover edition of Roald Dahl's stories for adults, the *Collected Stories* amply showcases his singular gifts as a fabulist and a born storyteller.

Later known for his immortal children's books, including *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, *James and the Giant Peach*, and *The BFG*, Dahl also had a genius for adult short fiction, which he wrote throughout his life. Whether fictionalizing his dramatic exploits as a Royal Air Force pilot during World War II or concocting the ingeniously plotted fables that were dramatized on television as *Tales of the Unexpected*, Dahl was brilliant at provoking in his readers the overwhelming desire to know what happens next—and at satisfying that desire in ways that feel both surprising and inevitable.

Filled with devilish plot twists, his tales display a tantalizing blend of macabre humor and the absurdly grotesque. From "The Landlady," about an unusual boardinghouse that features a small but very permanent clientele, to "Pig," a brutally funny look at vegetarianism, to "Man from the South," in which a fanatical gambler does his betting with hammer, nails, and a butcher's knife, Dahl's creations amuse and shock us in equal measure, gleefully reminding us of what might lurk beneath the surface of the ordinary.



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Editorial Review

Review

“With the inventive power of a Thomas Edison and the imagination of a Lewis Carroll . . . Roald Dahl is a wizard of comedy and the grotesque, an artist with a marvelously topsy-turvy sense of the ridiculous in life.”
—CLEVELAND PLAIN DEALER

“Dahl has the mastery of plot and characters possessed by great writers of the past, along with a wildness and wryness of his own. One of his trademarks is writing beautifully about the ugly, even the horrible.”
—LOS ANGELES TIMES

“A collection of Roald Dahl stories is always occasion for applause.”
—CHICAGO DAILY NEWS

“An ingenious imagination, a fascination with odd and ordinary detail . . . are the first strengths of Dahl’s storytelling.”
—NEW YORK TIMES BOOK REVIEW

“[Dahl’s] stare is unblinking, and most of his tales are irritants, provocations. Fantastic as Grimm, neat as O. Henry, heartless as Saki, they stick in the mind long after subtler ones have faded: incredible (literally), unforgettable, and vengefully funny.”
—from the Introduction by Jeremy Treglown

About the Author

Roald Dahl (1916-1990) was born in Llandaff, South Wales, and went to Repton School in England. His parents were Norwegian, so holidays were spent in Norway. As he explains in *Boy*, he turned down the idea of university in favor of a job that would take him to 'a wonderful faraway place'. In 1933 he joined the Shell Company, which sent him to Mombasa in East Africa. When World War II began in 1939 he became a fighter pilot and in 1942 was made assistant air attaché in Washington, where he started to write short stories. His first major success as a writer for children was in 1964. Thereafter his children's books brought him increasing popularity, and when he died children mourned the world over, particularly in Britain where he had lived for many years.

From The Washington Post

This will give you an idea of how rare and highly valued stories by Roald Dahl once were: In 1974 he published *Switch Bitch*, a mere four tales collected in a volume that barely exceeded 200 pages. It became a selection of the Book of the Month Club and went into a second American printing.

All of those stories had first appeared in *Playboy*. This was a far cry from the Roald Dahl of *Willy Wonka* and *Giant Peach* fame -- his lucrative children's franchise was still just warming up. Indeed, as Jeremy Treglown points out in his introduction to these *Collected Stories*, Dahl tried writing for kids because he'd run out of ideas for the kind of work that first made his name. In the late 1940s and throughout the '50s, before inspiration flagged, he'd sold stories of malice and vengeance and the law of unintended consequences to the *New Yorker*, *Esquire*, *Collier's*, *Harper's* and the *Ladies' Home Journal*, then resold several to perhaps the classiest anthology series ever shown on American TV, "Alfred Hitchcock Presents." (Peter Lorre was Dahl's memorable "Man from the South," a gambler who liked to wager his Cadillac against his opponents' fingers, and Barbara Bel Geddes played the housewife who clubbed her husband to death with a frozen leg of

lamb, which she then calmly roasted and served to the cops sent over to investigate.)

As time went on, Dahl's rate of production fell from two or three stories per year to three or four years per story. *Someone Like You* (1953) contained 19 tales, and *Kiss, Kiss* (1960) had 11. But the *Switch Bitch* quartet was the fruit of nearly a decade, and Dahl managed to eke out only five more before his death in 1990. Now, all 51 of his short stories for grownups have been assembled in a single volume of the prestigious Everyman's Library. It's an honor richly deserved.

The first 10 stories, originally gathered in a volume called *Over to You* (1946), stem from Dahl's experience as a fighter pilot for the Royal Air Force in World War II. For the most part, they are taut, smoothly written, sprinkled with attar of Hemingway -- and rather unexceptional. But one, "An African Story," combines two qualities that became Dahl trademarks: malevolence and esoteric knowledge (in this case, the virulent poisonousness of a snake, the mamba).

After the war, he began writing about civilian life, shrewdly playing up the new consumer products and savoir faire in which English and American magazine readers longed to immerse themselves. Soon he took material similar to that of "An African Story" -- an encounter with a poisonous snake (this time a krait) -- and gave it a nice, climactic twist. It was a precursor of many to come.

Dahl's forte was to deliver the last few paragraphs or lines of a story like the key piece of a jigsaw puzzle, causing the whole thing to click into place and reveal the hidden shape toward which all the other pieces had been furtively trending. In the brilliant "Man from the South," for example, the last-minute appearance of the gambler's long-suffering wife elevates the goings-on from yarn to fable. Needless to say, this kind of thing is deuced hard to bring off. If the fillip seems artificial or needlessly sensational, the reader is apt to scoff. The eminent English novelist Angus Wilson said he quit writing short stories (after amassing about half of Dahl's total) because he found it impossible to keep generating the final "snap" that readers expected. Nobody snapped better than Dahl.

His methods also included peopling his tales with characters as grotesque-looking as Dick Tracy villains. The predatory gourmet of "Taste" (he's another of Dahl's high-stakes gamblers) has a "permanently open taster's lip, shaped open to receive the rim of a glass or a morsel of food. Like a keyhole, I thought, watching it; his mouth is like a large wet keyhole." The geeky inventor of "The Great Automatic Grammatizator" has "ears as big as rhubarb leaves." The sexually straying wife in "Neck" resembles a "mustang."

Revenge figures in a number of these stories (one is called "Vengeance Is Mine Inc."), as does that old plot device, the comeuppance experienced by someone who tries to grab a windfall by cheating. Dahl was fond of misused contraptions (the domestic elevator in "The Way Up to Heaven") and inventions that turn on their creators ("The Sound Machine"). And once in a while, he dropped in the most surprising ending of all -- for him, anyway: a happy one.

But looking for leitmotifs in Dahl's stories seems almost beside the point. Whether pegged to children or adults, what they all had in common was simply this: a magician's touch unsurpassed in 20th-century fiction.

Reviewed by Dennis Drabelle

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Users Review

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