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## Abstract

The reason why I decided to write an extended essay on English B, is because I was interested in the topic that I've chosen. I enjoy reading short stories, especially those that have a surprising ending. I find both O'Henry and Roald Dahl quite successful in their short stories. After reading many short stories of the two, I realized that there are some differences between the abovementioned writers. After outlining the differences, I decided to examine these in further detail.

As explained in the extended essay, the main difference between the two writers is their use of characterization. Roald Dahl makes his characters' traits quite obvious, whereas O'Henry chooses to convey this in between the lines. This difference, added with their style creates a difference in their short stories. Since O'Henry has a more closed tone compared to Roald Dahl, the surprise factor in their twisted endings also differs from each other. The main separation however is in their use of characterization.

Three short stories by both writers have been chosen. The reason why these short stories have been chosen is because the differences between the writers mentioned above are quite clear in these short stories.

Word Count: 197

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O'Henry <sup>1</sup>, is one of the greatest American short story writers remarked for his peculiar narrative techniques and style. O Henry is specifically known for his short stories with unpredictable endings in which he is so successful that many people call it 'O'Henry Style Ending'.

Similarly, Roald Dahl <sup>2</sup> is also a writer who produced many pieces of literature most of which also have twisted endings.

This extended essay is an attempt to answer the question: 'To what extent are these two writers handling of the twisted endings in their short stories are similar to or different from each other.'

## II - Literary Approaches of O'Henry and Roald Dahl

Being a professional user of language as can be seen from the way he leads the reader to the end of his stories O'Henry not only uses the setting, the atmosphere

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<sup>1</sup> O Henry Appendix 1

<sup>2</sup> Roald Dahl Appendix 2

and the mood but also characterization to have the tension created. When we have a look at the short stories he wrote, it can easily be observed that most literary techniques used by all the famous writers are also used in O'Henry's stories.

In a way, we can say that O'Henry seems to have written short stories only to end them right in their climaxes, thus creating his own finales as "O'Henry ending". Roald Dahl; however has given other types of literatures as well.

Since O'Henry has written many short stories, he seems to be able to get to the end using different methods: He uses his themes to lead the readers to the climax. He uses foreshadowing techniques for his purpose. He uses setting to base the climax on. However most importantly, he uses characterization as an item to set the plot. We observe characterization portrayed between the lines instead of being told straight away which also does not divide the reader's attention with descriptions and only make him focus on the end which creates the impression that the main aim is the twisted ending. The characteristic traits of the personas do play a vital role in the presentation of not only the whole story but also the climax ending.

### III - Characterization in O'Henry and Roald Dahl

If we define the term "Characterization", it is creating and developing, or in other words building up a character and it can be made in two different ways: Directly

or Indirectly. In direct characterization which Roald Dahl uses, the author directly states a character's personal traits. On the other hand, in indirect characterization which is used in many O'Henry short stories, the author tells the reader only what the character looks like without making any further comments, leading the reader to draw conclusions depending on the information he or she has been given through dialogues and the actions that take place throughout the story. In most of the O'Henry short stories, indirect characterization is used in order to render twisted endings more influential. The best examples can be 'After 20 Years', 'The Last Leaf', 'Hearts and Hands' and 'The Ransom of the Red Chief'.<sup>3</sup>

However, if we were to examine the short stories of Roald Dahl we observe that both the climax ending and the plot are all based on the attributes of the characters. Thus, characterization is quite crucial in many ways, as the characteristic traits of the personas are the factors that lead the reader to climax end.

Unlike O'Henry, Roald Dahl clearly designates the characteristic traits of the personas and states them in the very beginning of the short story. Since the events taking place and the climax are based on the characters, if the features of the characters were not stated clearly but instead mentioned in between the lines like those of O'Henry's, neither the climax nor the storyline would have been settled on a substantial basis.

The aspect that makes a difference between the two writers' short stories is the way they convey their message. O'Henry has a closed style and he does not give concrete messages or there cannot be found any specific clue that would point out or

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<sup>3</sup> Paul J. Horowitz. Collected Stories of O. Henry. New Jersey: Gramercy Books, 1986.

give any information about the ending beforehand. Roald Dahl on the other hand, carries the reader to the end using different methods though it is generally characterization. Dahl gives messages and signs throughout the story as for the end or how a plot the story will follow. In a way Dahl builds up the story and though the ends are surprising there is an expectation. O'Henry on the other hand ends the story quite unexpectedly, and the fact that him not revealing a lot about the ending before helps him catch his readers.

Dahl, on the other hand, uses indirect characterization, the best example of which is the short story 'The Way Up To The Heaven'.<sup>4</sup>

In the story, there is an old couple, Mr. and Mrs. Foster. Mrs. Foster is going to visit her daughter in France. However she is a person that is very afraid of being late for everything but her husband couldn't care less. After long struggle to catch the plane, Mrs. Foster cunningly leaves her husband in the elevator and goes to the airport herself. In this story everything is based upon Mrs. Foster's great fear of being late for an appointment. The most conspicuous characteristic of Mrs. Foster is her excessive anxiety which in some situations is so exaggerated that it can be classified as phobia about being late; and as Mrs. Foster is the main character, this specific property of hers is focused and is explained in detail in the very beginning of the story: "*All her life Mrs. Foster has had an almost pathological fear of missing a train, a plane, a boat, or even a theatre curtain.*" This very characterization of Dahl makes us, the readers forgive "poor" Mrs. Foster for her murder. The climax of the story which also is the end is when the reader finds out that Mrs. Foster disregarded her husband being stuck in an elevator which eventually results in his death just not to deal with it

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<sup>4</sup> Ronald Carter, ed. Roald Dahl Ten Short Stories. London: Penguin, 2000.

so that she can be at the airport on time. If it weren't for this fear of hers, she wouldn't have ignored her husband's death just to catch her plane. As the climax and the ending of a story are the most important parts as it is where the problems are resolved and as the climax of this story is based upon Mrs. Foster's personality we can say that the most important part of the story is based upon this. So, basically not only the beginning but also the climax and the whole story is based upon the characters and their personal traits. This is a great example which points how Roald Dahl introduces the climax attributing it to characterization in short stories.

The writer explaining the properties of the main character enables him to base the climax on a more permanent basis. Had the writer tried to give the personal traits between the lines, the climax would not be so striking for the reader, as it would be quite unclear for the reader as he would not be able to understand the reasons of the thing she did.

Although we cannot say that characterization is not an important item in O'Henry's pieces, we can say that it is not as prominent as it is in Roald Dahl's. Unlike Roald Dahl, O'Henry does not list the characteristics of a persona but instead conveys it between the lines. This is one of the most important points where O'Henry and Roald Dahl differ from each other. Stating there is no characterization in O'Henry's stories, just because he does not list the properties would not be accurate. Let's take '*The Last Leaf*'<sup>5</sup> from O'Henry:

The story is based upon the illness of a girl named Johnsy. She is caught by flu and her situation is critical. However the most important factor that affects her

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<sup>5</sup> Paul J. Horowitz. Collected Stories of O. Henry. New Jersey: Gramercy Books, 1986.



health is her pessimism. She is convinced that she would not survive the illness. There is a tree whose leaves she counts, believe that as the last leaf falls she will die. Her roommate who also is her close friend tries to convince her that the situation is not so. The doctor says that her chance of surviving is depending on her will to survive. Then comes a Mr. Behrman who paints his masterpiece as the last leaf so that Johnsy regains hope and gets better. It so happens Mr. Behrman catches pneumonia and dies.

When we examine the story which again has a twisted or “O’Henry ending”, we can see that the surprise factor used in the climax is also the end. If it weren’t for the benevolence of Mr. Behrman, the story would have followed a much different pattern. If Mr. Behrman had not put himself in danger and gone out in the rain to paint that leaf he wouldn’t have killed himself. Yet the reader barely meets Behrman and his masterpiece. As is mentioned earlier the style of characterization may be different but the way O’Henry depicts the personal traits of his persona is quite different from that of Roald Dahl’s.

Although the whole plot is based on him, Behrman is only mentioned just several times throughout all the events. There is no clear, straight statement that would point the kind of self-sacrifice from Mr. Behrman. However, in the end of the story Sue, states that the leaf Mr. Behrman has painted is the masterpiece which Behrman had also been talking for many years. If the story was examined in detail, signs of Behrman’s abnegation could be caught. These personality traits are conveyed in an unclear manner which is in accordance with O’Henry’s enclosed, literary style. The characterization and the description of personal traits in O’Henry’s short stories are not as clear as they are in Roald Dahl’s.

'The Ransom of the Red Chief'<sup>6</sup> written by O'Henry, is a perfect example outlining characterization in his short stories. In this story the two men, Bill Driscoll and Sam Howard who kidnap a boy from a nearby town so that they would ask for ransom, give up and pay the ransom themselves as the two cannot handle the boy only because they do not want to harm the little child in any way. In this story the characterization is mostly indirect; which makes the reader clearly understand how desperate the two men are. The way the traits of the characters are conducted is in unison with the indirect characterization.

However throughout the story there is hardly any definition of any of the characters. The reader is not informed of the characteristic traits of either the kid or Bill or Sam. The story being told in first person narration is of course a factor that affects this situation but it is also in accordance with the style of O'Henry which we can say consists of an enclosed strain. As the whole story is reflected to the reader through a character, Sam's point of view instead of an omniscient approach, the possibility of the reflection of a character's personality automatically drops. This however does not change the fact that the personalities of the characters are not clearly listed, but rather reflected to the reader through conversations.

Yet, the properties of the characters are quite clear. The kid being quite imaginative and active, and Bill being not able to stand to the kid and impatient about giving him back is all quite evident but still, it is not listed. The characteristic traits are not specifically mentioned in *The Ransom of the Red Chief* just like it is not mentioned in other O'Henry stories.

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<sup>6</sup> Yvonne Collioud SISKU. A World of Short Stories. USA: Pearson Education, 2008.

'After 20 Years'<sup>7</sup>, written by O'Henry would perfectly fit and explain the previous statements about his style.

In *After 20 Years*, a man is waiting for someone in a dark alley. Then a cop passes by and he checks if everything is OK. They start a conversation and the police officer finds out that the man is waiting for a friend of his. They were really close however they got separated and they had promised each other that they would meet each other at that alley 20 years later no matter what happens. While the man is waiting for his friend to show up, he lights a cigar. At that very short period of time, when he lights his cigar, the police officer sees his face. Then the police officer leaves. After a while someone appears in the alley. He introduces himself as Jimmy, the man the man waiting. They walk through dark streets because the lights are out. Then when they pass through the glare a light, the man sees the Jimmy Wells' face and realizes that he is not Jimmy. Then, the man reveals the truth that he in fact was a cop and that he is under arrest. Then he gives the man him a note. The note tells that, the previous police officer the man talked to was Jimmy, who showed up there but that when he saw the man's face when he lit his cigar, he realized that he was a criminal wanted in Chicago. If we examine the story in detail then it can clearly be seen that there is not even a single clue whatsoever that would point that the man was in fact Jimmy Wells who was the other man's old friend who was supposed to meet him at that specific time and place.

In the story, there is not even a single sentence or a referral to the end of the story or about the real identity of the policeman. However as said before if the reader is quite determined to find a shocking way, he could guess about the ending. Yet

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<sup>7</sup> Paul J. Horowitz. Collected Stories of O. Henry. New Jersey: Gramercy Books, 1986.

there is no specific sentence or a clue that anyone could claim to reveal the shocking end. That's why when it is revealed that the policeman who approached the other man was in fact Jimmy who was supposed to meet him at that time and place; it is quite a shock for the reader. But the whole story or the ending has nothing to do with characterization whatsoever. There is no sign that would show the reader that the police officer is a man of moral values and that he would strictly object to let the guilty man go even if he is a really old friend of his, or that Jimmy wouldn't be able to arrest the man himself even if he is a criminal, offering, them being old friends as an excuse. Also, the reader is not informed about Bob, being a criminal who is wanted in Chicago. It's all revealed at the end. This situation is what makes O'Henry's short stories more unexpected in terms of twisted ending. Everything is revealed at the end.

'Lamb To the Slaughter'<sup>8</sup> written by Roald Dahl, on the other hand, starts right away with descriptions:

Mary Maloney is waiting for her husband to come home from work. She is quite anxious and when her husband returns her husband is quite cold and distant. He tells her that he wants to talk something with her and after they do, Mary is shocked. The content of their conversation is not revealed however it is something that makes Mary quite shocked and furious. She goes to the kitchen and grabs a lamb leg and kills her husband with it and she cold-bloodedly calls police and tells them her husband is killed. Then she goes and prepares a meal with the very same lamb she killed her husband with. Then she offers the police officers the lamb meal

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<sup>8</sup> Antonella MIGNANI. Ten Women Ten Short Stories. Genoa: Blackcat, 1992.

she just prepared and she clears the only evidence that would point her guilty by making the police officers eat it.

Throughout the story Mary Maloney is described step by step starting from the very first moment her husband arrives home. Her feelings and her thoughts even her mimics are described in a very detailed way. Though it is never revealed what her husband has told her, it is not important. It seems as if it is, like the mystery and the twisted ending will be based around what Mr. Maloney told his wife. However, the content of their conversation is never revealed which does not create any confusion as this empty part is generously satisfied with descriptions of Mrs. Maloney. Her being in a shock of what she has learnt from her husband yet still keeping calm, everything is clear. It is a known fact that Roald Dahl has pictured woman as an evil figure in some of his literary pieces due to his personal life and when we examine the story we can see the effects of this condition. Mary Maloney killing her husband with a lamb leg and then preparing the dinner and making the police officers in the house who have come to investigate the crime, eat the lamb and thus destroying the last piece of evidence that would point her guilty, and doing all of these so cold-bloodedly, everything is clear. Had Mary Maloney had a different character, the story would have followed a very different path. If she hadn't been so cold-blooded she probably would have revealed the fact that she had killed her husband. Had she not been so frustrated about what she learned, she wouldn't have killed her husband. So the climax and thus the ending are again dependent on characterization.

The style of Roald Dahl is very different than of O'Henry's in that matter. Dahl clearly directs his reader, through detailed descriptions. If we were to examine the case from this point of view, it would be possible to state that O'Henry's twisted endings are more unexpected compared to those of Roald Dahl's. Since Roald Dahl

gives signs and conveys messages throughout the story as for the ending of the story, the reader is able to make speculations about the climax and the end. However this does not mean that Roald Dahl cannot surprise his readers. *The Way up To the Heaven* or *The Landlady* would be perfect examples as they have such a striking end. Yet, O'Henry's stories follow a more obscure path and storyline when compared, which creates a more mysterious atmosphere in which the reader is blind to what awaits him.

However Roald Dahl builds up his story, giving information bit by bit throughout the story. Roald Dahl foreshadows to his reader that something is coming and builds up his story that way. '*The Landlady*'<sup>9</sup> is an example.

The story is about a young man named Billy Weaver who comes in town and looks for a place to crash the night. He sees this house which rents rooms for night. He goes and asks the lady, about the price and he agrees to stay the night. The lady is very nice and friendly. The house very friendly and warm however there is something that makes Patrick uneasy. There are many stuffed animals and when Patrick asks about them the lady tells that she fills them herself. There are no other people staying at the house. He goes to the check-in notebook and sees that there are only two previous entries which date back a long time ago. Plus, the names in those entries are also familiar. He starts to think about the names and to the end while he was drinking a coffee prepared by the lady, he remembers that both of that people were young men of his age that came to this town and disappeared suddenly.

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<sup>9</sup> "The Landlady". [www.nexuslearning.net](http://www.nexuslearning.net) . 17 Dec. 2009. <<http://www.nexuslearning.net/books/holt-eol2/Collection%203/landlady.htm>>

Then he asks the landlady where these two men went and she answers they never left there.

So the story again ends up at the climax. The fact that something is going wrong and that something is weird has been made quite clear for the reader from the very beginning of the story. The lady, asking for such a small amount of money from him for a night or the other two entries in the journal being quite old, or the animals being so cold and motionless are some of these signs. The boy, Patrick asking questions but receiving very general and closed answers from the landlady or him questioning most of the things he sees and thinking about them all the time and the presence of the thoughts and the suspicions that busy his mind and the names he tries to remember and all. It is clear that the end is approaching and the suspicions have been awakened in the reader. The descriptions of the plot, the ideas and feeling or suspicions of Patrick and the disarrayed incongruities are the main elements that “constitute” the storyline.

#### IV - Conclusion

As it can clearly be seen by the short stories O’Henry’s short stories are more unexpected compared to those of Roald Dahl’s. The main reason for this is that Roald Dahl uses most of the components that form a story such as characterization in a detailed way and in fact expresses it clearly. That’s why, the reader is in the story

with the characters and thus is aware that the end is coming or can predict more or less what kind of an end that awaits. O'Henry on the other hand uses these language tools without making them too evident. This eventually leads to a shocking end, since everything is hidden in little details or between the lines. The examples given above support and prove the statement stated in the very beginning of the essay. Every element, especially characterization is reconciled within the stories of O'Henry as in accordance with the style of his. In the short stories of Roald Dahl on the other hand, everything is apparent, specifically characterization which enables him to base the plots of his short stories. This difference in their style, also leads a difference in the surprise factor of their short stories which in a nutshell could be summarized as O'Henry's stories being more unexpected compared to those of Roald Dahl's.

Word Count: 3745

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## Appendix 1:

**O. Henry** was the pen name of American writer **William Sydney Porter** (September 11, 1862 – June 5, 1910). O. Henry's short stories are well known for their wit, wordplay, warm characterization and clever twist endings.

## Life

### Early life

William Sidney Porter was born on September 11, 1862, in Greensboro, North Carolina. His middle name at birth was Sidney; he changed the spelling to Sydney in 1898. His parents were Dr. Algernon Sidney Porter (1825–1888), a physician, and Mary Jane Virginia Swaim Porter (1833–1865). They were married April 20, 1858. When William was three, his mother died from tuberculosis, and he and his father moved into the home of his paternal grandmother. As a child, Porter was always reading. He read everything from classics to dime novels. His favorite work was *One Thousand and One Nights*.

Porter graduated from his aunt Evelina Maria Porter's elementary school in 1876. He then enrolled at the Lindsey Street High School. His aunt continued to tutor him until he was fifteen. In 1879, he started working in his uncle's drugstore and in 1881, at the age of nineteen, he was licensed as a pharmacist. At the drugstore, he also showed off his natural artistic talents by sketching the townsfolk.

### Move to Texas

Porter traveled with Dr. James K. Hall to [Texas](#) in March 1882, hoping that a change of air would help alleviate a persistent cough he had developed. He took up residence on the sheep ranch of Richard Hall, James' son, in [La Salle County](#) and helped out as a shepherd, ranch hand, cook and baby-sitter. While on the ranch, he learned bits of [Spanish](#) and [German](#) from the mix of [immigrant](#) ranch hands. He also spent time reading classic literature. Porter's health did improve and he traveled with Richard to [Austin](#) in 1884, where he decided to remain and was welcomed into the home of the Harrells, who were friends of Richard's. Porter took a number of different jobs over the next several years, first as pharmacist then as a [draftsman](#), [bank teller](#) and [journalist](#). He also began writing as a sideline.

Porter led an active social life in Austin, including membership in singing and drama groups. Porter was a good singer and musician. He played both the [guitar](#) and [mandolin](#). He became a member of the "Hill City [Quartet](#)," a group of young men who sang at gatherings and serenaded young women of the town. Porter met and began [courting](#) Athol Estes, then seventeen years old and from a wealthy family. Her mother objected to the match because Athol was ill, suffering from [tuberculosis](#). On July 1, 1887, Porter eloped with Athol to the home of Reverend R. K. Smoot, where they were married.

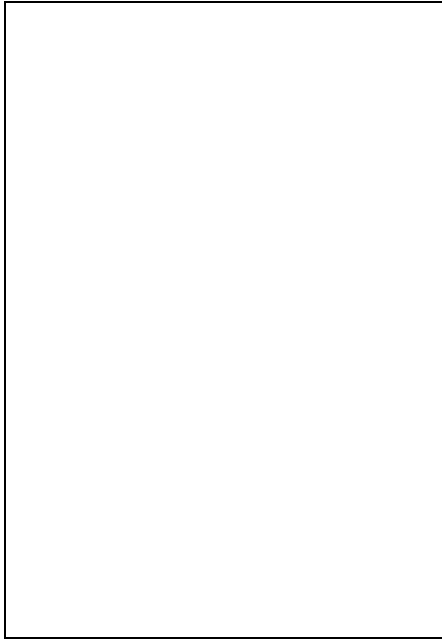
The couple continued to participate in musical and theater groups, and Athol encouraged her husband to pursue his writing. Athol gave birth to a son in 1888, who died hours after birth, and then a daughter, Margaret Worth Porter, in September 1889. Porter's friend Richard Hall became Texas Land Commissioner and offered Porter a job. Porter started as a draftsman at the Texas General Land Office (GLO) in

1887 at a salary of \$100 a month, drawing [maps](#) from [surveys](#) and [field notes](#). The salary was enough to support his family, but he continued his contributions to magazines and newspapers.

In the [GLO building](#), he began developing characters and plots for such stories as "Georgia's Ruling" (1900), and "Buried Treasure" (1908). The castle-like building he worked in was even woven into some of his tales such as "Bexar Scrip No. 2692" (1894). His job at the GLO was a political appointment by Hall. Hall ran for governor in the election of 1890 but lost. Porter resigned in early 1891 when the new governor was sworn in. The same year, Porter began working at the First National Bank of Austin as a teller and bookkeeper at the same salary he had made at the GLO. The bank was operated informally and Porter had trouble keeping track of his books. In 1894, he was accused by the bank of [embezzlement](#) and lost his job but was not indicted. He now worked full time on his humorous weekly called *The Rolling Stone*, which he started while working at the bank. *The Rolling Stone* featured satire on life, people and politics and included Porter's short stories and sketches. Although eventually reaching a top circulation of 1500, *The Rolling Stone* failed in April 1895, perhaps because of Porter's poking fun at powerful people. Porter also may have ceased publication as the paper never provided the money he needed to support his family. By then, his writing and drawings caught the attention of the editor at the [Houston Post](#).

Porter and his family moved to [Houston](#) in 1895, where he started writing for the *Post*. His salary was only \$25 a month, but it rose steadily as his popularity increased. Porter gathered ideas for his column by hanging out in hotel lobbies and observing and talking to people there. This was a technique he used throughout his writing career. While he was in Houston, the First National Bank of Austin was audited and the federal auditors found several discrepancies. They managed to get a federal indictment against Porter. Porter was subsequently arrested on charges of embezzlement, charges which he denied, in connection with his employment at the bank.

## **Flight and return**



Porter in his 30s

Porter's father-in-law posted bail to keep Porter out of jail, but the day before Porter was due to stand trial on July 7, 1896, he fled, first to [New Orleans](#) and later to [Honduras](#). While holed up in a [Tegucigalpa](#) hotel for several months, he wrote *Cabbages and Kings*, in which he coined the term "[banana republic](#)" to describe the country, subsequently used to describe almost any small, unstable tropical nation in Latin America. Porter had sent Athol and Margaret back to Austin to live with Athol's parents. Unfortunately, Athol became too ill to meet Porter in Honduras as Porter planned. When he learned that his wife was dying, Porter returned to Austin in February 1897 and surrendered to the court, pending an [appeal](#). Once again, Porter's father-in-law posted bail so Porter could stay with Athol and Margaret.

Athol Estes Porter died on July 25, 1897 from tuberculosis (then known as consumption). Porter, having little to say in his own defense, was found guilty of embezzlement in February 1898, sentenced to five years jail, and imprisoned on March 25, 1898, as federal prisoner 30664 at the [Ohio Penitentiary](#) in [Columbus, Ohio](#). While in prison, Porter, as a licensed pharmacist, worked in the prison hospital as the night druggist. Porter was given his own room in the hospital wing, and there is no record that he actually spent time in the cell block of the prison. He had fourteen stories published under various [pseudonyms](#) while he was in prison, but was becoming best known as "O. Henry", a pseudonym that first appeared over the story "Whistling Dick's Christmas Stocking" in the December 1899 issue of *McClure's Magazine*. A friend of his in New Orleans would forward his stories to publishers, so they had no idea the writer was imprisoned. Porter was released on July 24, 1901, for good behavior after serving three years. Porter reunited with his daughter Margaret, now age 11, in [Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania](#), where Athol's parents had moved after

Porter's conviction. Margaret was never told that her father had been in prison - just that he had been away on business.

### Later life

Porter's most prolific writing period started in 1902, when he moved to [New York City](#) to be near his publishers. While there, he wrote 381 short stories. He wrote a story a week for over a year for the *New York World Sunday Magazine*. His wit, characterization and plot twists were adored by his readers, but often panned by critics. Porter married again in 1907, to childhood sweetheart Sarah (Sallie) Lindsey Coleman, whom he met again after revisiting his native state of North Carolina. However, despite the success of his short stories being published in magazines and collections (or perhaps because of the attendant pressure that success brought), Porter drank heavily.

His health began to deteriorate in 1908, which affected his writing. Sarah left him in 1909, and Porter died on June 5, 1910, of [cirrhosis of the liver](#), complications of [diabetes](#) and an [enlarged heart](#). After funeral services in New York City, he was buried in the [Riverside Cemetery](#) in [Asheville, North Carolina](#). His daughter, Margaret Worth Porter, died in 1927 and was buried with her father.

### Stories

O. Henry stories are famous for their surprise endings, to the point that such an ending is often referred to as an "O. Henry ending." He was called the American answer to [Guy de Maupassant](#). Both authors wrote twist endings, but O. Henry stories were much more playful and optimistic. His stories are also well known for witty narration. Most of O. Henry's stories are set in his own time, the early years of the 20th century. Many take place in New York City, and deal for the most part with ordinary people: clerks, policemen, waitresses.

Fundamentally a product of his time, O. Henry's work provides one of the best English examples of catching the entire flavor of an age. Whether roaming the cattle-lands of Texas, exploring the art of the "gentle grafter," or investigating the tensions of class and wealth in turn-of-the-century New York, O. Henry had an inimitable hand for isolating some element of society and describing it with an incredible economy and grace of language. Some of his best and least-known work resides in the collection *Cabbages and Kings*, a series of stories which each explore some individual aspect of life in a paralytically sleepy Central American town while each advancing some aspect of the larger plot and relating back one to another in a complex structure which slowly explicates its own background even as it painstakingly erects a town which is one of the most detailed literary creations of the period.

*The Four Million* is another collection of stories. It opens with a reference to [Ward McAllister](#)'s "assertion that there were only 'Four Hundred' people in New York City who were really worth noticing. But a wiser man has arisen—the [census](#) taker—and his larger estimate of human interest has been preferred in marking out the field of these little stories of the 'Four Million.'" To O. Henry, everyone in New York counted. He had an obvious affection for the city, which he called "[Bagdad-on-the-Subway](#)," and many of his stories are set there—but others are set in small towns and in other cities.

Among his most famous stories are:

- "A Municipal Report" which opens by quoting [Frank Norris](#): "Fancy a novel about Chicago or [Buffalo](#), let us say, or [Nashville, Tennessee](#)! There are just three big cities in the United States that are 'story cities'—New York, of course, New Orleans, and, best of the lot, San Francisco." Thumbing his nose at Norris, O. Henry sets the story in Nashville.
- "[The Gift of the Magi](#)" about a young couple who are short of money but desperately want to buy each other Christmas gifts. Unbeknownst to Jim, Della sells her most valuable possession, her beautiful hair, in order to buy a platinum fob chain for Jim's watch; while unbeknownst to Della, Jim sells his own most valuable possession, his watch, to buy jeweled combs for Della's hair. The essential premise of this story has been copied, re-worked, parodied, and otherwise re-told countless times in the century since it was written.
- "[The Ransom of Red Chief](#)", in which two men kidnap a boy of ten. The boy turns out to be so bratty and obnoxious that the desperate men ultimately pay the boy's father \$250 to take him back.
- "[The Cop and the Anthem](#)" about a New York City [hobo](#) named Soapy, who sets out to get arrested so he can avoid sleeping in the cold winter as a guest of the city jail. Despite efforts at petty theft, vandalism, disorderly conduct, and "[mashing](#)" with a young prostitute, Soapy fails to draw the attention of the police. Disconsolate, he pauses in front of a church, where an organ anthem inspires him to clean up his life — and is ironically charged for [loitering](#) and sentenced to three months in prison.
- "[A Retrieved Reformation](#)", which tells the tale of safecracker Jimmy Valentine, recently freed from prison. He goes to a town bank to check it over before he robs it. As he walks to the door, he catches the eye of the banker's beautiful daughter. They immediately fall in love and Valentine decides to give up his criminal career. He moves into the town, taking up the identity of Ralph Spencer, a shoemaker. Just as he is about to leave to deliver his specialized tools to an old associate, a lawman who recognizes him arrives at the bank. Jimmy and his fiancée and her family are at the bank, inspecting a new safe, when a child accidentally gets locked inside the airtight vault. Knowing it will seal his fate, Valentine opens the safe to rescue the child. However, the lawman lets him go.
- "[After Twenty Years](#)", set on a dark street in New York, focuses on a man named "Silky" Bob who is fulfilling an appointment made 20 years ago to meet his friend Jimmy at a restaurant. A beat cop questions him about what he is doing there. Bob explains, and the policeman leaves. Later, a second policeman comes up and arrests Bob. He gives Bob a note, in which the first policeman explains that he was Jimmy,

come to meet Bob, but he recognized Bob as a wanted man. Unwilling to arrest his old friend, he went off to get another officer to make the arrest.

- "[The Pendulum](#)", describes the life of John Perkins who lives a monotonous life with his wife Katy in the Frogmore flats and is completely bored with his daily routine. One day, Katy leaves unexpectedly to meet her sick mother and that is when John realizes how important his wife is to him and he resolves to show her some amusement and stop neglecting her and is very remorseful for his behaviour. But as soon as Katy arrives, he forgets all his resolutions and gets up to go McCloskey's club to play pool as usual.
- "[Compliments of the Season](#)" describes several characters' misadventures during Christmas.
- "[Friends in San Rosario](#)", about embezzlement, a bank audit and loyalty to an old friend, bears poignantly upon Porter's real-life prison experience.

## Pen name

Porter gave various explanations for the origin of his pen name. In 1909 he gave an interview to [The New York Times](#), in which he gave an account of it:

It was during these New Orleans days that I adopted my pen name of O. Henry. I said to a friend: "I'm going to send out some stuff. I don't know if it amounts to much, so I want to get a literary alias. Help me pick out a good one." He suggested that we get a newspaper and pick a name from the first list of notables that we found in it. In the society columns we found the account of a fashionable ball. "Here we have our notables," said he. We looked down the list and my eye lighted on the name Henry, "That'll do for a last name," said I. "Now for a first name. I want something short. None of your three-syllable names for me." "Why don't you use a plain initial letter, then?" asked my friend. "Good," said I, "O is about the easiest letter written, and O it is."

A newspaper once wrote and asked me what the O stands for. I replied, "O stands for Olivier the French for Oliver." And several of my stories accordingly appeared in that paper under the name Olivier Henry.

Writer and scholar [Guy Davenport](#) offers another explanation: "[T]he pseudonym that he began to write under in prison is constructed from the first two letters of **Ohio** and the second and last two of **penitentiary**." (bold added)

## Legacy

The [O. Henry Award](#) is a prestigious annual prize given to outstanding short stories, and named after Porter. Several schools around the country bear Porter's pseudonym.

In 1952, a film featuring five stories, called [O. Henry's Full House](#), was made. The episode garnering the most critical acclaim was "The Cop and the Anthem", starring

[Charles Laughton](#) and [Marilyn Monroe](#). The other stories are "The Clarion Call", "The Last Leaf", "[The Ransom of Red Chief](#)" (starring [Fred Allen](#) and [Oscar Levant](#)), and "[The Gift of the Magi](#)".

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/O.\\_Henry](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/O._Henry)



## Appendix 2:

**Roald Dahl**; (13 September 1916 – 23 November 1990) was a British [novelist](#), [short story](#) writer, and [screenwriter](#).

Born in [north Cardiff](#), Wales, to [Norwegian](#) parents, he served in the [Royal Air Force](#) during the [Second World War](#), in which he became a [flying ace](#) and intelligence agent. He rose to prominence in the 1940s with works for both [children](#) and adults, and became one of the world's bestselling authors. His short stories are known for their unexpected endings, and his children's books for their unsentimental, often very [dark humour](#).

Some of his better-known works include [James and the Giant Peach](#), [Charlie and the Chocolate Factory](#), [Fantastic Mr Fox](#), [Matilda](#), [The Witches](#), and [The BFG](#).

### Early life

Roald Dahl was born in [Llandaff](#), [Cardiff](#), Wales in 1916, to [Norwegian](#) parents, Harald Dahl and Sofie Magdalene Dahl (*née* Hesselberg). Dahl's father had moved from [Sarpsborg](#) in Norway and settled in Cardiff in the 1880s, and his mother came over to marry his father in 1911. Roald was named after the [polar explorer Roald Amundsen](#), a national hero in Norway at the time. He spoke Norwegian at home with his parents and sisters, Astri, Alfhild, and Else. Dahl and his sisters were christened at the [Norwegian Church, Cardiff](#), where their parents worshipped.

In 1920, when Roald was still only three years old, his seven-year-old sister, Astri, died from [appendicitis](#). Weeks later, his father died of [pneumonia](#) at the age of 57. Dahl's mother, however, decided not to return to Norway to live with her relatives, but to remain in Wales since it had been her husband's wish to have their children educated in British schools, as he felt they were the best in the world.

Dahl first attended [The Cathedral School, Llandaff](#). At the age of eight, he and four of his friends (one named Thwaites) were [caned](#) by the [headmaster](#) after putting a dead rat in a jar of gobstoppers at the local sweet shop, which was owned by a "mean and loathsome" old woman called Mrs Pratchett who would always be forcing them to buy

sweets. This was known amongst the five boys as the "[Great Mouse Plot of 1924](#)". This was Roald's own idea.

Thereafter, he was sent to several [boarding schools](#) in England, including [Saint Peter's](#) in [Weston-super-Mare](#). His parents had wanted Roald to be educated at a British public school and, at the time, because of a then regular ferry link across the Bristol Channel, this proved to be the nearest. His time at Saint Peter's was an unpleasant experience for him. He was very homesick and wrote to his mother almost every day, but never revealed to her his unhappiness, being under the pressure of school censorship. Only after her death in 1967 did he find out that she had saved every single one of his letters, in small bundles held together with green tape. He later attended [Repton School](#) in [Derbyshire](#), where, according to his autobiography *Boy: Tales of Childhood*, a friend named Michael was viciously caned by headmaster [Geoffrey Fisher](#), the man who later became the [Archbishop of Canterbury](#) and crowned [the Queen](#) in 1953. (However, according to Dahl's biographer Jeremy Treglown, the caning took place in May 1933, a year after Fisher had left Repton. The headmaster concerned was in fact J.T. Christie, Fisher's successor.) This caused Dahl to "have doubts about religion and even about God". He was never seen as a particularly talented writer in his school years, with one of his English teachers writing in his school report "I have never met anybody who so persistently writes words meaning the exact opposite of what is intended,"

Dahl was very tall, reaching 6 ft 6 in (1.98 m) in adult life; he was good at sports, being made captain of the school [fives](#) and [squash](#) teams, and also playing for the [football](#) team. He developed an interest in [photography](#). During his years there, [Cadbury](#), the chocolate company, would occasionally send boxes of new chocolates to the school to be tested by the pupils. Dahl apparently used to dream of inventing a new chocolate bar that would win the praise of Mr Cadbury himself, and this proved the inspiration for him to write his third book for children, [Charlie and the Chocolate Factory](#) (1963) and include references to chocolate in other books for children.

Throughout his childhood and adolescent years, Dahl spent his summer holidays with his mother's family in their native Norway. His childhood and first job selling kerosene in [Midsomer Norton](#) and surrounding villages in Somerset are the subject of his autobiographical work, *Boy: Tales of Childhood*.

After finishing his schooling, he spent three weeks hiking through [Newfoundland](#) with the Public Schools' Exploring Society (now known as [BSES Expeditions](#)).

## Career

In July 1934, Dahl joined the [Shell Petroleum](#) Company. Following two years of training in the UK, he was transferred to [Dar-es-Salaam](#), [Tanganyika](#) (now [Tanzania](#)). Along with the only two other Shell employees in the entire territory, he lived in luxury

in the Shell House outside Dar-es-Salaam, with a [cook](#) and personal [servants](#). While out on assignments supplying oil to customers across Tanganyika, he encountered [black mambas](#) and [lions](#), amongst other [wildlife](#).

## World War II

In August 1939, as World War II loomed, plans were made to round up the hundreds of Germans in [Dar-es-Salaam](#). Dahl was made an officer in the [King's African Rifles](#), commanding a platoon of [Askaris](#), indigenous troops serving in the colonial army.

In November 1939, Dahl joined the [Royal Air Force](#). After a 600-mile (970 km) car journey from Dar-es-Salaam to [Nairobi](#), he was accepted for flight training with 20 other men, and was one of only three who survived the war, as the other 17 died in combat. With seven hours and 40 minutes experience in a [De Havilland Tiger Moth](#), he flew solo; Dahl enjoyed watching the wildlife of [Kenya](#) during his flights. He continued on to advanced flying training in [Iraq](#), at [RAF Habbaniya](#), 50 miles (80 km) west of [Baghdad](#). Following six months' training on [Hawker Harts](#), Dahl was made a [Pilot Officer](#).

He was assigned to [No. 80 Squadron RAF](#), flying obsolete [Gloster Gladiators](#), the last [biplane fighter aircraft](#) used by the RAF. Dahl was surprised to find that he would not receive any specialised training in [aerial combat](#), or in flying Gladiators. On 19 September 1940, Dahl was ordered to fly his Gladiator from Abu Sueir in [Egypt](#), on to Amiriya to refuel, and again to Fouka in [Libya](#) for a second refuelling. From there he would fly to 80 Squadron's forward [airstrip](#) 30 miles (48 km) south of [Mersa Matruh](#). On the final leg, he could not find the airstrip and, running low on [fuel](#) and with night approaching, he was forced to attempt a [landing](#) in the desert. The undercarriage hit a boulder and the aircraft crashed, fracturing his skull, smashing his nose, and temporarily [blinding](#) him. He managed to drag himself away from the blazing wreckage and passed out. Later, he wrote about the crash for his first published work.

Dahl was rescued and taken to a [first-aid](#) post in Mersa Matruh, where he regained consciousness, but not his sight, and was then taken by train to the Royal Navy hospital in [Alexandria](#). There he fell in and out of love with a nurse, Mary Welland. Dahl had fallen in love with her voice while he was blind, but once he regained his sight, he decided that he no longer loved her. An RAF inquiry into the crash revealed that the location to which he had been told to fly was completely wrong, and he had mistakenly been sent instead to the [no man's land](#) between the Allied and Italian forces.

In February 1941, Dahl was discharged from hospital and passed fully fit for flying duties. By this time, 80 Squadron had been transferred to the [Greek campaign](#) and based at [Eleusina](#), near [Athens](#). The squadron was now equipped with [Hawker](#)

[Hurricanes](#). Dahl flew a replacement Hurricane across the Mediterranean Sea in April 1941, after seven hours flying Hurricanes. By this stage in the Greek campaign, the RAF had only 18 combat aircraft in Greece: 14 Hurricanes and four [Bristol Blenheim](#) light bombers. Dahl saw his first aerial combat on 15 April 1941, while flying alone over the city of [Chalcis](#). He attacked six [Junkers Ju-88s](#) that were bombing ships and shot one down. On 16 April in another air battle, he shot down another Ju-88.

On 20 April 1941, Dahl took part in the "Battle of Athens", alongside the highest-scoring British Commonwealth ace of World War II, [Pat Pattle](#) and Dahl's friend [David Coke](#). Of 12 Hurricanes involved, five were shot down and four of their pilots killed, including Pattle. Greek observers on the ground counted 22 German aircraft downed, but because of the confusion of the aerial engagement none of the pilots knew who they shot down. Dahl described it as *"an endless blur of enemy fighters whizzing towards me from every side."*

The wing returned back to [Eleusis](#). Later on in the day, the aerodrome was [strafed](#) by [Bf 109s](#), but none of them hit any of the Hawker Hurricanes. The Hurricanes were then evacuated on 21 April 1941 to a small, secret airfield near [Megara](#), a small village, where the pilots hid. Approximately 50 miles (80 km) north the [Luftwaffe](#) was searching for the remaining Hurricanes. By approximately 6 or 7 a.m., about thirty Bf-109s and [Stuka](#) dive-bombers flew over the seven pilots who were hiding. The Stukas dived bombed a [tanker](#) in the Bay of Athens, and sank it. Dahl and his comrades were only 500 yards (460 m) away from the incident. Surprisingly, neither the bombers nor the fighters were able to spot the Hurricanes parked in the nearby field. At some time in the afternoon, an [Air Commodore](#) arrived at the airfield by car and asked if one of the seven could volunteer to fly and deliver a package to a man named Carter at Eleusis. Roald Dahl was the only one who volunteered to do it. The contents of the package were of vital importance, and Dahl was told that if he was shot down, or captured, he should burn the package immediately, so it would not fall into enemy hands, and once he had handed over the package, he was to fly to [Argos](#), an airfield, with the rest of the seven pilots in the squadron.

For the rest of April, the situation was horrible for the RAF in Greece. If the Luftwaffe had destroyed the remaining seven planes, they would then have had complete control of the skies in Greece. They intended to wipe them out. If the squadron were to be found, it would mean the worst. According to Dahl's report, at about 4:30 p.m. a [Bf 110](#) swooped over the airfield at Argos, and found them. The pilots discussed that it would take the 110 roughly half an hour to return to base, and then another half hour for the whole enemy squadron to get ready for take-off, and then another half hour for them to reach Argos. They had roughly an hour and thirty minutes until they would be strafed by enemy aircraft. However, instead of having the remaining seven pilots airborne and intercepting the 110s an hour ahead, the CO ordered them to escort ships evacuating their army in Greece at 6:00. The seven planes got up into the air, but the formation was quickly disorganised as the radios were not working.

Dahl and Coke found themselves separated from the rest of the wing. They could not communicate with them, so they continued on flying, looking for the ships to escort. Eventually they ran out of fuel and returned back to Argos, where they found the entire airfield in smoke and flames, with tents flamed, ammunition destroyed, etc.; however there were few casualties. While Roald Dahl and David Coke took off, three other aircraft in the wing somehow managed to get away. The sixth pilot who was taking off was strafed by the enemy and killed. The seventh pilot managed to bail out. Everybody else in the camp was hiding in the slit trenches. Immediately after Dahl and Coke figured out what was going on, the squadron was sent to Crete. A month later they were evacuated to Egypt.

As the Germans were pressing on Athens, Dahl was evacuated to Egypt. His squadron was reassembled in [Haifa](#). From there, Dahl flew sorties every day for a period of four weeks, shooting down a [Vichy French Air Force Potez 63](#) on 8 June and another Ju-88 on 15 June, but he then began to get severe headaches that caused him to [black out](#). He was invalided home to Britain. By this time his rank was [Flight Lieutenant](#).

Dahl began writing in 1942 after he was transferred to [Washington, D.C.](#) as Assistant [Air Attaché](#). His first published work, in the 1 August 1942 issue of [The Saturday Evening Post](#), was "Shot Down Over Libya" which described the crash of his Gloster Gladiator. [C. S. Forester](#) had asked Dahl to write down some RAF anecdotes so that he could shape them into a story. After Forester read what Dahl had given him, he decided to publish the story exactly as Dahl had written it. The original title of the article was "A Piece of Cake" but the title was changed to sound more dramatic - despite the fact that the he was not shot down at all.

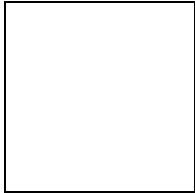
During the war, Forester worked for the British Information Service and was writing propaganda for the Allied cause, mainly for American consumption. This work introduced Dahl to espionage and the activities of the Canadian spymaster [William Stephenson](#), known by the codename "Intrepid". During the war, Dahl supplied intelligence from Washington to Stephenson and his organisation known as [British Security Coordination](#), which was part of [MI-6](#). He was revealed in the 1980s to have been serving to help promote Britain's interests and message in the United States and to combat the "[America First](#)" movement, working with such other well known agents as [Ian Fleming](#) and [David Ogilvy](#). Dahl was once sent back to Britain by British Embassy officials, supposedly for misconduct – "I got booted out by the big boys," he said. Stephenson promptly sent him back to Washington—with a promotion to [Wing Commander](#). Towards the end of the war, Dahl wrote some of the history of the secret organisation and he and Stephenson remained friends for decades after the war.

His record of five aerial victories, qualifying him as a [flying ace](#), has been confirmed by post-war research and cross-referenced in Axis records, although it is most likely

that he scored more than that during 20 April 1941 where 22 German aircraft were downed.

## Postwar life

### Family



[Patricia Neal](#) and Roald Dahl

Dahl married American actress [Patricia Neal](#) on 2 July 1953 at [Trinity Church](#) in New York City. Their marriage lasted for 30 years and they had five children: Olivia (who died of [measles encephalitis](#) in 1962, aged seven), [Tessa](#), Theo, [Ophelia](#), and [Lucy](#). He dedicated *The BFG* to Olivia after her death, and subsequently became a proponent of immunisation.

When he was four months old, Theo Dahl was severely injured when his baby carriage was hit by a taxi in New York City. For a time, he suffered from [hydrocephalus](#), and as a result, his father became involved in the development of what became known as the "[Wade-Dahl-Till](#)" (or WDT) valve, a device to alleviate the condition.

In 1965, Neal suffered three burst [cerebral aneurysms](#) while pregnant with their fifth child, Lucy; Dahl took control of her rehabilitation and she eventually relearned to talk and walk. They were divorced in 1983 following Dahl's affair with Neal's friend, Felicity ("Liccy") d'Abreu Crosland, 22 years his junior (born 12 December 1938), whom he subsequently married. [Ophelia Dahl](#) is director and co-founder (with doctor [Paul Farmer](#)) of [Partners in Health](#), a non-profit organisation. Lucy Dahl is a screenwriter in Los Angeles. Tessa's daughter [Sophie Dahl](#) (who was the inspiration for Sophie, the main character in her grandfather's book *The BFG*) is a model and author who remembers Roald Dahl as "a very difficult man – very strong, very dominant ... not unlike the [father of the Mitford sisters](#) sort of roaring round the house with these very loud opinions, banning certain types – foppish boys, you know – from coming round."

## Death and legacy

Roald Dahl died in November 1990 at the age of 74 of a rare blood disease, [myelodysplastic syndrome](#) (MDS, or "pre-leukemia"), in [Oxford](#),<sup>[18]</sup> and was buried in the cemetery at the



[parish church of Saint Peter and Paul](#) in [Great Missenden](#). According to his granddaughter, the family gave him a "sort of [Viking funeral](#)". He was buried with his [snooker cues](#), some very good burgundy, chocolates, [HB pencils](#) and a [power saw](#). In his honour, the [Roald Dahl Children's Gallery](#) was opened at [Buckinghamshire County Museum](#) in nearby [Aylesbury](#).

In 2002, one of [Cardiff Bay](#)'s modern landmarks, the historic Oval Basin plaza, was re-christened "[Roald Dahl Plass](#)". "Plass" means "place" or "square" in Norwegian, referring to the acclaimed late writer's Norwegian roots. There have also been calls from the public for a permanent statue of him to be erected in the city

Dahl's charitable commitments in the fields of [neurology](#), [haematology](#) and [literacy](#) have been continued by his widow since his death, through the Roald Dahl Foundation. In June 2005, the [Roald Dahl Museum and Story Centre](#) opened in [Great Missenden](#) to celebrate the work of Roald Dahl and advance his work in [literacy](#).

In 2008, the UK charity Booktrust and [Children's Laureate Michael Rosen](#) inaugurated The Roald Dahl Funny Prize, an annual award to authors of humorous children's fiction. In 2008, [The Times](#) ranked Roald Dahl sixteenth on their list of "The 50 greatest [British writers](#) since 1945".

On 14 September 2009 (the day after what would have been Dahl's 93rd birthday) the first [blue plaque](#) in his honour was unveiled in Llandaff, Cardiff. Rather than commemorating his place of birth, however, the plaque was erected on the wall of the former sweet shop (and site of "The Great Mouse Plot of 1924") that features in the first part of his autobiography [Boy](#). It was unveiled by his widow Felicity and son Theo.

## **Roald Dahl Day**

The anniversary of Dahl's birthday on 13 September is celebrated as "Roald Dahl Day" in Africa and Latin America

## **Writing**

Roald Dahl's story "The Devious Bachelor" was illustrated by Frederick Siebel when it was published in [Collier's](#) (September 1953).

Dahl's first published work, inspired by a meeting with [C. S. Forester](#), was "Shot Down Over Libya." Today the story is published as "A Piece of Cake". The story, about his wartime adventures, was bought by *The Saturday Evening Post* for \$900, and propelled him into a career as a writer. Its title was inspired by a highly inaccurate and sensationalised article about the crash that blinded him, which claimed he had been shot down instead of simply having to land due to low fuel.

His first children's book was [The Gremlins](#), about mischievous little creatures that were part of RAF folklore. The book was commissioned by [Walt Disney](#) for a film that was never made, and published in 1943. Dahl went on to create some of the best-loved children's stories of the 20th century, such as [Charlie and the Chocolate Factory](#), [Charlie and the Great Glass Elevator](#), [Matilda](#), [James and the Giant Peach](#) and *George's Marvellous Medicine*.

He also had a successful parallel career as the writer of macabre adult short stories, usually with a dark sense of humour and a surprise ending. Many were originally written for American magazines such as [Collier's](#), *Ladies Home Journal*, [Harper's](#), [Playboy](#) and [The New Yorker](#), then subsequently collected by Dahl into anthologies, gaining worldwide acclaim. Dahl wrote more than 60 short stories and they have appeared in numerous collections, some only being published in book form after his death (See [List of Roald Dahl short stories](#)). His stories also brought him three [Edgar Awards](#): in 1954, for the collection *Someone Like You*; in 1959, for the story "[The Landlady](#)"; and in 1980, for the episode of [Tales of the Unexpected](#) based on "[Skin](#)".

One of his more famous adult stories, "The Smoker" (also known as "[Man From the South](#)"), was filmed twice as both 1960 and 1985 episodes of [Alfred Hitchcock Presents](#), and also adapted into [Quentin Tarantino](#)'s segment of the 1995 film [Four Rooms](#). This bizarre, oft-anthologised suspense classic concerns a man residing in Jamaica who wagers with visitors in an attempt to claim the fingers from their hands; the 1960 Hitchcock version stars [Steve McQueen](#) and [Peter Lorre](#).

His short story collection *Tales of the Unexpected* was adapted to a successful [TV series of the same name](#), beginning with "[Man From the South](#)". When the stock of Dahl's own original stories was exhausted, the series continued by adapting stories by authors that were written in Dahl's style, including the writers [John Collier](#) and [Stanley Ellin](#).

He acquired a traditional [Romanichal Gypsy wagon](#) in the 1960s and the family used it as a playhouse for his children. He later used the *vardo* as a writing room, where he wrote the book [Danny, the Champion of the World](#).

A number of his short stories are supposed to be extracts from the diary of his (fictional) Uncle Oswald, a rich gentleman whose sexual exploits form the subject of these stories. In his novel "My Uncle Oswald" the uncle engages a temptress to seduce 20th Century geniuses and royalty with a love potion secretly added to chocolate truffles made by Dahl's favourite chocolate shop, [Prestat](#) of Piccadilly.

*Memories with Food at Gipsy House*, written with his wife Felicity and published posthumously in 1991, was a mixture of recipes, family reminiscences and Dahl's musings on favourite subjects such as chocolate, onions, and claret.



Dahl ranks amongst the [world's bestselling fiction authors](#), with sales estimated at 100 million.

### Children's fiction

Dahl's children's works are usually told from the point of view of a child. They typically involve adult villains or [villainesses](#) who hate and mistreat children, and feature at least one "good" adult to counteract the villain(s). These stock characters are possibly a reference to the abuse that Dahl stated that he experienced in the [boarding schools](#) he attended. They usually contain a lot of [black humour](#) and grotesque scenarios, including gruesome violence. [The Witches](#), [George's Marvellous Medicine](#) and [Matilda](#) are examples of this formula. [The BFG](#) follows it in a more analogous way with the good giant (the BFG or "Big Friendly Giant") representing the "good adult" archetype and the other giants being the "bad adults". This formula is also somewhat evident in Dahl's film script for *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang*. Class-conscious themes – ranging from the thinly veiled to the blatant – also surface in works such as [Fantastic Mr Fox](#) and [Danny, the Champion of the World](#).

Dahl also features in his books characters that are very fat, usually children. [Augustus Gloop](#), Bruce Bogtrotter, and Bruno Jenkins are a few of these characters, although an enormous woman named Aunt Sponge is featured in *James and The Giant Peach* and the nasty farmer Boggis in [Fantastic Mr Fox](#) features as an enormously fat character. All of these characters (with the possible exception of Bruce Bogtrotter) are either villains or simply unpleasant gluttons. They are usually punished for this: Augustus Gloop drinks from Willy Wonka's chocolate river, disregarding the adults who tell him not to, and falls in, getting sucked up a pipe and nearly being turned into fudge. Bruce Bogtrotter steals cake from the evil headmistress, Miss Trunchbull, and is forced to eat a gigantic chocolate cake in front of the school. Bruno Jenkins is turned into a mouse by witches who lure him to their convention with the promise of chocolate and, it is speculated, possibly disowned or even killed by his parents because of this. Aunt Sponge is flattened by a giant peach.

Dahl's mother used to tell him and his sisters tales about trolls and other mythical Norwegian creatures and some of his children's books contain references or elements inspired by these stories, such as the giants in *The BFG*, the fox family in [Fantastic Mr Fox](#) and the trolls in [The Minpins](#).

### Screenplays

For a brief period in the 1960s, Dahl wrote screenplays. Two – the [James Bond](#) film [You Only Live Twice](#) and *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang* – were adaptations of novels by [Ian Fleming](#), though both were rewritten and completed by other writers. Dahl also began adapting his own novel *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, which was completed and rewritten by [David Seltzer](#) after Dahl failed to meet deadlines, and

produced as the film [Willy Wonka & the Chocolate Factory](#) (1971). Dahl later disowned the film, though it is not clear whether his reasons for doing so were connected to the quality of the film itself or his leaving its production.

## Influences

Not surprisingly, a major part of Dahl's literary influences stemmed from his childhood. In his younger days, he was an avid reader, especially awed by fantastic tales of heroism and triumph. Amongst his favourite authors were [Rudyard Kipling](#), [William Thackeray](#), [Frederick Marryat](#) and [Charles Dickens](#) and their works went on to make a lasting mark on his life and writing. Dahl was also a huge fan of ghost stories and claimed that [Trolls](#) by [Jonas Lie](#) was one of the finest ghost stories ever written. While he was still a youngster, his mother, Sofie Dahl, would relate traditional Norwegian myths and legends from her native homeland to Dahl and his sisters. Dahl always maintained that his mother and her stories had a strong influence on his writing. In one interview he mentioned, "She was a great teller of tales. Her memory was prodigious and nothing that ever happened to her in her life was forgotten." When Dahl started writing and publishing his famous books for children, he created a grandmother character in [The Witches](#) and later admitted that she was based directly on his own mother as a tribute.

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roald\\_Dahl](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roald_Dahl)

