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For my family

1. Introduction

The author Roald Dahl is particularly famous for his children's literature, given that he "[...] was one of the most successful writers of children's books ever, both in terms of copies sold and money made" (Carrick 38). Before writing fiction for children, however, Dahl devoted himself to writing adult short stories (Makman 202, 203). His first collection of short stories was termed *Over To You: Ten Stories of Flyers and Flying* (1946) (Grigsby 41). The short story collection that followed, *Someone Like You* (1953), brought Dahl "[...] success and popularity [...]" (Grigsby 41). It did not gain a high amount of critical attention in the United Kingdom, but was critically acclaimed in the United States (Makman 215) and became a bestseller there (Grigsby 41). Dahl's third short story collection, *Kiss Kiss* (1960), "[...] was a popular success on both sides of the Atlantic [...]" (Carrick 41). John L. Grigsby observes that Dahl's two collections *Someone Like You* and *Kiss Kiss* "[...] are the ones upon which his admirers argue he merits canonical-writer status in literary history" (44).

Although Dahl's short stories are uniquely suspenseful, surprising, and darkly humorous, the amount of critical attention that has been focused on Dahl's short narratives is relatively small. Therefore, this thesis aims to add to the critical work on Dahl's adult narratives by thoroughly investigating their typical features. Moreover, it will attempt to gain new insights into Dahl's short stories by answering the question how they create the feelings of suspense and surprise in the reader. In addition, this thesis sets out to analyze how the reader cognitively processes the twists in the tale which, as will be further discussed in this thesis, are typical of Dahl.

In order to provide a detailed analysis of Dahl's narratives, Dahl's short story collection *Tales of the Unexpected* (1979) will be examined. This collection comprises sixteen short stories, seven of which were originally published in *Someone Like You* and the rest of which were taken from *Kiss Kiss*. Hence, the collection *Tales of the Unexpected* contains some of Dahl's most successful and representative adult short stories and lends itself perfectly to a critical analysis.

As the title of the collection already suggests, most of the stories from Dahl's *Tales of the Unexpected* contain a twist in the tale. It will be shown that a reader who is familiar with Dahl's narratives usually can already expect a twist at the end of a story

by Dahl, or, as the slogan of a theater adaptation of Dahl's short stories suggests, "expect the unexpected" (*Lyric Hammersmith*). Since Dahl's surprise endings arguably are the most distinctive feature of his typical stories and hence will be examined in great detail, the slogan from the theater adaptation has been borrowed for the title of this thesis.

In a thorough analysis of Dahl's short stories, this thesis will not only draw on numerous observations of critics who have commented on Dahl's narratives, but will also apply diverse theories to Dahl's stories. In chapter 2, theories of the short story will be discussed to show how the short story has developed historically and why it seems impossible to formulate a clear-cut definition of the short story. In chapter 3, then, it will be examined what historical tradition Dahl's short stories are written in. Moreover, the typical features of Dahl's short fiction will be introduced, and his narratives will further be classified. In chapter 4, a literary analysis of the narrative situation, narrative modes, and representation of thought in Dahl's short narratives as well as of the style used and the characters occurring in his short stories will be given. In addition, suspense theory will form the basis of an analysis of the creation of suspense in Dahl's stories. Furthermore, contextual frame theory, a model from the field of cognitive poetics, will be used in order to explain how Dahl's short fiction creates surprise in the reader and how the reader comprehends Dahl's twists in the tale. Eventually, in a concluding evaluation of Dahl's short stories, this thesis will explain why Dahl's narratives can be regarded as deliciously disgusting.¹

¹ A writer of *The Irish Times* has referred to Dahl's children's books as "[b]rilliantly disgusting" ("Disgusting' becomes high praise"), as will be discussed in chapter 3.

2. The Short Story: Refreshingly Resistant to Definitions

“Die short story ist sympathisch resistent gegenüber Definitionen” (Brosch 9).

When it comes to the genre of the short story, critics seem not to have been able to agree on a single definition that is satisfying to everyone: many have tried to define features of the short story other than its shortness that set it off from other genres, especially the novel. Others, however, think that the short story does not differ from the novel in kind but only in degree and that a universal definition of the short story on the basis of definitive characteristics is therefore impossible. In addition, due to the fact that scholars have not only disputed over how to define the short story, but also over what literary works can actually be regarded short stories and what narratives do not belong to the short story genre, there is no agreement on the history of the short story (Wright 46). Some want to emphasize the oral tradition of storytelling, therefore arguing that the short story’s beginnings are rooted in primal myths (Brosch 51) and regarding Aesop’s fables, narratives from the Old and the New Testament, and the first secular fourteenth-century tales of Boccaccio and Chaucer as the short story’s early ancestors (Sullivan and Levene 5). There are theorists who state that Washington Irving or Edgar Allan Poe mark the real beginning of the short story, whereas there also exists the opinion that the only true short story is the modern one (Wright 46).

What can be said with certainty, however, is that Edgar Allan Poe was one of the first writers to define the short story as a distinct genre. In his review of Hawthorne’s *Twice-Told Tales*, Poe produced the first elaborate theory of the short story, which he later specified in an essay entitled “The Philosophy of Composition” (Brosch 34). According to Poe, the poem is the highest art form (“Review” 60), while the short narrative, which he refers to as ‘tale,’ is the genre that comes closest to the lyric in its appeal to the true artist: “Were we called upon, however, to designate that class of composition which, next to such a poem as we have suggested, should best fulfil the demands of high genius [...] we should unhesitatingly speak of the prose tale [...]” (“Review” 61). Poe describes how the tale, just as the poem, has the power to create a unique impression in the reader (“Review” 60-61). Thus, in Poe’s view, the author of a tale first has to think of the specific “[...] unique or single *effect* [...]” (“Review”

61) that he wants to establish and then invent such events that will lead to the desired outcome (“Review” 61). In “The Philosophy of Composition,” Poe emphasizes this point by writing that

[n]othing is more clear than that every plot, worth the name, must be elaborated to its *dénouement* before any thing be attempted with the pen. It is only with the *dénouement* constantly in view that we can give a plot its indispensable air of consequence, or causation, by making the incidents, and especially the tone at all points, tend to the development of the intention. (67)

In an appeal for economic writing, Poe states that “[i]n the whole composition there should be no word written, of which the tendency, direct or indirect, is not to be the one preestablished design” (“Review” 61). He argues that the ‘unity of effect,’ however, can only be achieved in works that can be read “[...] at one sitting [...]” (“Philosophy” 69), i.e., in the case of the tale, within thirty minutes to two hours (“Review” 61). The novel, Poe states, cannot establish this ‘totality of effect’ because of its length (“Review” 61) and hence “[...] is objectionable [...]” (“Review” 61). However, he realizes that a literary work needs to have a certain length in order to create any impression at all (“Philosophy” 69) and argues: “Extreme brevity will degenerate into epigrammatism; but the sin of extreme length is even more unpardonable” (“Review” 61). Poe also draws a distinction between the tale and the essay, which he thinks does not attempt to produce any effect (“Review” 59).

All in all, Poe tries to define the short story as a genre that is independent from and in certain ways superior to the novel. He argues that the feature that distinguishes the short story from the novel is its ‘unity of effect,’ a characteristic that the prose tale shares with the poem and that the novel does not have due to its length. Poe lays great emphasis on the short story’s plot as a sequence of events that lead up to the intended *dénouement*.

Poe’s concept of the short story as a unified work of art had great influence on later short story theorists (Brosch 35). In 1901, Brander Matthews built on Poe’s theories of the short story in his work “The Philosophy of the Short-Story,” whose title is reminiscent of Poe’s “The Philosophy of Composition” (Henderson and Hancock 398). Like Poe, Matthews tries to define the short story on the basis of some other quality than its relative shortness (Wright 46). Therefore, he puts “[...] a hyphen between *short* and *story* [...]” (Wright 46) and argues that the ‘Short-story’ differs from the sketch (Wright 46): “[...] while a Sketch may be still-life, in a Short-story

something always happens” (Matthews 77). Following Poe, Matthews thus puts great emphasis on plot: “An idea logically developed by one possessing the sense of form and the gift of style is what we look for in the Short-story” (76). Moreover, Matthews insists that the ‘Short-story’ differs from the novel in kind: “The more carefully we study the history of fiction the more clearly we perceive that the Novel and the Short-story are essentially different – that the difference between them is not one of mere length only, but fundamental” (78). Extending Poe’s ideas, he declares that

[...] a Short-story has unity as a Novel cannot have it. Often, it may be noted by the way, the Short-story fulfils the three false unities of the French classic drama: it shows one action, in one place, on one day. A Short-Story deals with a single character, a single event, a single emotion, or the series of emotions called forth by a single situation. [...] The Short-story is the single effect, complete and self-contained, while the Novel is of necessity broken into a series of episodes. Thus the Short-story has, what the Novel cannot have, the effect of ‘totality,’ as Poe called it, the unity of impression. (73)

Furthermore, Matthews argues that the ‘Short-story,’ beginning with Boccaccio and Chaucer, has a longer history than the novel (78).

Another important formalist theorist of the first half of the twentieth century is the Russian Boris M. Éjxenbaum (May “Introduction” xvi-xvii). Consistent with Poe and Matthews, he claims that the short story differs from the novel in kind: “The novel is a syncretic form [...]; the short story is a fundamental, elementary [...] form. The novel derives from history, from travels; the story – from folklore, anecdote. The difference is one of essence, a difference in principle conditioned by the fundamental distinction between *big* and *small* form” (81). Moreover, Éjxenbaum, like Matthews, distinguishes the short story from the sketch by emphasizing that the short story is “[...] the story of action [...]” (81), therefore characterized by plot (81). He argues that it is typical for the short story to have surprise endings that mark the story’s climax, while the novel, because of its length and diverse episodes, ends differently, usually with an epilogue (82). Thus, Éjxenbaum states: “The short story [...] gravitates expressly toward maximal unexpectedness of a finale concentrating around itself all that has preceded. In the novel there must be a descent of some kind after the culmination point, whereas it is most natural for a story to come to a peak and stay there” (82). When it comes to the short story’s development, Éjxenbaum argues that the 1830ies and 1840ies in America mark the beginning of the short story as a distinct genre (83). He associates the rise of the American short story with the growing

popularity of magazines, which functioned as a platform for publishing short stories (83). Éjxenbaum argues that since Poe and his theory of the short story, all American short stories have been basically built on the same rules (85): they lead up to a surprise dénouement usually achieved because a riddle or an error is resolved at the end of the story, whereby the ending of the story instructs its beginning and middle (85). Hence, according to Éjxenbaum, unity of effect and stress on the outcome typify the American short story (87).

As can be deduced from Éjxenbaum's observations on the development of the American short story, Poe's description of the short story led to formulaic writing (Brosch 36): on the one hand, the rise of American literary magazines that reached its peak after 1891 was beneficial to the short story because it opened up a new market for short story writers, but on the other hand, those magazines were publishing a specific kind of short story and therefore did not allow for experiments with the form (Brosch 36). Instead, they led to the production of highly plotted stories with trick endings that were designed for mass media (Brosch 36). One author who is particularly famous for writing this type of short stories is O. Henry (Lohafer 109). He was a highly popular and influential American writer who published more than 250 short stories in numerous literary magazines throughout his career (May *Artifice* 13). The short story critic Charles E. May notes that "[b]y 1920, nearly five million copies of his books had been sold in the United States alone" (*Artifice* 13).

However, at the end of the nineteenth century, many critics condemned the formulaic short story that had resulted from Poe's prescriptive theory and a new theory of the short story was brought up (Brosch 36-37). This second strand of theory regarded the short story's affinity with oral narration as its exclusionary characteristic (Brosch 37).² One representative of this so-called 'public school' who puts emphasis on the short story's oral transmission is Mark Twain (Brosch 37). In his essay "How to Tell a Story," Twain draws a distinction between the humorous, the comic, and the witty story and points out that the humorous story is an exclusively American art form, while the comic story derives from England and the witty story is a French invention

² The following account of the strand of theory that focuses on oral transmission as well as the subsequent remarks on Henry James and the beginning of modernism in literature strongly follow Renate Brosch's line of reasoning (see Brosch 37-41). Most of the quotations from Mark Twain, Bret Harte, and Henry James that are used in this chapter are also to be found in Brosch, Renate. *Short Story: Textsorte und Leseerfahrung*. Trier: WVT Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2007, pp. 37-39.

(3). Furthermore, he argues that “[t]he humorous story depends for its effect upon the *manner* of the telling; the comic story and the witty story upon the *matter*” (3). His emphasis on the short story’s transmission by an oral narrator is further emphasized when he claims that “[t]he art of telling a humorous story – understand, I mean by word of mouth, not print – was created in America, and has remained at home” (4).

Similarly, Bret Harte argues for a typically American story that differs from the works of early writers such as Poe and Hawthorne, who he states were influenced by English literature (65-66). Thus, he writes:

But while the American literary imagination was still under the influence of English tradition, an unexpected factor was developing to diminish its power. It was *Humour* – of a quality as distinct and original as the country and civilisation in which it was developed. It was first noticeable in the anecdote or ‘story,’ and, after the fashion of such beginnings, was orally transmitted. It was common in the bar-rooms, the gatherings in the ‘country store,’ and finally at public meetings in the mouths of ‘stump orators.’ (65-66)

In addition, Harte declares that this sort of story was “[...] so distinctly original and novel, so individual and characteristic [...]” (66) that it could immediately be recognized as being American (66). He states that it was characterized by condensation and suggestiveness, that it was “[...] delightfully extravagant – or a miracle of understatement” (66) and that it reflected American life and thought (66). Moreover, he points out that the American story paid attention to dialects and that it did not require a meticulous writing style, neither did it have any moral relevance (66). Harte then goes on by arguing that a more literary, polished version of the American story eventually appeared in print and formed an important component of the literature in newspapers (66). Thus, Harte claims, the American short story has developed (66).

In the modernist period that followed, not only Poe’s concept of the formalized short story that has to be written towards a preconceptualized ending was condemned (Brosch 38); also Twain and Harte’s standpoint faded into the background and the short story was defined in new terms (Brosch 38-39). When it comes to the development of the modern short story, many critics mention the late-nineteenth century writer Henry James as an important American influence. While some regard James as a realist writer (e.g. Charters “History” 1550), others argue that he is an impressionist (e.g. Ferguson “Defining the Short Story” 227). In his essay “The Story-

Teller at Large: Mr. Henry Harland,” James distinguishes between the short story that is characterized by plot and the short story that focuses on an impression of life: “Are there not two quite distinct effects to be produced by this rigor of brevity [...]? The one with which we are most familiar is that of the detached incident, single and sharp, as clear as a pistol-shot; the other, of rarer performance, is that of the impression, comparatively generalized [...] of a complexity or a continuity” (64). He carries on by arguing that the impressionist short story is able to reflect “[...] the large in a small dose [...]” (64) and that it focuses on subject, not on plot (65).

Another highly influential American writer at the end of the nineteenth century was Stephen Crane (May *Artifice* 12), who, like James, can be regarded either as a realist (Charters “History” 1550) or an impressionist (Ferguson “Defining the Short Story” 227) author. May argues that reality in Crane’s stories is not the result of an accurate description of consecutive incidents (*Artifice* 12-13) but that “[r]ather, the very concept of ‘reality’ is made problematic by moments of time frozen into a kind of spatial stasis by the ironic impression of the perceiver” (*Artifice* 13). According to many critics, Crane, with his technique of combining romanticism’s subjectivity with realism’s objectivity, as Joseph Conrad might have been the first to notice, “[...] marks the true beginning of the modern short story in America” (*Artifice* 12).

Ann Charters argues that it were in fact two European short story writers, Guy de Maupassant from France and Anton Chekhov from Russia, who had the greatest influence on the short story around the turn of the twentieth century (“History” 1550). She observes that “[t]hey brought remarkable innovations to the content and form of the short story. [...] They insisted on focusing on the particular here-and-now quality of ordinary human existence [...]” (1550). While Maupassant’s specialties were carefully organized, conclusive plots and the scrupulous rendering of physical detail (Sullivan and Levene 6), Chekhov “[...] was much closer to the emerging spirit of modernism” (Sullivan and Levene 6). Charters analyzes that “[i]n Chekhov’s stories, [...] plots include less decisive action. They are subordinate to sympathetic dramatization of the characters’ psychology and mood” (“History” 1550-51). Similarly, May describes how in Chekhov’s short fiction, characters “[...] are less fully rounded figures of realism than embodiments of mood [...]” (*Artifice* 16). Chekhov’s short stories were translated into English in 1916 (Sullivan and Levene 6) and were spread in both England and America “[...] as examples of late-nineteenth-

century realism [...]” (May *Artifice* 15). However, they did not follow the same conventions as the realistic novel did but were referred to as ‘realistic’ pieces of fiction mainly because “[...] they seemed to focus on fragments of everyday reality [...]” (May *Artifice* 15-16). Chekhov’s short stories, critics realized, “[...] marked the beginnings of a new or ‘modern’ kind of short fiction – one that combined the specific detail of realism with the poetic lyricism of romanticism” (May *Artifice* 16).

In fact, Chekhov has influenced all short story writers of the twentieth century (May *Artifice* 16). Charters states that the next generation of European modernists of the early twentieth century to whom Chekhov was an important influence included personalities such as James Joyce, Katherine Mansfield, Franz Kafka, and Virginia Woolf, while in America, modernist writers were influenced by Chekhov as well as by Maupassant and consisted of writers such as, for example, Sherwood Anderson, Ernest Hemingway, Katherine Anne Porter, and William Faulkner (“History” 1551). May argues that Chekhov’s influence is best visible in the works of Joyce, Mansfield, and Anderson, who “[...] have received the most critical attention for fully developing the so-called modern short story [...]” (*Artifice* 16). Like Chekhov, those three writers do not rely on plot (*Artifice* 16) and therefore their short stories are highly distinct from the traditionalist conventions of nineteenth-century short fiction that go back to Poe’s concept of the short story.

Brosch explains that the short story’s transformation into its modern form took place because of a loss of faith in one’s ability to understand reality (39). In the romantic period, the “[...] ideal or spiritual, a transcendent objectification of human desire” (May *Artifice* 10) was regarded as significantly real, whereas realists wanted to depict the physical world and the realities of social life within it (May *Artifice* 10).

Modernist times, however, were marked by the predominance of a philosophical uncertainty about human knowledge and experience of the world (Brosch 39).

Suzanne C. Ferguson explains how “[...] when all we have in the world is our own experience of it, all received knowledge becomes suspect, and the very nature of knowledge becomes problematic” (“Defining the Short Story” 220) and argues that “[...] the quest for knowledge about reality is common to impressionist novels as well as short stories” (221). However, the short story was regarded as the one genre that was best amenable to the reflection of restless modern life and the depiction of truth by focusing on brief episodes of existence (Brosch 40) and on characters’ subjective

‘moments of revelation’ (Brosch 79), which James Joyce pushed to extremes and termed ‘epiphanies’ in his stories (Charters “History” 1551).

Hence, the plot-oriented story of the nineteenth century was replaced by the situation-oriented story of the twentieth century, which was supposed to depict a fragment of life (Brosch 74-75) and focus there an idea of what life is really like by centering on “[...] a moment of illumination near the end of the story, a moment in which apparently disparate threads of the characters’ experience are drawn together into an intelligible pattern, rather than a traditionally prepared plot climax [...]” (Ferguson “The Rise of the Short Story” 188-189). Sherwood Anderson, who published an important sequence of short stories entitled *Winesburg, Ohio* in 1919 (May *Artifice* 10), coined the term ‘slice-of-life story’ to define such non-formulaic short stories that have abrupt beginnings and focus on fragments of common life (Brosch 41, 74).

As can be concluded from the account of the modern short story and its interest in illuminative moments above, the short story’s brevity was considered an advantageous characteristic in the modernist period because it was believed that the short story was able to suggest more than was stated on the page (Hunter 2): “[...] the idea of a creative transaction between brevity and complexity – the art of saying less but meaning more – [...] became the basis of modernist experimentation in the short form” (Hunter 2). This idea has remained stable even after the end of modernism and has been expressed, for example, by Julio Cortázar, who compares short story and novel to photograph and film (406): he argues that whereas the film and the novel consist of accumulative events, the photograph and the short story have to work with the limitation that is naturally imposed on them (406). Thus, Cortázar states,

[...] the photographer or the story writer finds himself obliged to choose and delimit an image or an event which must be meaningful, which is meaningful not only in itself, but rather is capable of acting on the viewer or the reader as a kind of opening, an impetus which projects the intelligence and the sensibility toward something which goes well beyond the visual or literary anecdote contained in the photograph or the story. (406)

Since the modern short story was strongly characterized by an epiphany close to its end instead of a traditional dénouement, theorists of the twentieth century started to draw a distinction between the traditional story that is plotted and has a definite ending and the modern story that has an “[...] interiorized plot” (Charters “History” 1551) and is open-ended. Eileen Baldeshwiler, for example, distinguishes the larger

corpus of 'epical' from the smaller set of 'lyrical' short stories (231). She defines the two groups of short narratives as follows:

[t]he larger group of narratives is marked by external action developed 'syllogistically' through characters fabricated mainly to forward plot, culminating in a decisive ending that sometimes affords a universal insight, and expressed in the serviceably inconspicuous language of prose realism. The other segment of stories concentrates on internal changes, moods, and feelings, utilizing a variety of structural patterns depending on the shape of the emotion itself, relies for the most part on the open ending, and is expressed in the condensed, evocative, often figured language of the poem. (231)

Similarly to Baldeshwiler, Thomas M. Leitch draws a distinction between the 'anecdotal' and the 'epiphanic' story:

The anecdotal story, typified by Hawthorne's 'The Birthmark,' Poe's 'The Gold-Bug,' and the Sherlock Holmes stories of Arthur Conan Doyle, presents an Aristotelian action with a beginning, middle, and end; the epiphanic story, represented by Chekhov's 'The Lady with the Dog,' Joyce's 'Ivy Day in the Committee Room,' and Crane's Civil War stories, adumbrates a fictional world not by developing a plot involving purposive agents but by unfolding particular sensations or emotions and proceeding to a climactic revelation that does not necessarily take the form of a complete overt action. (130-131)

What can be inferred from Baldeshwiler and Leitch's observations on the two different types of short narratives is that a short story can be short either because it only consists "[...] of one incident or a closely related sequence of events" (Charters "Elements" 1554), as is usually the case with traditional short stories, or because some broader material has been compressed (Charters "Elements" 1554), as is often said to be typical of the modern short story, e.g. Frank O'Connor, who is of the opinion that the only real short story is the modern one (Hunter 3), states that in a short story, "[...] a whole life-time must be crowded into a few minutes [...]" (183).

O'Connor was one of those critics who were of the opinion that the short story is uniquely suitable for rendering the experience of modern life (Hunter 3): in his highly influential work *The Lonely Voice: A Study of the Short Story* from 1963, he argues that the short story reflects "[...] an intense awareness of human loneliness" (182). Thus, according to O'Connor, the short story differs from the novel in its subject matter: while the novel needs "[...] the concept of a normal society [...]" (181), the short story deals with outsiders (182) and hence remains "[...] remote from the community – romantic, individualistic, and intransigent" (182). O'Connor's influence is visible, for example, in the theories of Mary Rohrberger and Charles E. May

(Friedman 18-19), who focus on the short story as a symbolic art form (Brosch 44-45).

Like Baldeshwiler and Leitch, Rohrberger distinguishes between two kinds of short narratives, but in her opinion, the lyric story is the only true short story. Thus, she contrasts what she calls the 'short story proper' with the 'simple narrative' (Rohrberger 40). As opposed to Baldeshwiler, who considers the lyric short story to have started with Turgenev and Chekhov (232), Rohrberger traces the lyric story back to the romantic period, arguing that Hawthorne marks the real beginning of the short story and that Poe and Melville's stories are lyrical as well (40). Hence, Rohrberger draws a connection between the romantic and the modern short story by claiming that both rely on "[...] symbolic substructures [...]" (40), which she regards as the one main characteristic that distinguishes the real, lyric short story from the simple narrative (43). Therefore, Rohrberger defines the two kinds of short narrative as follows:

Both categories partake of the qualities of unity and coherence; but in the simple narrative interest lies primarily on surface level. There are no mysteries to be solved, no depths to be plumbed. Meaning is apparent, easily articulated and accomplished by simple ironic reversals. [...] Readers experience an immediate feeling of satisfaction in completion of the form. The short story, on the other hand, leaves readers with a set of emotions that cannot be easily sorted; readers are often confused as to meanings [...]. In this kind of story, reader satisfaction must be postponed until questions presented by the symbolic substructures are answered. (43)

In agreement with Rohrberger, May defines the short story as a lyrical form and distinguishes it from the novel on the basis of the different realities that the two genres deal with:

[...] whereas the novel is primarily a social and public form, the short story is mythic and spiritual. While the novel is primarily structured on a conceptual and philosophic framework, the short story is intuitive and lyrical. The novel exists to reaffirm the world of 'everyday' reality; the short story exists to 'defamiliarize' the everyday. Storytelling does not spring from one's confrontation with the everyday world, but rather from one's encounter with the sacred (in which true reality is revealed in all its plentitude) or with the absurd (in which true reality is revealed in all its vacuity). ("The Nature of Knowledge" 133)

In a more recent article from 2004, May again promotes his idea that while the novel lends itself to realism, the short story is especially amenable to the depiction of epiphanies. He states that because of its brevity, the short story focuses "[...] on a

single experience lifted out of the everyday flow of human actuality and active striving [...]” (“Why Short Stories Are Essential” 24), whereas the novel, because of its length, has to deal with “[...] the ordinary flow of everyday experience” (“Why Short Stories Are Essential” 24). In addition, he claims that in the novel, detail is used “[...] to give the reader the illusion that he or she ‘knows’ the experience [...]” (“Why Short Stories Are Essential” 18), whereas in the short story, it “[...] is transformed into metaphoric significance” (“Why Short Stories Are Essential” 18).

Moreover, May stresses the short story’s relation to mystery (“Why Short Stories Are Essential” 16, 17) and its consequential closeness to the primal roots of storytelling (“Why Short Stories Are Essential” 17), which he also emphasizes in his earlier article from 1984 when he argues that “[...] the short story precedes the long story as the most natural means of narrative communication” (“The Nature of Knowledge” 131). Like Rohrberger, May also draws a connection between his concept of the short story and the Romantic tradition of the early nineteenth century (“The Nature of Knowledge” 139) and includes stories by Poe, Hawthorne and Melville in the group of works that he considers to be short stories (“Why Short Stories Are Essential” 20-21). Brosch observes that May ignores the formulaic character of Poe’s stories and focuses on Poe’s affinities with the lyric instead (44), which it seems can be said about Rohrberger as well when it comes to her theory of the symbolic short story.

The literary critic Norman Friedman also detects several inconsistencies in Rohrberger and May’s approach, which promotes the theory that the short story differs from the novel in kind (Friedman 18). Friedman argues that since Rohrberger and May work deductively in defining the short story, i.e. they first postulate a definition of the short story by considering what it typically deals with and only then look at how these circumstances affect the story’s brevity (Friedman 18-19), they run into a logical problem: “[...] these critics assume that the short story has a characteristic subject matter which in turn calls forth a characteristic structure, or that it has a characteristic structure which in turn calls forth a certain subject matter. The problem with this procedure is that it mixes the categories” (Friedman 19). Hence, Friedman argues that when it comes to the causal relationship between the short story’s shortness and its content, “[...] the line of reasoning is reversible [...]” (Friedman 19) in Rohrberger and May’s approach. This observation seems to hold true when the development of May’s theory about the short story over the years

is analyzed: while in his essay from 1984, May argues that “[t]he short story is short precisely because of the kind of experience or reality embodied in it” (“The Nature of Knowledge” 132), he claims that the short story’s brevity gives it no choice but to focus on a specific type of experience in his article from 2004 (“Why Short Stories Are Essential” 24).

Furthermore, Friedman points out that Rohrberger, by relating the short story “[...] to the tradition of romance, which in turn leads to the modernist tradition of symbolism” (19), brings the short story as she defines it “[...] closer to romance than to either the simple narrative or the novel” (20), whereby the short story’s shortness is lost completely as a characteristic (20). Therefore, Friedman argues, Rohrberger also has problems showing how the modern short story’s symbolism distinguishes it from the modern novel as well as from the modern poem (20), for the modern short story’s characteristics that Rohrberger highlights are, according to Friedman, “[...] period traits and not genre traits” (20).

Friedman is also opposed to May’s above-mentioned theory that while the short story deals with epiphanies, the novel’s realm is realism when he writes: “May does not acknowledge that there are other kinds of novels than the realistic and that some of them *do* deal with fleeting moments of mythic perception – as do a number of Virginia Woolf’s novels, for example, and, I would argue, Joyce’s *Ulysses*” (22).

Moreover, Friedman states that May does not admit that not all short stories are about epiphanies, unless he followed Rohrberger’s line of reasoning and argued that those stories that do not deal with revelatory moments are not to be regarded as real short stories (23).

Like Friedman, Wright also is of the opinion that working deductively such as May and Rohrberger do is not the way to go. He objects to the deductive approach by arguing as follows:

When genre is conceived as a category, as it usually is in casual writing, it tends to become nothing more than a pigeonhole, and it gives rise to fruitless questions, such as whether this or that work belongs to it. Such questions, which are especially hostile to borderline works [...] as well as to new and original works in general, would not arise at all if genre were not imagined in this way. The question ‘Is X a short story or is it not?’ always seems a bit unreal. (47-48)

Brosch, too, is against setting up generic boundaries and favors an inductive approach in the field of genre definitions (9, 10). Working inductively when trying to define the short story means first looking at the biggest possible sample that is representative of the whole corpus of works that are regarded as short stories by different groups of people such as writers, readers, and critics and only then developing a definition of the short story (Friedman 16-18, Wright 48-50) instead of working with a pre-established definition and imposing it on those short narratives the definition applies to (Friedman 16).

Friedman, after promoting the inductive method for definitions of literary genres, argues that when trying to define the short story, a more limited definition than the one that a short story is “[...] a short fictional narrative in prose [...]” (29) is not possible (29). He states that within this definition, a wide range of stories with many different characteristics that appear in many different combinations is feasible (30). What we therefore cannot do, Friedman argues, is claim that the short story, because it is a story that is short, only deals with a certain subject matter or produces a specific effect (30). According to Friedman, “[w]e must be prepared to recognize the wide variety of possibilities that can fall under the heading of short fictional narrative in prose, and we must be careful to distinguish among features which are exclusive to the form, features which are independent of the form, and those which are accidental and historically conditioned” (30).

Wright works with Friedman’s definition of the short story as ‘a short fictional narrative in prose’ (Wright 50) and makes an attempt at answering the difficult question of how short a short story should be by suggesting that it should not exceed the length of *Heart of Darkness* (50), since this is the longest work that Wright knows has been called a short story (49). Moreover, he argues for working out a definition of the short story on the basis of a set of characteristics that generally occur throughout the body of works considered short stories and that do not all have to be found in every single short story (49). This enterprise, he clarifies, certainly is an eclectic one (51). Like Friedman, Wright is of the opinion that a common definition of the short story cannot be based on a certain subject matter or effect, but he suggests that subgenres could be established for more narrow definitions which are based on less general features of the short story (52). Concluding his thoughts on the short story, Wright emphasizes that “[w]e need conscious definitions for critical terms like *short*

story, for if we do not have them, we will be groping around with whatever unconscious definitions are in our heads” (52) and states that “[a] definition of the genre as a cluster of conventions [...] may facilitate not only discourse among critics but continuing insight into the art itself” (52-53).

As can be seen from this survey, many concepts of the short story have remained close to modernism even in postmodern times (Brosch 80). As far as the development of the short story after the modern period is concerned, Charters states that by the end of the twentieth century, “[...] the short story has been alive and well in the hands of writers in every country of the world [...]” (“History” 1553) and that “[i]n Europe and North America, the tradition continues with a rich diversity of literary forms and styles as new generations of writers come of age” (“History” 1553).

Brosch observes that it is characteristic of postmodern short stories to blur the boundaries between fiction and reality (91). She also mentions that since the beginning of postmodernism, literary genres are being mixed with each other, whereby the postmodern story is reminiscent of the short story’s beginnings as a hybrid form (46). Moreover, she considers the short story to be innovative (46) and multifaceted (9, 46) and, therefore, impossible to pigeonhole (9). As Brosch so beautifully points out, the short story is a form that is refreshingly resistant to definitions (9).

To conclude, the short story is and probably always will be a form that cannot be narrowed down to a specific definition on the basis of universal features that every short story possesses and that distinguish the short story from other genres not only in degree, but in kind. Those who have tried to find such a definition of the short story have focused on certain characteristics at the expense of others that they have ignored for their argument to apply. The short story, diverse and variable as it is, remains an indefinable genre.

Now that the concept of the short story has been examined from different critical viewpoints and the short story’s historical development has been sketched out with a focus on changes in the form that have taken place between the romantic and the postmodern periods, this thesis can start with the discussion of Roald Dahl’s short stories. As will become clear from the following chapters, Dahl’s short stories cannot be fitted to the modern or postmodern tradition but strongly rely on pre-modern

concepts of the short story. In the next chapter, the typical features of Dahl's short stories will be worked out and the question how Dahl's stories for adults can further be classified will be answered.

3. The Dahlian Short Story

When Roald Dahl stated in an interview that "[...] most short story writers who are writing today are writing mood pieces, and not short stories in the true sense of the word" (Wintle and Fisher) and that to him, the true definition of a short story is "[t]he old definition—A beginning, a middle and an end. It's a definite plot which progresses and comes to a climax, and the reader is fully satisfied when he's finished it" (Wintle and Fisher), he made explicit that his short stories are written in the tradition of Poe and not of Chekhov. The critic James Kelly also observes that Dahl's stories are short stories in the classical sense when reviewing the collection *Someone Like You*: "No worshiper of Chekhov, he. You'll find him marching with solid plotters like Saki and O. Henry, Maupassant and Maugham. [...] [G]ive him a surprise denouement and he'll give you a story leading up to it."

Dahl's short stories, with their reliance on plot and their unexpected, often shocking twist endings that are so typical of Dahl, can therefore be set apart from the modern short story that focuses on fragments of life and tends to be more open-ended.

Moreover, Dahl, like O. Henry, who he is so often compared to, made a living from publishing his stories in U.S. magazines for a long time (Makman 202), which is why his short stories can be regarded commercial stories that are part of popular culture and that were neglected by modern writers and critics (Wenzel "Die Pointe" 9).

When looking at those critics mentioned in the previous chapter who try to distinguish between two different types of short story, it is obvious that Dahl's stories would be classified as being 'epical' in Baldeshwiler's terms because they are plotted and closed; according to Leitch, they would be 'anecdotal' for the same reasons.

Rohrberger would not even include Dahl's stories in her canon of true short stories but would consider them to be 'simple narratives,' for they are neither open-ended nor marked by symbolism, and May, similarly to Rohrberger, would not term Dahl's narratives 'short stories' either because they are not characterized by epiphanies.

Now that it has been shown that Dahl's adult narratives are short stories in the traditional sense, two exemplary stories of Dahl, "Taste" and "Man from the South," shall be summarized in order to show that Dahl's stories typically rely on imaginative plots and have surprise endings. In "Taste," Mike Schofield bets his guest, wine connoisseur Richard Pratt, that he will not be able to guess the wine that he has provided for dinner. Schofield is so convinced Pratt will not be able to ascertain the wine's vintage and breed that he agrees on betting Pratt his daughter's hand in marriage. After tasting the wine carefully and commenting on every detail of it, Pratt finally guesses the wine right. The whole situation at the dinner table is about to escalate when all of a sudden, Schofield's maid approaches Pratt and hands him his glasses, which he, the maid states, had forgotten in the study where Schofield had left the bottle of wine to breathe before dinner.

"Man from the South," like "Taste," is about a wager between two men. An elderly man acquaints himself with a young American cadet at a hotel and soon involves him in a bet: if the boy is able to light his lighter ten times in a row, he will win the man's Cadillac, if not, the man will chop off the cadet's little finger that has been tied to a table. After the boy has lit his lighter for the eighth time, the man's wife storms into the hotel room and stops the bet. She apologizes for her husband and explains that he in fact does not have anything to bet with because she has won all his possessions from him in order to prevent him from betting. The story ends with the narrator's impression of what the wife's hand looked like: "I can see it now, that hand of hers; it had only one finger on it, and a thumb" (Dahl 42).

As is reflected by the two examples of typical short stories by Dahl above, Dahl's stories truly are uniquely surprising and Dahl has justly been referred to as "[...] the absolute master of the twist-in-the-tale mode of short fiction" (Cunningham).

However, apart from their surprise endings, which Dahl's stories are particularly famous for (Toynbee, Propson 75), his short stories still contain other features that are worth noticing. They can, for example, also be described as being bittersweet and featuring a dark vein of humor.

The bittersweetness of Dahl's stories has been addressed by several critics. Granville Hicks, for example, mentions that Dahl's "[...] great gift is for telling a macabre incident in such a way that the reader shudders and smiles at the same time" (qtd. in Grigsby 41) and Mark I. West observes that "[...] Dahl's stories are intended to

produce conflicting responses. In Dahl's fiction evil actions often come across as both appalling and amusing, and humor often coexists with tragedy" ("Mastering the Macabre"). Alan Warren praises Dahl for "[...] his near-perfect juxtaposition of humor with horror" (*Roald Dahl* 8) and refers to this feature as a "[...] 'grinning skull' quality of narration [...]" (*Roald Dahl* 8). A writer of *The Irish Times* once mentioned that Dahl's children's books are "[b]rilliantly disgusting" ("Disgusting becomes high praise"), and the same can certainly be said about his adult short fiction as well.

Thus, deliciously disgusting as Dahl's stories are, they feature black humor and have been referred to as macabre by numerous critics (e.g. Wood 176, Grigsby 45, Toynbee). Dahl's stories have even been compared to "[...] the whimsically macabre cartoons of Charles Addams" (Warren "Nasty, Nasty"). Moreover, Dahl's stories have also been called "[...] horrific [...]" (Petschek 6), "[...] wickedly mischievous [...]" (Yardley), and "[...] incredibly suspenseful [...]" (Warren *Roald Dahl* 1).

Suspense, in fact, plays an important role in traditional short stories (Brosch 100) and is therefore also indispensable to Dahl's stories. Dahl himself once referred to suspense as the most effective method for providing one's readers with "[...] pain-pleasure [...]" (Dahl qtd. in Warren *Roald Dahl* 19) and stated in an interview that he was constantly afraid of boring his readers (West "Interview" 65): "I always feel compelled to hold the reader, get him by the throat and never let go until the last page" (West "Interview" 65). Snaring his readership by way of suspenseful plots, Dahl makes it "[...] almost physically impossible [...]" (Wagner) for them not to finish reading one of his stories at once. This, of course, contributes to the unity of effect as Poe has conceptualized it.

What is also typical of Dahl's short stories is the clear and polished style in which they are written. Warren notes that there is a similarity between Dahl and the writer John Collier in this respect: "[...] both Dahl and Collier are conscientious craftsmen, polishing and honing their prose to perfection" (*Roald Dahl* 2). Willa Petschek, too, states that Dahl is a perfectionist in his field and notices that he regards many short stories of other writers with disdain because they do not rely on plot (15),³ as has already been mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. It seems that since Dahl, who

³ Petschek makes this point by quoting Dahl on what he calls "[...] mood pieces or essays [...]" (15). The quote is similar to the one used at the start of this chapter.

is so disrespectful of short stories in the modern sense, lays much emphasis on plot, he is less concerned with the characters of his short stories (Warren *Roald Dahl* 9). Warren writes that Dahl “[...] sketches characters in quickly, with fewer brushstrokes than his contemporaries” (*Roald Dahl* 9).

When it comes to the narrative voice and frequently occurring themes in Dahl’s stories, it can be observed that Dahl uses both heterodiegetic and homodiegetic narrators (Viñas Valle 301-307) and that the war of the sexes is a highly persistent theme in his short narratives (Makman 218). With regard to Dahl’s preference for depicting power struggles in his stories, Lisa H. Makman states that “[t]urning the tables is perhaps the most pervasive theme in Dahl’s literature for both adults and children” (219) and adds that the majority of the stories in *Someone Like You* and *Kiss Kiss* “[...] use dramatic shifts in the balance of power to shock the reader” (219). Moreover, revenge plays a major role in Dahl’s short stories. This is not only the case when his stories focus on power play, but also when deceitful and greedy characters get what they deserve – in these cases, it seems as if fate or Dahl himself took revenge on those characters who have not done right. Murderers, however, usually get away with the crimes they have committed in Dahl’s stories.

As can be deduced from the two stories “Taste” and “Man from the South” that have been recounted above, Dahl also likes to involve his characters in unusual wagers. Furthermore, Dahl, himself a connoisseur and collector of many things, often gives his characters special knowledge or makes them collectors of various objects (Makman 217, West “Mastering the Macabre”). Specific expertise, however, is frequently connoted negatively in Dahl’s stories, as J. D. O’Hara observes when remarking that Dahl’s stories often suggest “[...] that special knowledge is dangerous, or that the man with special knowledge is necessarily nutty” (qtd. in Grigsby 42).

In addition, many critics have argued that Dahl’s stories reflect a negative view of society: Toynbee writes that Dahl’s adult stories “[...] are gripping, well written, yet leave a sour sense that the author can find little to be said for the human race.” Wood states that “Dahl is at his best when he reveals the horrible thinness of much of our respectability [...]” (176), and West argues that the most important theme which can be found in the larger part of Dahl’s work for adults is “[...] the superficiality of civilization” (“Mastering the Macabre”).

The typical features of Dahl's short stories that have been introduced in this chapter will be thoroughly discussed and examined in the next chapter on the basis of Dahl's short story collection *Tales of the Unexpected*. In this chapter, however, the question of how Dahl's short stories can further be categorized still remains to be answered.

It seems that just like the short story per se, Roald Dahl's adult stories cannot be easily classified (Warren *Roald Dahl* 2). Warren states that Dahl's two short story collections *Someone Like You* and *Kiss Kiss*, many stories of which have been selected to constitute the collection *Tales of the Unexpected*, "[...] have earned him an enviable niche, not only in the genre of mystery/suspense fiction, but among the great short story writers of the twentieth century [...]" (*Roald Dahl* 1), but later adds that "Dahl's short stories are *sui generis*: he is rarely the author of horror stories in the vein of H.P. Lovecraft or Stephen King, nor is he a mystery writer in the tradition of Agatha Christie or John D. MacDonald" (*Roald Dahl* 1).

Robert Carrick argues that many of the stories in *Someone Like You* are "[...] speculative fiction, mostly in the dark fantasy or horror subgenre" (41) and considers most of the stories from *Kiss Kiss* that have also appeared in *Tales of the Unexpected* to belong to the genre of speculative fiction as well (41). While Carrick thinks that Dahl's stories "[...] contribute to his place in the fantasy tradition [...]" (47), Warren argues that although "[h]is stories frequently revolve around an outlandish or fantastic premise, [...] Dahl is careful to ground the story in reality, employing verisimilitude [...] to convince us, over our objections, that what seems utterly fantastical is just barely possible" (*Roald Dahl* 1).

Although it is true that Dahl's stories do not take place in unknown worlds that do not match our own, it still can be argued that some of his stories belong to the genre of fantasy or of science fiction, which "[...] is a form of literary fantasy or romance [...]" ("Science fiction" *Oxford Dictionary*). In "William and Mary," a man's brain and one of his eyes are kept alive in a tray after the man's body has succumbed to a deadly illness. The whole procedure of how the brain is going to be removed from the body and kept alive by an artificial heart is explained in great detail. The medical account of the surgery sounds so sophisticated and plausible that it indeed seems almost possible that a medical operation like this could be successful and that a brain could live on after its removal from the body. However, it can be argued that the situation in the story appears to be only *almost* possible, not "[...] just barely

possible” (Warren *Roald Dahl* 1), as Warren puts it. Hence, the story “William and Mary” can be regarded as science fiction (Propson 76), for science fiction “[...] explores the probable consequences of some improbable or impossible transformation of the basic conditions of human (or intelligent non-human) existence” (“Science fiction” *Oxford Dictionary*) or of individual beings (“Science fiction” *Encyclopædia Britannica*), whereby the transformation “[...] may involve some mutation of known biological or physical reality [...]” (“Science fiction” *Oxford Dictionary*). In “William and Mary,” William’s existential condition is changed drastically through a medical surgery that is, in fact, biologically impossible. As a consequence of the surgery, William’s brain can probably be kept alive for hundreds of years (Dahl 167) and he is able to live in a world full of thought and free of pain (Dahl 166-167).

In the story “Royal Jelly,” a man who is obsessed with bees first feeds himself, then his weak baby, with royal jelly, the food that bees give to their larvae and that makes the larvae grow considerably within a short period of time (Dahl 250). Dahl pretends that between eighty and eighty-five percent of the substances that royal jelly is composed of have not been identified (Dahl 253) and that royal jelly is a yet to be investigated miracle cure for an enormous amount of diseases (Dahl 255), which is, of course, scientifically incorrect information. By the end of the story, the baby seems to be turning into a bee: the baby’s mother observes that “[i]ndeed, the amount of flesh the child had put on since the day before was astonishing. [...] Curiously, though, the arms and legs did not seem to have grown in proportion. Still short and skinny, they looked like little sticks protruding from a ball of fat” (Dahl 260). Moreover, the baby’s stomach is suddenly spread with “[...] silky yellowy-brown hairs [...]” (Dahl 260) and eventually, the child is described as “[...] lying naked on the table, fat and white and comatose, like some gigantic grub that was approaching the end of its larval life and would soon emerge into the world complete with mandibles and wings” (Dahl 262). Again, this story involves the consequences of a biologically impossible situation and therefore, “Royal Jelly” can be argued to belong to the science fiction genre (Propson 76).

The story “Edward the Conqueror” appears to be a fantastic narrative, for these kind of narratives, Tzvetan Todorov suggests, arouse a sustained state of uncertainty on the part of the reader or possibly on the part of a character about whether the incidents involved are to be understood by way of either a natural or a supernatural explanation

(425), i.e. the reader or character has to hesitate between two possibilities: “[...] either he is the victim of an illusion of the senses, of a product of the imagination – and laws of the world then remain what they are; or else the event has indeed taken place, it is an integral part of reality – but then this reality is controlled by laws unknown to us” (Todorov 425). This is exactly the case with “Edward the Conqueror”: in this story, a woman comes to believe that a cat that has followed her into the house is a reincarnation of the composer Franz Liszt. The cat seems to enjoy listening to the music the woman is playing to him on the piano, even the music that is “[...] manifestly too *difficult*, too *classical*, to be appreciated by the majority of humans in the world” (Dahl 268). Moreover, the cat has warts on its face that are in the same spots as Liszt had them (Dahl 276-277) and it seems to despise the same music that Liszt himself never enjoyed (Dahl 277-278). When the woman’s husband does not believe her theory that the reincarnation of Liszt is sitting on their sofa, she tells him: ““Oh, my God! You idiot! You pompous idiot! Can’t you see that [...] this is something miraculous? Can’t you see *that?*”” (Dahl 280). In fact, this story leaves the reader uncertain whether the cat truly is an incarnation of Liszt and there is a supernatural explanation for what is happening or if the husband is right and the woman’s imagination is simply overactive.⁴

Apart from the three stories discussed above, none of the stories that are included in the collection *Tales of the Unexpected* seem to fit into the fantasy or science fiction genre. “Lamb to the Slaughter” can be classified as a crime story (North) because it revolves around a murder: a vengeful wife kills her husband with a “[...] big frozen leg of lamb [...]” (Dahl 25) because he has decided to leave her. The police investigate the case but cannot find the murder weapon – unaware that the murderess has served them the weapon for supper, the policemen eat up the lamb while discussing the case (Dahl 31).

However, as opposed to detective fiction, “Lamb to the Slaughter” does not focus “[...] on the method of detection [...]” (Scaggs 144) and on “[...] the detective who follows a particular method” (Scaggs 144) and therefore cannot be classified as a detective story in the strict sense of the term. It rather seems to be the case that Dahl’s readers identify, or at least side, with the murderess of the story (Bertonneau) and are

⁴ Similarly, Warren observes that in “Edward the Conqueror,” Dahl “[...] strikes the proper note of ambiguity, so we are free to decide whether the cat is indeed the reincarnation of Liszt or, alternately, to side with Edward in viewing his wife as mentally disturbed” (*Roald Dahl* 47).

tempted “[...] to join with Mary’s ‘giggle’ at the end of the tale, when her self-exculpating plan has prevailed” (Bertonneau). Thus, it might be argued that “Lamb to the Slaughter” can be considered noir fiction, since this sort of fiction is “[...] characterized less by rational investigation [...] than by violence, treachery, and moral confusion” (“Noir”) and since it usually invites the reader “[...] to adopt the point of view of a murderer or of an accessory to serious crime” (“Noir”).

“Lamb to the Slaughter” has been referred to as Dahl’s possibly most famous short story (Mabe, Frost) and Warren praises the story’s “[...] perfect balance between humor and horror” (*Roald Dahl* 29). In fact, “Lamb to the Slaughter” might be regarded as darkly humorous noir fiction,⁵ for although the story deals with the serious fact that a murderess gets away with the crime she has committed, it leaves the reader not only baffled, but also amused by the story’s peculiar ending.

Like many of Dahl’s stories, “Mrs Bixby and the Colonel’s Coat” cannot be easily assigned to a certain genre. Warren argues that the story “[...] is difficult to categorize except as a kind of domestic comedy [...]” (*Roald Dahl* 45). In fact, the story’s main character is a middle-class woman, Mrs Bixby, and as is usual for comedies, it features an episode of her normal life and deals with a human failing (“Comedy”), for Mrs Bixby betrays her husband with another man, the Colonel, who is extremely wealthy and whom she visits once a month in Baltimore. However, the story does not end happily for Mrs Bixby because the deceiver eventually is deceived herself: when the Colonel breaks up with Mrs Bixby and gives her a beautiful and highly expensive mink coat as a “[...] parting gift” (Dahl 222), Mrs Bixby takes the coat to a pawnbroker and pretends to have found the pawn ticket in her taxi in order not to have to explain to her husband where this extraordinary gift has come from. Mr Bixby decides to pick up the mysterious object from the pawnbroker before work, and in the end, his female work assistant marches off with the beautiful mink coat and Mrs Bixby is left with what her husband pretends to have picked up from the pawnbroker in the morning: “[...] a ridiculous little fur neckpiece [...]” (Dahl 233).

⁵ Thomas Bertonneau argues that “[...] ‘Lamb to the Slaughter’ belongs to the genre of comedy, as well as to the genre of crime fiction.” In fact, the story might be considered a mixture of black comedy (Bertonneau) and noir fiction because as in black comedy, in “Lamb to the Slaughter,” “[...] disturbing or sinister subjects like death, disease, or warfare, are treated with bitter amusement [...]” (“Black comedy”).

With regard to the story “Neck,” Warren argues that it is “[...] a delicious comedy of manners [...]” (*Roald Dahl* 37). The story centers around a situation in which Lady Turton, the oppressive and cuckolding wife of Sir Basil, gets stuck in the hole of a wooden sculpture with her head. Sir Basil, in a moment of victory over his wife,⁶ is left to choose between an axe and a saw to free Lady Turton and decides for the axe before he eventually tells his butler: ““What on earth are you thinking about. This thing’s much too dangerous. Give me the saw.”” (Dahl 119). Since the story features characters who belong to the upper class and since some of them apparently are dishonest and do not meet moral standards, as is usual for comedies of manners (“Comedy of manners”), “Neck” can indeed be considered a comedy of manners.

There are still other short stories included in the collection *Tales of the Unexpected* which could be classified as comedies of manners because they feature clever, usually upper class characters who are sophisticated and indulge in intrigue, although they might appear to be upright members of society at first glance (“Comedy of manners”). This is the case in “Taste,” in which the wine connoisseur Richard Pratt’s real character behind his elegant façade is revealed to everyone at the end of the story.

In “Parson’s Pleasure,” an antiques dealer tricks unwitting farmers into selling him their valuable pieces of furniture for extremely low prices by pretending to be a parson who works for “[...] the Society for the Preservation of Rare Furniture” (Dahl 199). On one occasion, however, his plan backfires and a highly valuable Chippendale Commode gets chopped up because the dealer has been too greedy for his own good. Although this story features a character who is not a member of high society, the main character is still clever, quick-witted, sophisticated, and from a higher class than those he deceives. Therefore, it can be argued that “Parson’s Pleasure” is a comedy of manners.

In “Nunc Dimittis,” Lionel Lampson, a “[...] wealthy, leisurely, middle-aged man of culture [...]” (Dahl 120) exposes his dishonest character to all of his friends – “[...] the most distinguished men, the most brilliant and influential women in the top crust of our society” (Dahl 138) – at a dinner party when he reveals a painting of one of his female dinner guests, Janet de Pelagia, in underwear to them out of revenge on the lady for allegedly calling him a bore. Not only is Lionel’s deceitful character that lies

⁶ Warren also observes that in “Neck,” Sir Basil “[...] enjoys a momentary triumph [...]” (*Roald Dahl* 37) over Lady Turton.

behind his gentlemanly façade depicted in the story, but also do both the woman who told Lionel that he had been called a bore by Janet de Pelagia as well as Janet de Pelagia herself appear to be dishonest: the former because she probably lied to Lionel about Janet, the latter because the end of the story strongly suggests that Janet has poisoned Lionel. Since “Nunc Dimittis,” as has been shown, is full of characters who, although seemingly cultured, are in fact immoral and pretentious, the story could be categorized as a comedy of manners.

There are two further stories included in the collection *Tales of the Unexpected* that might be regarded as comedies of manners because they feature seemingly genteel and upright upper-class characters who really are unscrupulous and cruel: “Skin” and “My Lady Love, My Dove.” In “Skin,” the immoral character is an apparently wealthy guest at an art exhibition who seems to stop at nothing to get hold of a valuable painting. In “My Lady Love, My Dove,” an extremely wealthy couple invites another couple – “[...] climbers [...]” (Dahl 44), the wife calls them – over for the weekend to play bridge with them. Both couples, although they behave elegantly and are well-mannered while in each other’s presence, are in fact full of intrigue: the hosts eavesdrop on their guests via a microphone that is hidden in the guestroom, while the guests turn out to be far from noble characters who cheat at bridge to make money. Especially the male guest, who treats his wife in a gentlemanly manner in front of other people, turns out to be extremely rude to her when no one else is present. At this point, it needs to be mentioned that “My Lady Love, My Dove” and all the other stories that have been categorized as comedies of manners above can also be classified as satires because clearly, they expose the moral faults and weaknesses of society (“Satire”).⁷

The remaining stories in *Tales of the Unexpected*, apart from “Gallop Foxley,” can all be argued to belong to the genre of horror fiction. “Gallop Foxley” again is a story that is hard to classify, but it seems that it could be regarded as one of those stories which Warren states are “[...] less horrific and more like well-told jokes [...]” (“Nasty, Nasty”). The story revolves around a male character called William Perkins who takes the train to work every day and who is irritated by a new commuter, whom

⁷ Makman observes that in the two short story collections *Someone Like You* and *Kiss Kiss*, Dahl “[...] laughs at and skillfully satirizes human foibles, especially arrogance, cruelty, and aggression” (215). In a review of Dahl’s *Collected Stories*, David Propson explicitly classifies “My Lady Love, My Dove” and “Neck” as satires (75).

he thinks he recognizes as the prefect who terrorized and beat him during his old school days at Repton. Perkins remembers unpleasant scenes from fifty years ago in which the prefect was involved and decides to embarrass his former bully in front of the other passengers on the train by reminding him of some of said scenes. In the end, however, it turns out that the new commuter is not who Perkins had believed him to be. The story truly reads like an elaborate joke, whose point causes people to laugh in surprise.

The stories “Man from the South,” “Dip in the Pool,” “The Landlady,” and “The Way Up To Heaven” can all be considered horror stories.⁸ In “Man from the South,” the image of the mutilated hand that closes the story shocks the reader and inspires a feeling of disgust, as is typical of horror stories (“Horror story” *Penguin Dictionary*). Moreover, horror stories often focus on physical mutilations (“Horror story” *Oxford Dictionary*), and although Dahl does not describe how the female character’s fingers are being cut off by her husband, the image of the hand suggests enough pain on the part of the female character and violence and madness on the part of the male character to sicken the reader.

In “Dip in the Pool,” a passenger on a ship jumps off the deck in order to win a bet concerning the distance the ship will travel within a day. The passenger makes sure someone sees him fall overboard, but the reader eventually has to come to the spine-chilling realization that the eye witness suffers from mental impairment. In this story, therefore, the horror lies in the shocking conclusion the reader has to draw about the eye witness’ state of mental health and its deadly consequences for the passenger.

“The Landlady” is “[m]odeled after traditional ghost stories [...]” (West “Mastering the Macabre”), but Dahl declared that he himself had never managed to write a ghost story (Tuttle): “[...] I started one and couldn’t bring it off [...]. It was called ‘The Landlady.’ The young man knocking at the door, and the woman opening it – I was thinking, well, this is going to be a lovely ghost story [...]. But I just couldn’t bring it off. So I got a new ending, and made her just a murderess” (Tuttle). Hence, what was supposed to become a ghost story turned into a horror story that does not have a ghost in it but features a mad taxidermist with a growing collection of carefully chosen, stuffed young men instead. “The Landlady” also contains Gothic elements, for its

⁸ Carrick classifies these stories as speculative fiction (41).

atmosphere is menacing to the reader and the story's hero is in desperate straits ("Gothic novel/fiction"). The fact that the young man in the story does not even realize he is in danger, whereas the reader is able to deduce that the landlady is a murderess and hence is in constant fear for the young character, seems to even heighten the suspense until it is almost unbearable.

"The Way Up To Heaven" is horrific in the sense that it deals with death, passive-aggressive behavior (West "Mastering the Macabre"), and "[...] subtle cruelty" (Carrick 41): a husband and wife lead an obviously unhappy marriage; the husband especially seems to enjoy tormenting his wife, who has an enormous fear of being late for occasions, by taking as much time as possible to get ready for leaving the house. This psychological torture finally stops, however, when the husband gets stuck in the elevator of their mansion shortly before the wife leaves for the airport to visit her daughter and grandchildren in Paris for six weeks. Pretending not to have realized that her husband has gotten stuck between floors, she flies off to Paris and leaves her husband to rot in the elevator. The story's ending, which makes the reader realize what has happened, seems to be shocking and the "[...] curious odour [...]" (Dahl 191) that is described by the end of the story to hint at the smell of a decomposing body appears to evoke a feeling of repulsion in the reader. However, Dahl once again seems to manage to add black humor to his story and to therefore cause the reader not only to experience feelings of shock and disgust, but to also be amused by the story's ending.

At this point, it needs to be mentioned that Dahl's more fantastical short stories for adults can also be said to belong to or share elements with the field of horror, for the fantastic can be argued to have its own position within this field (Schneider 225) and science fiction has led to a diversification of the horror genre ("Horror story" *Penguin Dictionary*) and is therefore strongly related to it. "William and Mary" obviously relies upon elements of horror because its description of how William's brain is going to be removed from the dead body is blood-curdling (Carrick 41) and its ending is especially horrific (Carrick 41) because it suggests that William's brain, unable to defend itself, is left to suffer under the rule of Mary, who has been oppressed by William throughout their marriage. Horror stories often deal with hell on earth as a subjective, psychological source of suffering ("Horror story" *Penguin Dictionary*), and this is most certainly the case in "William and Mary," for the reader can only try

to imagine what mental tortures William might have to go through in his disembodied state of being.

“Royal Jelly” is horrific in the sense that it deals with the shocking metamorphosis of a baby girl, “[...] monstrous transformations [...]” (“Horror story” *Oxford Dictionary*) being typical horror fiction material (“Horror story” *Oxford Dictionary*). In “Edward the Conqueror,” the ending evokes feelings of horror because it strongly suggests that the husband has burnt the cat that was so dear to his wife.

To conclude, although it is difficult to classify Roald Dahl’s short stories for adults, it can be argued that a great number of his stories can be positioned within the field of speculative fiction and that it is especially the horror genre which many of Dahl’s stories belong to. Dahl’s stories rely heavily on the creation of suspense and seem to often be written with the intention to shock the reader. Hence, it is not surprising that Dahl has been referred to as “[...] a master of horror – an intellectual Hitchcock of the writing world” (“Books and Bookmen” qtd. in Warren *Roald Dahl* 15).

Now that an attempt at categorizing Dahl’s stories from the collection *Tales of the Unexpected* has been made, a thorough investigation of the features of those stories can begin and the questions how Dahl creates feelings of suspense, surprise, and shock in the reader and how the reader processes Dahl’s twists in the tale can be approached.

4. Roald Dahl's *Tales of the Unexpected*

In the following subchapters, the narrative situation, the narrative modes, and techniques of thought representation used in Roald Dahl's short stories will be analyzed in great detail. Furthermore, the style of his narratives will be examined with a focus on Dahl's use of black humor, and the characters Dahl's stories involve will be discussed. In addition, suspense theory and cognitive poetics will be applied to Dahl's stories in order to show how feelings of suspense and surprise are created in his readers and how his readers comprehend the plot twists in Dahl's narratives.

4.1 Narrative Situation, Narrative Modes, and Representation of Thought⁹

As has already been mentioned in chapter 3, Roald Dahl uses homodiegetic narrators as well as heterodiegetic narrators in his stories for adults. Laura Viñas Valle argues that some of Dahl's homodiegetic narrators are detached eyewitnesses "[...] reporting what is happening without taking part in the action" (302), while others are "[...] protagonists of their own story [...]" (303), who will be referred to as 'autodiegetic narrators' in this thesis. The autodiegetic narrators in Dahl's stories, Viñas Valle states, tend to be more overt than the other homodiegetic narrators (who, in order to distinguish them from Dahl's autodiegetic narrators, usually will simply be referred to as 'homodiegetic narrators' henceforth) and hence "[...] address the implied reader, making comments aside and seeking for the reader's support and understanding" (303). Dahl's heterodiegetic narrators usually are covert and render the events with objectivity, but Viñas Valle observes that there are also "[...] rare instances where the omniscient narrator overtly addresses the reader" (305).¹⁰

Although Viñas Valle gives a detailed account of the narrative voice and especially the narrators' varying levels of intrusion in Dahl's stories, she does not acknowledge

⁹ The terminology used in this chapter is the one suggested by the English departments of the Universities of Tübingen, Stuttgart, and Freiburg: see Lethbridge, Stefanie, and Jarmila Mildorf. "Basics of English Studies: an introductory course for students of literary studies in English." Version 03/04. Web. 5 Aug. 2014.

¹⁰ It should be noted that the terminology which Viñas Valle uses in her article is different from the one used in this chapter. While in this chapter, a distinction between homodiegetic and heterodiegetic narrators as well as between external and internal focalization is made, Viñas Valle refers to 'first person narrators' and 'third-person omniscient narrators' in her analysis of the narrative voice in Dahl's short stories for adults: see Viñas Valle, Laura. "The narrative voice in Roald Dahl's children's and adult books." *Didáctica. Lengua y Literatura* 20 (2008): 291-308, pp. 301-307.

that Dahl also uses heterodiegetic narrators who present most of the story as perceived through the eyes of a single character.¹¹ The concepts of external and internal focalization will be further explored in the subchapter that focuses on heterodiegetic narrators in Dahl's adult short stories. Furthermore, the representation of consciousness will be discussed in all three subchapters on the different narrators in Dahl's stories. In addition, Viñas Valle's claim that Dahl's homodiegetic narrators who are not the protagonists of the stories solely are eyewitnesses to the events (302, 303) will be challenged.

In the following three subchapters, various passages from several stories that were published in Dahl's *Tales of the Unexpected* will be analyzed in terms of the narrative situation, the narrative modes, and the techniques of thought representation employed. Thus, it will be shown how Dahl makes use of different types of narrators in his stories.

4.1.1 Homodiegetic Narrators

The three short stories "Taste," "Man from the South," and "Neck" are the ones from the collection *Tales of the Unexpected* that involve homodiegetic narrators who are not the protagonists of the narrated events. In "Taste," Roald Dahl presents the narrative from the vantage point of a narrator who functions as a mere observer of the action. In the stories "Man from the South" and "Neck," however, the narrators are more involved in the action than the narrator in "Taste" is and therefore, strictly speaking, cannot be considered as mere eyewitnesses to the events of the story as Viñas Valle claims (302). Moreover, it can be observed that the narrators' level of intrusion varies in these three stories.

"Taste" is the short story of Dahl's in which the homodiegetic narrator is the most detached from the action: he is sitting at the dinner table with the other guests, but apart from one short dialogue between him and the host at the beginning of the story, he is not involved in any conversation with the other characters. The narrator watches the scene in front of him as if it were a stage play and reports his observations to the

¹¹ In her analysis of Dahl's two short story collections *Someone Like You* and *Kiss Kiss*, Viñas Valle only mentions 'third-person narrators' who are 'omniscient' and does not refer to what according to the terminology she uses would be termed 'limited third-person narration': see Viñas Valle, Laura. "The narrative voice in Roald Dahl's children's and adult books." *Didáctica. Lengua y Literatura* 20 (2008): 291-308, pp. 301-307.

reader. As Viñas Valle analyzes, the narrator in “Taste” is associated with “[...] static actions [...]” (302). There occur, for example, sentences like the following in the story: “Mike got up and poured the wine himself, and when he sat down again, *I could see that* he was watching Richard Pratt” [emphasis added] (8); “*I was conscious of* him sitting there, very still, containing himself, looking at his guest” [emphasis added] (9); “*I noticed* the maid standing in the background holding a dish of vegetables, wondering whether to come forward with them or not” [emphasis added] (12); “At that point *I saw* Mike pause” [emphasis added] (13).¹²

As can be deduced from these examples, the narrator in “Taste” frequently uses phrases (as emphasized in the sentences above) that highlight his static role of an observer of the ongoing events. Moreover, the examples given show that whereas the narrator himself does not take part in the events of the story, he often uses the narrative mode of a report of action to inform the reader about the other characters’ behavior.

With regard to narrative modes, it also needs to be mentioned that in “Taste,” direct speech is frequently employed, whereby the reader gets the impression that “[...] the narrator is absent and has relinquished control” (Viñas Valle 302). This observation shall be exemplified in the following excerpt from “Taste,” in which Mike Schofield tries to convince his daughter Louise to agree to his bet with Richard Pratt, which involves Louise having to marry Pratt if Schofield loses:

‘You know, Louise, we ought to think about this a bit.’
 ‘Now, stop it, Daddy! I refuse even to listen to you! Why, I’ve never heard anything so ridiculous in my life!’
 ‘No, seriously, my dear. Just wait a moment and hear what I have to say.’
 ‘But I don’t *want* to hear it.’
 ‘Louise! Please! It’s like this. Richard, here, has offered us a serious bet. He is the one who wants to make it, not me. And if he loses, he will have to hand over a considerable amount of property. Now, wait a minute, my dear, don’t interrupt. The point is this. *He cannot possibly win.*’
 ‘He seems to think he can.’
 (Dahl 13-14)

¹² For the emphasized phrases in the sentences given as well as for further examples of phrases that the narrators frequently use in Dahl’s stories when they observe the action, see Viñas Valle, Laura. “The narrative voice in Roald Dahl’s children’s and adult books.” *Didáctica. Lengua y Literatura* 20 (2008): 291-308, pp. 302-303.

In this excerpt, the mediating function of the narrator is completely suppressed. Clearly, the narrator in the passage above focuses on showing instead of telling and is a covert narrator.

In fact, the mediator in “Taste” often employs the narrative mode of direct speech and never addresses the reader directly. Although it seems that in “Taste,” the reader easily loses sight of the narrator at certain stages of the story, there are instances – apart from those in which the narrator refers to himself in the first person – in which the narrator becomes clearly visible by way of comment. This is the case, for example, in the following sentence in which Schofield’s wife is described by the narrator: “She jerked her head briskly up and down as she spoke, like a hen” (Dahl 14). Here, the narrator uses a simile to comment on what the mother looked like in his opinion.

Like the narrator in “Taste,” the narrator in “Man from the South” holds an important function as an observer of the unraveling action, but he is more directly involved in the events than the former narrator is. In “Taste,” the narrator only gets to speak to another character of the story once and even then only addresses four brief questions to him:

‘You go and fetch it, Mike?’ I said. ‘Where is it?’
‘In my study, with the cork out – breathing.’
‘Why the study?’
‘Acquiring room temperature, of course. It’s been there twenty-four hours.’
‘But why the study?’
‘It’s the best place in the house. Richard helped me choose it last time he was here.’
(Dahl 10)

In contrast, the narrator in “Man from the South” is involved in dialogues with other characters of the story several times. At the beginning of the narrative, for example, the narrator talks both to the man who later turns out to be a gambler and to the American cadet whom the man later in the story makes a bet with:

‘Excuse pleess, but may I sit here?’
‘Certainly,’ I said. ‘Go ahead.’
[...]
‘A fine evening,’ he said. ‘They are all evenings fine here in Jamaica.’ [...]
‘Yes,’ I said. ‘It is wonderful here, isn’t it.’
‘And who, might I ask, are all dese? Dese is no hotel people.’
He was pointing at the bathers in the pool.

‘I think they’re American sailors,’ I told him. ‘They’re Americans who are learning to be sailors.’
 ‘Of course dey are Americans. Who else in de world is going to make as much noise as dat? You are not American no?’
 ‘No,’ I said. ‘I am not.’
 Suddenly one of the American cadets was standing in front of us. He was dripping wet from the pool and one of the English girls was standing there with him.
 ‘Are these chairs taken?’ he said.
 ‘No,’ I answered.
 ‘Mind if I sit down?’
 ‘Go ahead.’
 ‘Thanks,’ he said.
 (Dahl 33)

Moreover, the narrator in “Man from the South” plays an important role in the betting situation that is at the center of the story, for it is his task to referee the bet. Therefore, it can be argued that while in “Taste,” the narrator can be considered an eyewitness to the narrative because he stands at the periphery of the story and is almost completely restricted to an observing function, the narrator in “Man from the South” is directly involved in the events of the narrative and hence cannot be regarded as a mere eyewitness. Thus, Viñas Valle’s claim that the narrator in “Man from the South” is only an onlooker who stays detached from the action of the story (302) can be challenged.

Moreover, the narrator in “Man from the South” relies far less on the mode of showing than the narrator in “Taste” does because he seldom uses long passages of direct speech which create the illusion that no narrator is present. The longest passage of direct speech that is not interrupted by the narrator’s report, description, or comment occurs when the two protagonists of the story decide on what to bet:

‘I never ask you, my friend, to bet something you cannot afford. You understand?’
 ‘Then what do I bet?’
 ‘I make it very easy for you, yes?’
 ‘Okay. You make it easy.’
 ‘Some small ting you can afford to give away, and if you did happen to lose it you would not feel too bad. Right?’
 ‘Such as what?’
 ‘Such as, perhaps, de little finger on your left hand.’
 ‘My *what*?’
 (Dahl 35)

Although in the extract above, the narrator is covert, in general, the narrator in “Man from the South” seems to be more overt than the one in “Taste” because, as has already been mentioned, he uses the narrative mode of direct speech less frequently. In addition, the narrator in “Man from the South” expresses his opinion at various stages of the story. Narrator comment occurs, for example, right at the beginning of “Man from the South,” when the narrator describes how he was sitting by the pool: “It was very pleasant sitting there in the sunshine with beer and cigarette. It was pleasant to sit and watch the bathers splashing about in the green water” (Dahl 32). In this excerpt, the narrator clearly evaluates the situation he is talking about.

Also in the following excerpt, the narrator’s opinion as far as the bet is concerned is made explicit: “But hell, what if the boy lost? Then we’d have to rush him to the hospital in the Cadillac that he hadn’t won. That would be a fine thing. Now wouldn’t that be a really fine thing? It would be a damn silly unnecessary thing so far as I could see” (Dahl 38). In this case, the narrator represents what he was thinking during the course of the narrated events by way of narrated monologue. The narrator is still visible in the excerpt because he uses the past tense in order to render the thoughts of the experiencing I that, in relation to the narrator’s present moment in which he tells the story, are already past. Thus, through the use of narrated monologue, the narrator is able to communicate his opinion, as it were, to the reader. Moreover, the use of irony in the extract in question (“That would be a fine thing. Now wouldn’t that be a really fine thing?” (Dahl 38)) clearly functions as evaluation.

In the last story that features a homodiegetic narrator who is not the protagonist of the narrative, i.e. in “Neck,” the narrator is also involved in the action and is yet more overt than the narrator in “Man from the South,” for he directly addresses the reader at many stages of the story. In fact, this makes the narrator in “Neck” similar to the autodiegetic narrators in Dahl’s stories and differentiates him from the other homodiegetic narrators who are not the main characters of the narratives.

Direct reader-addresses occur already at the beginning of “Neck,” after the narrator has introduced the two protagonists of the story, Sir Basil Turton and his wife Lady Turton, by telling the implied reader how Lady Turton married Sir Basil, the recent inheritor of *The Turton Press* and of a title, on the spot before any other woman could do so:

You can imagine that the London ladies were indignant, and naturally they started disseminating a vast amount of fruity gossip about the new Lady Turton ('That dirty poacher,' they called her). But we don't have to go into that. In fact, for the purposes of this story we can skip the next six years, which brings us right up to the present, to an occasion exactly one week ago today when I myself had the pleasure of meeting her ladyship for the first time. By now, as you must have guessed, she was not only running the whole of *The Turton Press*, but as a result had become a considerable political force in the country. (Dahl 103)

In this excerpt, the narrator clearly creates intimacy between himself and the reader by addressing the reader directly and by using the personal pronouns 'we' and 'us,' thereby implying that the narrator and the reader are in the same boat. Viñas Valle claims that "[...] in Dahl's adult books there is no flattery of the kind 'You and I', where the narrator overtly tries to establish complicity with the reader" (306).

However, this is not true in the excerpt above, where the narrator does indeed make the reader his accomplice.

In the last sentence of the extract above, the narrator seems to try to "[...] anticipate the reader's thoughts [...]" (Viñas Valle 306), which, as Viñas Valle observes, sometimes is the case in Dahl's adult stories (306). While Viñas Valle argues that in Dahl's adult books, the narrators anticipate the reader's thoughts in order to "[...] justify their actions or to reflect on them [...]" (306), the narrator in the excerpt above apparently does not do so for the reasons that Viñas Valle names. It rather seems to be the case that the narrator tries to involve the reader and to give him some information that, in the narrator's opinion, the reader probably has already been able to deduce himself.

However, in two other instances in which the narrator of "Neck" anticipates the reader's thoughts, Viñas Valle's observation holds true. In the first instance, the narrator tries to give reasons why he practically invited himself to stay at the Turtons' country residence for a weekend, as if he wanted the reader to approve of his actions: "You may think that perhaps I forced the invitation a bit, but I couldn't have got it any other way. And apart from the professional aspect, I personally wanted very much to see the house" (Dahl 105).¹³

¹³ Part of this quote is also to be found in Viñas Valle, Laura. "The narrative voice in Roald Dahl's children's and adult books." *Didáctica. Lengua y Literatura* 20 (2008): 291-308, p. 306.

In the second instance, the narrator tries to justify bargaining with the butler for his tip:

No doubt you think that I should never have started bargaining with the butler in the first place, and perhaps you are right. But being a liberal-minded person, I always try my best to be affable with the lower classes. Apart from that, the more I thought about it, the more I had to admit to myself that it was an offer no sportsman had the right to reject. (Dahl 108)¹⁴

Again, the narrator seems to try to make the reader understand why he acted the way that he did. Moreover, by stating that the reader is probably right in thinking that he should not have bargained with the butler, the narrator seems to reflect on his behavior, as Viñas Valle argues the narrators in Dahl's stories sometimes do (306).

The narrator in "Neck" is not only more overt than the narrator in "Man from the South" because he directly addresses the reader throughout the story, but also because he, as opposed to the narrators in "Taste" and "Man from the South," sometimes uses the narrative mode of indirect speech instead of direct speech, whereby "[t]he element of mediation is more noticeable [...]" (Lethbridge and Mildorf 64) than it is when direct speech is used:

I was sitting on the bed putting on my socks when softly the door opened, and an ancient lopsided gnome in black tails slid into the room. He was the butler, he explained, and his name was Jelks, and he did so hope I was comfortable and had everything I wanted.
I told him I was and had.
He said he would do all he could to make my week-end agreeable. I thanked him and waited for him to go. He hesitated, and then, in a voice dripping with unction, he begged permission to mention a rather delicate matter.
(Dahl 107)

The passage above also includes examples of narrator comment, which frequently occurs in "Neck." When Jelks is described as an "[...] ancient lopsided gnome in black tails [...]" (Dahl 107), the narrator obviously comments subjectively on the butler's appearance, for Jelks certainly is neither ancient nor a gnome. Rather, the narrator describes Jelks' looks by stating what mythical creature he reminded him of. Moreover, the narrator describes Jelks' voice as "[...] dripping with unction [...]"

¹⁴ Again, part of this quote can be found in Viñas Valle, Laura. "The narrative voice in Roald Dahl's children's and adult books." *Didáctica. Lengua y Literatura* 20 (2008): 291-308, p. 306. At this point, it also needs to be mentioned that Viñas Valle argues that Dahl's autodiegetic narrators "[...] try to make readers see their point of view, their reasons for acting in a particular way" (303). This argument, as has been shown by way of the two last excerpts, seems to apply to the homodiegetic narrator in "Neck" as well.

(Dahl 107), which can be regarded as an evaluation and therefore also functions as comment.

In fact, already at the beginning of the story, the narrator is highly noticeable because he takes a cynical view of women when describing how Sir Basil was courted by several females:

Naturally, the vultures started gathering at once, and I believe that not only Fleet Street but very nearly the whole of the city was looking on eagerly as they scrambled for the body. It was slow motion, of course, deliberate and deadly slow motion, and therefore not so much like vultures as a bunch of agile crabs clawing for a piece of horsemeat under water. (Dahl 102)

In this passage, the narrator's cynical attitude towards females lies in the fact that he compares the women with greedy and rather repellent animals and Sir Basil with their helpless prey.

The narrator in "Neck" is not only yet more overt than the one in "Man from the South," but he can also be argued to be more involved in the action of the story than him. In fact, the reader follows the narrator over many pages of the story as if he were the protagonist: the reader finds out about how the narrator meets Lady Turton and manages to invite himself over to the Turtons' country house, and he follows the narrator when he, all by himself, gets out of the car on his way there to admire the mansion's grounds. Moreover, he reads about how the narrator is alone in his room for the weekend when the butler enters and starts conversing with him, how he plays cards with Lady Turton and two other guests, and how he walks around the surroundings of the house together with Sir Basil. Naturally, the narrator is involved in conversations with other characters at many stages of the story.

Only when the action rises – starting with Lady Turton getting stuck in a sculpture – until the narrative reaches its peak at the end of the story, as is typically the case with traditional short stories, the narrator turns into an eyewitness to the events, using several phrases that stress his function as an observer, e.g. "[...] *I was watching* Jelks at this time. *I saw* the hand that was carrying the axe come forward an extra fraction of an inch towards Sir Basil" (Dahl 118); "[...] *I looked and saw* him standing there as calm as you please, still holding the axe" (Dahl 119); "[...] *I noticed* for the first

time two little warm roses of colour appearing on his cheeks [...]” (Dahl 119).¹⁵ By the end of the narrative, the story is no longer the narrator’s but obviously features Sir Basil and Lady Turton as its central characters.

All in all, the narrator in “Neck” can be argued to be even more involved in the action of the story than the narrator in “Man from the South” is because he seems to function as an autodiegetic narrator up until the point when the most important events of the story start happening and the narrator steps into the background.

At this point, it is still left to mention that all three homodiegetic narrators that have been thoroughly discussed above can be argued to be reliable narrators. Of course, each of them makes his opinion known at certain stages of the story and the narrators in “Man from the South” and “Neck” sometimes are ironic or cynical, as has been demonstrated in this subchapter. However, the reader can generally trust the narrators as far as their rendering of the events is concerned. Clearly, the narrators retell what happened accurately and the way they perceive and interpret the events usually seems to correspond with how the implied author perceives and interprets them. The reader is not lied to by any of the narrators, neither is he misled. Although the narrator in “Taste” does not tell the reader that Richard Pratt had known the wine’s breeding all along until the very end of the story, it can be argued that the narrator proceeds chronologically in telling the narrative so that the events are presented in the accurate order in which they actually happened to the narrator. Therefore, the narrators in “Taste,” “Man from the South,” and “Neck” can be considered as generally reliable narrators.

To conclude, a final remark on Dahl’s homodiegetic narrators shall be made. Viñas Valle argues that “[i]n Dahl’s adult work [...], the level of intrusion of the narrative voice varies” (307). She suggests that the autodiegetic narrators in Dahl’s adult short stories are more overt than the other homodiegetic ones (303). In this subchapter, a further important insight has been made in this respect: there also appears to be a gradation in the level of intrusion between Dahl’s homodiegetic narrators who are not the protagonists of the stories, for the narrator in “Neck” seems to be more overt than the one in “Man from the South,” while the one in “Man from the South” can be

¹⁵ Again, some of the phrases that are stressed in the quotes above and phrases that are similar to the ones quoted can be found in Viñas Valle, Laura. “The narrative voice in Roald Dahl’s children’s and adult books.” *Didáctica. Lengua y Literatura* 20 (2008): 291-308, pp. 302-303.

considered more overt than the one in “Taste.” Thus, there seems to exist not only a difference in the level of intrusion between Dahl’s autodiegetic and his other homodiegetic narrators, as Viñas Valle suggests (303), but also between the individual homodiegetic narrators of Dahl’s stories who cannot be regarded as the main characters. Moreover, the narrator in “Neck” has been proven to be similar to Dahl’s autodiegetic narrators with regard to their overtness, for he has been shown to address the reader directly, such as Viñas Valle observes Dahl’s autodiegetic narrators typically do (303).

Furthermore, it has been shown that while Viñas Valle’s observation that the narrator in “Taste” is an eyewitness to the events (302) seems to hold true, her claim that also the narrators in “Man from the South” and “Neck” are nothing more than observers of the action (302) has been challenged in this subchapter. The fact that these two narrators are indeed involved in the action of the story, the narrator in “Neck” even more so than the one in “Man from the South,” has been discussed in detail.

In the following subchapter on autodiegetic narrators in Dahl’s *Tales of the Unexpected*, focus will again be laid on the narrators’ level of overtness and examples of showing and of telling will be given.

4.1.2 Autodiegetic Narrators

The three stories from Dahl’s *Tales of the Unexpected* that feature autodiegetic narrators are “My Lady Love, My Dove,” “Galloping Foxley,” and “Nunc Dimittis.” All three narrators seem to be overt, constantly making comments and addressing the reader directly. However, it can be noticed that the narrators in “My Lady Love, My Dove” and “Nunc Dimittis” rely more heavily on the method of showing by means of direct speech than the narrator in “Galloping Foxley.” Moreover, the narrators in “Galloping Foxley” and “Nunc Dimittis” directly address the reader about twice as often as the narrator in “My Lady Love, My Dove” does and, as opposed to the latter, make side remarks between brackets.¹⁶ In addition, it is noticeable that all three

¹⁶ Viñas Valle states that “[t]he narrator’s comments between brackets, so common in Dahl’s children’s books, are reduced in number in the short stories so that it is rather rare to find the narrators adding an extra touch” (303). She adds that “[...] if this occurs, it tends to be the first person narrator rather than the third who places emphasis on a particular point that he finds significant” (303). In fact, it seems that especially in the story “Galloping Foxley,” side remarks between brackets occur more frequently than is usually the case in Dahl’s short stories. What Viñas Valle does not observe is the fact that Dahl’s autodiegetic narrators also make side remarks between dashes instead of brackets.

narrators frequently make side remarks between dashes.

In “My Lady Love, My Dove,” the narrator tells a story about how he and his wife spied on their weekend guests, whom they had invited for bridge, by placing a microphone in their guests’ room. As opposed to the narrator in the story “Neck,” which has been discussed in the previous chapter, the narrator in “My Lady Love, My Dove” can be considered an autodiegetic narrator because he remains directly involved in the action from the beginning until the end of the story. He and his wife clearly are the two characters the narrative centers around, and the power relations between them are strongly focused on in the story. Similarly, “Neck” focuses on the power relationship between its protagonists Sir Basil and Lady Turton. “My Lady Love, My Dove” ends with the narrator’s wife forcing him to start learning to count cards like their guests do. Hence, as is the case with “Neck,” the ending of the story “My Lady Love, My Dove” focuses on the narrative’s male and female protagonist and highlights their power relationship.

It has already been mentioned that the narrator in “My Lady Love, My Dove” is overt, which shall be exemplified in the following passage:

Now that I was away from her, I am ashamed to admit that I began to feel a bit of excitement myself, a tiny warm prickling sensation under the skin, near the tips of my fingers. It was nothing much, mind you – really nothing at all. Good heavens, I experience the same thing every morning of my life when I open the paper to check the closing prices on two or three of my wife’s larger stockholdings. So I wasn’t going to get carried away by a silly joke like this. At the same time, I couldn’t help being amused. (Dahl 49)

In this excerpt, the narrator explicitly comments on how he felt when he started to go about installing a microphone in the room for their guests. He also evaluates the situation by referring to his and his wife’s scheme as a “[...] silly joke [...]” (Dahl 49). Moreover, the narrator addresses the reader directly in this passage (“[...] mind you [...]” (Dahl 49)).

It has already been mentioned that Viñas Valle suggests that Dahl’s autodiegetic narrators “[...] try to make readers see their point of view, their reasons for acting in a particular way” (303). In the passage above, it seems to be the case that the narrator tries to downplay his scheme against his guests by calling it “[...] a silly joke [...]” (Dahl 49) and that he also tries to apologize for and downplay the feelings of excitement he experienced about it so as not to lose the reader’s support. In addition,

the narrator tries to give reasons why he started setting up the microphone in the first place:

She didn't say any more after that; she just sat there, absolutely still, watching me [...]. This, I knew from experience, was a danger signal. She was like one of those bomb things with the pin pulled out, and it was only a matter of time before – bang! and she would explode. In the silence that followed, I could almost hear her ticking. So I got up quietly and went out to the workshop and collected a mike and a hundred and fifty feet of wire. (Dahl 49)

Obviously, the narrator is intimidated by his wife and wants to justify what he did by explaining the reader that he was not able to withstand her.

The narrator in “My Lady Love, My Dove” also frequently makes side remarks between dashes as is the case, for example, in the following excerpt: “She was looking at me hard with those wide grey eyes of hers, and to avoid them – they sometimes made me quite uncomfortable – I got up and walked over to the French windows that led into the garden” (Dahl 45). In this sentence, the narrator again is clearly overt.

However, there are also instances in which the mediator in “My Lady Love, My Dove” is almost invisible. In the following passage, for example, a dialogue between the narrator's guests is represented through direct speech:

‘And how many cards to each suit? Watch my finger positions carefully.’
‘You said we could miss those.’
‘Well – if you're quite sure you know them?’
‘Yes, I know them.’
A pause, then ‘A *club*.’
‘King jack of clubs,’ the girl recited. ‘Ace of spades. Queen jack of hearts, and ace queen of diamonds.’
Another pause, then ‘I'll say *one* club.’
‘Ace king of clubs ...’
(Dahl 56)

As far as techniques of thought representation are concerned, it can be observed that the narrator tells the reader about the personal thoughts he had at various points in the story: “Don't worry, I told myself. Pamela will take care of these people. She won't let them come up here” (Dahl 50); “Was there not here, I wondered, a hint of resignation in her voice? Yes, that was probably it; he was pushing her too hard, making her take it too seriously, and the poor girl was tired of it all” (Dahl 53). The difference between these two excerpts lies in the tense in which the narrator's consciousness is presented. In the first excerpt, the narrator's thoughts are rendered in

the present tense of the story level, whereas in the second excerpt, they are rendered in the past tense by the narrator, who is at the narrating level.¹⁷ Thus, it seems that in the first extract, thought is represented by way of direct discourse, only without quotation marks. The second extract, however, is an example of narrated monologue, for the thoughts of the experiencing I are closely reproduced by the narrating I, who uses the past tense to refer back to those thoughts.

Furthermore, it needs to be mentioned that the narrator in “My Lady Love, My Dove” appears to be reliable because he apparently renders the events truthfully. Thus, the reader is not intentionally misled or lied to by the narrator and the narrator’s point of view seems to correspond with the implied author’s.

As far as the story “Gallop Foxley” is concerned, it can be observed that its narrator, like the one in “My Lady Love, My Dove,” is overt, addressing the reader even more often than the narrator in “My Lady Love, My Dove” does, as shall be shown by way of the following examples: “Believe me, there’s nothing like routine and regularity for preserving one’s peace of mind” (Dahl 70); “So you can see that I am, in every sense of the words, a contented commuter” (Dahl 71); “And now, try if you can to imagine my horror when the new man actually followed me into *my own* compartment!” (Dahl 72); “We spoke no more during the journey, but you can well imagine that by then my whole routine had been thoroughly upset” (Dahl 73); “I tell you I’ve never had such a shock in all my life” (Dahl 75). Many of these examples also show that the narrator wants the reader to see his viewpoint and to side with him, as Viñas Valle observes Dahl’s autodiegetic narrators typically do (303).

In addition, the narrator in “Gallop Foxley” frequently makes side remarks between brackets or dashes, as the following passage exemplifies:

He was doing his last year, and he was a prefect – ‘a boazer’ we called it – and as such he was officially permitted to beat any of the fags in the house. [...] In frosty or snowy weather I even had to sit on the seat of the lavatory (which was in an unheated outhouse) every morning after breakfast to warm it before Foxley came along. [...] He wore silk shirts and always had a silk handkerchief tucked up his sleeve, and his shoes were made by someone called Lobb (who also had a royal crest). (Dahl 77)

¹⁷ For a paper that concentrates on the difference between the perceiving self at the story level and the narrating self at the narrating level and that also includes examples from Roald Dahl’s short stories, see Triki, Mounir. “The representation of self in narrative.” *Journal of Literary Semantics* 20.2 (1991): 78-96.

Furthermore, the mode of presentation in this passage is telling, for the passage contains not only narrator comments in form of side remarks, but also descriptions and a report, which according to Franz K. Stanzel clearly belong to the mode of telling (65). The first and the third sentence of the extract above are descriptions of character, while the second sentence is a report of action.

As far as the mode of showing is concerned, it can be observed that “Gallopig Foxley” includes significantly less direct speech than “My Lady Love, My Dove” does. Moreover, if dialogue is represented through direct speech, the experiencing I of the narrator is always involved in it, whereby the narrator remains visible to the reader, as the following excerpt shows:

‘Grummitt,’ I whispered. ‘Who’s this bounder?’
‘Search me,’ Grummitt said.
‘Pretty unpleasant.’
‘Very.’
‘Not going to be a regular, I trust.’
‘Oh God,’ Grummitt said.
(Dahl 74)

In addition, the thoughts of the experiencing I are frequently represented in the narrative, such as is the case in the following excerpt:

There it was again, that curiously crisp, familiar voice, clipping its words and spitting them out very hard and small like a little quick-firing gun shooting out raspberry seeds. Where had I heard it before? and why did every word seem to strike upon some tiny tender spot far back in my memory? Good heavens, I thought. Pull yourself together. What sort of nonsense is this? (Dahl 73)

Up until the penultimate line, thought is represented by way of narrated monologue, which is obvious because the time in which the experiencing I’s thoughts are rendered is the past tense. With the sentence that starts in the penultimate line (“Good heavens, [...]” (Dahl 73)), however, the representation of thought changes: the time switches from past tense to present tense and an inquit formula is used to introduce the experiencing I’s thoughts (“[...] I thought” (Dahl 73)). Therefore, from the penultimate line onwards, thought is represented via direct discourse, with the quotation marks missing to indicate it.

At last, the reliability of the narrator in “Gallopig Foxley” has to be discussed. Like the narrator in “My Lady Love, My Dove,” the narrator in “Gallopig Foxley” can be argued to be reliable because he seems to give a precise account of the events that

happened to him and of the thoughts that crossed his mind at the story level. Although the reader does not realize that the experiencing I of the narrator is confusing a stranger with a person who once bullied him until the end of the story, the narrating I does not try to mislead the reader by presenting him with any wrong information. He simply accurately recounts the events as he experienced them in a chronological order.

Like the narrator in “Gallopig Foxley,” who clearly is the protagonist of the story because the whole narrative centers around his feelings, his thoughts, and the situation he found himself in, the narrator in “Nunc Dimittis” tells the reader his own story. “Nunc Dimittis” revolves around an evil plan that the protagonist realized in order to take revenge on a woman. As Viñas Valle observes, the narrator in “Nunc Dimittis” “[...] needs somebody to sympathize with him and looks at the reader for support [...]” (303). While the other autodiegetic narrators that have already been discussed above certainly also want the reader to understand and support them, the narrator in “Nunc Dimittis” even expresses this wish overtly: “I wanted, essentially, to address myself to an imaginary and sympathetic listener, a kind of mythical *you*, someone gentle and understanding to whom I might tell unashamedly every detail of this unfortunate episode” (Dahl 120).¹⁸

Thus, it is not surprising that the narrator in “Nunc Dimittis” directly addresses the reader at many stages of the story, e.g.: “[...] I suppose I am, after all, a type; a rare one, mark you, but nevertheless a quite definite type – the wealthy, leisurely, middle-aged man of culture, adored (I choose the word carefully) by his many friends for his charm, his money, his air of scholarship, his generosity, and I sincerely hope for himself also (Dahl 120-121); “You should know me well enough by now to judge me fairly – and dare I hope it? – to sympathize with me when you hear my story” (Dahl 121); “A curious way to behave, you may say, for a man such as me; to which I would answer – no, not really, if you consider the circumstances” (Dahl 131).¹⁹

All of the examples above belong to the mode of telling and clearly show that the narrator in “Nunc Dimittis” is overt: not only does he address the reader directly in

¹⁸ The larger part of this quote can also be found in Viñas Valle, Laura. “The narrative voice in Roald Dahl’s children’s and adult books.” *Didáctica. Lengua y Literatura* 20 (2008): 291-308, p. 303.

¹⁹ The last quote is also used by Viñas Valle, Laura. “The narrative voice in Roald Dahl’s children’s and adult books.” *Didáctica. Lengua y Literatura* 20 (2008): 291-308, p. 306.

each of the quotes, he also often makes side remarks between brackets and dashes and expresses his opinion. In the last quote, the narrator even tries to guess what the reader might be thinking, which, as has already been mentioned, Viñas Valle observes Dahl's narrators sometimes do in order to justify their deeds or to reflect on how they acted (306). As Viñas Valle also shows, this observation perfectly applies to the final quote above (306), in which the narrator tries to justify his strong desire to avenge himself for some unflattering remarks that a member of the other sex had made about him.

However, the narrator in "Nunc Dimittis" also becomes covert at some stages of the story in which the mode of showing prevails. This is the case, for example, when the narrator uses direct speech to represent what another character, Gladys Ponsonby, told him about a fashionable painter in London and his secret technique of painting all his female models naked before painting on their clothes in later sittings. Since Gladys Ponsonby's story within the story also includes dialogues between herself and the painter, John Royden, the reader easily loses sight of the actual narrator of the events. The following passage is an excerpt from the story that Gladys Ponsonby told the autodiegetic narrator:

‘That was about a year ago, and I remember how excited I was to be going into the studio of the great painter. [...] Mr Royden met me at the door, and of course I was fascinated by him at once. [...] He told me about how he painted quite differently from other artists. In his opinion, he said, there was only one method of attaining perfection when painting a woman's body and I mustn't be shocked when I heard what it was. [...] ‘You see, it's like this,’ he went on. ‘You examine any painting you like of a woman [...] and you'll see that although the dress may be well painted, there is an effect of artificiality [...]. And you know why?’
‘No, Mr Royden, I don't.’
‘Because the painters themselves didn't really know what was underneath!’
Gladys Ponsonby paused to take a few more sips of brandy.
(Dahl 125-126)

In this passage, the personal pronoun 'I' refers to Gladys Ponsonby. She makes use of indirect as well as of direct speech to represent the conversation she had with Mr Royden, which the actual, disguised narrator of "Nunc Dimittis" transmits verbatim to the reader. Only in the final sentence, which is a report of action, the story within the story is left and the actual narrator of "Nunc Dimittis" becomes visible again.

Like in the other two stories with autodiegetic narrators, “Nunc Dimittis” also includes passages in which the narrator’s consciousness is represented. The following excerpt is an example of narrated monologue: “My plan was working! The most difficult part was already accomplished. There would be a wait now, a long wait. The way this man painted, it would take him several months to finish the picture. Well, I would just have to be patient, that’s all” (Dahl 134).

As far as the reliability of the narrator in “Nunc Dimittis” is concerned, it has to be mentioned that the narrator’s self-characterization can be regarded as unreliable narration. At the beginning of the story, the narrator describes himself as a “[...] man of culture [...]” (Dahl 120) who is “[...] adored [...] by his many friends [...]” (Dahl 120) and whom the women he is surrounded by “[...] love [...] so dearly” (Dahl 121). As the story eventually shows, however, the narrator is not as cultured as he has described himself to be, for he takes highly cruel measures to take revenge on Janet de Pelagia. Moreover, it might certainly also be the case that the narrator’s acquaintances do not think of him as highly as he believes they do. When Gladys Ponsonby tells the narrator that Janet de Pelagia has called him a bore, she could be lying because she is jealous of Janet, but she may as well be telling the truth. The reader does not get enough information to be certain whether Gladys Ponsonby has been lying to the narrator or not, but it certainly seems arguable that the narrator is not as admired by the people around him as he thinks. By the end of the story, all of the narrator’s friends, except for Gladys Ponsonby, have turned their backs on him because of what he did to Janet.

When it comes to the narrated action, however, it can be observed that the narrator apparently renders the events truthfully. He does not seem to omit any information and he confesses to the reader what he did to Janet de Pelagia without trying to whitewash his deeds. Thus, apart from the fact that the narrator may think too highly of himself, wherefore his self-characterization should not be trusted easily, he appears to be reliable.

To conclude, the autodiegetic narrators in Dahl’s adult stories that have been discussed in this chapter all seem to be generally reliable in their rendering of the events. Moreover, they all appear to be overt: they frequently make comments, they do not refrain from side remarks and they address the reader directly. Furthermore, it is noticeable that the narrator in “Galloping Foxley” makes less use of the mode of

showing than the narrators in “My Lady Love, My Dove” and “Nunc Dimittis” do. Especially in “Nunc Dimittis,” the narrator presents long passages of speech directly, which give the illusion that no mediator is present. Thus, the narrators in “My Lady Love, My Dove” and in “Nunc Dimittis” become invisible at times, whereas the narrator in “Galloping Foxley” avoids longer passages of direct speech and therefore remains more overt than the other two autodiegetic narrators throughout the story.

In the next chapter, the heterodiegetic narrators in Dahl’s adult short stories will be discussed. Focus will be laid on focalization and the narrators’ level of intrusion will be analyzed.

4.1.3 Heterodiegetic Narrators

Most of the stories from Roald Dahl’s *Tales of the Unexpected* feature heterodiegetic narrators. The three short stories that will be discussed in this subchapter are “Skin,” “William and Mary,” and “Mrs Bixby and the Colonel’s Coat.” In “Skin,” internal focalization predominates, while in “William and Mary” and in “Mrs Bixby and the Colonel’s Coat,” the narrators often shift between an external and an internal focalization. In “William and Mary,” there is more than only one character-focalizer, whereas Mrs Bixby is the only character-focalizer in “Mrs Bixby and the Colonel’s Coat.” Dahl’s heterodiegetic narrators are usually covert. Viñas Valle observes that “[t]he third-person narrator stays ‘invisible’ as much as possible so that side comments or direct addresses to the reader are extremely rare” (305).

In “Skin,” most of the story is perceived through the mind of the protagonist, Drioli. There is a heterodiegetic narrator and external focalizer who turns up at the beginning and the end of the story in order to introduce Drioli and the setting to the reader and to conclude the story with some final observations, but the rest of the narrative is told by a heterodiegetic narrator who adopts Drioli’s viewpoint.

An important part of the story consists only of Drioli’s memories of an event that, looked at from Drioli’s present point of view, happened many years ago. Thus, the reader, who is allowed to look into the mind of Drioli, is given Drioli’s past thoughts and perceptions by way of his memories:

It was odd, Drioli thought, how easily it all came back to him now, how each single small remembered fact seemed instantly to remind him of another. There was that nonsense with the tattoo, for instance. Now, *that* was a mad thing if ever there was one. How had it started? Ah, yes – he had got rich one day, that was it, and he had bought lots of wine. He could see himself now as he entered the studio with the parcel of bottles under his arm [...]. (Dahl 86)

The whole passage quoted clearly covers a memory of Drioli's that he currently revives at the story level. Drioli's thoughts are rendered by the narrator through narrated monologue in an internal focalization. One sentence ("He could see himself now [...]" (Dahl 86)) is also represented by way of psychonarration.

Also after Drioli has entered the gallery, the reader seems to perceive the scene through the eyes of Drioli: "But before he had had time to gather his courage, he heard a voice beside him saying, 'What is it you want?' The speaker wore a black morning coat. He was plump and short and had a very white face. [...] 'If you please,' the man was saying, 'take yourself out of my gallery.'" (Dahl 96).

It can be argued that the passage above is rendered in an internal focalization and that thus, the man who talks to Drioli is described from Drioli's point of view. As becomes clear from the direct speech that has been quoted above, the person talking to Drioli is the owner of the gallery. Since he is referred to as "[...] [t]he speaker [...]" and "[...] the man [...]" (Dahl 96) in the extract above, the gallery owner obviously cannot be identified by the focalizer. Because of the fact that a heterodiegetic narrator and external focalizer would have known that the man talking to Drioli is the gallery owner, it can be argued that the focalizer in this passage is Drioli, who has no knowledge of the man's identity.²⁰

The story ends with a heterodiegetic narrator and external focalizer who comments on the old man Drioli's whereabouts:

It wasn't more than a few weeks later that a picture by Soutine, of a woman's head, painted in an unusual manner, nicely framed and heavily varnished, turned up for sale in Buenos Aires. That – and the fact that there is no hotel in

²⁰ A similar observation about a different passage from "Skin" is made by Mounir Triki in "The representation of self in narrative." *Journal of Literary Semantics* 20.2 (1991): 78-96, p. 85. Triki makes further interesting observations about focalization in "Skin," but it needs to be noted that at one point, he confuses two different characters in the narrative to be one and the same character: Triki argues that "[i]t is of paramount importance that what will become later perceived as 'the white canary-gloved hand' is here perceived to be 'a fat white paw'" (92) when talking about internal focalization in "Skin." However, the story reveals that while the "[...] fat white paw [...]" (Dahl 96) belongs to the gallery owner, the "[...] hand in the canary glove [...]" (Dahl 100) belongs to a different man.

Cannes called Bristol – causes one to wonder a little, and to pray for the old man’s health, and to hope fervently that wherever he may be at this moment, there is a plump attractive girl to manicure the nails of his fingers, and a maid to bring him his breakfast in bed in the mornings. (Dahl 101)

It seems that this narrator knows what happened to Drioli, but that he chooses not to tell the reader explicitly about Drioli’s fate. Instead, he becomes more overt, employing irony by stating that one can only hope for Drioli’s well-being while it is in fact obvious that Drioli has been killed.

As far as the story “William and Mary” is concerned, it can be observed that the heterodiegetic narrator frequently shifts between an external and an internal focalization. It is noticeable that in “William and Mary,” there is more than one character-focalizer: the narrator employs the perspective of Mary Pearl as well as the perspective of Landy, the doctor, at certain stages of the story. In the following passage, the narrator shifts from an external to an internal focalization, by which Mary becomes the character-focalizer:

William Pearl did not leave a great deal of money when he died, and his will was a simple one. With the exception of a few bequests to relatives, he left all his property to his wife. The solicitor and Mrs Pearl went over it together in the solicitor’s office, and when the business was completed, the widow got up to leave. At that point, the solicitor took a sealed envelope from the folder on his desk and held it out to his client. ‘I have been instructed to give you this,’ he said. ‘Your husband sent it to us shortly before he passed away.’ [...] Mrs Pearl accepted the envelope and went out into the street. She paused on the pavement, feeling the thing with her fingers. A letter of farewell from William? Probably, yes. A formal letter. It was bound to be formal – stiff and formal. The man was incapable of acting otherwise. He had never done anything informal in his life. (Dahl 152)

Up until the sentence that runs from the eighth into the ninth line (“She paused on the pavement [...]” (Dahl 152)), the heterodiegetic narrator employs an external focalization. He describes the situation objectively from outside the story. Then, there seems to be a shift to an internal focalization: in the sentence that describes how Mrs Pearl touches the envelope, it is referred to as “[...] the thing [...]” (Dahl 152). It seems arguable that this is how Mrs Pearl, not the heterodiegetic narrator, refers to the envelope because the impersonal reference to it as “[...] the thing [...]” (Dahl 152) conveys Mrs Pearl’s attitude towards her husband’s last message to her: she seems not to think of it as anything particularly important. It can be argued that an objective narrator would simply have referred to the envelope as ‘the envelope,’ which is why

the focalizer in this sentence appears to be Mrs Pearl. The rest of the passage continues to be presented by way of internal focalization because it is rendered as narrated monologue in which Mrs Pearl's thoughts are depicted.

The next passage will show that Mrs Pearl is not the only character-focalizer in "William and Mary":

Landy turned and stared at her. What a queer little woman this was, he thought, with her large eyes and her sullen, resentful air. Her features, which must have been quite pleasant once, had now gone completely. The mouth was slack, the cheeks loose and flabby, and the whole face gave the impression of having slowly but surely sagged to pieces through years and years of joyless married life. They walked on for a while in silence. (Dahl 172-173)

The first and the last sentence from this passage seem to be rendered by an external focalizer. In the rest of the excerpt, however, the narrator adopts Landy's perspective. In the second sentence, Landy's thought is represented indirectly and Mrs Pearl's eyes and her air are described as Landy perceives them. Also in the next two sentences, Landy remains the character-focalizer and Mrs Pearl's outer appearance is described as perceived by Landy.

With regard to the narrative voice in "William and Mary," it should not be left unsaid that several pages of the story consist of a letter from William to Mary. Viñas Valle states that "William and Mary" "[...] begins and ends with an omniscient narrator which at a certain point in the story becomes replaced by the voice of William" (305-306). However, it might be argued that the heterodiegetic narrator is not completely replaced by William's voice but that instead, the narrator becomes extremely covert in the passage in which the letter is reproduced, as is the case with long passages of showing. It seems arguable that the narrator is still present throughout the passage and that he is the one who renders the whole letter to the reader, but the reader gets the impression that the narrator has disappeared.

The last story that will be discussed in this chapter is called "Mrs Bixby and the Colonel's Coat." The heterodiegetic narrator in this story again makes use of both external and internal focalization, but this time, internal focalization is restricted to a single character, namely Mrs Bixby. At the beginning of the narrative, there is a heterodiegetic narrator and external focalizer who introduces the story of Mrs Bixby to the reader. In this introduction, the narrator is clearly overt because he makes

misogynist judgments about females, claiming that American women get rich through divorce and by waiting for their husbands to die: “Divorce has become a lucrative process, simple to arrange and easy to forget; and ambitious females can repeat it as often as they please and parlay their winnings to astronomical figures. The husband’s death also brings satisfactory rewards and some ladies prefer to rely upon this method” (Dahl 218). Moreover, as Viñas Valle observes, the narrator directly addresses the reader in the introduction when talking about the story of Mrs Bixby (305): “It is extremely popular with twice- or thrice-bitten males in search of solace, and if you are one of them, and if you haven’t heard it before, you may enjoy the way it comes out” (Dahl 219).²¹

After these introductory words, the narrator becomes covert and tells the story of Mrs Bixby, frequently shifting to an internal focalization in the course of the narrative. In the following passage, for example, Mrs Bixby clearly is the character-focalizer:

The great black coat seemed to slide on to her almost of its own accord, like a second skin. Oh boy! It was the queerest feeling! She glanced into the mirror. It was fantastic. Her whole personality had suddenly changed completely. She looked dazzling, radiant, rich, brilliant, voluptuous, all at the same time. And the sense of power that it gave her! (Dahl 222)

In this excerpt, the narrator does not only render Mrs Bixby’s thoughts to the reader (“Oh boy! It was the queerest feeling!” (Dahl 222)), but also describes Mrs Bixby’s impression of herself in the mink coat – the reader is able to perceive what Mrs Bixby feels like in the coat and how she, examining her reflection, thinks she looks in it. Also the first sentence of the passage seems to describe Mrs Bixby’s sensation when she is putting on the mink coat: the impression that the coat seems “[...] to slide on to her almost of its own accord, like a second skin” (Dahl 222) can certainly be argued to be Mrs Bixby’s.

All in all, it can be observed that while the larger part of the story “Skin” is told by a heterodiegetic narrator who presents the narrative events by way of internal focalization, the narrative “William and Mary” is told by a heterodiegetic narrator who employs both external and internal focalization, adopting the point of view of more than only one character. Also “Mrs Bixby and the Colonel’s Coat” is told by a

²¹ Viñas Valle uses the same quote in “The narrative voice in Roald Dahl’s children’s and adult books.” *Didáctica. Lengua y Literatura* 20 (2008): 291-308, p. 305.

heterodiegetic narrator who frequently shifts between an external and an internal focalization, but there is only one character-focalizer used. Moreover, Dahl's heterodiegetic narrators are usually covert, but it has been shown that they sometimes can also be more overt.

In the next chapter, the style in which Roald Dahl's adult stories are written will briefly be examined. Focus will be laid on the use of black humor in his narratives.

4.2 Style

The language of Roald Dahl's short stories has been referred to as "[...] crystal clear and viciously economical" (Barlow). When commenting on the style of Dahl's adult narratives, Alan Warren acknowledges that "Dahl's art is to make it look deceptively easy, even effortless" (*Roald Dahl* 6), and a reviewer from the *New York Times Book Review* praises Dahl's "[...] ability at straight narrative [...]" (qtd. in Warren *Roald Dahl* 7). In fact, Roald Dahl's style seems to remain polished throughout his short narratives from the collection *Tales of the Unexpected*; Dahl is able to hit the nail on the head with his concrete use of language. For instance, Dahl manages to set the scene effectively and apparently without any effort at the beginning of "The Landlady":²²

Billy Weaver had travelled down from London on the slow afternoon train, with a change at Swindon on the way, and by the time he got to Bath it was about nine o'clock in the evening and the moon was coming up out of a clear starry sky over the houses opposite the station entrance. But the air was deadly cold and the wind was like a flat blade of ice on his cheeks. [...] There were no shops on this wide street that he was walking along, only a line of tall houses on each side, all of them identical. They had porches and pillars and four or five steps going up to their front doors, and it was obvious that once upon a time they had been very swanky residences. (Dahl 142)

In this passage, the language is precise and the tone seems to be even monotonous, which is especially noticeable in the last sentence above in which the houses' attributes are simply recited one after the other. It might be argued that the houses' monotony, which makes all of them look the same, is reflected in the way they are described.

²² Alan Warren comments on how the opening of another of Dahl's stories, namely "Dip in the Pool," "[...] sets the mood perfectly and economically [with its gently cadenced tone] [...]" (*Roald Dahl* 7).

Dahl frequently makes use of adjectives and adverbs in the passage above (the adjectives that can be identified above are the following: ‘slow,’ ‘clear,’ ‘starry,’ ‘opposite,’ ‘cold,’ ‘flat,’ ‘wide,’ ‘tall,’ ‘identical,’ ‘front,’ ‘obvious,’ ‘swanky’; the adverbs used are ‘about,’ ‘deadly,’ ‘very’). However, the adjectives and adverbs that Dahl chooses are usually ordinary, which is why it still seems that the style can be described as plain. It is noticeable that the adjective ‘swanky’ is informal, which might hint at the fact that the houses are perceived through the young character’s eyes, who may use a word such as ‘swanky’ to describe them. In general, the diction of the passage appears to be concrete.

As far as syntax is concerned, it can be observed that Dahl often uses compound sentences that are coordinated by an ‘and.’ The first and the last sentence of the passage above are examples of such compound sentences. In the first sentence, there is also a prepositional phrase (“[...] with a change at Swindon on the way [...]” (Dahl 142)). These sentences, though they are not always short, are still easy to follow because they consist of shorter main clauses.

A rhetorical device that can be found in the passage above and that certainly needs to be mentioned because it is prominent in Dahl’s stories is the simile. In the simile above, the cold wind on the character’s cheeks is compared to “[...] a flat blade of ice [...]” (Dahl 142). Because of this simile, the reader seems to be able to experience the atmosphere of the story even better, almost himself feeling the bitter coldness of the wind that strikes the character’s face like a blade. Therefore, the simile can be argued to draw the reader further into the story and to put the reader into the mood intended by the author. Many similes that can be found in Dahl’s stories are also used to describe his characters, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

It seems to be generally the case that Dahl, through his use of clear language, is able to make the situations that his characters find themselves in at the beginning of the story appear normal and completely harmless to the reader. Thus, the reader seems to be put into a comforting mood before the events of the story heighten suspense in the reader until finally, the story ends with a twist and leaves the reader in surprise: Warren observes that Dahl “[...] affects a false air of casualness, to make what is coming the more unexpected. [...] Dahl’s method has much in common with a surgeon preparing a patient for an operation and muttering soothing words while administering the anesthetic” (*Roald Dahl* 7-8). Thus, the plain style that Dahl uses in

his short stories seems to perfectly serve his focus on plot and on the creation of a surprising effect at the end of the story, which the plot is directed at.

Another highly important aspect of Dahl's stories is black humor. Black humor can be defined as follows: "Gattung des Komischen, die existenzielle Bedrohungen wie Tod, Krankheit, Unfall, Unglück und Verbrechen oder das Böse zum Gegenstand hat" (Köhler "Schwarzer Humor"). Black humor can be bitter or macabre and grotesque (Köhler "Schwarzer Humor"), and it "[...] often situates wit or comedy at an inappropriate or awkward moment [...]" ("Black humor"). Another possible definition of black humor is the following: "**Schwarzer Humor** ist das Scherzen mit dem Schrecken und Grauen [...]" ("Schwarzer Humor"). Hence, when Warren praises Dahl's "[...] near-perfect juxtaposition of humor with horror" (*Roald Dahl* 8), which has already been mentioned in chapter 3, he comments on Dahl's skilled use of black humor in his narratives.

The rest of this chapter will discuss the use of black humor in two paradigmatic short stories of Dahl, namely "Lamb to the Slaughter" and "Dip in the Pool." As has already been summarized in chapter 3, "Lamb to the Slaughter" features a housewife who kills her husband with a leg of lamb, which she then cooks and serves the policemen investigating the case for dinner. Although the story actually deals with the serious issues of death and crime, the ending of the story is grotesquely comic because of the fact that the policemen talk about what the murder weapon might be while they are actually eating and thereby destroying the most important evidence:

The woman stayed where she was, listening to them through the open door, and she could hear them speaking among themselves, their voices thick and sloppy because their mouths were full of meat.
'Have some more, Charlie?'
'No. Better not finish it.'
'She *wants* us to finish it. She said so. Be doing her a favour.'
'Okay then. Give me some more.'
'That's the hell of a big club the guy must've used to hit poor Patrick,' one of them was saying. 'The doc says his skull was smashed all to pieces just like from a sledge-hammer.'
'That's why it ought to be easy to find.'
'Exactly what I say.'
'Whoever done it, they're not going to be carrying a thing like that around with them longer than they need.'
One of them belched.
'Personally, I think it's right here on the premises.'
'Probably right under our very noses. What you think, Jack?'

And in the other room, Mary Maloney began to giggle.
(Dahl 31)

It is certainly comic that the policemen naively eat up all of the lamb without being able to realize that the leg of lamb perfectly suits their description of the murder weapon. When one of the policemen belches, the situation appears to be so bizarre and out of place it seems the reader cannot do anything but laugh about it. Bertonneau observes that “Lamb to the Slaughter” is “[...] so grotesque, so darkly comic, so hilarious in some of its incidental details (the fourth line from the end features a belch), that one can easily fail to take it seriously.” Also when one of the policemen states that the murder weapon is probably right under their noses, he clearly uses this expression simply as a common saying and without realizing that the weapon literally is under the policemen’s noses, which makes the policeman’s statement appear comic to the reader.

All in all, the ending of “Lamb to the Slaughter” clearly mixes serious talk about murder with humor. From the point of view of the reader, the policemen’s behavior and statements seem to be comic. The situation is actually grave because somebody has been murdered cold-bloodedly, and it is horrific that the murderess gets away with her crime and that she eventually even giggles over the policemen’s naivety. However, since the whole situation is utterly grotesque, the reader is tempted to do as Mary Maloney does and laugh about it (Bertonneau). Therefore, the ending of “Lamb to the Slaughter” is at once horrific and comic and can be regarded as an excellent example of how black humor is employed in Dahl’s stories. Moreover, it needs to be mentioned that the effect that occurs at the end of the story is not only black humor, but also dramatic irony because as opposed to the policemen, the reader knows that the leg of lamb is the murder weapon and therefore, he interprets the situation at the dinner table and the policemen’s comments about the weapon differently than the police officers do (“Irony”).

The second story that will be examined in terms of black humor is “Dip in the Pool.” As has briefly been summarized in chapter 3, the story is about a passenger on a ship who deliberately goes overboard in order to win a bet concerning the ship’s daily travel distance. Mr Botibol, the passenger, is extremely careful about making sure that the only other passenger on deck, a woman, will give the alarm when he goes overboard. He makes sure that she is neither deaf nor blind, and he briefly talks to her

in order to be certain that she did not participate in the auction concerning the ship's travel distance herself and that she therefore has no financial reasons not to save him. Having thus ensured that there are no reasons why Mr Botibol's plan should not work, Mr Botibol finally jumps off the ship shouting for help, but the woman fails to give the alarm:

When the first shout for help sounded, the woman who was leaning on the rail started up and gave a little jump of surprise. [...] For a moment she looked as though she weren't quite sure what she ought to do [...]. [...] Then almost at once she seemed to relax, and she leaned forward far over the rail, staring at the water where it was turbulent in the ship's wake. Soon a tiny round black head appeared in the foam, an arm was raised above it, once, twice, vigorously waving, and a small faraway voice was heard calling something that was difficult to understand. [...]

After a while another woman came out on deck. [...]

'So *there* you are,' she said.

[...]

'It's very odd,' the woman with the fat ankles said. 'A man dived overboard just now, with his clothes on.'

'Nonsense!'

'Oh yes. He said he wanted to get some exercise and he dived in and didn't even bother to take his clothes off.'

'You better come down now,' the bony woman said. [...] 'And don't you ever go wandering about on deck alone like this again. You know quite well you're meant to wait for me.'

'Yes, Maggie,' the woman with the fat ankles answered [...].

'Such a nice man,' she said. 'He waved to me.'

(Dahl 68-69)

On the last two pages of the story, which have been quoted above, the reader gradually realizes that the woman who saw Mr Botibol go overboard is mentally impaired, which is one reason for the failure of Mr Botibol's plan that Mr Botibol had not considered. The story's ending deals with misfortune and with death as a consequence of bad luck, and the realization that Mr Botibol's eyewitness is mentally impaired is horrifying. One comic element lies in the fact that Mr Botibol was extremely careful about eliminating all possible reasons why his plan could fail, but he eventually did not consider the one reason that cost his life.²³ In this case, the black

²³ In her article on plot reversals, Catherine Emmott analyzes the story "Dip in the Pool" and also observes that Mr Botibol's plan does not succeed because he has not taken into consideration all the possible circumstances under which his plan could fail (151). She states that "[t]he main point of this story [...] is that plans are fallible because we fail to take into account all the possibilities, particularly when human greed is present and when we are forced to rely on the actions of others" (151).

humor is certainly bitter, for it is upsetting that Mr Botibol dies because of an unimportant auction and because of bad luck.

The fact that the woman taking care of the eyewitness does not understand what has happened also contributes to the bitter taste that the story leaves the reader with. The mentally impaired woman's final statement about how Mr Botibol waved at her seems like the punchline of a highly macabre joke. On the one hand, this statement is comic because the reader understands what the woman does not, namely that Mr Botibol was waving for help. On the other hand, it is horrific that the woman's misinterpretation of Mr Botibol's waving is one reason why Mr Botibol has to die. Hence, the ending of "Dip in the Pool" clearly features black humor. Moreover, as Emmott observes, "[t]he final outcome stands in ironic contrast [...]" (151) to Mr Botibol's plan.

To conclude, Dahl's stories are written in a clear style that seems to prepare the reader for the surprise dénouement that Dahl's short narratives typically lead up to. Another typical aspect of Dahl's stories is black humor, which especially comes to use at the end of his narratives and therefore also contributes to the effect the stories have on the reader, often leaving the reader simultaneously horrified and amused. In addition, irony plays an important role in Dahl's narratives.

The following chapter will briefly discuss the characters in Roald Dahl's short stories for adults.

4.3 Characters²⁴

It has already been mentioned that in his short stories, Dahl puts great emphasis on plot and on the surprising outcome which the plot is built towards. As has been thoroughly discussed in chapter 2, this focus on plot is characteristic of short stories in the traditional sense. Warren argues that Dahl's strong focus on plot is probably the reason why his characters lack psychological depth (*Roald Dahl* 9). As he puts it, "[...] Dahl gives us quick sketches of his characters, who are usually defined more by their actions than by lengthy descriptions" (*Roald Dahl* 8).

²⁴ Again, the terminology used in this chapter is the one suggested by the English departments of the Universities of Tübingen, Stuttgart, and Freiburg: see Lethbridge, Stefanie, and Jarmila Mildorf. "Basics of English Studies: an introductory course for students of literary studies in English." Version 03/04. Web. 5 Aug. 2014.

In fact, Dahl's characterizations have been referred to as being of "[...] comic-book quality [...]" (Makman 215) and his characters have been defined as "[...] grotesque-looking [...]" (Drabelle). Makman states that "Dahl uses caricature to exaggerate and illuminate quirky aspects of human behavior" (215). Similarly, West argues that "[l]ike any good caricaturist, Dahl exaggerates particular aspects of his characters' personalities in order to focus the reader's attention on traits and behavior patterns that might otherwise go unnoticed" ("Mastering the Macabre"). However, he adds that "[...] even though Dahl's characters may not be realistic, they are still drawn from real life" ("Mastering the Macabre").

In general, Dahl's characters are mono-dimensional and static. In a few stories, however, Dahl's mono-dimensional characters seem to develop throughout the narrative. This seems to be the case, for example, in "Lamb to the Slaughter," where Mary Maloney changes from an apparently caring housewife into a vengeful murderess who in the end even giggles over the detectives' naivety without showing the slightest sign of grief or regret.

Also in "Neck," the protagonist of the story, Sir Basil Turton, undergoes a development: he manages to turn the tables and enjoys a moment of power over his wife. The same could be said of Mrs Pearl in "William and Mary," who has been suppressed by her husband throughout their marriage and who undergoes a change in attitude, getting alarmingly euphoric when meeting her former husband's brain, which has been kept alive artificially together with one of his eyes. In the end, Mrs Pearl seems to have won the power struggle over her husband and demonstrates this by blowing cigarette smoke into his eye, smoking being a habit that her husband had never approved of.

Mrs Foster in "The Way Up To Heaven" undergoes a similar development: she eventually frees herself of her husband by letting him rot in a stuck elevator and consequently starts feeling "[...] remarkably strong and, in a queer sort of way, wonderful" (Dahl 190). Also in "Nunc Dimittis," the protagonist Lionel Lampson changes from an apparently civilized gentleman into a vengeful bully.

Mono-dimensional as Dahl's characters are, they often are depicted as either good or bad, as suppressed or suppressing characters. As has already been mentioned in chapter 3 and discussed above, however, turning the tables is a persistent theme in

Dahl's stories, and the suppressing characters often get suppressed themselves eventually. Moreover, deceitful characters often get punished in the end, as is the case, for example, in "Dip in the Pool," which has been discussed in the previous chapter and in which Mr Botibol meets an unpleasant death because he tried to win money by cheating. Also in "Taste," Richard Pratt, who cheats in order to win a bet, eventually is exposed as a liar in front of all the other characters.

Dahl's deceitful and scheming characters also present the probably most important theme underlying Dahl's short stories that has also been mentioned in chapter 3, namely the savagery that lies underneath the civilized façade of humanity (West "Mastering the Macabre"). Thus, many of Dahl's most deceitful and uncivilized characters, such as Lionel Lampson in "Nunc Dimittis" and Richard Pratt in "Taste," are upper-class characters whose behavior effectively reveals how hypocritical mankind can be. Furthermore, these two protagonists are examples of anti-heroes, who frequently populate Dahl's short stories.

It is also noticeable that sometimes, Dahl seems to bestow his unlikable characters with physically unattractive attributes that are supposed to reflect their disagreeable personality. This technique of implicit characterization comes to use, for example, in "Neck," where the narrator perceives Sir Basil Turton's dominant and cuckolding wife to be an utterly beautiful woman at first glance, but then he gets a closer look at her and describes her as follows:

The nostrils for example were very odd, somehow more open, more flaring than any I had seen before, and excessively arched. This gave the whole nose a kind of open, snorting look that had something of the wild animal about it – the mustang.

And the eyes, when I saw them close, were not wide and round the way the Madonna painters used to make them, but long and half closed, half smiling, half sullen, and slightly vulgar, so that in one way and another they gave her a most delicately dissipated air. (Dahl 104)

It is in descriptions like this one that Dahl's characters truly seem like caricatures from a cartoon. Another example in which one of Dahl's deceitful characters is depicted like a caricature is "Taste":

The man was about fifty years old and he did not have a pleasant face. Somehow, it was all mouth – mouth and lips – the full, wet lips of the professional gourmet, the lower lip hanging downward in the centre, a pendulous, 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. (Dahl 15)²⁵

The outward appearance of Richard Pratt seems somewhat repellent and thereby already appears to hint at Pratt's ignoble personality. Pratt's deceitful intentions are also implied when the narrator believes to see "[...] something distinctly disturbing about the man's face, that shadow of intentness between the eyes, and in the eyes themselves, right in their centres where it was black, a small slow spark of shrewdness, hiding" (Dahl 11).

However, not only the unlikable characters in Dahl's short stories are characterized as if they stemmed from a comic book. In "Royal Jelly," for example, the reader does not get to know much about Mabel Taylor, except that she is utterly concerned about her baby and that she has a "[...] handsome oval face [...]" (Dahl 245). Later in the story, Mrs Taylor gets highly upset about her husband feeding their baby with royal jelly and is portrayed as follows: "She turned and faced him, her eyes blazing, and she looked suddenly like some kind of little fighting bird with her neck arched over towards him as though she were about to fly at his face and peck his eyes out" (Dahl 260). This depiction of Mrs Taylor clearly is one more example of Dahl's preference for an exaggerated description of his mono-dimensional characters.

In the previous chapter, it has already been mentioned that Dahl frequently uses similes to portray his characters. This is the case, for example, in the previously quoted passage from "Taste," in which Richard Pratt's mouth is compared to a keyhole, as well as in the extract from "Royal Jelly" above, in which Mrs Taylor is compared to a bird that is fighting. Also in "Taste," Mrs Schofield is once compared to a bird by way of simile in order to refer to the way she moves: "She jerked her head

²⁵ It should be noted that part of this quote can also be found in Drabelle, Dennis. "Kiss, Kiss; Long before his tales for children, Roald Dahl wrote mordant short stories for adults." Rev. of *Collected Stories*, by Roald Dahl. *Washington Post* 29 Oct. 2006. *LexisNexis University*. 2014. Vienna University Library. Web. 5 Aug. 2014. Drabelle uses this quote to emphasize his point that Dahl's characters look grotesque. He also mentions the fact that Lady Turton in "Neck" is compared to a mustang.

Moreover, the same quote from "Taste" that has been used above can also be found in Warren, Alan. *Roald Dahl*. Starmont Contemporary Writers 1. Mercer Island: Starmont, 1988, p. 5. Warren observes that the human mouth is a frequently recurring image in Dahl's narratives (*Roald Dahl* 5). It seems to be the case that this image occurs especially when repellent characters are described and that the image of the mouth is therefore negatively connoted in Dahl's stories. Thus, for example, the adulterous Mrs Bixby in "Mrs Bixby and the Colonel's Coat" is described as "[...] a big vigorous woman with a wet mouth" (Dahl 219), and the deceitful Gladys Ponsonby's mouth is compared to "[...] a salmon's mouth [...]" (Dahl 130) in "Nunc Dimittis."

briskly up and down as she spoke, like a hen” (Dahl 14). Another example in which a character’s behavior is described by way of caricature and through the use of a simile can be found in “Galloping Foxley”: “*There* it was again, that curiously crisp, familiar voice, clipping its words and spitting them out very hard and small like a little quick-firing gun shooting out raspberry seeds” (Dahl 73).

Lastly, Warren’s observation that Dahl’s characters are characterized implicitly rather than explicitly (*Roald Dahl* 8), which has been mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, needs to be discussed in more detail. This observation certainly holds true, but of course, there are also instances in which an explicit characterization takes place. Frequently, this is done in a block characterization, as is the case in the following example:

All her life, Mrs Foster had had an almost pathological fear of missing a train, a plane, a boat, or even a theatre curtain. In other respects, she was not a particularly nervous woman, but the mere thought of being late on occasions like these would throw her into such a state of nerves that she would begin to twitch. (Dahl 179)

In this passage from “The Way Up To Heaven,” Mrs Foster is characterized explicitly by a heterodiegetic narrator. Mrs Foster also clearly is a mono-dimensional character, for her immense fear of being late is the one exaggerated characteristic that defines her throughout the story. Also Mr Foster is mono-dimensional, for he is characterized mainly as someone who seems to take pleasure in letting his wife wait for him as long as possible whenever they have an appointment. At the beginning of the story, Mr Foster is described as follows:

Mr Foster may possibly have had a right to be irritated by this foolishness of his wife’s, but he could have had no excuse for increasing her misery by keeping her waiting unnecessarily. Mind you, it is by no means certain that this is what he did, yet whenever they were to go somewhere, his timing was so accurate – just a minute or two late, you understand – and his manner so bland that it was hard to believe he wasn’t purposely inflicting a nasty private little torture of his own on the unhappy lady. And one thing he must have known – that she would never dare to call out and tell him to hurry. He had disciplined her too well for that. (Dahl 179)

Apart from the last sentence, this passage again is an example of explicit characterization. In the last sentence, Mr Foster could be argued to be characterized implicitly because the narrator reveals Mr Foster’s attitude towards his wife, implying that Mr Foster is a dominant husband who does not seem to show a high amount of

affection for Mrs Foster but instead appears to think of her as someone who has been trained by him.

In fact, Mr and Mrs Foster are characterized implicitly for the larger part of the story, as is also the case in the following excerpt:

Next morning, Mrs Foster was up early, and by eight-thirty she was downstairs and ready to leave.
Shortly after nine, her husband appeared. ‘Did you make any coffee?’ he asked.
‘No, dear. I thought you’d get a nice breakfast at the club. The car is here. It’s been waiting. I’m all ready to go.’
[...]
‘Your luggage?’
‘It’s at the airport.’
‘Ah yes,’ he said. ‘Of course. And if you’re going to take me to the club first, I suppose we’d better get going fairly soon, hadn’t we?’
‘Yes!’ she cried. ‘Oh yes – *please!*’
‘I’m just going to get a few cigars. I’ll be right with you. You get in the car.’
She turned and went to where the chauffeur was standing, and he opened the car door for her as she approached.
‘What time is it?’ she asked him.
‘About nine-fifteen.’
Mr Foster came out five minutes later, and watching him as he walked slowly down the steps, she noticed that his legs were like goat’s legs in those narrow stovepipe trousers that he wore. As on the day before, he paused half-way down to sniff the air and to examine the sky.
(Dahl 187)

In this passage, the reader is able to make inferences about the characters’ personalities and about their relationship on the basis of their actions, which are reported by a heterodiegetic narrator. Thus, it is observable that Mrs Foster is terribly nervous about missing her flight. Her anxiety is recognizable because her voice is raised (“‘Yes!’ she cried” (Dahl 187)), because she is pleading her husband to finally get going, and because she keeps track of time. Moreover, at one point, the narrator renders Mrs Foster’s perception of her husband’s legs looking like goat’s legs to the reader. This perception can be argued to characterize Mrs Foster implicitly, for it seems that Mrs Foster draws a connection between her husband and the devil, who is often depicted with goat’s legs. Hence, Mrs Foster appears to think of Mr Foster as an evil man who tortures her on purpose.

In fact, the passage above strongly implies that Mr Foster deliberately takes as much time as possible before leaving for the airport. His evil intentions are apparent in his

behavior: he shows up late, then he disappears again to get some cigars, and when he has finally left the house, he takes his time walking down the steps and looking at the sky before getting into the car. Thus, the explicit block characterization of Mr Foster that is carried out by the narrator at the beginning of the story is confirmed later in the story, when Mr Foster is characterized implicitly.

The extract above reveals that Mr and Mrs Foster are an unhappy couple whose relationship clearly is not characterized by love and affection. It can be noticed that also many other stories of Dahl are populated by male and female characters who seem to be in an unloving relationship or who are caught up in unbalanced power relationships, e.g. “My Lady Love, My Dove,” “Neck,” “William and Mary,” “Mrs Bixby and the Colonel’s Coat,” and “Edward the Conqueror.”

As far as techniques of characterization are concerned, it can be observed that also in all the other stories from Dahl’s *Tales of the Unexpected*, the characters certainly are characterized more implicitly than explicitly. In “Lamb to the Slaughter,” for example, Mary Maloney is first characterized explicitly as a loving wife:

She loved to luxuriate in the presence of this man, and to feel – almost as a sunbather feels the sun – that warm male glow that came out of him to her when they were alone together. She loved him for the way he sat loosely in a chair, for the way he came in a door, or moved slowly across the room with long strides. She loved the intent, far look in his eyes when they rested on her, the funny shape of his mouth, and especially the way he remained silent about his tiredness, sitting still with himself until the whisky had taken some of it away. (Dahl 23)

This characterization, however, is completely overruled by Mary Maloney’s succeeding actions, which define her as a cold-blooded murderess.

Sometimes, the characters in Dahl’s stories also rely on self-characterization. In “Nunc Dimittis,” for example, the autodiegetic narrator describes himself to the addressee at the beginning of the story, which has already been discussed in chapter 4.1.2. Also in “Gallop Foxley,” the autodiegetic narrator introduces himself at the beginning of the story, describing himself as someone who enjoys having a daily routine that does not change:

I have always liked the process of commuting; every phase of the little journey is a pleasure to me. There is a regularity about it that is agreeable and comforting to a person of habit, and in addition, it serves as a sort of slipway along which I am gently but firmly launched into the waters of daily business routine. [...]

But normally, when I arrive in the morning with my usual four minutes to spare, there they all are, these good, solid, steadfast people, standing in their right places with their right umbrellas and hats and ties and faces and their newspapers under their arms, as unchanged and unchangeable through the years as the furniture in my own living-room. I like that. (Dahl 70)

However, also these two protagonists are generally characterized implicitly more than explicitly: Lionel Lampson in “Nunc Dimittis” describes himself as a civilized upper-class gentleman (Dahl 120-121), but his rude behavior towards Janet de Pelagia shows that he is not nearly as civilized a person as his self-characterization suggests. Perkins, the protagonist of “Gallop Foxley,” is more reliable than Lionel Lampson, for the narrative depicts that he clearly is a man who loves his routine. Implicitly, Perkins’ self-characterization presents him as a person who is rather narrow-minded because he is not open to change. This character trait is also depicted later in the story by way of implicit characterization, e.g. when Perkins describes the feelings of horror he had when a new commuter got into Perkins’ compartment (Dahl 72) and when Perkins states that his “[...] day was ruined” (Dahl 74) because the stranger’s presence had mixed up his routine (Dahl 73).

Moreover, the story implies that Perkins seems not to have come to terms with having been terrorized by Gallop Foxley in his schooldays. This is suggested by the fact that he confuses a complete stranger, who is almost ten years younger than him, with Foxley, as well as by his lively memories of how Foxley had tortured him at school. His desire for revenge on Foxley is apparent when Perkins decides to embarrass the stranger whom he believes to be Foxley in front of the other passengers: “A bit of teasing and discomfort wouldn’t do him any harm. And it would do *me* an awful lot of good” (Dahl 84).

To conclude, it has been shown that the characters in Dahl’s stories are characterized implicitly rather than explicitly and that frequently, important information about a character is given in a block characterization. Furthermore, it has been analyzed that Dahl’s characters are mono-dimensional and that they often seem like caricatures because their mannerisms and physical appearances are frequently exaggerated.

The next chapter will focus on how Dahl creates feelings of suspense in the reader.

4.4 The Creation of Suspense

Suspense has been referred to as a phenomenon that gives “[...] narrative its life” (Abbott 57) and the experience of which is the reason why most people read fiction (Wenzel “Spannung” 181). However, suspense seems to be hard to grasp because it results not only from textual aspects, but also depends on the psychological make-up of the reader of a suspenseful text (Wenzel “Spannung” 181). Therefore, “[t]here are basically two different ways to approach the problem of describing and explaining suspense. One begins with an analysis of suspenseful texts (books, films, etc.), whereas the other focuses on the reception process” (Vorderer, Wulff, and Friedrichsen vii). Although it seems important to mention that suspense is indeed an interdisciplinary phenomenon, this chapter will concentrate mainly on textual features of Dahl’s short stories that have the potential to create suspense in the reader, and therefore will adopt a text-oriented approach. However, issues related to the reader such as his expectations and his concern for a fictional character will necessarily be touched upon as well.

Before getting into further detail as regards the creation of suspense in fiction, it needs to be clarified that there is a distinction between suspense and tension (Pfister 142, Pyrhönen “Suspense and Surprise,” Wenzel “Spannung” 181): tension is primarily found in poetry (Wenzel “Spannung” 181) and can refer to the “[...] simultaneous co-existence [...]” (“Tension”) of a poem’s literal and metaphorical meaning, or to what is called ‘conflict structures,’ such as “[...] the counterpoint [...] between the rhythm and meter of a poem and speech rhythms [...]” (“Tension”). Suspense, on the other hand, is related to the development of the action of a text (Pfister 142, Wenzel “Spannung” 181) and results from uncertainty about the outcome of an entire narrative or of a shorter episode within a narrative that does not necessarily have to be suspenseful overall (Carroll “The Paradox of Suspense” 74). Thus, “[s]uspense is an emotion that besets us when we are confronted with narrative fictions that focus our attention on courses of events about whose outcomes, in the standard case, we are acutely aware that we are uncertain” (Carroll “The Paradox of Suspense” 75).

It is argued that the number of possible outcomes, however, has to be limited for suspense to arise (Pfister 142-143, Wenzel “Spannung” 182). According to Heta Pyrhönen, “[t]he intensity of suspense is inversely proportional to the range of

possibilities” (“Suspense and Surprise”) and the climax of suspense “[...] begins when narrative possibilities are reduced to clear-cut binaries such as success or failure” (“Suspense and Surprise”). Noël Carroll even goes so far as to claim that when suspense comes into play, “[...] the course of events in question can have only two outcomes, and those potential outcomes stand in relation to each other as logical contraries [...]” (“The Paradox of Suspense” 76). Thereby, he denies that fiction in which readers are confronted with more than two possible and opposed outcomes deals with narrative suspense. Instead, he argues for a distinction between suspense and “[...] other forms of narrative uncertainty [...]” (“The Paradox of Suspense” 75). Hence, Carroll suggests that mysteries in the classical mode of whodunit, since they principally allow for the entertainment of “[...] indeterminate and logically nonexclusive [...]” (“The Paradox of Suspense” 76) answers to the question of who committed the crime, need to be differentiated from suspense fiction (“The Paradox of Suspense” 75-76).

Furthermore, Carroll argues that uncertainty concerning the two possible outcomes of an action is not sufficient for suspense to be created, for uncertainty about if it will or will not start snowing in the storyworld, for example, does not necessarily give rise to suspense (“The Paradox of Suspense” 76). Therefore, he suggests that the reader has to prefer one of the possible outcomes in order to feel suspense (“The Paradox of Suspense” 76). As far as preferences for a certain outcome are concerned, Pyrhönen states that “[t]ypically, when a likable character is in danger, readers hope for a favourable outcome” (“Suspense and Surprise”). According to Carroll, the most important factors contributing to the liking of characters appear to be moral ones (“The Paradox of Suspense” 80). Thus, he hypothesizes that

[...] suspense takes control where the course of events that is the object of the emotional state points to two logically opposed outcomes, one of which is evil or immoral but probable or likely, and the other of which is moral, but improbable or unlikely or only as probable as the evil outcome. (“The Paradox of Suspense” 77)²⁶

Carroll clarifies, however, that in his opinion, “[...] the audience’s moral responses are frequently shaped by fiction itself” (“The Paradox of Suspense” 79). Hence, he suggests that a reader can morally support characters in suspense narratives who do

²⁶ This hypothesis is also discussed by Pyrhönen in her entry on suspense and surprise: see Pyrhönen, Petra. “Suspense and Surprise.” *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2005.

not act according to the reader's normal moral standards, but who still are depicted as more virtuous than their opponents ("The Paradox of Suspense" 78-79). Pyrhönen goes further than Carroll nevertheless and argues that "[s]uspense need not [...] be tied to morality as, for example, Patricia Highsmith's Tom Ripley novels suggest by making readers fear for an amoral criminal" ("Suspense and Surprise").

From Carroll's quote on suspense and moral likeliness above, it becomes clear that the probability of the possible outcomes also plays an important role in the creation of suspense. While Carroll is of the opinion that suspense cannot exist without the reader preferring a specific outcome ("The Paradox of Suspense" 76), as has been discussed above, Wenzel suggests that as long as the reader does not have any preference for one of the potential outcomes, an even probability of the outcomes is able to create suspense ("Spannung" 183). He then argues that as soon as the reader is in favor of a certain character, suspense is the greater the less probable a positive outcome is for the favored character ("Spannung" 183).

As far as the reader's relationship to the favored character is concerned, both Manfred Pfister and Peter Wenzel argue that the reader identifies with the character (Pfister 144, Wenzel 183). Carroll, however, is opposed to the theory of character-identification: he argues that if the reader identified with a character, he would feel exactly what the character feels ("The Philosophy of Horror" 90), but observes that "[...] in a great many cases, the emotional state of the audience does not replicate the emotional state of the characters" ("The Philosophy of Horror" 91). He states that the reader can, for example, feel suspense when the character does not ("The Philosophy of Horror" 91). Therefore, Carroll takes a more cognitive approach, hypothesizing that the reader, instead of identifying with the character, assimilates the character's situation ("The Philosophy of Horror" 95). This means that firstly, the reader is able to understand how the character in question evaluates the situation internally, and that secondly, the reader looks at the situation from outside of it and hence sees it "[...]" as a situation involving a protagonist who has the viewpoint she has" ("The Philosophy of Horror" 95). The two different approaches discussed in this passage show that there is no clear answer to the question how a reader's relationship to a character and particularly to the character's emotions can be explained. What remains certain, however, is that a reader can be concerned for a character and that this concern can give rise to suspense.

Apart from uncertainty, a limited number of possible outcomes, the probability of these potential outcomes, and the reader's concern for a character, there exist yet other factors that can be argued to influence suspense. Pfister, for example, regards the amount of risk involved in the course of events whose outcome is uncertain as a component that is related to the intensity of suspense: "In bezug auf die Handlungssequenzen selbst, die die Figuren und Rezipienten in Planung und hypothetischen Prognosen antizipieren, gilt, daß das Spannungspotential mit der Größe des involvierten RISIKOS wächst" (144). Furthermore, he argues that information which is oriented towards the future course of action can manipulate the intensity of suspense (145). Thus, according to Pfister, information about a character's plans and about possible obstacles to these plans heightens suspense (145).

The conditions of suspense and the factors that are influential to its intensity which have been discussed so far all operate at the story level. However, as Wenzel observes, suspense can be created at the discourse level as well ("Spannung" 182). William F. Brewer argues that "[...] three of the most important discourse structures used in entertainment stories are surprise structures, curiosity structures, and suspense structures" (110).²⁷

As far as surprise discourse structure is concerned, Brewer assumes that "[...] surprise is produced by including critical expository or event information early in the event structure, but omitting it from the discourse structure" (111). Hence, crucial information that is needed in order to interpret the course of events correctly is withheld from the reader without the reader realizing so (111-112). Consequently, the disclosure of this information later in the narrative creates surprise in the reader and forces him to reinterpret the events retrospectively (112). About narratives that are structured this way, Wenzel states the following:

Mit Spannung haben diese Texte allerdings nur bedingt zu tun. So kann das Überraschungsschema bestenfalls ungezielte Spannung auslösen – in Fällen, in denen der Leser schon mit dem Überraschtwerden rechnet. Der wichtigste Effekt des Schemas, die Überraschung, ist hingegen vom Charakter der

²⁷ Wenzel refers to Brewer's distinction between said discourse structures in his analysis of suspense at the discourse level: see Wenzel, Peter. "Zur Analyse der Spannung." *Einführung in die Erzähltextanalyse: Kategorien, Modelle, Probleme*. Ed. Peter Wenzel. Trier: WVT, 2004. 181-195, pp. 186-194.

Spannung grundverschieden: kurz und gegenwartsbezogen statt von längerer Dauer und zukunftsorientiert. (187)

With regard to curiosity discourse structure, Brewer argues that

[...] curiosity is produced by including a crucial event early in the event structure. In a text with curiosity structure (unlike a surprise discourse) the discourse contains enough information about the earlier events to let the reader know that the information has been omitted from the discourse. This type of discourse organization causes the reader to become curious about the omitted information, and the curiosity is resolved by providing enough information later in the text to allow the reader to reconstruct the missing event. (112)

When looking at Carroll's theory of suspense, which has been discussed further above, it becomes obvious that Carroll, like Brewer, distinguishes narratives with curiosity structure from suspense fiction, for a curiosity discourse structure is used in classical mysteries (Brewer 112-113) and clearly allows for more than two possible outcomes that are contrary to each other. As opposed to Carroll and Brewer, Wenzel argues that narratives that use a curiosity structure also produce suspense in the reader and distinguishes between two different types of suspense based on whether suspense is created by a curiosity structure or by a suspense structure ("Spannung" 187-188).

Regarding suspense discourse structure, Brewer suggests that

[...] suspense is produced by including an initiating event or situation in the underlying event structure. An *initiating event* is an event that has the potential to lead to a significant outcome (good or bad) for one of the main characters in the narrative. In addition, we hypothesize that the event structure must contain the outcome of the initiating event. In general, suspense discourse is organized with the initiating event early in the text and with considerable intervening material before the outcome is presented. The initiating event causes the reader to become concerned about the potential consequences for the character, the intervening material prolongs the suspense, and the eventual occurrence of the outcome resolves the suspense. (113)

Furthermore, Brewer observes that suspense structure shows one important difference to the other two forms of discourse structure that have been discussed: he states that for feelings of surprise and curiosity to be created, the discourse structure and the event structure have to diverge, whereas for suspense to be produced, the discourse structure can stay parallel to the event structure (113).

As far as Roald Dahl's short stories are concerned, it can be observed that some of them use surprise discourse structures. "Taste" and "Dip in the Pool" are typical examples of stories in which crucial information occurs early at the story level, but is

omitted at the discourse level and only told at the end of the narrative, whereby surprise is created in the reader. In “Taste,” the reader is not aware that Richard Pratt has known the vintage and breed of the wine all along until this information is disclosed at the end of the story, and in “Dip in the Pool,” the reader eventually realizes that the lady on deck of the ship is mentally impaired, which forces him to reinterpret the previous events from a new perspective.

It can certainly be argued that since Dahl is a specialist in creating surprise endings, a reader who is well acquainted with Dahl’s work for adults will already expect a twist in the tale when reading one of his stories. Hence, it seems that Wenzel’s above-mentioned observation regarding surprise discourse structure can be applied to Dahl’s narratives: it can be assumed that when it comes to Dahl’s short stories, the reader feels suspense because he is already expecting that something unexpected will eventually happen in the story.

However, most of Dahl’s stories certainly are not only suspenseful because the reader expects the unexpected when he is confronted with them. At the story level, Dahl’s narratives are able to create suspense because they typically deal with events that can lead to no more than two possible outcomes which are opposed to each other. Furthermore, the reader usually prefers one of the alternative outcomes because he fears for one of the characters and therefore hopes for a positive outcome for that character, which typically is less likely than the negative outcome. Moreover, suspense in Dahl’s short stories generally results from uncertainty regarding the outcome of the whole narrative, not of a sequence within the narrative. Therefore, most of Dahl’s stories do not only contain briefer episodes that are suspenseful, but are suspenseful overall. All the observations about Dahl’s narratives made in this passage apply to both “Taste” and “Dip in the Pool.”

In “Taste,” the reader is uncertain whether Mike Schofield will lose or win the bet against Richard Pratt. Thus, the potential outcomes are reduced to the two possibilities of winning or losing, and since Pratt is depicted as an unlikable character in the story whereas Schofield and his family are likable, the reader hopes that Schofield will win the bet. Moreover, suspense is considerably heightened in “Taste” because the risk involved is relatively high, since Schofield agrees on betting his daughter’s hand in marriage.

When the bet starts, Schofield seems convinced that it is impossible that Pratt will be able to ascertain the wine's vintage and breed, but as has already been discussed further above, a reader who is familiar with Dahl's adult stories will already consider a negative outcome likely at this point and therefore feel a high amount of suspense. However, even in a reader who does not know anything about Dahl's narratives, the intensity of suspense will grow higher and higher when with every fact that Pratt is able to name about the wine during the wine tasting, it seems more and more probable that he will be able to guess the wine. This observation coincides with Wenzel's argument that the less likely a positive outcome is for a favored character, the more suspense is felt ("Spannung" 183). Also Carroll's hypothesis that suspense occurs when the morally incorrect outcome is as probable as or more probable than the morally correct one ("The Paradox of Suspense" 77) applies to the story "Taste," since a positive outcome for the negatively depicted Richard Pratt is likely in this case. Suspense is eventually resolved when Richard Pratt wins the bet, and it gives way to the feeling of surprise when the maid reveals that Pratt has been secretly looking at the wine label before dinner.

Like "Taste," "Dip in the Pool" does not use a suspense discourse structure, but it is still a suspenseful narrative: at the story level, "Dip in the Pool" creates suspense in the reader because the reader is in a state of uncertainty as to whether Mr Botibol's plan to slow down the ship by jumping overboard will succeed or fail. Thus, two contrary outcomes are possible. Moreover, the reader prefers a positive outcome for the protagonist because he seems to be able to understand Mr Botibol's viewpoint and his desperation over probably losing a considerable amount of money.

In the story, Mr Botibol thinks of potential dangers to the successful execution of his plan. He considers that the person seeing him go overboard might not give the alarm (Dahl 65-66), he wonders if he could get entangled in the ship's propeller or if he could get hurt when hitting the water (Dahl 67), and although he is almost sure that there are no sharks in the water (Dahl 67), he apparently cannot fully eliminate the possibility of sharks lurking in the sea. Since Mr Botibol considers dangerous obstacles to his plan, the reader has to take all of these obstacles into consideration as well. Consequently, the probability of a positive outcome for Mr Botibol seems less likely and suspense is heightened. In addition, as has also been observed about "Taste" and as seems to be generally the case with regard to Dahl's short stories, it

can be argued that a reader who is familiar with Dahl's adult narratives will consider a shocking ending even more probable than the text already suggests, which contributes to the feeling of suspense.

Furthermore, it can be argued that suspense is also heightened because Mr Botibol will die in the sea if his plan does not succeed, and the risk involved is therefore at its maximum (Pfister 145). Suspense is finally resolved when Mr Botibol's plan fails and he is left behind in the sea, and the feeling of surprise subsequently occurs when it turns out that the eyewitness on board is mentally impaired.

It can be observed that those short stories of Dahl's that are the most suspenseful usually also are the most surprising ones and therefore can be regarded as examples of "[...] good plotting [...]" in the traditional sense (Pyrhönen "Suspense and Surprise"). Like "Taste" and "Dip in the Pool," these stories of Dahl's normally rely on a surprise discourse structure and deal with suspenseful material. However, there are also narratives of Dahl's that are suspenseful and surprising and that do not use a surprise discourse structure. In "Parson's Pleasure," for example, a suspense discourse structure is used. Hence, this story is not only suspenseful because it deals with suspenseful material, but because this material is also organized in a way that leads to suspense.

As has already been summarized in chapter 3, "Parson's Pleasure" is about a dealer in antiques who disguises as a parson in order to buy precious pieces of furniture for cheap prices from the farmers in the English countryside. One Sunday, Mr Boggis, the dealer, happens to come across an extremely valuable Chippendale Commode from the eighteenth century in one of the farmhouses. Since there exist only three other Chippendale Commodes worldwide, Mr Boggis is aware that the commode he has found will not only make him rich, but also famous. He goes to great lengths to convince the suspicious farmers that the commode is only a reproduction and not worth a high amount of money. In fact, he pretends that he would like to buy the commode only because he has a use for its legs. Once he has made a deal with Rummins, the owner, to buy the commode for twenty pounds, he goes to fetch his wagon, which he has parked out of sight because he thinks a parson driving a large car looks suspicious. Meanwhile, the farmers worry that the commode will not fit into the parson's car and that consequently, the clergyman will back out of the deal they have made. Therefore, Claud, one of the farmers, cuts the legs off the commode.

Since they are still uncertain whether the rest of the commode will fit into the car, Claud chops it up to make firewood out of it.

In “Parson’s Pleasure,” suspense is generated at the story level because the reader is uncertain about the outcome of the course of action, and because the number of outcomes is limited to Mr Boggis either succeeding or failing to take the valuable commode into his possession. Moreover, it can be argued that the reader hopes for Mr Boggis to succeed and therefore prefers one of the opposed outcomes. The fact that the reader hopes for a positive outcome for Mr Boggis although he is a negative character is consistent with Pyrhönen’s observation that a reader can also fear for characters who have no moral principles (“Surprise and Suspense”). Carroll’s explanation that a reader can side with an immoral character as long as his opponents are depicted even more negatively than him (“The Paradox of Suspense” 79) does not seem to apply to “Parson’s Pleasure,” for Mr Boggis is not portrayed as more virtuous than the farmers.

As regards the probability of the two potential outcomes, the positive outcome the reader hopes for seems no more probable than the negative outcome he fears. Moreover, being familiar with Dahl’s stories and their frequently shocking endings again can be argued to contribute to the feeling of suspense, since the fact that “Parson’s Pleasure” has been written by Dahl increases the probability of a negative outcome for Mr Boggis. Furthermore, the risk involved in Mr Boggis’ attempt to take the fourth Chippendale Commode into his possession is considerably high because being accredited as the one who found the valuable commode would clearly change Mr Boggis’ life. Therefore, the high risk involved in “Parson’s Pleasure” can be argued to lead to a high amount of suspense.

Now that the factors producing and heightening suspense in “Parson’s Pleasure” at the story level have been discussed, it will be shown that the narrative also follows a suspense discourse structure. First of all, it can be observed that although the story features a surprise ending, the surprising effect does not result from the discourse structure diverging from the event structure. In “Parson’s Pleasure,” surprise occurs because the farmers make wrong assumptions about Mr Boggis’ car, which will be further analyzed in the next chapter, and not because any information that is crucial to the correct interpretation of the course of events has been omitted from the discourse structure and revealed only later.

In “Parson’s Pleasure,” the discourse structure stays parallel to the event structure. It contains an initiating event that generates suspense, intervening material that prolongs it, and an outcome that resolves it. Hence, “Parson’s Pleasure” clearly uses a suspense structure as Brewer conceptualizes it (113).

In this suspense discourse structure, the initiating event that can lead to a positive or negative outcome for Mr Boggis is his discovery of the fourth Chippendale Commode, which he obviously desires to buy from the owner. In “Parson’s Pleasure,” this event is described as follows:

And there it was! Mr Boggis saw it at once, and he stopped dead in his tracks and gave a little shrill gasp of shock. Then he stood there for five, ten, fifteen seconds at least, staring like an idiot, unable to believe, not daring to believe what he saw before him. It *couldn't* be true, not possibly! But the longer he stared, the more true it began to seem. After all, there it was standing against the wall right in front of him, as real and as solid as the house itself. [...] What he saw was a piece of furniture that any expert would have given almost anything to acquire. [...] He knew, as does every other dealer in Europe and America, that among the most celebrated and coveted examples of eighteenth-century English furniture in existence are the three famous pieces known as ‘The Chippendale Commodes’. [...] And here, Mr Boggis kept telling himself as he peered cautiously through the crack in his fingers, here was the fourth Chippendale Commode! And *he* had found it! He would be rich! He would also be famous! (Dahl 203-205)

As according to Brewer is typically the case with suspense structures, the initiating event occurs relatively early in “Parson’s Pleasure” (113), with more than half of the story’s pages left until suspense is finally resolved. The material that prolongs suspense deals with Mr Boggis’ attempt to win the farmers’ trust and to persuade them that the commode is simply a Victorian reproduction, until suspense reaches its peak when the commode is about to get chopped up by the farmers.

When trying to convince the farmers that the commode is not valuable, Mr Boggis proceeds highly carefully and wins the farmers over step by step, but the situation clearly is a delicate one. Therefore, the reader is constantly afraid that the suspicious farmers will not believe Mr Boggis and that the commode will be harmed one way or the other. The events that lie between the initiating event and the outcome shall be discussed in more detail at this point.

After the initiating event, Mr Boggis claims that the commode is a fake, but that he could still use its legs. The farmers do not trust him, however, and show him the

invoice for the commode, which is written in an old-fashioned style. Suspense seems to be heightened at this point, because the invoice increases the value of the commode and therefore, yet more money is at risk:

Mr Boggis was holding on to himself tight and fighting to suppress the excitement that was spinning round inside him and making him dizzy. Oh God, it was wonderful! With the invoice, the value had climbed even higher. What in heaven's name would it fetch now? Twelve thousand pounds? Fourteen? Maybe fifteen or even twenty? Who knows? (Dahl 208)

Then, Mr Boggis starts explaining to the farmers why the commode is a reproduction. First of all, he tells them that the invoice has been faked. When one of the farmers argues that Mr Boggis cannot be sure that the commode is a reproduction because it has been painted, Mr Boggis carefully scratches off a small patch of white paint from the commode, and talks about how the commode's color underneath the paint has been achieved by processing the wood. Then he claims that the patina has been faked as well:

'[...] I can almost *see* them doing it, the long, complicated ritual of rubbing the wood with linseed oil, coating it over with french [sic] polish that has been cunningly coloured, brushing it down with pumice-stone and oil, bees-waxing it with a wax that contains dirt and dust, and finally giving it the heat treatment to crack the polish so that it looks like two-hundred-year-old varnish! [...]' (Dahl 210)

Realizing that Mr Boggis knows his field, the farmers get less suspicious, but Mr Boggis knows that they are "[...] still a long way from trusting him" (Dahl 211). Therefore, a negative outcome for Mr Boggis still seems likely and suspense continues to hold on.

Mr Boggis carries on explaining why the commode cannot possibly have been produced before Victorian times. He talks about how the brass handles have been made to look old, and he secretly exchanges a screw from one of the handles for one of the screws he has in his pockets to claim that the screws from the commode's handles are not hand-made and therefore have to stem from later times.

Finally, the farmers seem convinced and the owner and Mr Boggis negotiate the price for the commode. Mr Boggis is able to get the price down because he affirms once again that he only needs the legs of the commode and states that while he might be able to use the drawers, the carcass is simply firewood. When Mr Boggis finally goes to fetch his car, he has to control himself: "Walk slowly, Boggis. Keep calm, Boggis.

There's no hurry now. The commode is yours! Yours for twenty pounds, and it's worth fifteen or twenty thousand! The Boggis Commode!" (Dahl 214). While this is the point at which Mr Boggis thinks that his plan has worked, the reader is still in suspense because he fears that something terrible will happen next. The fact that the reader does not feel the same emotions as Mr Boggis does at this stage – the reader fears a negative outcome and feels suspense, while Mr Boggis is excited and utterly happy –, seems to support Carroll's above-mentioned theory that instead of identifying with the character, the reader assimilates the character's situation internally and externally (Carroll "The Philosophy of Horror" 88-96): it can be argued that the reader understands that Mr Boggis evaluates the situation positively and that at the same time, the reader is able to feel suspense because from an external viewpoint, he assesses the situation which Mr Boggis is in as one that could still lead to a negative outcome ("The Philosophy of Horror" 95).

While Mr Boggis is on his way to the car, the farmers have the following discussion:

'You did very nicely, Mr Rummins,' Claud told him. 'You think he'll pay you?'

'We don't put it in the car till he do.'

'And what if it won't go in the car?' Claud asked. 'You know what I think, Mr Rummins? You want my honest opinion? I think the bloody thing's too big to go in the car. And then what happens? Then he's going to say to hell with it and just drive off without it and you'll never see him again. Nor the money either. He didn't seem all that keen on having it, you know.'

Rummins paused to consider this new and rather alarming prospect.

'How can a thing like that possibly go in a car?' Claud went on relentlessly.

'A Parson never has a big car anyway. You ever seen a parson with a big car, Mr Rummins?'

'Can't say I have.'

'Exactly! And now listen to me. I've got an idea. He told us, didn't he, that it was only the legs he was wanting. Right? So all we've got to do is to cut 'em off quick right here on the spot before he comes back, then it'll be sure to go in the car. [...]'

(Dahl 215)

During this discussion, suspense is heightened because the probability that the commode will be damaged increases considerably. Then the farmers take the drawers out of the carcass, Rummins gets a saw, and the commode is carried outside. Hence, it is highly probable that the commode will be harmed and suspense is extremely high. When Claud finally cuts off the legs, the feeling of suspense gives way to the feelings of surprise and shock. However, the story is not completely over at this point and a

high amount of suspense is produced one more time when Claud voices his opinion that the carcass still will not fit into the car:

‘Just let me ask you one question, Mr Rummins,’ he said slowly. ‘Even now, could *you* put that enormous thing into the back of a car?’

‘Not unless it was a van.’

‘Correct!’ Claud cried. ‘And parsons don’t have vans, you know. All they’ve got usually is piddling little Morris Eights or Austin Sevens.’

‘The legs is all he wants,’ Rummins said. ‘If the rest of it won’t go in, then he can leave it. He can’t complain. He’s got the legs.’

‘Now you know better’n that, Mr Rummins,’ Claud said patiently. ‘You know damn well he’s going to start knocking the price if he don’t get every single bit of this into his car. [...] So why don’t we give him his firewood now and be done with it. Where d’you keep the axe?’

‘I reckon that’s fair enough,’ Rummins said. ‘Bert, go fetch the axe.’

Bert went into the shed and fetched a tall woodcutter’s axe and gave it to Claud. Claud spat on the palms of his hands and rubbed them together.

(Dahl 216)

During the dialogue quoted above, suspense increases further and further until Claud takes the axe and prepares to chop down the commode. At this point, the complete destruction of the Chippendale Commode and Mr Boggis’ miserable failure are almost certain and suspense reaches its peak. Finally, the outcome is presented: “Then, with a long-armed, high-swinging action, he began fiercely attacking the legless carcass of the commode. It was hard work, and it took several minutes before he had the whole thing more or less smashed to pieces” (Dahl 216-217). Hence, the end of the story resolves suspense completely and causes the reader to feel surprise and shock over what has happened.

At this point, it needs to be mentioned that the ending of “Parson’s Pleasure” might not only provoke feelings of surprise and shock, but also of malicious glee in the reader because the reader may enjoy seeing Mr Boggis, a ruthless crook, eventually get his just deserts. In this case, it might be argued that suspense does not need a character whom the reader cares about, but only a situation in which the reader is concerned about the object in question. Thus, the reader could be argued to feel a high amount of suspense throughout “Parson’s Pleasure” because he fears that the valuable commode will be harmed, and in the end, suspense could be argued to reach its maximum because the commode is about to get chopped up. After the outcome, the reader might simultaneously be shocked that the commode has been destroyed and amused that Mr Boggis is punished for his treachery.

All in all, it has been shown that Dahl's narratives usually deal with suspenseful material, which is why they can produce suspense in the reader even when they do not follow a suspense discourse structure. Frequently, Dahl's stories create both feelings of suspense and surprise and therefore can be regarded as well-crafted short stories in the traditional sense. Moreover, it might also be argued that Dahl's narratives sometimes provoke the feeling of malicious glee in the reader. While issues of suspense have been thoroughly discussed in this chapter, the way surprise is created in Dahl's narratives has only briefly been touched upon. The following chapter will devote itself fully to the examination of Dahl's twists in the tale.

4.5 The Creation of Surprise

As has been carefully discussed in chapter two, the plot of traditional short stories is supposed to lead to a surprise dénouement. Dahl so skillfully builds most of his stories towards a surprising outcome that his adult narratives are famous for their twists in the tale. In this chapter, an approach from cognitive poetics will be applied to two surprising short stories of Dahl's in order to account for how he creates surprise in the reader and how the reader processes Dahl's twists in the tale.

Before a close analysis of the twists in Dahl's short stories can take place, a definition of the academic field termed 'cognitive poetics' shall be given: "Cognitive poetics aims to provide a model of reading that combines technical insights from psychology, artificial intelligence and text analysis [...]" (Emmott 145). Hence, cognitive poetics does not concentrate on textual aspects alone, neither does it only focus on the reader of a text (Stockwell 2); instead, it investigates "[...] the natural process of reading when one is engaged with the other" (Stockwell 2).

In his introduction to cognitive poetics, Stockwell states that "[t]he experience of literature [...] is one of rational decision-making and creative meaning construction" (151), but he also acknowledges that "[...] reading literature can [...] often be an emotional process [...]" (151) and that most people read literature because they get pleasure from it (151-152). Cognitive poetics tries to investigate how readers are "[...] 'transported' by literature" both cognitively and emotionally (151), i.e. how they use "[...] a text to build and then experience a literary world [...]" (152). This "[...] imaginative projection [...]" (151) can be subsumed under the cognitive poetic idea of the 'comprehension' of literature (151).

A cognitive poetic model that can account for how readers comprehend literary texts is called ‘contextual frame theory’ (Stockwell 155). Catherine Emmott exemplifies how contextual frame theory can be used to investigate the comprehension of plot reversals in popular literature (145-159). She states that “[f]or ‘twists in the tale’ and other plot reversals, contextual frame theory aims to highlight the cognitive skills involved in reading these texts, without forgetting the pleasure that readers can get from the additional demands that such texts make on their inference-making abilities” (158-159). Therefore, contextual frame theory lends itself perfectly to an interpretation of the twists in Dahl’s short stories, which are part of popular literature and hence are read for amusement. The aspects of contextual frame theory that are presented hereafter in order to provide a basis for an analysis of Dahl’s narratives have been taken from Emmott.²⁸

Contextual frame theory “[...] focuses particularly on how contexts within fictional worlds are constructed” (Emmott 146). In plot reversals like the ones that are examined in Emmott’s article, “[...] readers and/or characters are ‘led up the garden path’, making erroneous inferences about a context because key information is omitted or because they are placed in a position where they wrongly assess a situation” (146). The same observation accounts for the two short stories of Dahl’s that will be discussed in this chapter. Before a discussion of these stories can take place, however, the “[...] basic principles of contextual frame theory [...]” (146) need to be provided.

The first principle of contextual frame theory to be mentioned is termed ‘contextual monitoring.’ Emmott observes the following:

Readers continually carry out *contextual monitoring*, maintaining information about who is present in specific narrative contexts in mental presentations termed *contextual frames*. The *primed frame* is the mental representation of the context in which the reader feels that he/she is actively witnessing the action as it unfolds. (146)

Another principle is concerned with the readers’ expectations about the realities within narrative contexts: if no evidence suggests otherwise, readers will assume that

²⁸ See Emmott, Catherine. “Reading for pleasure: A cognitive poetic analysis of ‘twists in the tale’ and other plot reversals in narrative texts.” *Cognitive Poetics in Practice*. Ed. Joanna Gavins and Gerard Steen. London: Routledge, 2003. 145-159. Emmott also discusses two of Dahl’s stories – “Taste” and “Dip in the Pool” – in this article.

“[...] fictional contexts operate in the same way as real-life ones” (146). Hence, “[f]rame assumptions can [...] be made, utilising basic schemata about physical, perceptual and behavioural factors within contexts. For example, we expect that characters will not suddenly de-materialise from a context, unless we are reading a science-fiction story” (146).

By way of ‘within-frame inferences,’ readers can combine frame assumptions with the information gained through contextual monitoring (146). This way, readers are able to “[...] predict and explain the actions and knowledge states of the particular individuals concerned” (146). Both contextual monitoring and making within-frame inferences are central to the processing of written narratives, for all the information that exists about a literary context will seldom be stated in every single sentence of a text (147). Therefore, “[...] contextual frames enable us to take minimal contextual information in each sentence and cognitively construct the remaining context around it in order to fill the gap” (147).

Apart from the principles of contextual frame theory explained above, it is important to distinguish between several kinds of frame assumption in order to be able to discuss Dahl’s twists in the tale (147). If readers expect a narrative context to function like the ones in the real world, as has already been discussed above, Emmott speaks of ‘Type 1 frame assumptions’ (147). She states that if a fictional character says something, for example, readers will assume that other characters nearby will hear that character, unless there is evidence that makes the readers expect otherwise (147).

‘Type 2 frame assumptions,’ then, are made when there are circumstances given within the literary context that diverge from those the readers would principally expect (147). Emmott observes that “[i]f we know that an individual is profoundly deaf or is wearing a personal stereo, then he/she may be assumed not to hear. Hence, Type 1 and 2 frame assumptions are based on our real-world expectations, but may vary according to our knowledge of specific individuals and their circumstances” (147).

As opposed to Type 1 and Type 2 frame assumptions, ‘Type 3 frame assumptions’ are made about narrative worlds that differ from our real world in certain ways. This is the case, for example, in ghost stories (147). There might also occur ‘Type 4 situations’ that create surprise in the readers because their assumptions turn out to

have been wrong, e.g. when they realize at a certain point that the story they are reading is a ghost story and therefore belongs to a different genre than they had assumed previously (147).

If a course of events turns out to be “[...] different from expected [...]” (148) or if it has to be reinterpreted because withheld information has been disclosed, as is often the case with Dahl’s narratives, the concept of ‘projected frames’ can be used to explain these kinds of twist in the tale (148). Projected frames can be defined as “[...] mental representations of contexts which are embedded within the primed context, but are not themselves developed in sufficient detail for the reader to feel that they are primed” (148).

In her article, Emmott discusses three different types of projected frame: an ‘off-stage projected frame’ refers to a context that takes place somewhere else at the same time as the primed context, but that the reader’s attention is not drawn to (148). A ‘retrospective projected frame,’ on the other hand, “[...] reconstructs an earlier situation, without developing it as a flashback” (148). The third type of projected frame discussed is termed ‘planned projected frame’ and describes future events that are being planned by a character (148). It is possible for a reader to make ‘cross-frame inferences’ “[...] by using information from a projected frame or a previously primed frame to draw conclusions about another projected frame or the current primed frame” (148).

The last concept that needs to be described at this point because it will be applied to the two short stories analyzed in this chapter stems from the field of psychology and deals with characters’ roles and identities (149): characters that are called ‘scenario-dependent’ (Sanford and Garrod qtd. in Emmott 149, Anderson, Garrod, and Sanford qtd. in Emmott 149) are “[...] minor characters who are tied to a particular scene and who perform script-like actions in that scene (e.g. waiters in restaurants)” (149). Since scenario-dependent characters act according to a particular script, they are not considered significant characters and are not paid a high amount of attention to (149). Such characters can, however, “[...] step out of role (prompting a *role re-appraisal*) [...]” (149) or be “[...] re-identified as major characters (prompting an *identity re-appraisal*)” (149), thereby creating surprise in the reader (149).

Now that Emmott's contextual frame theory has been outlined, the notions discussed above will be applied to the two short stories "Parson's Pleasure" and "The Way Up To Heaven" in order to account for how Dahl creates surprise in the reader and how the reader processes the plot twists that Dahl's short stories are particularly famous for.

"Parson's Pleasure" has already been discussed in detail in the previous chapter. It has been mentioned that Mr Boggis drives a large wagon, but that he usually parks his car out of the farmers' sight because he thinks that it is unusual for a parson to drive such a large car. Hence, Mr Boggis makes the Type 1 frame assumption that a clergyman normally drives a car that is smaller than a wagon. This assumption is outlined in the story as follows: "He parked the car about a hundred yards from the gates and got out to walk the rest of the way. He never liked people to see his car until after the deal was completed. A dear old clergyman and a large station-wagon never seemed quite right together" (Dahl 198).

The Type 1 frame assumption discussed above occurs early in the story and is repeated later by the farmer named Claud. Claud, like the other farmers, infers that since Mr Boggis is dressed like a parson and behaves like one, he is in fact a clergyman. Based on Claud's expectation that Mr Boggis is a parson and on the Type 1 frame assumption that parsons do not drive large cars, Claud concludes that the commode will not fit into Mr Boggis' car: "How can a thing like that possibly go in a car?" Claud went on relentlessly. 'A parson never has a big car anyway. You ever seen a parson with a big car, Mr Rummins?'" (Dahl 215). After cutting off the commode's legs, Claud asks Rummins if he thinks that the commode will fit into the car now. Rummins answers that the car would have to be a van for the commode to fit into it, and Claud repeats the Type 1 frame assumption about parsons driving small cars once again: "And parsons don't have vans, you know. All they've got usually is piddling little Morris Eights or Austin Sevens.'" (Dahl 216).²⁹

While the reader is able to make the within-frame inference that since Mr Boggis drives a wagon, the commode will fit into it, the farmers rule out the Type 2 circumstance (Emmott 151) that Mr Boggis' car is the size of a van. Based on their

²⁹ Michael Wood also observes that Mr Boggis and the farmers make the same assumption that parsons have small cars: see Wood, Michael. "The Confidence Man." *Contemporary Literary Criticism*. Ed. James P. Draper. Vol. 79. Detroit: Gale Research, 1994. 176-179, p. 178.

believe that Mr Boggis is a parson and on the Type 1 frame assumption that parsons drive small cars, the farmers infer that Mr Boggis' car will be too small for the commode. Since the farmers mistakenly exclude the Type 2 possibility (Emmott 151) that because of specific circumstances – in this case because Mr Boggis is no parson after all – Mr Boggis might be driving a large car, Mr Boggis' plan eventually fails and surprise is created in the reader.³⁰ Ironically, the valuable commode is destroyed because Mr Boggis has made the same Type 1 frame assumption about parsons' cars as the farmers and has hidden his wagon for this reason. If he had parked his car for the farmers to see, they would have been able to infer that the commode will fit into Mr Boggis' car. Moreover, since the destruction of the commode is a direct result of Mr Boggis pretending to be a parson, Mr Boggis can be argued to suffer poetic justice.

In addition, the role of the farmer named Claud changes in "Parson's Pleasure": at the beginning of the story, Claud is briefly introduced as a farmer who "[...] had dropped in on Rummins in the hope of getting a piece of pork or ham out of him from the pig that had been killed the day before" (Dahl 201). Hence, he incidentally happens to be at Rummins' farm when Mr Boggis walks in on them, and until when Mr Boggis and Rummins have made a deal, Claud is in the background and only talks to Mr Boggis occasionally. Although Claud may not be regarded as a scenario-dependent character because he does not "[...] perform script-like actions [...]" (Emmott 149), Emmott's observation that "[i]n certain cases, the writers play with the relative prominence of characters, and, as a result, individuals who appear to be little more than 'props' suddenly acquire plot significance" (149) applies to Claud: Claud is paid little attention to by the reader until his role is reappraised (Emmott 149, 153) by the end of the narrative. Unexpectedly, Claud becomes a character who is central to the story's outcome, for he is the one who convinces Rummins that the commode will not fit into the car, and who comes up with the ideas to cut the legs off the commode and to cut the carcass into pieces (Dahl 215-216). It is also Claud who performs the acts of cutting off the legs and chopping the carcass of the commode (Dahl 216-217).

³⁰ For a similar analysis of Dahl's "Dip in the Pool," see Emmott, Catherine. "Reading for pleasure: A cognitive poetic analysis of 'twists in the tale' and other plot reversals in narrative texts." *Cognitive Poetics in Practice*. Ed. Joanna Gavins and Gerard Steen. London: Routledge, 2003. 145-159, pp. 150-151. In this article, Emmott also mentions "Parson's Pleasure" as an example of a story which, like "Dip in the Pool," shows that plans can fail because we do not consider all the possible circumstances (151).

Claud's identity does not change because he remains a farmer (Emmott 153), but he changes from being a minor character to being a main character, which is central to the creation of surprise in "Parson's Pleasure."

To conclude, in "Parson's Pleasure," surprise is created in the reader because the farmers in the story rule out a correct Type 2 possibility (Emmott 151), which leads to an unexpected change in the story's outcome. The Type 1 frame assumption that all parsons drive small cars is uttered by Claud, who seems like a minor character at first, but then assumes a major role in the story because the narrative would have ended differently if Claud had not convinced Rummins of his Type 1 frame assumption without considering any possible Type 2 circumstances (Emmott 151).

According to Emmott, twists in the tale that are more complex than those in which frame assumptions are manipulated (150) "[...] can be achieved by combining within-frame inferences and cross-frame inferences" (152). This is the case in Dahl's "The Way Up To Heaven," in which the reader has to build a retrospective projected frame in order to be able to comprehend the twist in the tale (Emmott 153). At the beginning of the story, a primed frame for the Fosters' house and their living situation (F1) is created in which the reader learns that Mrs Foster is constantly afraid of being late (Dahl 179) and that Mr Foster lets her wait on the first floor until the last possible minute whenever she has to catch a train (Dahl 179-180). The reader also gets to know that there is an elevator in the house (Dahl 179), that the house has six storeys, that Mr and Mrs Foster have four servants, and that they do not often have guests (Dahl 180). After general information about the Fosters' living situation has been given, a primed frame for the scene in the hall, in which Mrs Foster is waiting for Mr Foster, is created (F2). While this frame remains primed, a planned projected frame (F3) is set up in which Mrs Foster's plan to go to Paris and her wish to move there are displayed:

This was an important journey for Mrs Foster. She was going all alone to Paris to visit her daughter, her only child, who was married to a Frenchman. Mrs Foster didn't much care for the Frenchman, but she was fond of her daughter, and, more than that, she had developed a great yearning to set eyes on her three grandchildren. [...] And now, lately, she had come more and more to feel that she did not really wish to live out her days in a place where she could not be near her children, and have them visit her, and take them for walks, and buy them presents, and watch them grow. She knew, of course, that it was wrong and in a way disloyal to have thoughts like these while her husband was still alive. She knew also that although he was no longer active in his

many enterprises, he would never consent to leave New York and live in Paris. It was a miracle that he had ever agreed to let her fly over there alone for six weeks to visit them. But, oh, how she wished she could live there always, and be close to them! (Dahl 181-182)

Then, Mr Foster finally enters the hall and he and Mrs Foster leave the house and get into the car that takes Mrs Foster to the airport. Hence, the frame for the hall (F2) is unprimed and the frame for the car (F4) is primed. While the Fosters are sitting in the car, a new planned projected frame (F5) is created as they talk about what will happen to the servants and the house for the next six weeks, and where Mr Foster is going to live while Mrs Foster is gone:

‘I arranged everything with the servants,’ Mr Foster said.
‘They’re all going off today. I gave them half-pay for six weeks and told Walker I’d send him a telegram when we wanted them back.’
‘Yes,’ she said. ‘He told me.’
‘I’ll move into the club tonight. It’ll be a nice change staying at the club.’
‘Yes, dear. I’ll write to you.’
‘I’ll call in at the house occasionally to see that everything’s all right and to pick up the mail.’
‘But don’t you really think Walker should stay there all the time to look after things?’ she asked meekly.
‘Nonsense. It’s quite unnecessary. And anyway, I’d have to pay him full wages.’
(Dahl 183)

When Mrs Foster arrives at the airport, the primed frame for the car (F4) is unprimed and a primed frame for the airport (F6) is set up. At the airport, Mrs Foster is informed that her flight is postponed until the following morning. Therefore, she calls her husband who, in an off-stage projected frame (F7), is at the Fosters’ house. Mrs Foster tells him that her flight has been postponed and her husband tells her that all the servants have already left the house (Dahl 185). Again, a planned projected frame (F8) is built when Mr and Mrs Foster discuss where Mrs Foster should spend the night:

‘In that case, dear, I’ll just get myself a room somewhere for the night. And don’t you bother yourself about it at all.’
‘That would be foolish,’ he said. ‘You’ve got a large house here at your disposal. Use it.’
‘But dear, it’s *empty*.’
‘Then I’ll stay with you myself.’
(Dahl 185-186)

Hence, Mrs Foster takes a taxi back to the house and when she enters it, the frame for the hall (F2) is primed again. Mr and Mrs Foster both are standing in the hall, talking to each other about the following day. Hence, another planned projected frame (F9) is set up in which Mr and Mrs Foster plan to leave at nine o'clock in the morning and that Mrs Foster will drop Mr Foster at the club (Dahl 186). Then, the primed frame (F2) is briefly left as Mrs Foster goes to bed in her bedroom on the second floor (Dahl 186-187), but it is soon primed again when the story switches to the next morning, when Mrs Foster is waiting for her husband in the hall (Dahl 187). After Mr Foster has entered the hall, they have a brief conversation (Dahl 187), and Mrs Foster leaves the house to wait for her husband in a car that Mr Foster had ordered the previous day (Dahl 186). Thus, another primed frame (F10) is set up for the scene in front of the house, where Mrs Foster is waiting for her husband in the car, while Mr Foster, in an off-stage projected frame (F11), is getting some cigars (Dahl 187).

Mr Foster finally comes out of the house and gets in the car, but before they can drive off, he remembers that he wanted to give Mrs Foster a present for their daughter, which he claims to have forgotten in his bedroom (Dahl 187-188). Hence, Mr Foster goes to get the present in an off-stage projected frame (F12), while the primed frame remains the one for the scene in front of the house (F10). While Mr Foster is inside the house, Mrs Foster finds the present hidden in the car (Dahl 188). She hurries to the front door to get her husband, but then she does not open the door. Instead, she seems to listen closely to some noise inside the house (Dahl 189), and then hurries back to the car:

‘It’s too late!’ she cried to the chauffeur. ‘I can’t wait for him, I simply can’t. I’ll miss the plane. Hurry now, driver, hurry! To the airport!’

The chauffeur, had he been watching her closely, might have noticed that her face had turned absolutely white and that the whole expression had suddenly altered. There was no longer that rather soft and silly look. A peculiar hardness had settled itself upon the features. The little mouth, usually so flabby, was now tight and thin, the eyes were bright, and the voice, when she spoke, carried a new note of authority.

‘Hurry, driver, hurry!’

‘Isn’t your husband travelling with you?’ the man asked, astonished.

‘Certainly not! I was only going to drop him at the club. It won’t matter. He’ll understand. He’ll get a cab. Don’t sit there talking, man. *Get going!* I’ve got a plane to catch for Paris!’

(Dahl 189-190)

At this point, the reader can already guess that something must have happened to Mr Foster inside the house. When Mrs Foster sits in the plane (which the primed frame F13 is created for), she is in “[...] pure astonishment at what she had done [...]” (Dahl 190), and when after six weeks, she leaves Paris (a primed frame F14 being set up for Paris), Mrs Foster’s behavior seems “[...] to hint at the possibility of a return in the not too distant future” (Dahl 190). These two facts reinforce the reader’s suspicion that something has happened to Mr Foster.

The surprise ending is finally presented as follows:

Arriving at Idlewild, Mrs Foster was interested to observe that there was no car to meet her. It is possible that she might even have been a little amused. But she was extremely calm and did not overtip the porter who helped her into a taxi with her baggage. [...]

The taxi drew up before the house on Sixty-second Street, and Mrs Foster persuaded the driver to carry her two large cases to the top of the steps. Then she paid him off and rang the bell. She waited, but there was no answer. Just to make sure, she rang again, [...]. But still no one came.

So she took out her own key and opened the door herself. The first thing she saw as she entered was a great pile of mail lying on the floor where it had fallen after being slipped through the letter box. The place was dark and cold. A dust sheet was still draped over the grandfather clock. In spite of the cold, the atmosphere was peculiarly oppressive, and there was a faint and curious odour in the air that she had never smelled before.

She walked quickly across the hall and disappeared for a moment around the corner to the left, at the back. There was something deliberate and purposeful about this action; she had the air of a woman who is off to investigate a rumour or to confirm a suspicion. And when she returned a few seconds later, there was a little glimmer of satisfaction on her face.

[...] Then, suddenly, she turned and went across into her husband’s study. On the desk she found his address book, and after hunting through it for a while she picked up the phone and dialed a number.

‘Hello,’ she said. ‘Listen – this is Nine East Sixty-second Street... Yes, that’s right. Could you send someone round as soon as possible, do you think? Yes, it seems to be stuck between the second and third floors. At least, that’s where the indicator’s pointing... Right away? Oh, that’s very kind of you. You see, my legs aren’t any too good for walking up a lot of stairs. Thank you so much. Good-bye.’

She replaced the receiver and sat there at her husband’s desk, patiently waiting for the man who would be coming soon to repair the lift.

(Dahl 191-192)

In order to comprehend this twist in the tale, the reader has to connect information by way of cross-frame inferences to establish a retrospective projected frame (F15) for the situation in which Mr Foster got stuck in the elevator (Emmott 153): the reader unites the new information that the mail has not been picked up, that there is a curious

smell in the house, and that the elevator is stuck between floors with the off-stage projected frame's information that Mr Foster wanted to get the present from his bedroom (F12) and that Mrs Foster listened to a noise inside the house before driving off without Mr Foster (F10). Moreover, the reader also uses the information from the first primed frame about the Fosters not having many visitors (F1) and the information from the planned projected frames F5 and F8 about the servants not staying at the house for six weeks and the house being empty without them. In addition, the information from the planned projected frame F9 about Mrs Foster dropping Mr Foster at the club on her way to the airport is united with the other information as well.

Once all the information has been connected and the retrospective projected frame (F15) has thus been created, the reader can make several within-frame inferences: he can infer that Mr Foster took the elevator to go up to his bedroom, and that the elevator then got stuck between two floors. He can also infer that Mrs Foster was aware that the elevator had gotten stuck because she heard what had happened when she was listening at the front door. Moreover, the reader can make the within-frame inference that because all the servants had left, because the Fosters do not often have guests, and because Mr Foster had not ordered a car for himself since Mrs Foster was supposed to drop him off at the club, the accident in the house had gone unnoticed by any servants or friends of the Fosters. The reader can then make the within-frame inference that Mr Foster has been stuck in the elevator the whole time while Mrs Foster was in Paris, and that the mail has not been picked up for this reason. Moreover, the reader is able to infer that Mr Foster has died in the elevator because a person cannot survive for six weeks without food or water, and that the smell in the house stems from Mr Foster's dead body.

After these within-frame inferences have been made, the reader can make cross-frame inferences to relate the information from F15 to the previously primed frames F10, F13, and F14. The frame F10 can now be reinterpreted because the reader understands that Mrs Foster realized that Mr Foster had been stuck in the elevator when she was listening at the door and did nothing to save him, aware of the consequences for Mr Foster. Moreover, before the surprise ending occurs, the reader does not know what it is Mrs Foster has done and is astonished at (Dahl 190), which is stated in the primed frame F13, and he cannot be sure why Mrs Foster gives the impression that she will

return to Paris soon again (Dahl 190), which is mentioned in the primed frame F14. After the retrospective projected frame (F15) has been established and applied to these two frames, however, the reader understands that in F13, Mrs Foster thought about the fact that she had left her husband in the elevator to rot, and that in F14, she gave the impression that she would return to Paris in the near future because she knew she would be able to move there without Mr Foster holding her back.³¹

Moreover, it should not be left unsaid that the style used in the final passage of “The Way Up To Heaven,” which has been quoted further above, suggests that when Mrs Foster returns back to her house, she pretends that she expects Mr Foster to open the door when ringing the bell, possibly because she wants the driver to see that she acts like an innocent wife. Even later, when she investigates the house, she seems to intentionally play the role of the innocent. Thereby, the reader is kept in suspense. Realistically, Mrs Foster must have known what has happened to her husband after realizing that the mail has not been picked up, but she continues to pretend that she does not know what has happened to Mr Foster in her call to the firm or fire department about the elevator. In addition, the reader is never explicitly told that Mrs Foster left her husband to rot in the elevator. Hence, the reader can draw the conclusion that Mrs Foster will also pretend to be completely innocent in front of the police and get away with the murder. Moreover, it can be argued that Mrs Foster’s identity has to be re-appraised by the reader because he believes her to be a submissive wife at the beginning of the story, whereas she eventually turns out to be a murderess.

All in all, in “The Way Up To Heaven,” the reader does not realize what happened to Mr Foster in the house until the outcome is presented at the end of the story. Surprise is created in the reader because key information that has been omitted is eventually disclosed. Retrospectively, the reader is able to reinterpret the course of events by way of cross-frame and within-frame inferences.

To conclude, this chapter has shown that with the help of a cognitive poetic model, namely contextual frame theory, it can be analyzed how Dahl’s twists in the tale

³¹ For an interpretation of Dahl’s short story “Taste” that deals with cross-frame inferences and within-frame inferences, see Emmott, Catherine. “Reading for pleasure: A cognitive poetic analysis of ‘twists in the tale’ and other plot reversals in narrative texts.” *Cognitive Poetics in Practice*. Ed. Joanna Gavins and Gerard Steen. London: Routledge, 2003. 145-159, pp. 152-153.

produce surprise in the reader and how the reader is able to comprehend these plot reversals. Dahl's surprise endings typically rely on the disclosure of crucial information that has been withheld, but it has been shown that his twists can also be based on wrong frame assumptions being made and on the manipulation of our expectations about characters (Emmott 149).

5. Conclusion

Dahl's short stories have been described as 'deliciously disgusting' in this thesis (see chapters 1 and 3), and in this conclusion, a final evaluation of Dahl's short story collection *Tales of the Unexpected* shall be undertaken, wherein it will be explained why Dahl's narratives can be regarded as simultaneously delicious and disgusting in several ways. It can certainly be argued that suspense and an unsettling twist in the tale are the most important ingredients of a typically Dahlian short story, and this thesis has brought new insights as to how Dahl's stories create feelings of suspense and surprise in the reader. Below, it will be shown why these affects render Dahl's narratives both attractive and repellent to the reader.

As far as suspense is concerned, it has already been mentioned in chapter 3 that Dahl himself defined this feeling as a combination of pleasure and pain (Dahl qtd. in Warren *Roald Dahl* 19). Similarly, critics who have examined fictional suspense have referred to it as a "curious mixture of pain and pleasure" (Barnet, Berman, and Burto qtd. in Brewer 108) and have commented on its "delicious agony" (Bartholomew qtd. in Brewer 108). Mikos argues that excitement and suspense in film "[...] are determined by a pleasurable experience of anxiety, horror, and other negatively pegged emotions" (48). The same observation certainly accounts for suspense in narrative fiction as well. Hence, Dahl's short stories can be regarded as deliciously disgusting because they create an emotion in the reader that is at once painful and pleasurable.

The surprising effect at the end of Dahl's short stories also contributes to the mixed feelings of pleasure and outrage readers usually experience when they are confronted with Dahl's narratives. On the one hand, as has been discussed in chapter 4.5, readers can take pleasure in putting to use certain cognitive abilities in order to understand plot twists (Emmott 158-159). On the other hand, Dahl's twists in the tale often present an outcome that is contrary to the one that the reader was hoping for. This

thesis has also shown that black humor and irony frequently add a bittersweet taste to the affect of surprise at the end of Dahl's short stories, rendering the reader both terrified and amused over what has happened. Therefore, Dahl's short stories also achieve their dichotomous effect because the surprise endings that they are famous for typically are challenging in a way that is enjoyable and often grotesquely humorous, but also provoke feelings of shock and horror in the reader.³²

Moreover, as has been observed in chapter 4.4, the plot twist is such a quintessential feature of Dahl's adult short stories that a reader who is familiar with Dahl's narratives will already expect a sickening surprise ending when starting to read. This a priori expectation heightens the feeling of suspense and therefore contributes to the positive experience of apprehension that Dahl's narratives provoke.

Dahl's short stories are uniquely suspenseful and surprising, and it is especially the combination of suspense and surprise in Dahl's narratives that makes them simultaneously delightful and unpleasant. A typical short story of Dahl creates feelings that are similar to a ride on the rollercoaster: one is amused, but also terrified; and when it is over, one is relieved, maybe slightly sickened, but still, one wants to take another ride.

A reader who is familiar with Dahl's adult fiction will expect a painfully pleasurable experience and, above all, a shocking twist in the tale when he is confronted with one of Dahl's short stories, but he will want to continue to enter the world of Dahl's narratives that is full of revenge and mischief nevertheless, and he will enjoy the trip. The very fact that Dahl's adult stories are deliciously disgusting seems to make them memorable to the reader, and appears to be the reason why Dahl's short fiction is so popular.

³² See also Alan Warren, who, as has already been discussed in chapters 3 and 4.2, emphasizes Dahl's "[...] near-perfect juxtaposition of humor with horror" (*Roald Dahl* 8).

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German Abstract

Im Rahmen dieser Arbeit werden die wichtigsten Charakteristika von Roald Dahls Kurzgeschichten für Erwachsene aufgezeigt und, basierend auf Dahls Kurzgeschichtensammlung *Tales of the Unexpected*, eingehend analysiert. Des Weiteren untersucht die vorliegende Arbeit, wie Dahls Kurzgeschichten Gefühle der Spannung und Überraschung im Leser erzeugen und wie es dem Leser gelingt, die typischerweise vorkommenden unerwarteten Wendungen am Ende von Dahls Kurzgeschichten zu verstehen. Außerdem versucht diese Arbeit, die einzelnen Kurzgeschichten aus *Tales of the Unexpected* zu kategorisieren und zu zeigen, in welcher Tradition Dahls Kurzgeschichten geschrieben sind.

Die theoretische Basis der Untersuchung liefern mehrere kritische Studien und Artikel zu Dahls Kurzgeschichten, Theorien der Kurzgeschichte, Theorien zur Spannungserzeugung in der Literatur, sowie die sogenannte ‚contextual frame theory‘ von Catherine Emmott aus dem Bereich der kognitiven Poetik. So stellt sich durch die Analyse von Dahls Kurzgeschichten aus der Sammlung *Tales of the Unexpected* heraus, dass die Kurzgeschichten traditionelle Kurzgeschichten und insbesondere von Spannung und einem Überraschungseffekt gekennzeichnet sind. Es wird außerdem auf die narrative Situation, die narrativen Modi, und die Bewusstseinswiedergabe in Dahls Kurzgeschichten eingegangen. Auch die Charaktere in Dahls Geschichten, welche normalerweise eindimensional sind, und die Themen – nicht zuletzt Dahls negative Auffassung der Gesellschaft – werden behandelt.

Durch eine genaue Analyse der Erzeugung von Spannung in Dahls Kurzgeschichten stellt sich heraus, dass diese üblicherweise auf der story-Ebene Spannung generieren und auf der discourse-Ebene oftmals einem Überraschungsschema, manchmal aber auch einem Konflikt- und Bedrohungsspannungsschema folgen. Diese Arbeit zeigt auch, dass Überraschung in Dahls Kurzgeschichten erzeugt wird, weil falsche ‚frame assumptions‘ gemacht werden, weil wichtige Information bis zum Ende zurückgehalten wird und weil der Leser falsche Erwartungen bezüglich der Rolle und Identität von Charakteren hat. Der Leser muss Rückschlüsse ziehen, um das Überraschungsende in Dahls Kurzgeschichten verstehen zu können.

In einer letzten Evaluierung von Dahls Kurzgeschichten legt diese Arbeit nahe, dass sie gerade deshalb so populär sind, weil sie spannend, überraschend, oft schockierend, und durch schwarzen Humor und Ironie gekennzeichnet sind.

English Abstract

In this thesis, the most important features of Roald Dahl's adult short stories are introduced and thoroughly analyzed on the basis of Dahl's short story collection *Tales of the Unexpected*. Moreover, this thesis examines how Dahl's short stories create feelings of suspense and surprise in the reader and how the reader manages to comprehend the twists that typically occur at the end of Dahl's short narratives. Furthermore, this thesis tries to categorize the short stories from *Tales of the Unexpected* and to show what tradition Dahl's short stories are written in.

The theoretical basis of the investigation is formed by various critical studies and articles about Dahl's short stories as well as by short story theories, theories about the creation of suspense in literature, and Catherine Emmott's contextual frame theory from the field of cognitive poetics. The analysis of Dahl's short narratives from the collection *Tales of the Unexpected* shows that they are short stories in the traditional sense and that they are characterized especially by suspense and a surprise dénouement. Moreover, the narrative situation, the narrative modes, and the representation of consciousness in Dahl's short stories are discussed. In addition, the usually mono-dimensional characters in Dahl's short narratives and the themes – not least Dahl's negative view of society – are examined.

A thorough analysis of the creation of suspense in Dahl's short stories shows that they usually generate suspense at the story level and that they often follow a surprise discourse structure, but that sometimes, a suspense discourse structure is used as well. This thesis also shows that surprise is created in Dahl's short stories because wrong frame assumptions are made, because crucial information is withheld until the end of the stories, and because the reader has wrong expectations about the role and identity of characters. The reader has to make inferences in order to comprehend the twists in Dahl's short narratives.

In a final evaluation of Dahl's short stories, this thesis suggests that they are so popular because they are suspenseful, surprising, often shocking, and characterized by black humor and irony.

Curriculum Vitae

Persönliche Daten

Name Pia Spörer
Staatsangehörigkeit Österreich

Schulische Ausbildung

1995 – 1999 Volksschule Süd, 3150 Wilhelmsburg
1999 – 2007 Gymnasium Englische Fräulein,
3100 St. Pölten
Juni 2007 Reifeprüfung am Gymnasium Englische
Fräulein

- ausgezeichneter Erfolg bei der Reifeprüfung
- Erlangung der Ehrennadel des Gymnasiums Englische Fräulein für ausgezeichneten schulischen Erfolg in jedem Schuljahr

Studium

Oktober 2007 – Juni 2008 Lehramtsstudium UF Englisch UF Italienisch,
Universität Wien
Seit Oktober 2008 Lehramtsstudium UF Englisch UF Psychologie
und Philosophie, Universität Wien
Seit Oktober 2010 Bachelorstudium Italienisch, Universität Wien
Oktober 2010 Erhalt des Leistungsstipendiums der Universität
Wien für das Lehramtsstudium UF Englisch
UF Psychologie und Philosophie
Seit März 2012 Lehramtsstudium UF Italienisch UF
Psychologie und Philosophie, Universität Wien
August 2012 – Dezember 2012 Auslandsstudium (Englische Literatur und
Italienisch) an der University of Maryland,
USA

- Erlangung der Auszeichnung „Semester Academic Honors“ für ausgezeichnete universitäre Leistungen

Berufliche Erfahrungen

Juli 2006	Ferialpraktikum in der Apotheke „Zur Mariahilf“, 3150 Wilhelmsburg
Seit 2008	Kassa-Aushilfe der Jugendkulturhalle „Freiraum“, 3100 St. Pölten
Juli 2009	Ferialpraktikum in der Apotheke „Zur Mariahilf“, 3150 Wilhelmsburg
2009 – 2011	Tätigkeit als Nachhilfelehrerin (Englisch, Latein) der „Biku Lernstudios“, 3100 St. Pölten
Juli 2010	Ferialpraktikum in der Apotheke „Zur Mariahilf“, 3150 Wilhelmsburg

Besondere Kenntnisse

Sprachkenntnisse ³³	Deutsch: Muttersprache Englisch: Level C1+ (IELTS; siehe „Zertifikate“) Italienisch: Level B1 (Selbsteinschätzung)
Führerscheine	Klasse B (PKW), Republik Österreich Klasse M (Kleinkraftrad), Republik Österreich
EDV-Kenntnisse	Microsoft Word PowerPoint Internetnutzung
Zertifikate	Sprachreisen-Zertifikat <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Sprachwoche in Malta, 03. – 10. April 2003 IELTS („International English Language Testing System“) <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Ablegung im April 2012○ Gesamtbeurteilung: 8 von 9 Punkten („Very good user“) = Level C1+ des CEFR

³³ Die genannten Sprachlevels entsprechen dem „Common European Framework of Reference“ (CEFR)

Hinweis

Diese Diplomarbeit hat gezeigt, dass die Studentin in der Lage ist, ein wissenschaftliches Thema selbständig zu bearbeiten. Es wird darum gebeten, zu beachten, dass die vorliegende Diplomarbeit mit jedweder Note zwischen „Sehr gut“ und „Genügend“ abgeschlossen worden sein könnte, da nicht ersichtlich ist, wie diese Arbeit letztlich beurteilt wurde.