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## An Explication of “Willing Suspension of Disbelief” with a Focus on Roald Dahl’s Novels

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### Abstract

This paper proposes to testify S.T. Coleridge’s concept ‘Willing Suspension of Disbelief’ in his seminal work *Biographia Literaria*. This concept is testified or evaluated with the reference to Roald Dahl’s novels *Charlie and Chocolate factory* and *James and the Giant Peach*. It explicates the said notion ‘Willing Suspension of Disbelief’. This paper attempts to provide overall details of the works for this comprehensive work related to the fictitious, imaginative and magical world created by Dahl. The central focus of this paper is to show how the authors create the mind-set of the readers while reading fantasy and magical world created through the works. Obviously, as readers we forget the real world and enter into the magical world and suspending our disbelief and begin to think what we read is happening at the present moment. Further the paper provides the instances where this happens while reading the above said works of Dahl.

**Keywords:** Willing Suspension of Disbelief, Fantasy, supernatural elements, wish fulfilment.

### Introduction

Samuel Taylor Coleridge introduced the term willing suspension of disbelief in his text *Biographia Literaria*. It can be seen as we read fantasy literature. Readers step into the shoes of the writers as they imagine. Therefore, it is presumed that fantasy literature thrives on the willing suspension of disbelief act. It also assists the readers to set aside their critical and logical sense while reading the stories. This makes the readers visualize in their minds. They could see all that is mythical, magical and enthralling supernatural. In this way the readers suspend their disbelief temporarily by engaging themselves emotionally and empathetically to the plot, the fictional beings, magical scenes and unrealistic events.

### Children’s Literature – A Flight of Imagination and Wish Fulfilment

Extraordinary writers like Tolkien, Enid Blyton, J.K. Rowling, and Roald Dahl portray the world of children’s literature with captivating themes and plots. As the child develops creativity from his/her habit of reading stories or novels or fables, the children’s writers fulfil their needs or wishes by taking them to the adventurous and dreamy world. Thereupon the readers not only glue themselves to the fictional beings but also suspend their attitude about reality because it is the place where their dreams and wishes get fulfilled without any Struggle. For instance, in J.K. Rowling’s novel *Harry Potter* and the philosopher stone protagonist Harry’s bond with an owl, rat scabbers, three headed dog and

the half giant Hagrid, who later creates a bridge between the real and fantasy world which makes the readers to get connected to the narrative.

Freud’s theory of wish fulfilment and the Psychological mindset of the author often found in the stories of Roald Dahl. In his memoir ‘*Boy: The Tales of childhood*’ he highlights his own experience with his mother who used to narrate bed time stories to Dahl. Additionally we could find Dahl’s love for flying and chocolates. When he was a boy, these wishes which have been embedded in the mind of the author get fulfilled in his writings. The chocolate, which he liked, becomes the chocolate river. Likewise his love for flying planes gets fulfilled in his imaginative account for the children. For instance, Charlie press the up and out button. “It said.....UP AND OUT” (CCF-167). Thus the lift takes off like a rocket.

### Narrative Structure and the Imaginary World of Dahl

Dahl makes use of immersive narrative techniques like poems, similes, metaphors, alliteration, puns and personification for his children’s novel. With these he offers the children a space for imagination for finding paradise i.e. the fantasy world through which they fulfil their desires. Though Dahl’s novels encompasses with multiple inventive and creative features, his storytelling is steeped in tradition. The reason behind his method of traditional storytelling is the fact that his readers who are most often the children under 10 years old. In order to make the children read and follow the

story very easily, he uses a simple narrative i.e. a beginning, middle and end. He also introduces the characters in the beginning of the novel. This makes Dahl outstanding from his contemporaries. With the aim to make the story interesting, he plays with words and invent new words like Boot boggler, Electric Fizz, Telly-Telly bunkum box etc. Dahl's creative poems in his children novels not only created a sense of love for fantasy world but also enhanced the reader's creativity and happiness. Similarly his poems spilled the beans about the characters. Hence the mindset of the readers gets immersed in the imaginary world

"Augustus Gloop! Augustus Gloop!  
The great big greedy nincompoop! "[CCF-93]

Here the readers can easily get that Augustus Gloop is greedy boy unlike the good natured Charlie. Dahl additionally uses like other literary devices like imagery foreshadowing, onomatopoeia, alliterative phonaesthesia, reduplication, malapropism and spoonerism. Dahl employs the foreshadowing technique to subtly hint at a future event. He makes his bibliophiles to foresee the plot through his wonderful description and suspense building method. For instance, in the novel *Charlie and the chocolate factory*, the protagonist Charlie's initial feeling of connection with chocolates and Grandpa Joe's curiosity of telling stories about Willy Wonka's chocolate factory, lead the readers to imagine and anticipate Charlie's connection with the Willy Wonka's Chocolate factory before his actual entry, into the factory. "Charlie, the lover of chocolate, more than anything else" (CCF-7). Moreover Dahl uses magical terminologies which have specific meaning in the context of the story. Correspondingly, Dahl utilises onomatopoeia birds and mimic the humorous sounds they describe throughout his novels. Frizzlecrump, fizzlewiggler, squizzle and so on are some of the examples.

Furthermore, Dahl uses an additional technique called spoonerism as a source of amusement i.e. he uses catasterous disastrophe for disastrous catastrophe, jipping and skumping for skipping and jumping. Dahl employs some of the strategic expressions like matching the spelling by adding different letters to a corresponding word according to the pronunciation. For instance in the novel *Witches*, the grand high witch implement orders to her subordinates with a weird pronunciation. Dahl skips the letters of her speech not only to evoke the danger but also the laughter among the readers." You ancient Vuns have served me Vell". (*Witches*-100) Here it is visible that Dahl skips certain stress pattern in between expressions which typically help the readers to understand the differences in the utterances when particularly spoken by the magical creatures or witches. Dahl's narrative style and the usage of creative language especially in his children's novels, takes his readers engaged in surprise and satisfaction.

### **Willing Suspension of Disbelief in Dahl's Novels**

Roald Dahl, the man of magical, alluring and enchanting words stand superior among his contemporaries. He has been celebrated by his children readers all over the world. Dahl gives a particular attention to touch children's happiness, creativity and adventurous events because he believed that through an interesting story he can make the children as bibliophiles. Dahl's novels are naturally coated with fantasy and wonders. Hence the readers naturally suspend their disbelief while reading the novels of Dahl by connecting, emotionally, as well as empathetically to the plots and

characters.

Nicholson, refers Dahl's works as "tales of fantasy" (*The Marvellous Boy* -319). Dahl considered writing stories for the munchkins play a vital role in boosting their creativity and interest for reading. Thus he created a phenomenal fantasy world for his readers where they connect heart and soul into what they read. For instance in the novel *Charlie and the chocolate factory*, Dahl through his wonderful narration opens the door of Willy Wonka's magical factory not only to the winners of golden ticket but also to his readers who too believe the chocolate river and OmpaLoompas are true. Thus the readers suspend their belief over the real world and begin to fantasize what is being read. In the next instance when, Augustus Gloop fell in the chocolate river and sucked by the pipes as a result of his greedy nature every child who reads this novel begins to empathize that he or she is Augustus Gloop.

In the novel *James and the giant peach* Dahl showers joy to his children readers with whimsical fantasy events one by one starting from the presence of Magical old man who offers a bag of greenish crystal like objects. He exists as a source of wish fulfilment to all those fantastic events that happen in the life of James as well as to the readers who too emotionally connect with the plot and the protagonist James. For Instance when James communicate with the creatures like Centipede, Lady Bird, and Green Grasshopper after, entering into the magical door of the peach the readers go along with him and attach to the magical world by suspending their disbelief. According to Coleridge the supernatural elements originate from inward nature of human beings, but at the same time it should have some truth. It is evident when James Henry Trotter enters into the giant peach; he felt the freshness of fruit by smelling and also drinks the juice of that fruit. Here Dahl associates the truth of the real world with the fantasy world.

Dahl includes yet another magical character called Cloudmen who collects clouds from the sky and transforms them into marbles. Dahl's portrayal of Cloudmen characters in his novel evoke a sense of wonder. Here the readers who too enjoyed the same sense of feeling by while observing the sky associates their ideas with Dahl's writing. Thereupon, they suspend their disbelief. It is perhaps the ardent wish of the common men to witness the imaginary characters which they see from the sky. Similarly in the novel *James and giant Peach* Dahl expresses his love for flying by converting the 700 seagulls as a plane which fly up with the giant peach and the passengers to the sky when the shark try to attack the peach. Through this Dahl fulfils the extraordinary and imaginary wishes of his readers. It is said that children are often magnetized by airplanes.

### **Conclusion**

Thus the focus of the paper is to highlight the skilful picturization of the imaginary world of Roald Dahl's creative works which enforce 'Willing Suspension of Disbelief' in the mind of the readers so that they stay connected to what they read and visualize.

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