



What I think about when I think about Roald Dahl

Article Author:

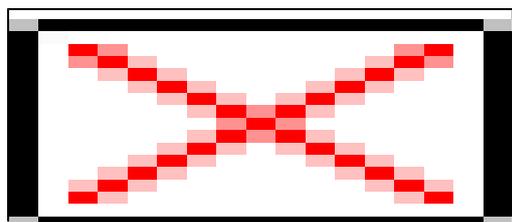
[Matt Brown](#) [1]

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Byline:

Matt Brown explains what **Roald Dahl** means to him

As the nation celebrates **Roald Dahl Day**, author **Matt Brown** considers what the great man means to him.



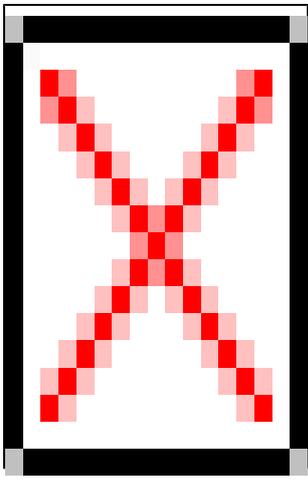
I'm trying to write this piece about Mr Dahl and my computer is insisting on autocorrecting the word 'Roald' to 'Ronald'. This is a curious coincidence because the first thing I think about when I think about Roald Dahl is *Ronald* Dahl. It's what I've always called him to myself because it makes me laugh. I'm certain that **Not the Nine O'Clock News** did a **Tales of the Unexpected** parody and called the host, Ronald Dahl. In my memories of life as a boy, **Tales of the Unexpected** holds a sacred place. It was the telly show I watched in absolute silence from the corner of our living room, trying hard not to breathe too loudly so that my mum and dad would forget that it was past my bedtime. My infatuation probably had as much to do with the title sequence as the cunning twists in the tales. Oh, the flames, the tarot cards, the dancing women. It was a heady mix for an eight-year-old country boy like me.

For the record, my favourite Dahl story when I was a kid was **The Magic Finger**. Oh, sure, I loved the Chocolate Factory and the Giant Peach and the Giant, who was Big and Friendly, but there was something about the darkness of the Magic Finger that delighted me. The girl's bottled-up anger and its inevitable, uncontrollable release spoke to the way I operated. Although, now I think about it, I'm afraid that it didn't change the way I think about hunting and eating animals. Perhaps Ronald's own views on that matter were complicated because a decade later he wrote **Danny Champion of the World**, a book that gave you a blueprint on the very best ways to kill and cook pheasant.

I read **Danny Champion of the World** to my son when he was about seven. He loved it as I knew he would. His grandparents live very near Gypsy House and the woods near their house must be where Ronald was thinking about when he wrote the book. However, as an adult I now have very mixed feelings about **Danny Champion of the World** because it was while I was reading it with my son that I failed the Dahl Test of Fatherhood.

You may have noticed that a lot of the dads in Ronald Dahl's books are the sort of dad's any kid would love to have. They love life and let their kids take apart car engines or create underground Utopias when the local farmers try and kill them. They fly kites (that they've made) and spend the afternoon wandering through the woods with their kids naming trees or birds or woodland creatures. I think that Ronald himself was definitely this sort of dad. We have a book at home of Dahl stories and in it is a forward by his daughter, giving us a glimpse of the kind of father he was.

?He was always open to the possibility of an adventure. Even when he drove us to the school bus in the morning we would take a detour to follow a fire engine with sirens wailing.?



I'll never forget the look of disappointment in my son's eyes when, as we were reading **Danny Champion of the World**, he asked me if we could go poaching together. I don't know about you but my almost pathological fear of outdoor activities means that I'm probably not the sort of dad who will spend his evenings crawling around a wood trying to entice a pheasant to eat drugged raisins. The very best I could do was to buy a pheasant and cook it in the way Danny's dad liked, roasted and with lots of bread sauce. I also made a mental note to try and be a bit more Dahl-y the very next opportunity I got. A few days later, I was with my sons in the car when I saw an ambulance speeding past, sirens a go-go, and set off in hot pursuit, just like Ronald would have done. As I accelerated, a car pulled out in front of me so I braked hard and let off a volley of expletives that contained at least three of the top five worst swear words in the world. The ambulance sped out of sight and both my sons burst into tears. It was a very demoralising ninety seconds.

So, if you do let the heady whiff of Dahl-y adventure fill your nostrils then for heaven's sake be careful. Happy birthday, Ronald.

Matt Brown's latest book [Mutant Zombies Cursed My School Trip](#) [3] (978-1474960236) is published by Usborne.

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