



From Loneliness To Belonging: Consolation And Bonding In Roald Dahl's "*Charlie And The Chocolate Factory And The BFG*"

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Abstract: This research paper examines how Roald Dahl's *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* and *The BFG* use nurturing relationships to provide consolation in the face of existential challenges. Through close textual analysis and supported by existentialist theory, the study reveals how characters like Charlie and Sophie overcome loneliness, fear, and absurdity by forming bonds rooted in empathy and moral choice. These relationships serve as a counter to the indifferent or hostile world they inhabit. Dahl's portrayal of consolation emphasizes not fantasy or escape, but human connection as the source of meaning, making his stories emotionally resonant for readers of all ages.

Keywords: Consolation, loneliness, nurturing bonds, fear, human connection.

Children's Literature is often misinterpreted and dismissed as a light hearted or purely didactic and moralistic or only confined to the young readers. Kimberley Reynolds contends, "Children's books are where many people first encounter profound existential ideas, though often veiled in story and symbol" (Reynolds 22). Roald Dahl literature celebrated for its whimsical narratives, imaginative settings and dark humour, delves deeply into the human psyche. They address complex themes such as existential angst, quest for identity, morals, loneliness and the need for consolation. Many scholars who work on Roald Dahl usually note Dahl's adeptness at blending smoothly dark themes with humour and a lot of fantasy. Dahl's child protagonists are the ones who confront fear, loss, and injustice, and who triumph not through power but through resilience and the bonds they form with others.

Roald Dahl's first book for children, "*The Gremlins*" was published in 1943 and who's last, "*The Minpins*" was published posthumously in 1991 was so very popular for nearly half a century. In 2000 British readers named him the favourite author. A British writer Jeremy Treglown in his book writes "a war hero, a connoisseur, a philanthropist and a devoted family man who had to confront an appalling succession of tragedies." Roald dahl always grabs inspiration to craft his stories from his real-life experiences. He was at Repton School, Derbyshire for his secondary education. He along with the other boys there enjoyed a curious privilege and courtesy of the Cadbury chocolate company. "Every now and again, a plain grey cardboard box was dished out to each boy in our House," (Dahl 181) Dahl writes in "*Boy*". Inside were eleven chocolate bars. Dahl and the other boys got to rate the candy, and they took their task very seriously. Too subtle for the common palate was one of Dahl's assessments. The thought of the factory and the chocolate laboratory setting stayed with him until he invented his own crazy factory in his famous work "*Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*". Dahl masterfully captures the childhood fascination with candy—a feeling most adults can only faintly remember. In his stories, candies often serve as a launchpad for vivid flights of imagination, filled with fantastical powers and possibilities. In 1972, *The Horn Book*, a journal focused on children's literature, published a harsh critique of Dahl written by children's author Eleanor Cameron. She claims that Dahl's works simply promotes instant pleasure though Dahl uses candy to spark wonder and imagination. Dahl's imaginative capability was by far eccentric in a way that seems interesting to the young readers for example, the famous *Willy Wonka rainbow drops*- suck them and one can spit in seven different colours, *Stickjaw* for talkative parents. He used candies as a source not only for its sweetness but for proper and unimaginable creativity.

Several other dahl's best books, such as "*The BFG*", "*The Witches*", "*Matilda*" were written during his later period. Each book focuses on a bond between a child and an adult that represents an ideal of perfect understanding and companionship. Dahl has a huge play with his characters. They are timid characters who tend to succeed eventually. Dahl's work had its readiness to let children outsmart and overcome adults. the dark elements of fairy tales to help them process feelings like anger, resentment, and helplessness in a symbolic and indirect way. And yet the essence of Dahl is his willingness to let children triumph over adults. He is a contemporary teller of fairy tales who instinctively grasps the kind of insight and an argument that Bruno Bettelheim offered in his 1976 book, "*The Uses of Enchantment*", that children need the darker elements of fairy tales to help them symbolically work through feelings of anger, resentment, and helplessness. Bettelheim also says that children gain from seeing violence and cruelty in fairy tales, because it challenges the common tendency to hide the truth—that many problems in life come from human nature and our tendency to be aggressive, selfish, or antisocial. Many of Dahl's works are nothing but complex narratives of wish fulfilment. Many fairy tales, including most of Dahl's stories, present the hopeful idea that by facing life's hardships with determination, one can overcome them—a comforting fantasy that helps every reader cope.

Dahl's memorable protagonists namely Charlie, James, Matilda are timid characters who usually succeed at the end. Charlie Bucket, gentle and well-mannered, wins Wonka's contest precisely because of those very qualities. James begins his story as a lonely orphan—his parents were suddenly killed by a rogue rhinoceros on the first page—and was cruelly mistreated by his aunts. But through his friendship with a group of quirky insects who were living inside a giant peach and by using his own cleverness, he travelled across

the ocean to New York. There, his incredible journey made him a hero, and drew “hundreds and hundreds of children” to visit his new home inside the peach stone, that was set in the Central Park. “The saddest and loneliest little boy that you could find now had all the friends and playmates in the world,” (150) Matilda uncovered a hidden ability to move objects with her mind—a power explained as the result of her intelligence not being fully stimulated. This idea resonates strongly with children, who often believe there are still untapped powers within their minds. She uses this gift to send a message on the classroom blackboard, that scared off her cruel enemy, the terrifying headmistress Miss Trunchbull, who then abandons and flees from her position in fear.

Roald Dahl’s *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* and *The BFG* feature young protagonists who faced loneliness and hardship in a world filled with absurdity and injustice. Yet instead of giving in to despair, Charlie and Sophie discover purpose, joy, and comfort through caring relationships. Though rich in fantasy, these stories are deeply grounded in existential themes: the absurd nature of life, the significance of moral choices, and the restorative power of love and empathy. Through a close reading of both novels and engagement with existentialist philosophy and children’s literature theory, this paper contends that Dahl portrays consolation not as mere comfort, but as something actively cultivated through meaningful human connection.

In *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, the world beyond the factory is defined by scarcity and hardship. Charlie Bucket lived in deep poverty with his extended family: “They had only one bed and the six grown-ups took turns sleeping in it, while the others slept on chairs” (Dahl, *Charlie* 5). The outside world offered little comfort. However, what kept Charlie going was the emotional warmth and strength of his family, particularly Grandpa Joe: “The whole family adored this old man, and it wasn’t just because he was the oldest and the head of the household. It was because he was always full of fun” (6).

Grandpa Joe was more than just a grandparent—he served as Charlie’s emotional anchor. When Charlie discovered the golden ticket, Grandpa Joe’s joyful reaction—shouting “Yippee!” and springing out of bed after years of being bedridden—signifies a pivotal moment, not only in the story but in their emotional bond (34). From an existential perspective, this burst of joy represents a leap toward meaning. Despite the improbable odds of finding the ticket, their connection reaffirms life, hope, and possibility. Grandpa Joe worked in the chocolate factory years ago, and Charlie winning the ticket made him relive the fantasy.

Willy Wonka’s chocolate factory, though whimsical and fantastical, operates according to a firm moral code. The children who fail—Augustus, Veruca, Violet, and Mike—were each undone by personal flaws such as greed, arrogance, entitlement, and indifference. Their failures underscored a lack of empathy and humility. Charlie, in contrast, demonstrated selflessness. When he decides to return the Everlasting Gobstopper instead of betraying Wonka by selling it to Slugworth, Wonka responds, “So shines a good deed in a weary world” (Dahl, *Charlie* 165). Charlie’s reward is not just inheriting the factory, but a symbolic rebirth—a new beginning within a loving and supportive family. This moment echoes Viktor Frankl’s existential insight that “suffering ceases to be suffering at the moment it finds a meaning” (Frankl 113). Charlie’s hardships are not magically undone, but they are transformed through his moral choices and sense of belonging. Dahl’s vision of consolation is not a sudden miracle, but the result of ethical integrity and genuine love.

In *The BFG*, Dahl focuses more on emotional loneliness than physical poverty. Sophie, a lonely orphan, introduced during the “witching hour,” a time when “all the dark things came out from hiding and had the world to themselves” (Dahl, *BFG* 9). Her sudden capture by the Big Friendly Giant seemed terrifying at first. However, the BFG surprised her with his clumsy but sincere kindness: “I is not understanding human beans at all” (29). Though his speech is quirky and confused, it radiates warmth. His deep isolation reflects Sophie’s own, and it is this shared sense of loneliness that forms the foundation of their bond.

The BFG is shunned by the other giants because of his kindness. While they feast on humans, he refuses to harm anyone. Instead, he survives on “snozzcumpers”—foul-tasting vegetables—and drinks fizzy “froboscottle,” which makes him laugh rather than burp (48). These playful inventions go beyond humour; they symbolically replace fear with joy and horror with absurdity. As Philip Nel points out, “Dahl’s invented language is therapeutic. It allows children to laugh at the grotesque and the frightening” (Nel 133). Through humour and empathy, Dahl makes deep existential fears easier to face.

Sophie and the BFG form a powerful alliance to stand up against evil. The other giants—like Bonecruncher and Fleshlumpeater—represent a kind of nihilism, committing violence without guilt or reason. In contrast, Sophie and the BFG take action not out of obligation, but because it is morally right. As Sartre states, “Man is nothing else but what he makes of himself” (Sartre 28). By choosing to act, they reject the idea that cruelty is unchangeable.

Their choice to approach the Queen marks a turning point of existential affirmation. When Sophie declares, “Let’s go to the Queen right now!” it reflects her shift from a scared orphan to a courageous decision-maker (Dahl, *BFG* 114). The BFG, once shy and withdrawn, grows braver through her friendship. Together, they bring about real change by capturing the giants—proving that choice and courage can reshape the world.

The dreams that the BFG catches and shares represent the unconscious and the promise of hope. He tells Sophie, “Dreams is full of mystery and magic... Do not try to understand them” (98). By giving dreams to children, he offers quiet comfort—an invisible act of care and compassion. From an existential perspective, this gesture affirms the beauty of life even in the face of fear and uncertainty. Here, consolation comes not through clear answers, but through empathy.

In both novels, nurturing adults—like Grandpa Joe and the BFG—stand in stark contrast to the harsh, authoritarian figures often found in Dahl’s work. These gentle characters provide what D.W. Winnicott describes as a “holding environment,” a safe emotional space where children can take risks, make mistakes, and grow (Winnicott 44). Their presence soothes not by solving every problem, but by offering steady, loving support. In a similar way, Dahl’s stories can give readers a feeling of emotional safety and reassurance.

Reader-response theorists observe that children often relate to characters like Charlie and Sophie because of their outsider status. As Maria Nikolajeva notes, “Consolation in children’s literature often involves the reaffirmation of a just world, but in Dahl’s work, consolation is interpersonal. It resides in bonds, not systems” (Nikolajeva 56). Charlie and Sophie don’t change the world itself; instead, they transform their experience of it by forming deep, meaningful relationships.

This focus on personal connection reflects themes found in other children’s literature. In *The Little Prince*, the fox tells the prince, “It is only with the heart that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye” (Saint-Exupéry 87). Similarly, in *The Tale of Despereaux*, love and storytelling empower a small

mouse to defy his destiny. Like Dahl's protagonists, these characters find comfort not through external success, but through shared emotion, vulnerability, and genuine care. Dahl's approach is distinct in its blend of dark humour and tender redemption. His invented worlds may be grotesque, but they are not hopeless. His characters face real existential fears—loss, abandonment, meaninglessness—but persist through trust, imagination, and love. Frankl argued, "The salvation of man is through love and in love" (Frankl 57). Dahl's work exemplifies this ideal. Charlie and Sophie are not saved by luck or power, but by their capacity to love and be loved.

In conclusion, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* and *The BFG* are more than whimsical adventures. They are deeply existential stories in which consolation arises from human connection. In worlds filled with absurdity and cruelty, Dahl's young heroes find hope not in escapism, but in nurturing bonds. Their journeys affirm that consolation is not the denial of suffering, but the discovery of meaning within it. For readers young and old, this remains one of Dahl's most enduring gifts.

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