

# **BOOK REVIEW OF *DANNY THE CHAMPION OF THE WORLD* WRITTEN BY ROALD DAHL**

INRI AYU SILVYA

Prof. Dr. Nurdien H Kistanto, M.A

Department of English, Faculty of Humanities

silvyainri@gmail.com

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

*Danny the Champion of the World* is a children novel written by the famous and successful writer of children book, Roald Dahl. Children's literature is a form of literary work written to be consumed by children containing all the things that are familiar with the world of children. According to O'Sullivan in *Historical Dictionary of Children Literature* (2010) children's literature is a literary work which is easily understood by children with casual language and exhilarating story content aimed to build children's character in the society (O'Sullivan, 2010:5). It can be concluded that children's literature functions as the medium to provide entertainment containing good stuffs inside to build a good character for children in the society.

In making a literary work, the elements of human feeling are often imported as an expression of the author's feeling, experience, thought and imagination to his/her work. One of the literary works that describe reflection of human feeling explicitly is novel. Novel tells the reader how the characters are described, what they feel, what they do in the story, and so on. Danny, the character in *Danny the Champion of the World* novel is presented by the author as if he is telling the story about himself directly to the reader.

A novel entitled *Danny the Champion of the World* tells the reader about a life and the adventure of nine years old boy Danny and his marvelous father. Poor Danny must admit the fact that he cannot receive the affection of a mother. When Danny was about four months, his mother died suddenly. He also has no brother or sister on his side, so he only lives alone with his father. Danny and his father are described living in an old gypsy caravan behind a filling station and a

workshop owned by his father. Since Danny was a child, he used to be familiar with car engines and the stuffs in the workshop which he used as his play-room.

As Danny grows up, he discovers the deepest darkest secret of his father. Danny was shocked and disbelieved that his marvelous father is a pheasant poacher (illegal hunter) in Hazell's wood. However, at the same time, Danny also discovers a brilliant idea dealing with poaching. Danny's brilliant idea leads him and his father to the real adventure in poaching pheasants at Hazell's wood where there were so much keepers equipped with gun.

*Danny the Champion of the World* written by Roald Dahl attracted the writer attention because it contains so many good moral value messages not only for children, but also for parents to be applied in the society. Through this writing, the writer will give a brief summary of *Danny the Champion of the World* written by Roald Dahl and review the strength and weakness of the book.

## **2. SUMMARY OF *DANNY THE CHAMPION OF THE WORLD***

The author, Roald Dahl engages the reader to be acquainted with a nine-year old boy named Danny. He only lived alone with his father and had no brother or sister. When Danny was about four months, his mother died suddenly so Danny's father should look after Danny all by himself. It was not easy for Danny's father after his wife left. He should take over the things that his wife usually does for Danny while at the same time he had to earn money for living.

Danny and his father owned a small two pumps filling-station and a workshop. They did not live in a luxury house but in an old gypsy caravan behind the filling station surrounded by fields and woody hills. Since Danny was a child, he was very close and familiar with million things of car engines because he spent all of his days in the workshop which had been his play-room to help his father. Even though Danny did not have nice things normally children have, he never had unhappiness or illness moments because all the love that his father had for Danny's mother when she was alive are given entirely to him.

Danny was nine years old when his father let him knew the deepest and darkest secret of his dad. That time as usual, Danny's father would tell him a story before he slept and after Danny had slept, he would also sleep in the bunk above Danny. But it was different that night. Danny woke up for some reasons and he could hear nothing of his father breathing and it was true that

his father did not there beside him. He tried to find a light so he could see things clearly and seek his father.

Danny could not find his father anywhere until he heard footsteps approaching him from a distance and it was his father who has return. Danny's father took his hand and walked him back to the caravan. In a silence, Danny's father had decided to let Danny knew his deepest, darkest secret. He told Danny that he had been done poaching pheasants in Hazell's wood. Then and there, Danny was shocked because he disbelieved that his marvelous father was a poacher (illegal hunter). That night Danny's father revealed all the dark secrets in the whole life of him, included the method how to capture pheasant.

The next poaching had been planned by his father with Danny's consent but Danny did not come with him. His father promised to return home at ten thirty at night but it was ten minutes past two when Danny opened his eyes and his father was not yet return to the caravan. Without any doubts, Danny decided to go after his father in case he was injured by driving Baby Austin to reach his six miles father soon. When Danny arrived upon Hazell's wood, he found that his father was injured; he fell into the hole specially made to trap poacher and his ankle was broken. Danny should quickly find a way to bring both of them out without being discovered by Hazell's wood keepers until finally they got home and Danny's father needed a serious treatment for his broken ankle.

After the incident Danny's father had in Hazell's wood, he was very mad at Mr. Victor Hazell and wanted to take revenge. Shortly after that, a brilliant idea was discovered by Danny. He remembered that his father had sleeping pills Doc. Spencer gave and the pheasants like raisins so much. Danny suggested his father to wreck the pills till it became powder then put it into the raisins so that the pheasants would fall asleep right after they ate the raisins. A doubt appeared in Danny's father whether the new method would work or not but he gave it a try.

Before the famous pheasant shooting party of Mr. Hazell started, they came to the Hazell's wood, carrying the sleeping powder raisins to be spread for the pheasants. After waiting for a moment, obviously Danny's brilliant idea was a huge success because they managed to capture one hundred and twenty pheasants. They put them into the sacks and there was Charlie Kinch in his taxi who was ready to take away the hunting of Danny and his father to the caravan.

The next day, Danny, his father, Doc. Spencer and Mrs. Clipstone were shocked to know that all the pheasants they had captured were woken up and flown on and at the same time Mr.

Hazell arrived finding that all of his pheasants were in the filling-station of Danny's father. Mr. Hazell claimed that all of the pheasants were belong to him but Danny's father said it was not his anymore because they flew and stayed on the land of Danny's father and that was the rule. Nobody could do anything especially Sergeant Samways. Mr. Hazell finally left the filling-station madly with his Rolls-Royce. It was the time Danny and his father got their victory and because of the brilliant idea Danny had, his father called him "Danny the Champion of the World".

### **3. ROALD DAHL AND HIS WORK**

No one expected that Roald Dahl, a former of ace fighter pilot would become a children's literature writer. Dahl was born from Norwegian parents, Harald Dahl and Sofie Magdalene Hesselberg in Llandaff on September 13, 1916. The little Dahl first attended school in Llandaff Catholic School but he later transferred to St. Peter, a boarding school in England as his father wished. Dahl then continued his study to Repton in 1929, a private school which has an excellent academic reputation.

Because of his adventurous desire, Dahl decided to join the Great Britain Air Force rather than attended Oxford or Cambridge University. When Dahl was in charge as the fighter pilot in WWII, he got an accident which made him suffers serious injuries in his cranium, spine, and hip. Roald Dahl met Patricia Neal, an American actress in 1953 whom he married but divorced after 30 years of marriage. Dahl finally decided to remarry with Felicity Ann Crossland which became his wife until he died in the age 74 on November 23, 1990.

Some of Dahl's children's literature works are *James and the Giant Peach* (1961) — followed by *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (1964) — *Kiss kiss and Fantastic Mr. Fox* (1970)—*Danny the Champion of the World* (1975), *The Enormous Crocodile* (1978) and *My Uncle Oswald* a year later — *The Twits*, *Revolting Rhymes*, *The BFG* and *The Witches* (early 1980s) — *Boy*, *Going Solo*, *Matilda*, *Esio Trot*, and finally *The Minpins* (1991).  
<https://www.roalddahl.com>

### **4. REVIEW OF THE BOOK**

#### **4.1 The Strengths of Roald Dahl *Danny the Champion of the World***

##### **4.1.1 Point of View**

According to Barnet, Berman and Burto in *An Introduction to Literature* (1989:123) they wrote that in every story, there is someone who tells it to the reader or listener. Barnet, Berman and Burto also added that the author may write a book but the story is not told by he/she; the character does. Danny, the main character of *Danny the Champion of the World* book occupied as the narrator (first person point of view) here. Sharing the same opinion with Barnet, Berman and Burto, Stanton in his book entitled *An Introduction to Fiction* (1965:33) wrote that first person point of view enables the reader to have an experience as what the main character experienced in the story.

#### **4.1.2 Easy to Understand Language**

Children's literature is form of literary work which is easy to understand and contains pleasant things and *Danny the Champion of the World* satisfies the qualification of children's literature. One of the examples is quoted below:

“During my early years, I never had a moment's unhappiness or illness and here I am on my fifth birthday. I was now a scruffy little boy as you can see, with grease and oil all over me, but that was because I spent all day in the workshop helping my father with the cars.” (Dahl, 1975:11).

The paragraph above shows that Danny describes himself in detail. He illustrates himself when he was on his fifth birthday and how he looked alike that time. Overall, there is no vocabulary that is hard to be understood by children. Even though Dahl provides picture of Danny when he was on his fifth birthday, children still can imagine Danny's figure at that time without having to look at the picture because of the casual language and the clear description of him.

#### **4.1.3 Pleasant Things**

Children's literature certainly contains pleasant things. *Danny the Champion of the World* tells the reader many pleasant things done by Danny and his father. In this novel, Danny and his father do some pleasant things such as make a kite and a fire balloon. His father told Danny how to make them by using the stuffs which are exist in the house. This is not only a pleasant thing children could do, but it also educates and enhances children's insight but the imagination still in the reach of children.

#### **4.1.4 The Moral Message for Children**

It is a must that children's literature contains not only good things, but also good messages which can build the good character of them to be applied in the society and according to O'Sullivan; children's literature is made in purpose to build children's character in the society (O'Sullivan, 2010:5). In *Danny the Champion of the World*, there are many good things which can be learned not only by children, but parents as well.

##### **1. Well-Cultured Kid**

In this book, the author, Roald Dahl creates Danny's character as a good, obedient, respectful, and caring boy. Even though Danny was the only child that his father had, he did not become a pampered boy. He always obeys his father, has respect for adults, and he has a caring attitude towards his father and others.

When the readers read this book, they will find a part where Danny's father broke his ankle when he went poaching pheasant into Hazell's wood. Because his broken ankle was badly injures, Doc. Spencer decided to carried Danny's father to the hospital for further treatment. Because William (Danny's father) will not be at home, Doc. Spencer ordered Danny to stay at the caravan and get a good sleep, and Danny obeys what Doc. Spencer saying.

##### **2. A Grateful Boy**

Danny, is told was from a not-rich family. His father was only a good mechanic who repaired motor-car engines and served customers with petrol. They lived in an old gypsy caravan surrounded by fields and woody hills behind the filling-station and a workshop owned by Danny's father. Although they lived in a full of simplicity life, Danny never complained and he just loved what he had that time. Here, what Dahl wants to remind is children should have a sense of understanding about what happen around them and be grateful for what they have.

##### **3. A Proud Boy of His Father**

Danny tells the reader that his father was not an educated man. He said that the people, who did not know him well, would think that his father is fierce and serious man. Actually all of these thought are not true because his father was a very funny man. "My father, without the slightest doubt, was the most marvelous and exciting father any boy ever had." (Dahl, 1975:16),

this sentence shows that even if his father was not an educated man, Danny was proud to have William as his father. Danny thought that he was the luckiest boy in the world to have a father like him. Behind his father weakness, there are many things inside his father that became his strength so that is why Danny was proud of his father.

## **4.2 Weakness**

It is not fair if we discuss a book only about its strength but ignoring the weakness. Actually it is hard for the writer to find the weakness of the writing by a great, and well-known children's literature author such as Roald Dahl but the writer did try at least. One thing that is dominant which is highlighted by the writer that becomes the weakness point of *Danny the Champion of the World* written by Roald Dahl is about violation.

When the reader reads this book carefully, in some parts he/she will find some aspects of violation done by particular characters in the book either it is an act or verbal and in the writer opinion, it is not good for children to imitate or consume. Here, the role of parents is very needed to keep an eye on their children and give understanding for them.

### **1. Poaching**

The first violation provided by this book is the reader will often find out the word poaching. According to Hornby in *Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary of Current English* (1948:642), poaching is going on somebody else's property illegally or in short is stealing. For Danny's father and other characters, poaching is an art which had been done hereditary and it seems fine. But, poaching is stealing and stealing is a violation which cannot be done in society. Even though Danny first was disbelieved that his father is a poacher, but in the end he participated poaching with his father and he even discovered new method of poaching. Below is William's statement which proves he did poaching:

“Poaching is such a fabulous and exciting sport that once you start doing it, it gets into your blood and you can't give it up! Just imagine,...” (Dahl 1975:39).

William told Danny that he had been poaching with his father since he was at Danny's age. He describes poaching as an extraordinary and pleasant sport to be done to Danny, the time he decided to reveals what he has done. Danny who thought that his father was the best father he

has ever had was shocked after knowing that his father did poaching. Here, Roald Dahl wants to tell that a good person also turn out to have done the things we did not expect.

## **2. Abusive Behavior done by Adults**

The second is abusive behavior which is done by Mr. Victor Hazell, the antagonist character in *Danny the Champion of the World* and the owner of Hazell's wood where there were so many pheasants breed. Mr. Hazell was told that he passed Danny's father filling-station and stopped by to fill his car fuel. Speaking cruelly to Danny, whom at that time preserves the filling station, he spoke like this:

“Fill her up and look sharp about it. And keep your filthy little hands to yourself d’you understand? If you make any dirty finger-marks on my paint-work, I’ll step right out of this car and give you a good hiding.” (Dahl, 1975:53).

Danny who was eight at that time did not understand of what Mr. Hazell meant. Mr. Hazell only warned Danny if Danny's hand made his car dirty, he would step out of his Rolls-Royce car and will give Danny a punishment by a leather riding-crop beside him. What was done by Mr. Hazell to Danny is not a good thing to be consumed by children because speaking rudely to other especially children is not a good thing to be done.

## **3. Traffic Violation**

The last point which becomes the weakness of this book is traffic violation. There is a part where Roald Dahl tells the reader when Danny drove a car alone to rescue his father. Below is the part that proves it:

“I pressed down the clutch pedal again and pushed the gear-lever into first. This was it... Ten yards away lay the main road...I released the clutch very slowly...” (Dahl, 1975:64).

The paragraph above describes how Danny tried to drive the car to rescue his father who had not returned home from poaching. He tells the reader how to run a car step by step just like what is written in the instruction book. Danny's purpose might be good but it is not yet proper to be done by him. What was done by Danny can be categorized as a violation. It is a violation because that time Danny was only a nine-year old boy and this cannot be justified in any country.



To be allowed to drive a vehicle, someone's must have a driving license and must be seventeen or above.

## 5. CONCLUSION

*Danny the Champion of the World* is a children's literature written by Roald Dahl. In making children's book, it is better that the book contains good things and moral messages which can be learned by the children to create good behavior for their selves in society. Besides as an entertainment, children's literature is also good for educating, improving imagination, giving new experience to children. Generally, children's literature has the characteristics of an easy language to understand by them, contains exhilarating things, and usually enclosed with attractive pictures to help them develop their imagination.

*Danny the Champion of the World* is a story about Danny and his father who lived in an old gypsy caravan. Danny's father owned a small filling-station and a workshop which he used to earn money for living. His mother died suddenly when he was four months so Danny's father should took care of him while earn money at the same time. Danny never felt unhappy or illness because he got all of the affection of mother from his marvelous father.

One day, Danny found out his father deepest darkest secret. Knowing the fact that his father is a poacher, Danny was shocked and disbelieved but it led him to a brilliant idea. He discovered a new effective poaching method and it was a huge success in the history of poaching and that was what make Danny's father called him the champion of the world.

In writer's opinion, *Danny the Champion of the World* is one of the great children's literatures Roald Dahl has ever made. The writer would like to recommend the reader who wants to read this book. Besides the story that is easy to understand, it also provides some attractive pictures that can help children to develop their imagination. There are many good lessons which can be learned not only by children but also parents. Even though this book was written for children, it also contains some messages for parents how to educate and behave to their children. For children who read this book, the writer suggests that parental supervision is needed because there are some contents that is not good to be consumed.

## REFERENCES

Barnet, Sylvan., Morton, and Burto. (1989). *An Introduction to Literature*. New York: Scott, Foresman and Company, USA.

Dahl, Roald.(1975). *Danny the Champion of the World*. New York. Penguin Books: USA Inc.

Hornby, AS. (1948). *Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary of Current English*. Oxford: Oxford Univesity Press.

O’Sullivan, Emer. (2010). *Historical Dictionary of Children Literature*. Plymouth: United Kingdom. Scarecrow Press, Inc.

Stanton, Robert. (1965). *An Introduction to Fiction*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc.

The Roald Dahl Organization.*Dahl, Roald “About Roald Dahl”*. <<https://www.roalddahl.com/roald-dahl/about>>. Feb 15, 2017.

The Roald Dahl Organization.*Dahl, Roald “Roald Dahl Titles”*. <<https://www.roalddahl.com/global/roald-dahl-titles>>. Feb 15, 2017.

