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Roald dahl boy tales of childhood book review

A long time ago, in 1916, a little boy was born to Norwegian parents living in South Wales. His father was a successful businessman, but idiosyncratic to say the least. He wanted his children to have an appreciation of beauty, so before they were born he spent hours taking his pregnant wife on "glorious walks" to take in the natural splendour of the countryside. In this way he hoped that the wonder of nature and an appreciation of it would somehow be transmitted to his unborn child. The little boy's father had only one arm, but got along just fine with the aid of various ingenious gadgets he'd invented for himself, like the sharpened fork which acted as all three forms of cutlery, which he kept in a special case in his pocket. He also kept a long and involved diary. Sadly, the little boy's father died when he was still very young. The little boy was Roald Dahl and doesn't it sound like the little boy grew up to be very like his father - an inveterate scribbler, inventor and appreciator of good things, with a little bit of eccentricity thrown in? Boy is a collection of stories Roald Dahl has to tell about his babyhood and schooldays, beginning of course, as all stories of childhood should begin, with a setting of the scene, and an explanation of the things which went before. After his father's death the Dahl family did not return home to Norway, but stayed in Wales, for Dahl senior had been a great supporter of the public school system and had always wanted his children to have an English education. His mother was determined to fulfil that aim. Dahl's first school was in Llandaff in Cardiff, and his memories of it are sparse in comparison with his memories of the sweet shop nearby: "The sweet shop in Llandaff in the year 1923 was the centre of our lives. To us, it was what a bar is to a drunk, or a church to a bishop. Without it, there would have been little to live for. But it had one terrible drawback, this sweet shop. The woman who owned it was a horror... Her name was Mrs Pratchett. She was a small skinny old hag with a moustache on her upper lip and a mouth as sour as a green gooseberry." Oh, if that little bit isn't enough to make you read Boy then shame on you! I love it. Only Dahl would mention a drunk and a bishop in a children's book, only Dahl would remember the importance of sweets, or the horror of a nasty lady behind the counter and brook no argument when calling her a hag. Of course Mrs Pratchett is very nasty, losing no opportunity to short-change the children with their sweets or to generally be disparaging and unpleasant. Marvellously, she receives her comeuppance, for Dahl and his little group of friends one day place a dead mouse in the gobstopper jar when she's not looking, with hilarious and awful consequences. Summers were wonderful for the Dahl family, for then they returned to Norway, a huge travelling circus they made: "We were always an enormous party. There were my three sisters and my ancient half-sister (that's four), and my half-brother and me (that's six), and my mother (that's seven), and Nanny (that's eight), and in addition to these there were never less than two others who were some sort of anonymous ancient friends of the ancient half-sister (that's ten altogether). I must be tempting you by now, surely? There is another, wonderful piece of Dahl, for how children love to count, and list and repeat and to hear counting and listing and repeating. Those holidays were full of lazing, and boating, and eating, in far-away, secluded Norwegian islands and they were full of fun, and naughtiness too, of course. Once, the ancient half-sister took her pompous boyfriend along who really did get on everyone's nerves but hers. One of his most annoying habits was his constant pipe- smoking, and while he was swimming one of Dahl's sisters replaced all the tobacco in the bowl of the pipe with crushed goat droppings. When he returned the entire family watched him smoke, aghast, before falling into hysterics as he realised what had happened. And that is only the beginning. However, Boy is only a short, slim little book, over before you know it, leaving you hungry for more (don't worry, there are two further volumes) and so I'd better not tell you much else. Soon enough, Dahl makes the step from prep to boarding school, and here things aren't so blissful. The rigid, incomprehensible discipline, the endless push for pigeon-holing and conformity and the cruel, institutionalised ways this was enforced often left Dahl lonely, homesick and afraid. He wrote home to his mother every week and even after countless readings of the book I still get a tight, sad, terrible feeling inside when I see some of the copied letters, signed "love, Boy" and when I read of the horrors of ritualised corporal punishment. Still, these times weren't without their amusements, and anyway, I've given away too much already. You should read them for yourself. Boy is written with every bit of the skill Dahl has brought to children's fiction - it is amusing, honest, rhythmic, wry. And it provides also a fascinating insight into the inspiration for all that wonderful fiction. Perhaps one of the reasons we all find stories so satisfying is that stories, both invented and true, are like a thin layer torn from a part of a whole: rounded but at the same time incomplete. Stories can entertain and they can teach, they can make us happy or they can make us sad, but the most valuable thing they give is a sense of inclusion, a sense of feeling an indivisible part of that whole. Stories are amongst the most precious of all the things we have, and often the true ones are the most important of all. Autobiographies probably have more to tell us about selves than about times and places, they are more stories than histories. I think. I think too, that this is a good thing, and I think Roald Dahl would have agreed with me. He prefaces Boy with a few words: "This is not an autobiography. I would never write a history of myself. On the other hand, throughout my young days at school and just afterwards a number of things happened to me that I have never forgotten... Some are funny. Some are painful. Some are unpleasant. I suppose that is why I have always remembered them so vividly. All are true." In this way, autobiography, or stories about oneself, whether written down so wonderfully by Dahl, or simply told at bedtime by parents, give a shared, public form to a person's private meanings - including, enriching, and connecting with the child who listens. Every life is worth recording, worth getting down truthfully. What could be more fascinating than a human life in all its strength and frailty? For the life we live today is enlarged and enriched by what we learn about past lives. The most wonderful thing about Boy is that Roald Dahl is a writer who never lost that acute sensory ability of a child to see, hear and smell with a vividness that is lost in adulthood, or that simple, honest directness lost too in adulthood that is not afraid to speak of what it sees. School, to Dahl, was often a terrifying, incomprehensible place, governed by incomprehensible adults and yes, English public schools with their rigid discipline and desire to enforce conformity aren't the places I'd choose to send my children. But perhaps, when you're tiny, all schools seem a bit like that. Can you remember? Roald Dahl can and perhaps even with this book he wanted, finally, to win his argument. For children and for adults, make no mistake about that. Boy will make you laugh, as Dahl always does, with its outrageous tales of dead mice in sweet jars, and goats poo in smoking pipes. It will make you shudder with awful stories of the cane and noses hanging by threads of flesh and it will make you cheer for the goodies (mostly children, of course) and boo-hiss the baddies (mostly those adults foolishly trusted with any degree of authority). There's a bottom or two in there as well, always a good thing. Oh, it's a wonderful book, full of the most rich and arresting detail. And you'll have hours of fun spotting the inspiration for the most awful of characters in all the other Dahl creations. But most of all it will make you feel included, a part of that whole from which it is taken. Read and share Boy with your children. Tell and share stories about yourself too. Collect and treasure all the stories that you can. For more childhood memoirs, try our review of Little House In The Big Woods by Laura Ingalls Wilder. Boy: Tales of Childhood by Roald Dahl is in the Top Ten Biographies and Autobiographies. Boy: Tales of Childhood by Roald Dahl is in the Most Read Reviews On Bookbag. Please share on: Facebook, Twitter and Instagram You can read more book reviews or buy Boy: Tales of Childhood by Roald Dahl at Amazon.co.uk Amazon currently charges £2.99 for standard delivery for orders under £20, over which delivery is free. You can read more book reviews or buy Boy: Tales of Childhood by Roald Dahl at Amazon.com. Like to comment on this review? 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