

The re-writing of Roald Dahl

“Words matter,” begins the discreet notice, which sits at the bottom of the copyright page of Puffin’s latest editions of Roald Dahl’s books. “The wonderful words of Roald Dahl can transport you to different worlds and introduce you to the most marvellous characters. This book was written many years ago, and so we regularly review the language to ensure that it can continue to be enjoyed by all today.”

Put simply: these may not be the words Dahl wrote. The publishers have given themselves licence to edit the writer as they see fit, chopping, altering and adding where necessary to bring his books in line with contemporary sensibilities. By comparing the latest editions with earlier versions of the texts, [The Telegraph](#) has found hundreds of changes to Dahl’s stories.

The modern editor of Dahl faces a dilemma: how to retain Dahl’s compelling spikiness, which has enthralled generations of readers, while bringing it in line with the hair-trigger sensitivities of children’s publishing.

Puffin’s overhaul is the result. While there have been tweaks before, there has never been an alteration on this scale.

[References to physical appearance](#) have been heavily edited. The word “fat” has been removed from every book – Augustus Gloop in Charlie and the Chocolate Factory may still look like a ball of dough, but can now only be described as “enormous”.

In the same story, the Oompa-Loompas are no longer “tiny”, “titchy” or “no higher than my knee” but merely small. And where once they were “small men”, they are now “small people”.

Passages not written by Dahl have also been added. In *The Witches*, a paragraph explaining that witches are bald beneath their wigs ends with the new line: “There are plenty of other

reasons why women might wear wigs and there is certainly nothing wrong with that.”

An emphasis on mental health has led to the removal of “crazy” and “mad”, which Dahl used frequently in comic fashion. A mention in *Esio Trot* of tortoises being “backward” – the joke behind the book’s title – has been excised.

The words “black” and “white” have been removed: characters no longer turn “white with fear” and the Big Friendly Giant in *The BFG* cannot wear a black cloak.

The changes were made by the publisher, Puffin, and the Roald Dahl Story Company, now owned by Netflix, with sensitivity readers hired to scrutinise the text. Puffin and the Roald Dahl Story Company made the latest changes in conjunction with Inclusive Minds, which its spokesperson describes as “a collective for people who are passionate about inclusion and accessibility in children’s literature”. Alexandra Strick, a co-founder of Inclusive Minds, says they “aim to ensure authentic representation, by working closely with the book world and with those who have lived experience of any facet of diversity”. To do this, they call on a team of “Inclusion Ambassadors” with a variety of “lived experience”. She says they mostly work with authors writing now, but are sometimes asked to work on older texts.

Sensitivities over Dahl’s stories were heightened when a 2020 Hollywood version of *The Witches* led to a backlash over its depiction of the Grand Witch, played by Anne Hathaway, with fingers missing from each hand.

Warner Bros was forced to make an apology after Paralympians and charities said it was offensive to the limb difference community. *Remind me never to write a novel featuring a friend of my father’s, a man known to all as Tommy Fingers, sometimes just ‘Fingers’ who was noted for his skill and gentleness with pigeons, because, or maybe in spite of his lack in the finger*

department. The only community whose opinion mattered to him was that of the Pigeon [Fancy](#).

Some examples of before and after

2001		2022	
Even if she is working as a cashier in a supermarket or typing letters for a businessman		Even if she is working as a top scientist or running a business	
A boy it will be for a certainty because girls are not keeping pet mice			Removed
She went on olden-day sailing ships with Joseph Conrad. She went to Africa with Ernest Hemingway and to India with Rudyard Kipling		She went to nineteenth century estates with Jane Austen. She went to Africa with Ernest Hemingway and California with John Steinbeck	
Dickens or Kipling	Dickens or Austen		

The two above examples are from Matilda, the part where the heroine is learning about the escapist power of literature. I know that wokists dislike Rudyard Kipling, but what is wrong with Joseph Conrad a man who in his youth was a refugee and who served his way up the ranks as a merchant seaman, and therefore had the lived experience of that about which he wrote? And what is right about Ernest Hemingway that he remain despite his machismo and avowed enjoyment of hunting? I think Matilda and Roald Dahl's audience need a quick course on George Orwell, so they know what the grown-ups are doing to their books.

From Esio Trot the story of a tortoise; The name itself is a play on words which is now (below) completely lost.

<p>"Tortoises are very backwards creatures. Therefore they can only understand words that are written backwards."</p>	<p>"They can only understand words that are written backwards."</p>
---	---

The nuclear family and the traditions of marriage are largely erased. I'm surprised the term 'married' wasn't removed. Many mentions of mother and father have been.

A few weeks later, Mrs Silver became Mrs Hoppy and the two of them lived very happily ever after.	A few weeks later, they got married and the two of them lived very happily ever after.
---	--

Next, from the BFG (the Big Friendly Giant)

<p>“Every night unpleasant things are happening in Baghdad,” the Sultan said. “We are chopping off people’s heads like you are chopping parsley.”</p> <p>“I’ve never chopped parsley in my life,” said the Queen.</p>	Removed
Then, turning to the two military men	Then, turning to the two military personnel
“Go forward, men!” the head of the Army said.	“Go forward!” the Head of the Army said,
There were six well-trained efficient men	There were six well-trained efficient people
<p>“Do you have separate dreams for boys and girls?” Sophie asked. “Of course, the BFG said. “If I is giving a girl’s dream to a boy, even if it was a really whoppsy girl’s dream, the boy would be waking up and thinking what a rotbungling grinksludging old dream that was.” “Boys would,” Sophie said. “These here is all the girls’ dreams on this shelf,” the BFG said.”</p>	Removed
The BFG expressed a wish to learn how to speak properly, and Sophie, who loved him as she would a father, volunteered to give him lessons every day	According to the BFG’s wishes, Sophie, who loved him as she would a father, taught him how to spell and write sentences

Like the new BFG the children will learn correct sentences,

properly spelled in [goodthink](#), and will never wrongthink because they will lack the vocabulary to do so.



Look how thin the new editions to the right are compared to the 2001 editions? How much has been removed????

I checked my daughter's childhood books which she has kept; as you can imagine she grew up on the 2001 editions.