

Censorship through Sensitivity Editing. The Case of Roald Dahl's *Charlie and The Chocolate Factory*

VERÓNICA ORTIZ BLANCO
UNIVERSIDAD DE OVIEDO
ortizveronicablanco@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT:

Roald Dahl has always been lambasted for his depiction of violence, racism, and sexism in his children's books. These issues coupled with Dahl's antisemitic attitude and mean-spiritedness have raised concerns about the books' suitability for young readers. Consequently, Dahl's books have been frequently censored for various reasons. Despite this, his works have been venerated and beloved by generations, becoming one of

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the most successful children's authors. Thus, this article will focus on the censorship imposed on Roald Dahl's Charlie and the Chocolate Factory (1964) since it has become a notorious example of public outrage due to its sensitivity editing. To analyse the changes introduced in this children's classic, a methodological approach based on the editorial decisions' typology is used as the framework for my study. The results show that the sensitivity editing fails to address the underlying issues within the text, as the changes are largely superficial and, at times, inconsistent.

KEYWORDS: *Censorship; Sensitivity Editing; Roald Dahl; Children's Books; Diversity Discourse.*

La Censura por la Edición Sensible. El Caso de *Charlie y la Fábrica de Chocolate* de Roald Dahl

RESUMEN:

Roald Dahl siempre ha sido criticado por su representación de violencia, racismo y sexismo en sus libros infantiles. Estas cuestiones, junto con la actitud antisemita y malintencionada de Dahl, han suscitado dudas sobre la idoneidad de los libros para los jóvenes lectores. Como consecuencia, los libros de Dahl han sido frecuentemente censurados por diversas razones. A pesar de ello, sus obras han sido veneradas y queridas por generaciones de lectores, convirtiéndose en uno de los autores infantiles de mayor éxito. Este artículo se centrará en la censura impuesta a Charlie y la Fábrica de Chocolate (1964), ya que se ha convertido en un ejemplo notorio de indignación pública debida a su edición sensible. Para analizar los cambios introducidos en ese clásico infantil se utiliza un enfoque metodológico basado en la tipología de las decisiones editoriales, como marco de estudio. Los resultados demuestran que la edición sensible no logra abordar los problemas subyacentes en el texto, ya que los cambios son en su mayoría superficiales y, en ocasiones, inconsistentes.

PALABRAS CLAVE: *Censura, Edición Sensible; Roald Dahl; Literatura Infantil; Discurso de Diversidad*

1. Sensitivity Editing of Roald Dahl's Books

The Daily Telegraph's report on February 2023 revealed that numerous changes and additions were made in the 2023 British edition of Dahl's titles (Singh & Cumming, 2023). The modifications were approved by Puffin and the Roald Dahl Story

Company. The sensitivity editing was recommended by Inclusive Minds, an organisation that assists in the process of writing and editing new books as well as in the revision of language to reprint old titles, dodging the perpetuation of damaging stereotypes and inauthentic representations. This paper claims that this is a rupture with the artistic integrity. As a matter of fact, Dahl rejected several proposals of editors to soften his books.

The idea to bowdlerise the new edition is claimed to have started already in 2020, the same year when Dahl's family made an official apology for the author's anti-Semitic statements. Nevertheless, three years later, this expurgated version has only been issued in the UK. U.S. publisher Penguin Young Readers, Dutch publisher De Fontein and French publisher Gallimard have declared that they will not sanitise the original text (O'Sullivan, 2023).

The purported aim of the alterations was to suit modern audiences and readership removing offensive and sensitive language mainly related to mental health, race, gender, violence, and weight. Some of the stressed changes in the books include tortoises in *Esio Trot* coming from various countries rather than primarily from North Africa; the Cloud-Men are now referred to as Cloud-People in *James and the Giant Peach*; Matilda is reading Jane Austen and John Steinbeck instead of reading Joseph Conrad and Rudyard Kipling; and tractors are no longer described as having black machines in *Fantastic Mr Fox*.

This textual tampering sparked instant controversy, and accusations of wokeism and cancel culture were made. This triggered alarm on social media as many portrayed it as an attack on free speech. The CEO of PEN America posted a thread of 13 tweets explaining their alarm. Newspapers such as *The New York Times*, *The Guardian*, and *The Washington Post* reported this thread as well as Salman Rushdie's tweet stating that "Roald Dahl was no angel but this is absurd censorship." (Rushdie, X, comment posted February 18, 2023). Other influential public figures such as the UK Prime Minister's official spokesperson, the Queen

Consort Camilla and Wes Anderson publicly criticised this editing (Khomami, 2023).

Apart from immediate public outrage, these alterations have also caused some comedic responses. Namely, the 2023 edition of *The Witches* (1983) reminds readers that there are a myriad of plausible reasons for wearing wigs apart from being a witch. This addition of a teachable moment in the story deviates from Dahl's writing style and intended purpose. As it will be delved into in the following paragraph, Dahl's stories are characterized by a lack of explicit moralising nor patronising components. A comedic response to these meaningless alterations was written in an opinion article in *The Washington Post* presenting other well-renowned books with the same sensitivity editing, which resulted in, for example, *The Wizard of Oz* narrating that "It was all right when Dorothy's house fell on and crushed that witch, but, in general, it is bad" (Petri, 2023). For many, this textual tampering transforms books into comedies, being close to satire, akin to *Politically Correct Bedtime Stories: Modern Tales for Our Life and Times* (1994) by James Finn Garner.

This whitewashing goes against the core and success of Dahl's works. His books are revolting, outrageous and mischievous. These features as well as his nastiness and spikiness appeal to young readers. Many children love the types of stories which make them, and even adults, laugh thanks to the exaggerated and disgusting imagery. Moreover, these books subvert adult-imposed narratives taking the child's side. In fact, in his stories, the child characters tend to face oppressive circumstances and injustices with creativity, defiance and heroism. The protagonists flout conventions and question authorities which are sometimes depicted as fantastical beings such as witches or giants.

Dahl himself had to encounter challenging situations during his life which led him to create stories fusing reality and fantasy, cruelty and joy. He was marked by the tragic loss of his father and sister when he was three years old as well as by his experience as a pilot of the Royal Air Force during World War

Two and as a spy for MI6. He faced the devastating loss of his daughter, the arduous recovery of his son from brain injury due to an accident and the recovery of his wife's stroke. Certainly, his life influenced his writing. Dahl's experiences appear explicitly in his autobiographies *Boy* (1984) and *Going Solo* (1986), and the authorised biography *Storyteller: The Life of Roald Dahl* (2010) by Donald Sturrock.

Some believe that despite the censoring of certain words and phrases, the sensitivity editing did not achieve to erase the problematic and nasty spirit of Dahl's books. Another component in his books which has not been modified is the use Gobblefunk language, i.e., inventive words created by Roald Dahl. In fact, the *Oxford Roald Dahl Dictionary* (2016) was published compiling those imaginative words such as "to churgle", "snozzcumber", and "propsposterous". In the following section, we will analyse in detail the effects of the sensitivity edition on readers.

It should be noted that the immense majority of readers were not aware of these changes until the *Telegraph's* report was published. The only notification regarding the alterations appears printed in small size letters at the bottom of the copyright page of the censored books. The notice reads, "Words matter. (...) 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" (Dahl, 2023: viii).

This note is obscure. The chosen verb to describe the sensitivity editing is "to review." Reviewing something is not the same as editing, removing or replacing something. The notice does not clearly state that they have censored certain parts of the book nor the detailed reasons and criteria for the modifications. Thus, it remains ambiguous and subjective.

Following the public debate sparked by the report, Penguin Random House reprinted the unrevised editions in 2024 under The Roald Dahl Classic Collection. The MD of Penguin Random House Children's said that "by making both Puffin and Penguin versions available, we are offering readers the choice to decide

how they experience Roald Dahl's magical, marvellous stories" (Penguin, 2023). Nevertheless, the specific changes to Dahl's books have not been publicly revealed by the publishing house.

The revised version will be kept in the children's collection with a colourful book cover, while the original, having beige tones and reissued by an adult imprint, will be located in the adult section. The censored version will be, therefore, the primordial choice, being placed in the children's section. The classic reprint collection will probably fade away and we will have to wait until Dahl's books enter the public domain to observe the response of the public to the original versions.

Regarding copyright, Smith notes that editors can claim copyright in the new editions of classic books to extend exclusivity and delay their release into the public domain (2024, 19). However, in the case of the sensitivity editing of Dahl's children's books, there might not be enough significant changes to legally create copyrightable derivative works. However, they could still claim rights to the original underlying work (Smith, 2024). This would extend the benefits that copyright bestows, while adapting Dahl's works to new generations of readers to come. Since this is something novel, more research on the legal consequences of editing classic works is needed.

Some believe that if a book is outdated and irrelevant for modern readers, as British writer Philip Pullman claims, it should be allowed to fade away (Khomami, 2023). There are many contemporary writers whose children's books can align with the demands of modern readers. However, there is a market due to Dahl's appeal to nostalgic adults. According to David Mitchell, the rationale for the changes introduced in Dahl's novel is to accommodate to market forces and maximise profit (Khomami, 2023). Netflix, the right holder of Dahl's stories, has announced their aspiration to create profitable cultural products to expand Dahl universe to be enjoyed by contemporary consumers. Retrofitting existing literature is the new trend which seems to be more lucrative than creating completely new narrative universes.

As aforementioned, the editorial changes in Dahl's books lack transparency with the readership as they fail to identify the elements considered unsuitable for children that required to be removed. This lack of transparency can be considered censorship. Therefore, this paper will analyse *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* in detail, comparing the changes made between the 2001 and 2023 editions. The 2001 edition was selected over the original because it serves as a midpoint in the book's editorial evolution. It is widely accessible and incorporates earlier revisions, allowing for a clearer assessment of the more recent alterations. The book itself was selected for several reasons: It is one of Dahl's best-known and best-selling works; it has been subject of critical scrutiny and editorial intervention, particularly due to its portrayal of the Oompa Loompas as colonial slaves. Dahl himself revised elements related to the Oompa Loompas, and the illustrations were also modified.

Finally, its cultural relevance persists today, as demonstrated by a variety of contemporary intertextual adaptations. The recent film prequel *Wonka* (2023) reveals the enduring popularity. Since Warner Bros. acquired the intellectual property in 2016, the story expanded into a broader media franchise, including two video games (1985; 2005), two musicals (2004; 2013), the opera *The Golden Ticket* (2010); and four films (1917; 2005; 2017; 2023). Additionally, Wes Anderson released four short film adaptations in 2023.

2. Methodological approach

With a focus on sensitivity editing, this article offers a methodological framework for the comparative analysis of the 2001 and 2023 editions of *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. The approach is grounded in a comparative close reading of both editions to identify and categorise editorial decisions typically made during the reedition of a children's classics. Close reading is understood as an informed, detailed examination of textual elements and their impact on the reading experience (Lucas, 1990; Jasinski,

2001; Smith, 2016). The analysis is further guided by MacLeod's (1994) list of taboos in children's literature and López's (2000) classification of motivations behind modifications in translated editions.

Although the initial focus was on verbal language, it became essential to include paratextual elements, following Lefevere's (1992) theoretical contribution to translation studies. The analysis considers the cleansing related to problematic topics such as political correctness (Machado, 2015), child protection and violence (Travalia, 2019; Ruiz Arriaza, 2020). The framework also draws on scholarship on censorship (See Moore, 2015; Erlanson et al., 2020; Steel & Petley, 2023). However, while most research focuses on book bans, this study examines the intrasemiotic re-writing. Hence, the following categorisation provides a basis for systematic analysis for future comparative studies.

- Deleting, changing and softening categorical assertions and words with a categorical meaning.
- Deleting and softening ableist language.
- Deleting and changing offensive language related to body image
- Deleting and changing offensive language related to racism
- Deleting and changing sexist language for inclusive language.
- Changing sexual language for innocuous expressions.
- Deleting language designating dangerous objects and violence
- Discarding an American term in favour of a British English one.
- Changing old-fashioned expressions for updated expressions.
- Changing ambiguous expressions for self-explanatory ones.
- Correction of corrupted words.

3. Charlie and the Chocolate Factory: A comparative analysis

Although *The Telegraph* published several examples of the alterations, it overlooked numerous modifications (Cumming, 2023). Thus, this paper presents a comprehensive analysis of all detected changes, using the methodological framework outlined in the previous section.

At first glance, it can be observed that the new version has altered the book's cover, title page, page layout and added a bonus chapter. This chapter, "Spotty Powder", belongs to an early draft of the story in which other children, such as Miranda Mary Piker, appear visiting the chocolate factory. In addition to these elements, they also included a recipe of Hair Cream to advertise the new recipe book *Marvellously Revolting Recipes* (2023).

Regarding the book cover, the 2023 paperback edition includes a gold-glitter finish, vibrant colours, a capitalised title with relatively bigger letter size than the old cover design (Dahl, 2001: i; 2023: i). Interestingly, in contrast to the 2001 version, the new book cover design places the author's name at the foreground. Overall, both covers invite readers to read the book, but they have different marketing strategies and design, also signalling a shift in aesthetics.

Besides, the illustration on the title page in the bowdlerised edition differs from the one in the 2001 edition. Rather than depicting Charlie alone, the revised edition presents an illustration of Charlie and Willy Wonka (Dahl, 2001: v; 2023: vii). This modification reshapes the focus of the narrative, giving more prominence to Willy Wonka and emphasizing their relationship. The fact that Charlie is no longer standing alone could also be interpreted as a departure from his image of resilience, being a child hero able to navigate and overcome challenges without an adult figure.

Considering page layout, the new edition has a running head with the book's title on the verso and the chapter's title on the recto. The new version has included a drop cap at the beginning of each chapter and the chapter heads are capitalised (Dahl, 2023).

Moreover, the first page of the 2023 version presents an invitation to personalise the book by signing the book's owner name in the designated space. The prompt states, "QUICK! MISCHIEF MAKERS, SIGN HERE so everyone knows this book belongs TO YOU" (Dahl 2023: iii). By urging children to write their names, it emphasises the importance of book ownership and personal property.

Both editions contain the much-cherished illustrations by Quentin Blake (1932). The English illustrator, who became the first Children's Laureate in 1999, is characterised by his free-wheeling and sketchy drawing style, expressive black ink lines and watercolour shading. Nevertheless, he was not the original illustrator of *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. The first edition published in the US in 1964 contains Joseph Schneiderman's illustrations. These original drawings differed from the following ones, particularly in the depiction of the Oompa Loompas, which will be discussed in this paper. It was not until 1995 that Blake's illustrations were incorporated to the story. Some believe that Blake's lively and whimsical illustrations heavily contributed to the lasting fame of Dahl's stories. Possibly, that is why a short biography appears below Dahl's in the new edition (Dahl, 2023: iii).

As this paper will prove, some elements in several illustrations have been erased in the 2023 edition. As a matter of fact, it seems that Quentin Blake is a supporter of the cosmetic edits of Dahl's stories since there is a testimonial of him on the website of Inclusive Minds claiming that

Books offer children a way of exploring and understanding the world. We owe it to them to ensure that those books include everyone. Which is why I support Inclusive Minds in helping ensure that all children can see themselves reflected in stories and pictures (Inclusive Minds n.d.).

The results of the comparative analysis of the two editions of *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* based on the methodological framework are the following:

3.1. *Censoring categorical assertions*

Categorical assertions are defined as the statements whose meaning is absolutely certain. In categorical logic, sentences usually simplify complex ideas, clearly establishing the relationship between two categorical terms, the subject and the predicative. Categorical claims can be classified in the four Aristotelian propositions: universal affirmative, universal negative, particular affirmative or particular negative proposition.

In this book, the sentence “Mr Bucket was the only person in the family with a job” (Dahl, 2001: 15) was deleted due to its categorical and potentially offensive assertion. This statement might overlook the essential unpaid labour of other family members, such as house chores and caring for children and elderly parents, which has been typically undertaken by women. Therefore, it could be offensive as it devalues the work of Mrs Bucket who do not have an employment outside the home but contributes to the family giving care for Charlie, Granpa George, Granma Georgina, Granpa Joe and Granma Josephine. Another sentence that has been tampered is “Like all extremely old people, he was delicate and weak” (Dahl, 2001: 22). The new edition changed the word “all” for “most” to avoid making a universal affirmative statement, acknowledging that there are elderly people who may not be fragile and vulnerable (Dahl, 2023: 18).

On another occasion, when Granpa Joe is describing the shadows of the Oompa Loompas in the factory, Charlie asserts that “There aren’t any such people” (Dahl, 2001: 31). However, this universal negative dismisses the existence of “little people”. To soften this assertion, the new version deleted Charlie’s exclamatory sentence. He says instead, “Tell me more about these people” (Dahl, 2023: 36). This sentence recognises human diversity and shows an open-minded approach to the topic.

The last instance of softening categorical assertions appears when the leader of the tribe accepts Wonka’s offer saying, ““It’s a deal!” he cried.” (Dahl, 2001: 95). In contrast, the leader of the tribe does not categorically agree with Wonka’s proposal, as he

demands to consult the rest of the Oompa Loompa community before committing to work for Wonka. He says, "Let's go and ask the others. But I think it's a deal!" (Dahl, 2023: 142). This modification underscores the importance of making collective and consensual decision, avoiding unilateral impositions exercised by a ruler.

3.2. *Deleting or softening ableist language*

Ableist language is a pervasive part of the lexicon. It refers to the words and phrases that systematically devalue and undermine people with a disability. Words, such as "lame", "insane" and "stupid", are used casually as pejorative metaphors resulting in linguistic microaggressions since they equal disability to a negative denotation.

All these ableist expressions have been removed and replaced to halt the perpetuation of ableism, thereby refuting the idea that individuals who have a disability are inferior. Some people believe that eliminating ableist language from our mental lexicon is a crucial part to dismantle ableism from the society.

The adjective "monstrous" was deleted to abate ableism in the phrase "his face was like a monstrous ball of dough" (Dahl, 2001: 36; 2023: 43). Monstrosity tends to be displayed by facial or mental disabilities, and it is used to refer to unnatural, or deformed beings. This perpetuates ableism since evil and darkness is portrayed by the physical and mental differences that may characterise some people with a disability.

The word "crazy" has been subject of censorship since denigrates people with psychiatric disabilities or mental illnesses. For example, in "The crazy prince" and "Are you crazy?" the adjective was erased (Dahl, 2001: 26, 65; 2023: 25, 89). On some occasions, "crazy" was replaced; for example, a "crazy Indian prince" (Dahl, 2001: 23), became a "ridiculously rich" one (Dahl, 2023: 22). Another editorial decision was to soften it with "bizarre" (Dahl, 2001: 30, 177; 2023: 34, 277). Lastly, the reference to the Oompa-Loompas being "crazy about" cacao (Dahl, 2001:

95) was replaced by “the Oompa-Loompas loved this particular food” (Dahl, 2023: 140).

Aside from the bowdlerising this adjective, other words referencing people with a mental health condition were censored. In the unexpurgated version, “the Oompa-Loompas were all rowing like mad” (Dahl, 2001: 111), while they “were all rowing frantically” in the new edition (Dahl, 2023: 168). The allusion to “dotty” (Dahl, 2001: 24) was deleted in the new edition. By the same token, the phrase “just don’t install the idiotic thing at all” (171) was eliminated as it contains the adjective “idiotic”, an ableist slur that refers to intellectually disabled people. Similarly, the word “dumb” and the idea that Miss Bigelow “spend her life shut up in some / Disgusting sanatorium” was removed for the same reason (Dahl, 2001: 129).

The mention to a hearing impairment was deleted in the phrase: “But Augustus was deaf to everything” (Dahl, 2001: 97) and replaced with “ignoring everything” (Dahl, 2023: 145). Interestingly, the sentence “I am a little deaf in my left ear” (Dahl, 2001: 158) was transformed into “You do tend to mumble” (Dahl, 2023: 252). However, mumbling could indicate a mental illness and be a symptom of speech sound disorder such as dysarthria. Thus, this substitution of a reference to deafness with mumbling may not be the most appropriate choice if the aim is to avoid ableist language.

3.3. Offensive language

Regarding offensive language that has been censored either by deleting or replacing it with more sensitive language, two thematic groups stand out. Firstly, offensive language related to body image and secondly, the multiple racist and colonial references.

3.3.1. Deleting and changing offensive language related to physical appearance

Concerning physical appearance, many instances identified as body shaming and fatphobia have been removed from the

2023 edition. Body shaming refers to the long-standing prejudice and disapproval of non-conventional body shapes, while fatphobia defines the discrimination and stigmatisation of obesity. Today, it is recognised that society humiliates and regularly comments on body size and shape, particularly shaming people for being overweight.

Fatphobic and fat-shaming comments in the children's book have been deleted. As a matter of fact, the most common word removed in the new version was the term "fat". For instance, the description of Augustus Gloop as a "nine-year-old boy who was so enormously fat" (Dahl, 2001: 36) was transformed into being "enormous" (Dahl, 2023: 43), and he has "Great fold bulged out from every part of his body" (43) instead of having "great flabby folds of fat" (Dahl, 2001: 36). In addition, "the call of this enormous stomach" (Dahl, 2001: 97) was censored.

Augustus Gloop is characterised as being a glutton for chocolate and obese. As with all characters, Dahl exaggerated his defining features, even creating a caricature, in order to produce interest, funny moments and engage young readers. Thus, the term "fat" is repeated to describe Augustus as well as to portray Mr and Mrs Salt. The new edition deleted the word "fat" in the phrases: "Who's the big fat boy?" (Dahl, 2001: 77), "She shot out a fat hand" (122), "Mrs Salt was a great fat creature" (137), "his fat wife" (145), and "He used to be fat!" (182) (To compare see Dahl, 2023: 112, 190, 216, 229, 295).

Additionally, the distinctive song the Oompa Loompas sing when Augustus Gloop was pulled into the pipe was modified. The sensitivity editing changed offensive phrases including words as "pig" to refer to the child and verbs such as "to gorge and guzzle" related to eating in large quantities with voraciousness and greed: "How long could we allow this beast/ To gorge and guzzle, feed and feast/ On everything he wanted to?/ (...) However long this pig might live,/ We're positive he'd never give/ Even the smallest bit of fun/Or happiness to anyone" (Dahl, 2001: 104). This extract of the song was replaced by "For one such

child as vile as he/ Bad things happen, wait and see!/ We cannot say we are surprised,/ Augustus Gloop had been advised./ But then he took another sip/And now he's going on a trip" (Dahl, 2023: 155-156).

Moreover, the following description of the shopkeeper was completely censored due to the focalisation on fatness: "The man behind the counter looked fat and well-fed. He had big lips and fat cheeks and a very fat neck. The fat around his neck bulged out all around the top of his collar like a rubber ring" (Dahl, 2001: 62). The subsequent references to the shopkeeper accompanied by the adjective "fat" were deleted as well (Dahl, 2001: 63, 65; 2023: 89, 95). It should be mentioned that the illustration of the shopkeeper depicting him as an obese adult was not altered (Dahl, 2001: 63; 2023: 87).

To further illustrate instances of offensive language related to body image, there are examples of shaming for thinness and height-shaming. Even though thinness has been mocked, the 2023 edition did not sanitise the majority of those extracts. To illustrate an example, the new version deleted the exclamatory sentence "Now he's thin as a straw!" (Dahl, 2001: 182).

Regarding height-shaming comments, they suffered more censorship. In particular, the references to the Oompa Loompas' size have been removed or altered. These comments regarding the Oompa Loompas' size could be viewed as offensive and potentially racist language. Some examples of references to body size are the followings: "Hundreds of Ooma-Loompa children no more than four inches high playing in the streets" (154) which was transformed into "Hundreds of Oompa-Loompa children playing in the streets" (Dahl, 2023: 244). The word "tiny" is replaced by "little" on many occasions (Dahl, 2001: 92, 102, 171; to compare see 2023: 136, 152, 275). Surprisingly, there is an instance in which the term "tiny" is chosen to substitute "midget" when referring to Mike Teavee's size (Dahl, 2001: 166; 2023: 269).

The sensitivity editing aimed to remove the disapproval and humiliation of non-conventional body shapes and promote body

neutrality. Nonetheless, Augustus Gloop and other characters are still being mocked for being under or overweight.

Apart from those alterations, Wonka's affirmation that "there'll be no excuse anymore for little boys and girls going about with bald heads!" (117) could be considered offensive. It imposes beauty standards and discriminatory. Children may experience hair loss due to many reasons such as medical treatments or genetic conditions. Thus, baldness should not be perceived as something negative. This reference to baldness resonates with the sensitivity censorship towards the idea that witches are the only people using wigs in *The Witches*. Nowadays, observations on someone's baldness are considered sex-related harassment in some countries.

3.3.2. Deleting and changing offensive language related to racism and colonialism

Among the offensive language deleted there are many racist words and expressions that have been modified due to sensitivity reasons. In fact, this category suffered the most changes. In particular, this paper could identify numerous modifications related to the portrayal of the Oompa-Loompas.

The depiction of the Oompa-Loompas was already controversial when the first edition of the book was published in 1964. Originally, the Oompa-Loompas were black pygmies imported from an unknown part of the African continent. The NAACP found it offensive, claiming that it reinforced racist stereotypes denigrating African Americans. As a result of the public criticism, the Oompa-Loompas became orange-skinned beings with green hair coming from Loompaland in the 1971 film *Willy Wonka & the Chocolate Factory*. Regarding the children's book, Dahl revised it and accepted some changes. In the 1973 edition of the book, the Oompa-Loompas came from Loompaland and were not black-skinned. The illustrations of the Oompa-Loompas by Schindelman accommodated the new narrative, showing white-skinned Oompa-Loompas in the 1973 version.

When the book was reissued with new illustrations, Blake decided to maintain the Oompa-Loompas with rose-white skin. They are described as “no larger than medium-size dolls”, “showing beautiful white teeth”, rosy-white skin, golden brown long hair and wearing “the usual deerskin” (Dahl, 2001: 92, 101-102). Today, the new edition has deleted the references to their appearance, but Blake’s illustrations remain the same (Dahl, 2023: 152). In contrast to these cultural representations, Tim Burton’s film (2005) cast Deep Roy, a Kenyan-British actor of Indian descent, to portray the Oompa-Loompas.

In terms of clothing, the older edition mentions that they “wear the same kind of clothes they wore in the jungle” (96). Namely, Wonka explains that “The men, as you can see for yourselves across the river, wear only deerskins. The women wear leaves, and the children wear nothing at all. The women use fresh leaves every day...” (96). Both quotations have been completely removed as it was considered insensitive and offensive (See Dahl, 2023: 139, 140). Similarly, the description of the tribe leader as a “poor little fellow, looking thin and starved” (Dahl, 2001: 95) was eliminated.

It should be highlighted that the expurgated edition removed and softened other distinctive characteristics and material. While in the previous edition the Oompa-Loompas were “imported direct from Loompaland” (Dahl, 2001: 93), the new version changes the meaning removing the idea of being imported. It is stated that “They come from Loompaland” (Dahl, 2023: 138). Instead of being shipped “in large packing cases with holes in them” (2001: 95), they “agreed to come over” (2023: 142). Hence, the aim of these deletions is to eliminate the colonial and racial implications.

Moreover, the sensitivity editing wanted to avoid othering the Oompa-Loompas. An illustrative example appears when Willy Wonka explains that he tried an experimental food on “an Ooma-Loompa yesterday in the Testing Room and immediately a huge black beard started shooting out of his chin” (Dahl, 2001: 117). The editors changed this offensive image for a more

inclusive one modifying the narrative. In the new version, Wonka tried it himself (Dahl, 2023: 178-179). Thus, they did not want to show an unethical human experimentation on subordinate workers.

Besides that, in order to remove the idea that they were uncivilised people, in the new edition they no longer “spent every moment of their days climbing through the treetops” (2001: 93) nor “living in a tree-house village” (95). By the same token, Willy Wonka invites the Oompa-Loompas “to come with me” (Dahl, 2023: 140) rather than saying to “come back to my country” (2001: 95). There are power dynamics implied in these sentences. The 2023 chosen phrase indicates an affable invitation, while the older expression might carry connotations of cultural superiority and ownership. Besides, Wonka offered them an endless supply of cacao beans claiming that the Oompa-Loompas “can gorge [themselves] silly on them” (Dahl, 2001: 95). This expression was erased in the 2023 version as it could be offensive, suggesting a mockery for their eating preferences inadvertently perpetuating harmful stereotypes. Considering damaging stereotypes, the idea that “they’re as drunk as lords” (Dahl, 2001: 137) was also censored not only due to the propagation of racial stereotyping, but also due to the encouragement for alcohol consumption among children.

Also, the servant-like call to summon an Oompa-Loompa has been edited. In the older version, it says that “Mr Wonka turned around and clicked his finger sharply, click, click, click, three times. Immediately, an Oompa-Loompa appeared, as if from nowhere, and stood beside him” (Dahl, 2001: 101). Conversely, in the new edition there is a different situation. “Mr Wonka turned around as an Oompa-Loompa appeared, as if from nowhere, and stood beside him” (2023: 152). The plausible for this modification is that the former one was a condescending and disrespectful attitude potentially offensive and racist. The way the Oompa-Loompa is being called could symbolise their condition of servitude. This idea is reinforced by the narrator that tells the

readers that “the Oompa-Loompa bowed and smiled” (101). In many cultures, bowing is a symbol of veneration and subordination. Needless to say, this sentence was deleted in the 2023 version of the book.

Despite the numerous changes, the editing is unsuccessful. The new edition carries the same racial and colonial connotations: The Oompa-Loompas are still a tribe living in the jungle. They love cacao beans, and they were imported to work in a factory for a white man as a replacement of white labour. It seems reasonable to believe that the underlying colonial and racist elements can be perceived by children today.

Apart from being unsuccessful deleting racist imagery, it could be argued that the new edition could contribute to the dehumanisation of the Oompa-Loompas since they are not defined as people, just as factory workers without agency nor voice. The affirmation “Of course they’re real people” (Dahl, 2001: 92) was deleted. Now, they are labour, as Wonka says, “they love it here. They are wonderful workers” (Dahl, 2023: 142).

There were other alterations made related to offensive language used to refer to children. Namely, the Oompa-Loompas sing a song in which the following chunk was completely removed: “But this revolting boy, of course,/ Was so unutterably vile,/ So greedy, foul, and infantile,/ He left a most disgusting taste/ Inside our mouths, and so in haste/ We chose a thing that, come what may./ Would take the nasty taste away” (Dahl, 2001: 104). The adjectives used to describe Augustus Gloop in this song might have been considered too cruel and malicious. Likewise, the word “brat” and “beast” to mention this child were removed from the song (104). In fact, it could be argued that the term “beast” is part of the ableist language as well.

3.4. Deleting sexist language. Changing sexist language for inclusive language

Roald Dahl’s book displays sexist and gender-discriminatory language that fosters stereotypes and demeans a particular

gender. Therefore, the 2023 edition has deleted sexist language from *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. The plausible aim of these alterations is to transform the story into a more inclusive and updated one. The comparison reveals that most changes favour gender-neutral language, promoting not gender-specific vocabulary. There were also some examples of gender-sensitive language that treats genders equally.

Regarding gender-neutral language, the revised edition has replaced the pronoun “he” for “they”. The pronoun “he” is deleted to refer to unknown people because it omits women and non-binary people. One clear example appears when Willy Wonka says that a “grown-up person won’t listen to me; he won’t learn. He will try to do think his own way” (Dahl, 2001: 185). In the 2023 version, Wonka says, a “grown-up person won’t listen to me; they won’t learn. They will try to do think their own way” (Dahl, 2023: 300). This modification of the referent includes gender identity, while the older version could be perceived as only referring to men. Similarly, editorial changes have substituted the word “men” for “people” and “man” for “person” when referring to unidentified individuals or a group of people. For example, the original expressions “It is a little man! Can you see him?” (Dahl, 2001: 91) has become more inclusive using gender-neutral language. In fact, the expurgated version says, “It is a little person! Can you see them?” (Dahl, 2023: 136).

On another occasion, the term “men” was deleted to favour the gender-neutral word “people”. The resulting sentence is “Mind you, there are thousands of clever people who would give anything for the chance to come in and take over from me” (Dahl, 2023: 300). It should be emphasised that this editorial decision is really illustrative to demonstrate the power of language. In the original version, only clever men could inherit and run the chocolate factory. Now, it is open to anyone, regardless of their gender identity. By the same token, they substituted the gendered noun “women” for “people” and “girls” for “folks”.

To be specific, “A hundred women working for me” (Dahl, 2001: 40) can imply and foster a gender-based hierarchy in which a man, Wonka, is the superior. Hence, the editors did not want to perpetuate unequal power dynamics and represent a discriminatory workplace (Dahl, 2023: 49).

Moreover, some gendered terms describe entities as feminine or masculine, assigning characteristics to a particular gender. Gendered terms might also be used as an insult to imply weakness or inefficiency of a gender if a person does not follow the traditional expectations. The word “ladylike” is a biased term that appears in “My mother says it’s not ladylike” (Dahl, 2001: 48). It could be classified as stereotyping, reinforcing and even dictating the appropriate behaviour women should follow. To replace this term in Dahl’s story, the 2023 edition used the neutral adjective “undignified” (Dahl, 2023: 63). However, “undignified” might still impose traditional gender roles and social expectations on women. It does not completely lack implications and gender connotations. Needless to say, a dignified or undignified behaviour can be ambiguous and constraining.

The textual tampering decided to avoid using gender-discriminatory nouns to refer to groups of people. In the 2023 version, gendered nouns are replaced with gender-neutral words. By way of illustration, “policemen with arms linked” (Dahl, 2001: 75) has been replaced by “police officer with arms linked” (Dahl, 2023: 110). Another instance of the use of gender-neutral words is the following: “All the children, except Charlie, had their parents with them” (Dahl, 2023: 110). The unedited version mentions “both their mothers and fathers” (Dahl, 2001: 75). This example is a case in point. It shows that parents as the gender-neutral option was chosen to acknowledge the different types of families, e.g., married parents, single parents, LGBTIQ+ parents, guardians, or foster parents. Using “parents” is not only more inclusive to respect diverse family structures, but also more sensitive to avoid making assumptions about the gender identity of caregivers and family dynamics.

3.5. *Changing sexual language for innocuous expressions*

The new editions have tried to avoid patronising and sexually objectifying women by using more inoffensive terms. The original version included the following sentences: “She needs a really good spanking” and “She wants a good kick in the pants” (Dahl, 2001: 41, 107). Both phrases are offensive. They promote the sexualisation and objectification of women as well as encouraging physical violence. That is, these expressions are demeaning and diminish women’s agency and respect. Additionally, they perpetuate the image of men exercising control and authority through violence. Hence, the phrases were substantially edited, resulting in the sentences: “She needs a really good talking to” and “She needs to learn some manners” (Dahl, 2023: 51, 171). It deleted the reference to aggressive and violent practices that sexually dehumanise women, using instead innocuous expressions to boost respectful and diplomatic approaches.

Other examples of the removal of sexual language are the descriptions of physical appearance, particularly of certain body parts of women. These descriptions are sexually objectifying, and they are considered sexist microaggressions today. The story’s narrative voice described Violet Beauregarde’s jaws as “huge, well-trained jaws”, and her lips as “huge rubbery lips” (Dahl, 2001: 122, 123). To reduce the influence and exposure to sexual and objectifying comments on physical appearance, the 2023 version deleted the adjectives describing Violet’s jaws and lips (Dahl, 2023: 190, 192).

3.6. *Deleting language designating dangerous objects*

Some children’s books aim to promote positive values and morals. The depiction of dangerous objects such as toy guns contributes to normalising the use of weapons. Therefore, sensitivity editors have removed the depictions of violence and weaponry in the new version of the *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. Namely, the references to Mike Teavee shooting or holding toy

pistols were scrubbed. As an example, the following description was completely removed: “Mike Teavee himself had no less than eighteen toy pistols of various sizes hanging from belts around his body, and every now and again he would leap up into the air and fire off half a dozen rounds from one or another of these weapons” (Dahl, 2001: 49-50).

In order to be coherent, the new edition has also erased the pistols in the illustrations of Mike Teavee. The edited illustrations are displayed on pages 67, 112, 254 270, 296 (Dahl, 2023). The original drawings can be found on pages 50, 77, 158, 167, 182 (Dahl, 2001).

Likewise, other sentences referring to guns were censored such as “Look at all those toy pistols he’s got hanging all over him” and “waving his pistols in the air” (Dahl, 2001: 78, 166). Surprisingly, the whitewashing did not remove a description of film Mike Teavee was watching in which gangsters are shooting at each other. The only censored part was that they were using “machine guns” (Dahl, 2001: 49). The rest remained the same: “He was watching a film in which one bunch of gangsters was shooting up another bunch of gangsters” (Dahl, 2023: 66).

Sensitivity editors opted for the removal of mentions to pistols and other weaponry. A possible reason for this deletion is to curb the association of children and men with weapons and violent behaviour, as well as to dodge any controversy or criticism from advocacy groups, since toy guns for children are still today a contentious subject.

3.7. Discarding an American term in favour of a British English one

Another editorial decision was to change the word “pants” (Dahl, 2001: 72) for “trousers” (2023: 106). Understandably, the edited version was published in the UK; hence, the British term prevailed over the American one. The analysis could not find any other instances that favoured a British term.

3.8. *Changing old-fashioned expressions for updated language*

Sensitivity editors modified words that were deemed to be old-fashioned, too. Namely, they substituted the word “wind-cheater” (Dahl, 2001: 77) with “jacket” (2023: 113). Windcheater is a less common word whose meaning may not be recognised by children. Therefore, jacket seems a more straightforward and commonly used term. Similarly, the dated exclamation to express surprise “Great Scott!” might have been also deleted due to its potential link to religion. It could be an old-fashioned alternative used to avoid blasphemy which children could not be familiar with (Dahl, 2001: 104).

Another word that has been changed is “queer”. Since the 16th century, the term “queer” has meant “strange, peculiar” before acquiring the different meanings related to being not heterosexual. The word has been used in the 19th century as an insult. Today, the LGBTQI+ community has reclaimed the word as an umbrella term for the community and a symbol of pride and political resistance. Nevertheless, the reclamation has been contentious as there is a social divide in the LGBTQI+ community regarding its usage.

In Dahl’s book, “queer” is used referring to the original, old-fashioned meaning. The narrator says, “Then a few queer rumblings were heard” (Dahl, 2001: 119). In another instance, “Charlie experienced a queer sense of danger” (157). To avoid confusions with the contemporary usage, the 2023 edition chose to replace this term with “strange” (Dahl, 2023: 184, 249).

3.9. *Changing ambiguous expressions for self-explanatory ones*

There is an identified change that deals with ambiguity and clarity. The original sentence reads, “Mr Bucket, holding the newspaper up close to his face because his eyes were bad” (Dahl, 2001: 46). Sensitivity editing may have considered the expression “his eyes were bad” problematic. It might be deemed

ableist, since “bad” could be an insensitive and disrespectful for people with eye-related conditions, carrying negative connotations. This adjective, which may be perceived as offensive, could also be interpreted in multiple ways. Therefore, the new version scrubbed it and added for clarity that “he was short-sighted” (Dahl, 2023: 61).

3.10. Correction of corrupted words

In *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, the prince of Pondicherry orders Wonka to build a chocolate palace. The editors decided to update the geographical name to the current name of the region, Puducherry. Puducherry is a territory of India that was part of former French India. The name Puducherry, meaning “new settlement”, was corrupted by the French colonizers. It was galli-cized; thus, the region became known as Pondicherry. After the independence, in 2006, the original name was officially reestablished as part of the renaming of cities in postcolonial India.

In 1964, Pondicherry was the official name. Hence, it is reasonable that Dahl did not use the indigenous term. The 2023 edition modifications support the decolonisation efforts in India updating real allusions for text accuracy. (See Dahl, 2001: 24, 25; 2023: 22-25).

Conclusions

Censorious actions try to operate being imperceptible, editing texts without readers’ awareness. This was evident in the new edition of *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (2023), where substantial alterations were made without public notice. This article developed a methodological framework to examine changes grounded in sensitivity reasons and applied it in a comparative close reading.

The analysis reveals that, despite substantial modifications, censorship fails to erase problematic aspects of Dahl’s work. It still depicts colonialist, fatphobic, racist and sexist discourses. Rather than confronting these issues, the revisions sugarcoat the

text, ultimately deepening the concerns and undermining a historical understanding. It could be even further dehumanising the Oompa-Loompas by reducing them to voiceless workers, reinforcing gender roles, and mocking non-normative bodies. Nonetheless, the new edition distorts Dahl's unique essence, marked by an exaggerated, revolting and sharp-edged storytelling.

In many instances, the changes appear to be driven by the desire to protect young readers from harmful or outdated values, aligning the text to current social norms by using innocuous terms. A smaller subset seemed aimed to improve accessibility, replacing rare words. Although they may help young readers follow the story more easily, these changes were few and assume they need such assistance. As Lawrence (2020) points out, such editorial intervention may violate reader's autonomy and reduce their critical engagement as well as the book's interpretive possibilities. Nevertheless, the editorial decisions appear to have been shaped primarily to maximise the book's marketability and appeal towards modern sensibilities.

These findings echo previous studies on rewritten children's literature (Hiller & McCann, 1994; Tarif, 2018), which similarly analyse censorship shaped by sociocultural anxieties. In all, themes deemed inappropriate for the time are hidden rather than critically engaged with, being readers uninformed of said changes. By removing problematic content, publishers sacrifice potential critical reflection opportunities in favour of avoiding controversy.

Representation and inclusivity matter, but by trying to include contemporary values of inclusivity, the 2023 edition becomes akin to traditional oppressive forms of censorship. It operates through a process of exclusion, posthumously silencing Dahl's voice and perspective, imposing contemporary viewpoints (Burt, 1994). Such bowdlerisation raises questions about the legitimacy to posthumously modify canonical works. It also points to a tension between protecting young readers and fostering their critical thinking skills through exposure to sensitive

material. Rather than sanitising literature, publishers could offer contextual frameworks to actively consume and reflect on the power of literature.

The findings contribute to current debates about sensitivity editing children's books, laying the groundwork for future research into the ethical, legal and pedagogical implications of such interventions. Further studies could also examine copyright extensions of derivative materials (See Smith, 2024), literary heritage control, and whether alternatives, such as content warnings and classroom discussions, could be implemented to fully engage with uncensored literature.

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