

# 23100 Roald Dahl's Books Are Rewritten to Cut Potentially Offensive Language

By Derrick Bryson Taylor, *The New York Times*, Feb. 20, 2023

New editions of the works of Roald Dahl — the best-selling British novelist whose children's classics include *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* and *Matilda* — have been rewritten to make them less offensive and more inclusive.

The changes have prompted widespread criticism from prominent literary figures and others, including Prime Minister Rishi Sunak of Britain. *The Telegraph*, a British newspaper, reported that hundreds of words, including descriptions of characters' appearances, races and genders, had been changed or removed in at least 10 of the author's 19 children's books.

Dahl died in 1990. A review of the author's works began in 2020, before Netflix acquired the Roald Dahl Story Company, which manages the author's copyrights and trademarks, Rick Behari, a company spokesman, said in a statement on Monday. "When publishing new print runs of books written years ago, it's not unusual to review the language used alongside updating other details including a book's cover and page layout," Mr. Behari said.

Changes reported by *The Telegraph* include characters who are no longer described as "fat" and references to "mothers" and "fathers" that have been updated to "parents" or "family." Mr. Behari said that the estate had partnered with Inclusive Minds, an organization that champions diversity and accessibility in children's literature. The group said that it had helped "provide valuable input when it comes to reviewing language that can be damaging and perpetuate harmful stereotypes."

Criticism of the changes was swift. Salman Rushdie, the prizewinning author of *Midnight's Children* and *The Satanic Verses*, called the changes "absurd censorship." Suzanne Nossel, chief executive of PEN America, an organization that supports freedom of expression, said on Twitter that selective editing could "represent a dangerous new weapon." "Those who might cheer specific edits to Dahl's work should consider how the power to rewrite books might be used in the hands of those who do not share their values and sensibilities," she said.

Matthew Dennison, who wrote a biography of Dahl, said by email on Monday that the author was known to have fractious relationships with his editors and disliked anyone tampering with his work. Dahl always resisted unnecessary sanitizing, Mr. Dennison said, noting that the author would recognize that alterations to his novels, brought on by the political climate, reflected adult sensibilities rather than children's misgivings. "I never get any protests from children," Mr. Dahl once said. "All you get are giggles of mirth and squirms of delight. I know what children like."

(405 words)