



# DR MELISSA DERBY: Roald Dahl rewritten: when will this madness end?

"Augustus Gloop is no longer fat, Mrs Twit is no longer fearfully ugly, and the Oompa-Loompas have gone gender-neutral".

Yes, you read that right – the latest body of work to fall prey to the cancel culture busy bodies is that of children's literary genius, Roald Dahl.

Like so many children, I grew up on Roald Dahl books, with my son recently reading (for the third time) my well-worn, dog-eared copy of *The Twits* – a book, I have discovered in adulthood, that's as funny to read aged 41 as it was when I first read it, aged 6. My son, when he got to the final chapter, exclaimed 'This is so funny! I don't want it to end!'

At a time when literacy rates across the country are plummeting, and children who read for pleasure are as rare as a conservative in a humanities department, why, oh why, are we messing with the classics?!

While we can debate whether it's appropriate or not to refer to someone as "fat" (with the holier-than-thou judgment coming down from Dahl's publishing company noting it most certainly is not appropriate), we have got to the point that, in *James and the Giant Peach*, Miss Spider's head is no longer "black" and the Earthworm has given up its "lovely pink" skin for "lovely smooth skin". Last I checked, spiders are often black, if the ones that make a most unwelcome appearance in my home are anything to go by, and earthworms often appear pink in colour. Are the words "pink" and "black" to be insert any colour but black or pink]-listed?

The word "black" took another hit, having been removed from the description of the terrible tractors in *Fantastic Mr. Fox*. The machines are now simply "murderous, brutal-looking monsters". What if, in Roald Dahl's imagination, the tractors were black? A rather pertinent question to ask is 'what was going through the censors' heads if they felt the word 'black' was inappropriate here?' I'm sure that question would make the so-called anti-racist zealots squirm.

Another change is presumably meant to empower women – in *The Witches*, the wording has shifted from "even if she is working as a cashier in a supermarket or typing letters for a businessman" to "even if she is working as a top scientist or running a business". As a girl who devoured Roald Dahl books over and over, I was never 'limited' by the original text. Rather, it was my parents who took responsibility for broadening my horizons, not Roald Dahl.

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I could list other egregious changes, but why bore us all with the nit-picking of the miserable, vocal few? Instead, I'll continue to read my original copies of Dahl's stories with my son so that he can enjoy them in their lively, edgy, wonderfully colourful glory, just as I did.

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