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FEMALE ANIMAL CHARACTERS IN ROALD DAHL'S CHILDREN'S BOOKS: A MISOGYNISTIC PORTRAYAL

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ABSTRACT

Children's literature is of utmost importance in children's development. Apart from introducing them to the world and the emotions and stimulating their imagination, it also mirrors the society they live in and reproduces its social rules and accepted norms. This is especially true when it comes to gender stereotypes, those that display and reinforce the masculine and feminine roles constructed by a given society. This binary, one-dimensional, and conventional representation is harmful to young readers because it negatively impacts their apprehension of gender roles and attributions, their personality, behaviour, and aspirations for the future.

World-renowned children's author Roald Dahl has often been criticised for being both a controversial author and a racist, misogynistic person. By adopting a feminist literary critical approach, this study analyses the way Dahl and his illustrator Quentin Blake portray female anthropomorphic animal characters, generally neglected by previous researchers in favour of human characters, in four books: *James and the Giant Peach* (1961), *The Magic Finger* (1966), *Fantastic Mr. Fox* (1970), and *The Giraffe and the Pelly and Me* (1985). Apart from being barely visible, these female characters are weak, inactive, often useless, and confined indoors, as opposed to their male counterparts, adventurous, leaders, and decisive. Moreover, female characters are constantly belittled, mistreated, and insulted. Therefore, this study proves that children's literature must stop conveying gender stereotypes and offer non-sexist, gender-fair stories that accurately reflect our society and respect characters of all ages, genders, races, and ethnicities, especially women.

KEY WORDS: children's literature, gender stereotypes, gender roles, Roald Dahl, feminism, feminist literary criticism

RESUMEN

La literatura infantil es de mayor importancia en el desarrollo de las niñas y niños. Además de introducirles al mundo y a las emociones y de estimular su imaginación, también refleja la sociedad en la cual viven y reproduce sus reglas sociales y normas aceptadas. Esto aplica especialmente en cuanto a los estereotipos de género, los que exhiben y refuerzan los papeles masculinos y femeninos de una sociedad. Esta representación binaria, unidimensional y convencional es dañina para lectoras y lectores jóvenes porque impacta negativamente su comprensión de los roles y atribuciones de género, su personalidad, comportamiento y aspiraciones para el futuro.

Roald Dahl, el autor infantil mundialmente reconocido, ha sido repetidamente criticado por ser un escritor controversial y una persona racista y misógina. Desde un enfoque feminista crítico literario, esta investigación analiza la representación que Dahl y su ilustrador Quentin Blake hacen de los personajes animales antropomórficos femeninos en *James y el melocotón gigante* (1961), *El dedo mágico* (1966), *El súperzorro* (1970) y *La jirafa, el pelicano y el mono* (1985). Además de ser apenas visibles, estos personajes son débiles, inactivos, inútiles, confinados en interiores y constantemente denigrados por los personajes masculinos, atrevidos, líderes y decisivos. Por lo tanto, esta investigación demuestra que la literatura infantil debe dejar de transmitir estereotipos de géneros y ofrecer historias no sexistas y equitativas que reflejan nuestra sociedad y respetan los personajes, independiente de su edad, género, raza o etnicidad, especialmente las mujeres.

PALABRAS CLAVE: literatura infantil, estereotipos de género, roles de género, Roald Dahl, feminismo, crítica literaria feminista

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INTRODUCTION

Children's literature is an important step in children's development, since it "introduce[s] [them] to the written word, provide[s] entertainment, and stimulate[s] the imagination" (Brugeilles, Cromer & Cromer, 2002, p. 240). Indeed, it familiarizes them with the world and emotions, and it teaches them important values. It also mirrors the society they live in and reproduces its social rules and accepted norms, especially when it comes to gender stereotypes. Female characters are underrepresented and have less interesting roles than male characters, staying at home to take care of the family and household while male characters go outside the house to embark on adventures and take risks (Kneeskem & Reeder, 2020, par. 1). Such representation definitely has a negative impact on how children apprehend gender roles and attributions by reinforcing their gender bias in real life, affecting their career aspirations, attitudes, personality, and choices in the future (Hamilton & Anderson, 2006, p. 757).

A number of best-selling authors of children's literature have influenced and inspired generations of young readers around the world, such as J. K. Rowling, René Goscinny, C.S. Lewis, Isabel Allende, Beatrix Potter, Alma Flor Ada, Alexander Pushkin, Stephenie Meyer, Ruskin Bond, Gloria Anzaldúa, Yang Hongying, and Lewis Carroll, to cite a few. One of those who have best managed to create an entire universe is Roald Dahl. With his books translated into more than 59 languages (BBC News, 2015) and sold at more than 250 million copies (Slater, 2020), Dahl has been read by millions of children around the world. His stories were adapted for television and cinema and they have influenced many authors; today, Dahl is still one of the best-selling children's authors (BBC News, 2016). However, his books are much criticized, deemed disturbing, outrageous, violent, and showing too much pain (Casulli, 2015, p. 5), and so is his personality. His first wife called him "Roald the Rotten" to refer to his misogyny, cheating, bullying, arrogance, and anti-Semitism (Anderson, 2016). The Dahl family and the Roald Dahl Story Company released an official statement in December 2020 to denounce and apologize for the writer's anti-Semitic views and declarations ("Apology for anti-Semitic comments made by Roald Dahl", 2020). Nevertheless, even though Dahl's anti-Semitism did not deeply mark his books, his misogyny very much did (Kerridge, 2020).

While Dahl's stereotypical and misogynistic depiction of women has been greatly debated when it comes to *The Witches*, *Matilda*, and *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (Mulders, 2016; Þórðardóttir, 2019; Stauri, 2020), the anthropomorphic animal characters have generally been neglected. Anthropomorphism, or giving animals and objects human characteristics, is much used in children's literature to "soften the didactic tone and ease the

tension raised by dealing with issues not yet fully resolved or socially controversial” (Burke & Copenhaver, 2004, p. 210). Reading about animals who act like humans allows children to both understand how their society works and to emotionally distance themselves from the characters (*ibid.*, p. 213). But this detachment might be even more harmful when it comes to gender stereotypes and misogyny.

Our hypothesis is that Dahl’s anthropomorphic animal characters, both male and female, are highly stereotypical. While male animals are stronger, adventurous, and resourceful, female animals are less significant to the storyline, dependent, and obedient, and their depiction more often than not falls into misogyny. Therefore, our first objective will be to systematically review Roald Dahl’s portrayal of animal characters with a special emphasis on female ones in *James and the Giant Peach* (1961), *The Magic Finger* (1966), *Fantastic Mr. Fox* (1970), and *The Giraffe and the Pelly and Me* (1985). The second objective will be to determine to which extent their description is stereotypical and misogynistic. Since Dahl’s work is strongly connected with Quentin Blake’s illustrations, the visual representations will also be taken into account in order to ascertain whether they support, intensify, or lessen Dahl’s misogynistic depictions.

To this end, the first chapter is devoted to defining some fundamental terms in any feminist study related to gender and sexism; it also analyses gender stereotypes in children’s literature, especially in Britain, and their impact on children’s cognitive development. The second chapter gives a general socio-historical overview of feminism and its different waves before zooming in on Feminist literary criticism, its origins, and its aims, from the 18th-century proto-feminist Mary Wollstonecraft to Kate Millet in the 1970s and Elaine Showalter in the 1990s. The third chapter is dedicated to Roald Dahl’s life and prominent role in British children’s literature as well as the controversy around his books and his personality. The darkness and violence of his characters and stories on the one hand and the materialisation of his racist and misogynistic opinions on the other hand have made some doubt Dahl’s appropriateness for young readers. The fourth and main part of this study reviews and analyses Dahl’s depiction of female animal characters, independently as well as in comparison with male animal characters. It also examines whether there was an evolution of this portrayal from the early 1960s to the mid-1980s, since the four selected were published between 1961 and 1985.

1. GENDER STEREOTYPES IN BRITISH CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

Children's literature has a long lasting influence on its young readers' cognitive development, which is why the messages it conveys must be carefully evaluated and crafted. Many problems denounced in today's society that are related to gender, gender identity, gender role, gender stereotypes, and misogyny are commonplace in children's books. Therefore, it is not surprising to keep seeing them in our everyday life. This chapter defines the terms mentioned above and focuses on the way children's literature in Britain preserves and expresses gender stereotypes. Then, it explains how the rise of successive feminist movements and theories in the late 60s and early 70s in Great Britain stimulated the flourishing of feminist literary theories, which aimed at reconsidering the portrayal of female characters in literature, challenging culture constructed gender roles, and widening the field of literary studies.

1.1. Terminology: Defining the Terms

1.1.1. *Gender, Gender Role, and Gender Identity*

An increased interest around the concept of gender and its fluidity can be noticed in western societies around the end of the 20th century and beginning of the 21st century. Gender is commonly opposed to another concept that many people tend to confuse, sex. While sex is biologically assigned to a baby at its birth (male or female), *gender* is what Wolfreys et al. (2006) define as the "cultural constitution of notions concerning femininity or masculinity" (p. 45). In other words, it represents "the socially acceptable, and socially acquired, forms of being either male or female" (p. 45), that is to say, the clothes, activities, career, studies, behaviour, and interests that make you a "true" man or woman in the eyes of the society. Klages (2012) adds that gender is a "binary structure for assigning social meaning to biologically dimorphic bodies" (p. 29), and Cranny-Francis et al. (2003) deplore the fact that "[e]very human body in modern societies is assigned a place in a binary structure of gender" (p. 1).

Following the rules of your assigned sex is a way to fit in the social mould and maintain a certain "status quo in society" (Wolfrey et al., 2006, p. 45). This idea of separating one's biological sex from their gender was revolutionary when Beauvoir formulated it in 1949 in her essay *The Second Sex*, since it clearly distinguished the ideas of being *female* and being *woman* (Mercier, 2015, par.4). The opening sentence of Beauvoir's second opus, "One is not born a woman, but becomes one" (1949, p. 6), establishes a clear difference between what makes you,

biologically and socially, a woman or a man. To her, we are born female, but we *become* women by learning –or being taught– how to match the expectations of society regarding our biological sex. This learning process starts in the earliest stages of childhood and is known as gender role, or what a given society expects its members to look like, dress, behave, speak, and think in order to match one’s biological sex. Western societies view men as strong, decided, ambitious, risk-taking, money-driven, and protective; on the other hand, women are supposed to be shy, discreet, creative, smiley, motherly, elegant, and submissive. Every culture has a different vision of what male and female members should look like, and how they should behave. Nonetheless, they all have this point in common: gender is socially and culturally *constructed* (Fallaize, 2007, p. 84), and it is performed as an “act” – hence the concept of *gender performativity* – (Butler, 2006, p. 200) to match society’s expectations rather than one’s true gender identity.

Gender identity is the way one feels about his gender. Wood & Eagly (2015) explain that when members of a society internalize the different meanings associated with a gender or the other, “gender becomes part of their identities” (p. 461). However, they may or may not feel that their gender identity matches their sex and its associated gender role. Today gender is understood as being much more fluid and complex than simply binary. Gender identities include cisgender, transgender, agender, gender non-conforming, non-binary, gender fluid, Two-Spirit, or gender queer (Ghosh, 2020, par. 1).

Already in the 18th century, Mary Wollstonecraft studied and denounced the degrading effects of gendered identity on both men and women – although it is much worse for women. To this influential proto-feminist and pioneer in feminism, feminist literary criticism, and the vision of gender in general, qualities and virtues are not gendered by nature. She defended the fact that gender does not exist in the mind or soul (Manly, 2007, p. 50) and sees it as a “prison” (p. 51). She strongly believed that the overcoming of the different stereotypes associated with each gender would allow everyone to fully develop their talent and capabilities (p.51). Unfortunately, gender is still widely pictured as solely binary and stereotypically constructed.

1.1.2. Stereotype and Gender Stereotype

Merriam-Webster defines a *stereotype* as “something conforming to a fixed or general pattern”. Then, it adds that a *stereotype* is especially “a standardized mental picture that is held in common by members of a group and that represents an oversimplified opinion, prejudiced

attitude, or uncritical judgment”. Thus, stereotypes help us create a mental preconception of an individual or a group according to how others visualise them and spread this vision.

Culture and society create and disseminate stereotypical conceptions of their members according to their race, class, or gender. Regarding the latter, masculine and feminine roles are influenced in every sphere of our life, be it public or private, through literature, cinema, TV, toys, music, sports, grammar, politics, etc. Cranny-Francis et al. (2003) say that our western gendered system “organises virtually every realm of our lives; whether we are sleeping, eating, watching TV, shopping or reading, gender is at work. Yet because it is everywhere, it is sometimes difficult to see it in operation” (p. 1). Therefore, the pernicious, overwhelming importance of gender and its associated gender roles have led to a generalisation and normalisation of gender stereotypes in our everyday life and activities.

Regarding our character, men are always pictured as “the heroes of Westerns, hard-boiled private eyes, and British secret agents”, while women are shown and thought of as “timid, dependent, irrational, and self-pitying” (Bertens, 2014, p. 85). As far as sexual drive is concerned, masculine sexuality is competitive and aggressive, while feminine sexuality is defined by “lack (of phallus) and passivity” (Wolfreys et al. 2006, p. 90). At work, men are rational, ambitious, and powerful, while women are hysterical, selfish, and incapable of handling responsibilities. In poetry, women are fragile and insipid creatures that the poet worships; in movies, they are terrified and in need of protection. To conclude with this constructed image of “a man” and “a woman” that our culture reflects, “a masculine gendering is supposed to evoke positive connotations; a feminine gendering is supposed to evoke negative ones” (Bertens, 2014, p. 85). We can add that stereotypes can be extremely hurtful, in particular when it comes to gender.

1.1.3. Misogyny and Sexism

Our western world is based on binary oppositions: white/black, colonizer/colonized, rich/poor, manager/worker, and, in the case of gender, men/women. As Wolfreys et al. (2006) mention it, the first term of each binary opposition is “privileged hierarchically over the other” (p. 18). Indeed, with men/women, “we have an implicit opposition in which the masculine term is the privileged one” (Bertens, 2014, p. 113). Culture, society, and history have always put men in the spotlight as being kings, leaders, managers, hunters, heads of family, providers, athletes, in short, superior to women and in charge of them. Men have been, for millennia, the directors, actors, producers, and spectators of a movie in which women hardly got minor parts.

The world was led and designed by men and for men. “Why is it a ‘discman’ not a ‘discwoman’ or a ‘discgirl’? Why is a ‘gameboy’ not a ‘gamegirl’?” asks Bertens (2014, p. 113). Why do we find, in so many languages that distinguish masculine and feminine, the same rule of “the masculine prevails”?

This idea that men are superior to women has led to sexism and misogyny. Both terms are often mistaken and used interchangeably, but they have a slight difference in meaning. Savigny (2020) notices that “misogyny and sexism are analytically and ontologically separable, while ideologically linked” (p. 3). Indeed, whereas Merriam-Webster defines *sexism* as “prejudice or discrimination based on sex, *especially*: discrimination against women”, *misogyny* is a “hatred of, aversion to, or prejudice against women”. Although it has existed for millennia, the term *misogyny* was popularised after the publication of Andrea Dworkin’s book *Woman Hating* in 1974, in which the author explains and criticises the long-standing, systematic, and institutionalised discrimination against women. In other words, sexism is rooted in the belief that men are naturally and biologically superior to women, and misogyny is a “violent expression of sexism” (Savigny, 2020, p. 1), an institutionalised and internalised ideology that enforces sexism. Both can only exist in a patriarchal society, and their consequences affect women in terms of salary, security, or sexuality, for example. Nevertheless, we cannot separate sexism and misogyny from other types of discrimination based on race, class, and physical ability. Not all women experience sexism comparably even though the base is essentially similar (Savigny, 2020, p. 1).

The turn of the 21st century and the advances of feminist movements brought better visibility and legal recognition for women. Therefore, many considered that sexism did not exist anymore because women had reached their goals and had become equal to men. Savigny (2020) considers that the term *sexism* was lost (p. 2) in the “postfeminist” era when feminism was not considered necessary anymore. But despite what media wanted us to believe, sexism has never disappeared, and it has recently made a huge come-back in the form of “retrosexism”, a need to resettle men’s superiority in front of the threat that the advances of women represent (Whelehan, 2000, cited by Savigny, 2020, p. 2).

1.2. Gender Stereotypes in British Children's Literature

1.2.1. *British Children's Literature*

Children's literature is constituted by "the body of written works and accompanying illustrations produced in order to entertain or instruct young people" (Fadiman, 1998, par. 1). Children's literature encompasses a wide array of genres, types, and themes, but what truly sets it apart is its young readership and the way it is read, "suggesting trance, distinct from that of adult reading" (par. 9).

More often than not, this type of literature has been considered "inferior" along with other genres, such as detection or suspense (Fadiman, 1998, par. 6). Nonetheless, experts all agree on the fact that children's literature aims at instructing and socialising children by entertaining them (Weitzman et al., 1972; Peterson & Lach, 1990; Burke & Copenhaver, 2004; Crippen, 2012; Nebbia, 2016). In this sense, it "mirror[s] the [readers'] world" (Burke & Copenhaver, 2004, p. 206) and transmits "issues of knowledge and social belief" (p. 210).

While many keep considering children's literature as a mere leisure activity, experts urge us to "acknowledge that the body of children's literature reflects contentious issues that reside at the core of our culture. Children deal with these issues seriously through their reading and learning" (Burke & Copenhaver, 2004, p. 210). This is why children's stories that convey gender stereotypes are so detrimental to their young readers because they will shape their beliefs as adults. And unfortunately, gender stereotypes abound in children's literature.

1.2.2. *Gender Stereotypes in Children's Literature*

The long-lasting impact of books on children and the consequences on their development and future make it all the more essential to point out gender stereotypes in children's literature. Through books, very young readers accept such stereotypes and internalise them, which later has negative repercussions on both boys and girls, who feel confined to the role they see represented, though it is evidently more salient for girls (Nebbia, 2016, p. 21).

In 1972, trailblazers in the field of gender representations in children's books Weitzman, Eifler, Hokada & Ross (Hamilton et al., 2006, p. 758) studied what they called "sex-role stereotypes" (Weitwman et al., 1972, p. 1125) in the books winners and runners-up of the prestigious Caldecott Medal, a North-American award given to the most distinguished picture books of the year. Victory assures massive sales for the winner (p. 1127), therefore a widespread

young readership. Even though the authors specify that the Caldecott winners were considerably “less stereotyped than the average book” (p. 1127), their findings unequivocally proved that women were “invisible” (p. 1128). First, they are outnumbered by their male counterparts in the titles, the text, the plot, and the illustrations. Then, they are inactive and homebound, prevented from any action by “frilly, starched, pink dresses” (p. 1137). Always immobile and alone, the way they are represented indicates that “women cannot exist without men” (p. 1136). On the contrary, boys and men carry out varied and interesting activities, from group sports and games to adventures. Finally, adult women have “stereotyped and limited” (p. 1139) roles, reduced to four options only: fairy, mother, godmother, and maiden (p. 1140), functions that are evidently cumulative. Weitzman et al. go as far as to state that the only woman that is not stereotyped “is clearly not a ‘normal’ woman – she is a mythical creature” (p. 1140). Adult men are involved in a vast array of activities and jobs that both require advanced education and grant a higher status level (p. 1145).

One of the major issues with gender stereotypes in literature dedicated to young readers is that they are taken as role models and play a significant part in the way children view and shape themselves (Weitzman et al., 1972; Paterson & Lach, 1990; Hamilton et al., 2006). This influences the way children “make sex-role distinctions and express sex-role preferences” (Weitzman et al., 1972, p. 1125) and learn what is socially accepted and expected for each gender. Portraying boys as more successful and notable socially teaches girls “to have low aspirations” (Weitzman et al. 1146) and informs them that their worth will depend on the man they accompany.

Several experts carried out similar studies in the following decades, such as Peterson & Lach in 1990, Hamilton et al. in 2006, and Brower in 2017. They all start their study with the following question: Have things changed? And their answer is the same: no, things have not changed in North-American and European children’s literature since the 1970s and Weitzman et al.’s groundbreaking study. Peterson & Lach (1990) focus on the consequence of gender stereotypes on young readers’ cognitive and affective development, finding that they “directly affect the way in which the person comprehends the world” (p. 193) and generates clear, life-long cognitive issues. Hamilton, Anderson, Broadbent & Young (2006) open their publication with a striking question: “Does sexism in picture books matter?” to which they categorically answer that “[w]e care ..., feminists and many parents, feminists or not” (p. 757). Their findings demonstrate that women are underrepresented, passive, confined indoors, and solely playing nurturing roles (p. 761). To them, gender bias is unfavourable to the child’s aspirations, behaviour, and future. Brower’s 2016 study on Newberry award-winning books, although

carried out on a small sample, shows “some movement in equalizing the presentation of characters of different genders” (p. 23), with women working outside the house and more female characters having constructive roles in the plot. Nevertheless, “[f]emale characters are still underrepresented, and both genders are still subject to portrayals defined by societal expectations” (p. 25).

Therefore, despite an apparent growing interest in and awareness of gender stereotypes in children’s books since the 1970s, “very little constructive response or change has occurred” (Peterson & Lach, 1990, p. 190). Moreover, while the worries about these stereotypes sharply rose in the late 70s and early 80s, the general interest has gradually but constantly decreased in Europe, especially in Great Britain (p. 190).

2. FEMINISM AND FEMINIST LITERARY CRITICISM

2.1. A Historical Approach to Feminism

Feminist literary criticism cannot be separated from feminism. It is rooted in the different movements and theories developed by feminist scholars. Therefore, a quick overview of these movements is necessary before we start talking about feminist literary criticism. Kang et al. (2017) define Feminist history as follows:

Feminist history is part of a larger historical project that draws on the experiences of traditionally ignored and disempowered groups (e.g. factory workers, immigrants, people of color, lesbians) to re-think and challenge the histories that have been traditionally written from the experiences and points of view of the powerful (e.g., colonizers, representatives of the state, the wealthy) – the histories we typically learn in highschool textbooks. (p. 114).

Although feminist thought can be found as early as in the Middle Ages, it was not fully formed, theorised, and recognised before the 19th century, especially in the United States and in Western Europe. While Kang et al. (2017) use the accepted terms “first wave”, “second wave”, and “third wave” to characterise the feminist periods, they argue that these “waves” are “not mutually exclusive or totally separate from each other” (p. 114), and that it is better to consider them as reciprocally informing and influencing each other. Therefore, each “wave” both praises the objectives reached by the previous one and denounces its limitations.

Pilcher & Whelehan (2004) explain that the term “wave” represents the “apparent pattern of rise and fall of feminism over time” that copies the movement of a “tidal water” (p.

52). They also indicate that *feminism* is an umbrella term that hides a great plurality of discourses, positions, and political and philosophical ideas. This diversity has even impelled the use of the term *feminisms* in the plural forms. Nevertheless, feminists of all periods and parties have all fought with the aim of ending the oppression and lack of legal identity of women in patriarchal societies and structures (Pilcher & Whelehan, 2004, p. 52), or, as Kang et al. (2017) formulate it, a common goal to challenge structures of power and eventually create a better world (p. 133). Women's inferior status and their unfair social condition was the basis of all feminist demands (Mora & Van Hooft, 1982, p. 3).

The beginning of the first wave of feminism is not unanimously agreed upon. Some consider it started in the late 18th century with Mary Wollstonecraft's groundbreaking re-reading of male authors and the French Revolution (Pilcher & Whelehan, 2004, p. 52), others say it was in the mid-19th century (Kang et al. 2017, p. 116) or even in the late 1800s (Mushaben, 2020). The first wave ended in the late 1920s with the 19th Amendment giving women the right to vote in the United States, and after the Second World War in Europe. First-wave feminists struggled to achieve the same rights as men in terms of vote, political engagement and representation, and legal rights. They sought enfranchisement (Pilcher & Whelehan, 2004, p. 144). However, their fight was not universal, since their members were western, white, and middle-class. The lack of intersectionality of the first wave and its tendency to exclude working women and women of colour was strongly criticised, since "white middle-class feminists ... cannot speak for the experience of all women" (Goldman, 2007, p. 78). In the United States, first-wave feminism overlapped with the abolitionist movement in an effort to allow everyone self-ownership (Kang et al., 2017, p. 117).

The start of second-wave feminism is consensually pinned down in the late 1960s. Its members fought against a "separate but equal" policy and aimed at reaching economic citizenship (Mushaben, 2020). Inspired by the civil rights movements in the United States, second-wave feminism combatted sex segregation at work (pay gaps, access to employment, sexual harassment), in finances (loans, insurance policies, conditions to own a credit cards), and in health (pregnancy rights, reproductive rights). A strong emphasis was put on "the oppressiveness of a patriarchally defined society" (Pilcher & Whelehan, 2004, p. 144) and the unfairness of gender norms. Although this second wave was more inclusive and intersectional by recognising the necessity to include women of colour, second-wave feminism failed to see other discriminations like class oppression and racism (Kang et al., 2017, p. 126).

Third-wave feminism started in the mid-1980s and early 1990s and continued through the new millennium (Mushaben, 2020). Denouncing the lack of intersectionality of the previous

waves, it fought against all sorts of discrimination and the gaps between law and reality (Kang et al., 2017, p. 128). It condemned the pay gap between men and women and between white employees and black employees, police violence against the black community and transgender people, homophobic violence, heterosexism, and the double marginalisation of “non-white, disabled, trans, single or non-monogamous, middle-class, or non-western” queers (p. 129). One of the most prominent figures of third-wave feminism is Judith Butler and her groundbreaking works *Gender Trouble* (1990), *Bodies that Matter* (1993), and *Undoing Gender* (2004), in which she coined and theorised the concept of *gender performativity*. She also vehemently criticised “a pervasive heterosexual assumption in feminist literary theory” and a “restricted ... meaning of gender” (2006, p. viii) that led to homophobia and transphobia as well the construction of “new forms of hierarchy and exclusion” (p. viii) within feminism itself. Her work was based on the conviction that normative gender in a society is reinforced by normative sexuality, i.e. heterosexuality (p. xi); in other words, she sees gender and sexuality as closely intertwined and both imposed on people by their society, the former being used to secure the latter (p. xii). Wrongly denominated “post-feminism”, third-wave feminism used coalitional actions and created alternative forms of cultures to confront popular culture and the stereotypes it conveyed. Many sub-groups originated in this third wave: Queer movement (strongly inspired by Butler’s work), Transnational feminism, Sex-positive feminism, and ecological groups.

Finally, although its existence is still debated, some have contemplated the existence of a fourth-wave feminism created in the early 2010s. Through an intensive use of social media and hashtags (the most significant example being #MeToo) and the participation in Women’s marches, fourth-wave feminists focus on sexual harassment, body shaming, rape culture, video games, and the internet (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2021).

2.2. Feminist Literary Criticism

Feminism does not only consist of associations, demonstrations, political manifestos, and artistic performances. It was also expanded into theoretical grounds, encompassing “work done in a broad variety of disciplines” (Peter, 2010, p. 58), such as linguistics, philosophy, history, sociology, musicology, anthropology, etc. (Plain & Sellers, 2007, p. 3). Among the many feminist theories, the one that is of particular relevance for this study is feminist literary criticism. This part focuses on feminist literary criticism, the way it was influenced by feminism, its principles and applications, its goals and relevance.

Feminist literary criticism is a subcategory of literary studies; it is even seen as “a vital dimension of literary studies” (Plain & Sellers, 2007, p. 2), since it has remodelled the entire literacy process from writing to publishing to reading. Feminist literary criticism mainly aims at “understand[ing] the position of females and gender conflict as a feature in literary works written by male writers” (Peter, 2010, p. 58). Therefore, it analyses how femininity and its symbols are represented, and how this representation oppresses women (Freedman, 2007, xvii) and “contain[s] and constrain[s] women in practice” (Plain & Sellers, 2007, p. 6). There is no consensus around feminist literary criticism, and this field has always been disparaged by “polemic ..., advocacy” (Eagleton, 2007, p. 107), “battles and bad press” since it “properly beg[a]n” in the 1960s after the second-wave feminism in the USA and in Europe (Plain and Sellers, 2007, p. 3).

Even though some experts claim the existence of some proto-feminist thought during the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, and the seventeenth century, they all agree on the fact that the pioneers in feminist literary criticism were Mary Wollstonecraft, Virginia Woolf, and Simone de Beauvoir. The first set the basis of the next 200 years of feminism by re-reading her male counterparts and exposing their idealised, aestheticized, and misogynistic vision of women (Plain & Sellers, 2007, p. 8). The second is unanimously considered the “founder of modern feminist literary criticism” (p. 9) with the publication of her groundbreaking essay *A Room of One's Own*, the “richest manifesto for feminist literary criticism” (Goldman, 2007, p. 78) in which she claims that “woman is the most discussed animal in the universe” (Woolf, 1929, p. 19), yet she is never accurately depicted. The latter introduced the difference between sex and gender, which would later be at the core of feminist literary criticism. Interestingly, they all considered that gendered models are detrimental to both women and men. They encouraged the revelation of the “fictionality of both femininity and masculinity” (Plain & Sellers, 2007, p. 50) and the dismantling of the oppression of gender altogether.

Feminist literary criticism has evolved with time alongside feminist movements and theories. Consequently, their goals have changed as well. The first step, set by the pioneers previously mentioned and put into practice in the 1970s by Kate Millett (*Sexual Politics*, 1970) and Eva Figes (*Patriarchal Attitudes: Women in Society*, 1970) aimed at revolting against androcentrism – systematically evaluating from a masculine point of view. This was done by re-reading works written by male authors “with a different attention to authority and gender” (Goldman, 2007, p. 68) and questioning the acceptance of “male” genius and “man” as the norm. This kind of reading shows that male writers have traditionally portrayed women as a mere “signifier in patriarchal discourse” (p. 75), an imaginary character that reduces all women

to a single, poor, and fetishized representation. Toril Moi declared in *Sexual/Textual Politics* (1985) that “to study ‘images of women’ in fiction is equivalent to studying false images of women in fiction written by both sexes” (p. 43). However, some later feminist literary critics denounced the fact that the first works on the “inadequate male representation of women in literature” (Eagleton, 2007, p. 106) terribly lacked what they were trying to rescue: women. Their studies failed to show “what women have felt and experienced” by putting too much emphasis on “what men have thought women should be” (p. 108).

This disagreement with a sole focus on “female reader’s estrangement from male-authored texts” (Eagleton, 2007, p. 108) led to the second step of feminist literary criticism in the late 20th century with Elaine Showalter’s *gynocritics* – the theory and practice of women as writers. She advocated for a shift to “female reader’s identification with female-authored texts” (p. 108) through the retrieval of lost and marginalised classic female authors and the creation of a female literary tradition, that is to say, a new canon of female writers. Showalter considered that only a woman could adequately conduct the “complicated business” of portraying women and the feminine (Goldman, 2007, p. 74). Therefore, the late 1970s and early 1980s saw a shift from the literary representation of women by male writers to the literary representation “of women, by women and for women” (Eagleton, 2007, p. 107). Nonetheless, many feminists saw in the defence of a “feminine writing” the recognition of a difference between male and female writing that they had been fighting against for so long.

The third step in feminist literary criticism aspired to bring to life the multiple experiences of women, not only that of western, white, middle-class women. They advocated for a broader inclusion of women as subjects and writers, and consequently, as readers and critics. Black feminist criticism, lesbian feminist criticism, and male feminist criticism arose from this need. Although they were created earlier, they all became prominent thanks to the surge of third-wave feminism in the early 1990s.

Contemporary black feminist critics fought a double battle: against black men who dominated the Black Power movement and against white women who ruled feminism (Keizer, 2007, p. 154). Their goal, apart from establishing a continuousness between the early black feminist critics from the nineteenth century and their modern approach, was to point out and denounce the oppression and struggles of black women, subject to multiple discriminations. After Alice Walker and the Combahee River Collective in the 1970s and Deborah McDowell and Barbara Christian in the 1980s, the 1990s saw an explosion of essays by black feminist critics, theorising black women’s gender, racial, sexual, literary, and political oppression. Other aspects, such as black Diasporas, representations of black women in different geographical

zones (the Caribbean, Europe, the United States...), the Black Arts movement, and the enormous production of African American literature were also part of black feminist criticism. Keizer (2007) mentions that there are “black feminist critics who are not black women” (p. 160) who nonetheless richly contributed to the field.

Nevertheless, it is incorrect to simplistically oppose white and Black feminist literary critics. Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa addressed this reductive division in 1981 by editing *This Bridge Called my Back*, a collection of essays subtitled *Writings by Radical Women of Color* that was later reedited four times. This book aimed at “forg[ing] links with women of color from every region” (Moraga, 1983, p. ii) and giving a voice to those who could not be included in the so-called “international” feminism that was mostly composed of white, Western-European women. Cherríe Moraga, Gloria Anzaldúa, Mitsuye Yamada, Rosario Morales, Audre Lorde, and Chrystos, among others, put pen to paper to break down “the diabolically erected barriers” that prevented Chinese, Mexican, African, Native American, Filipino, Third World, and recently-immigrated women (Cade Bambara, 1983, p. viii) from hearing and seeing each other and report problems caused by colonialism, racism, and patriarchy. Cherríe Moraga sees the metaphor of the bridge as something that “can bind [women of color] together” (p. iv), Gloria Anzaldúa views it as something that “one builds ... as one walk” (p. vi), and Toni Cade Bambara understands it is an opportunity to “cross over to a new place” (p. vi), a rite of passage to enter a community. In any case, all the essayists agree on the fact that feminism is “constantly ... subverted by internal differences” (Moraga, p. iii), and that the Third World feminist movement needs specific writings, re-readings, and theories that are not similar to that of white, Western-European feminist literary criticism. Gavatri Spivak shares this opinion in her groundbreaking essay *Can the Subaltern speak?* (1988) in which she highlights the double suffering of Third World women as both subalterns in an imperialist system and female in a patriarchy (1988, p. 102). She also rejects the idea of an “international feminism” (p. 84) since “one cannot put together a ‘voice’ [of all the women]” (p. 93).

Regarding lesbian literary criticism, despite starting earlier than the second-wave feminism, it was not academically supported and theorised before the late 1980s (Gonda, 2007, p. 170). The pioneering works are Jeannette H. Foster’s *Sex Variant Women in Literature* (1956-1985) and Barbara Grier’s *The Lesbian in Literature* (1967), and Jane Rule’s *Lesbian Images* (1975). Gonda (2007) insists on the fact that lesbian feminist criticism was mainly made of personal and autobiographical writing used as a moral and political weapon (p. 171). Lesbian feminist criticism has often been criticised for its extremism, its “failure to take account of class and racial differences” (p. 171), its political stubbornness, its lack of clear boundaries, and its

essentialist ideas. Outstanding concepts from lesbian feminist critics are Adrienne Rich's "lesbian continuum", Audre Lorde's "Sister Outsider", Judith Butler's "gender performativity", Gloria Anzaldúa's writing halfway between theory and poetry, and Terry Castle's "special question": when is a text a "lesbian text"? (Keizer, 2007, pp. 174-5). In spite of the creation of a lesbian literary canon in the 1990s, there is still no consensus about the exact definition of lesbian literature and lesbian writing among lesbian feminist critics.

Finally, male feminist critics have long been mocked and criticised, since it seems that men and feminism are incompatible. Men can endeavour to be the most genuine and compassionate possible (Thomas, 2007, p. 187), but they are still men, protected by patriarchal rules and institutions. A feminist reading is supposed to contest male authority and erase the deceptive, dominant male perception (Tunç Opperman, 1994, par. 32), which seems discordant with a male reader. Calvin Thomas (2007) draws our attention to the fact that women and men are both literary constructed (p. 189), and he mentions that there have been feminist male authors and male women's rights supporters for centuries (p. 189). To him, male allies in the streets and in the academy have been especially influential and active since the 1960s. Stephen Heath's *The Sexual Fix* (1982), which reviews and criticises "'sexological' discourses from nineteenth-century medial treatises and Freudian psychoanalysis" to pop culture and modern sexual self-help books (Thomas, 2007, p. 194) is cited as the inauguration of male feminist criticism. Later, Paul Smith's *Men in Feminism* (co-edited with Alice Jardine in 1987) and Tom Digby's *Men Doing Feminism* in 1998 pushed further the fight against "the divine legitimization of masculinist tradition" (Thomas, 2007, p. 196).

In conclusion, feminist literary criticism denounces the assumption that the universal in literature is male by questioning and deconstructing male authority in texts. Defined by Toril Moi (1982) as "a specific kind of political discourse, a critical and theoretical practice committed to the struggle against patriarchy and sexism" (cited by Tunç Opperman, 1994, par. 26), feminist literary criticism uses different methods to reprove unreal representations of female characters and the invisibilization of female authors. Starting with a focus on women as subjects in the hands of male writers, then shifting to women as authors and readers, and finally reaching a third, more inclusive phase that intends to include all the possible female experiences –and not only that of western, white, straight, middle-class women–, feminist literary criticism avoids reductive or oversimplifying readings and aims at setting a bias-free literature for all individuals, regardless of their class, race, or sex (Tunç Opperman, 1994, par. 26). McDowell (1995) adds that feminist literary criticism did not only aspire to "change the social stratum, but also ... to invent new substitute models of reading and writing" (cited by Peter, 2010, p. 58).

3. ROALD DAHL: A PROMINENT YET CONTROVERSIAL FIGURE

3.1. Roald Dahl's Life, Figure, and Reception

It is quite difficult to distinguish the true from the false about Roald Dahl's life, since he had a tendency to "exaggeration ... and self-dramatization" (Sturrock, 2010, p. 18), which led him to add details and change important elements anytime he would talk or write about his life. Moreover, his pride and his wish "to appear strong [and] dominant" (p. 133) encouraged the "mythmaking" (p. 133). Donald Sturrock (2010) states that "[i]n this narrative, there was little place for weakness and incapacity" (p. 133), and subsequently a free hand for imagination.

Sturrock, Dahl's official biographer, met the opinionated, pessimistic, depressive, theatrical "six foot five inches tall, craggy" (2010, p. 11) author in February 1986 as he was preparing a documentary for a BBC Christmas special dedicated to children's literature. After all, Dahl was at the time "the most famous and successful living children's writer" (p. 10). However, despite Dahl's fame, this was the very first BBC documentary about him because "many people in the UK arts affected to despise" children's literature in the 1980s (p. 10). After Dahl's death in 1990, his daughter Ophelia asked Sturrock to write his biography (p. 17). Although she had been appointed as his official biographer, her busy professional and personal life led her to delegate this task to Sturrock, who was at the same time not from the family but still close enough to Dahl.

The first twenty-five years of Dahl's life are summarised by Sturrock (2010) as follows: "Norwegian parents, a childhood in Wales, miserable schooldays, youthful adventures in Newfoundland and Tanganyika [today Tanzania], flying as a fighter pilot, a serious plane crash, then a career as a wartime diplomat in Washington" (p. 9). Even though Dahl affirmed that his personal life did not inspire his writing, all these elements can be found throughout his books, and Sturrock notices that "the parallels between the two are intriguing" (p. 46). Traumatic childhoods, orphans, animals, sicknesses, bullies, corporal punishment, and abusive parents abound in Dahl's universe.

Dahl started to seriously write in 1942 in Washington. While he was having dinner with the British author C. S. Forester, he proposed to "save the writer the trouble of making notes and eating at the same time by writing up his experiences himself and sending them on to Forester the next day" (Sturrock, 2010, p. 169). And while he was turning his personal experiences into what would become his very first published short story, *Shot Down Over*

Lybia, he found his vocation. Even though the final version greatly differed from his original drafts and was published anonymously, Dahl “had made his literary debut” (p. 170).

Writing soon became Dahl’s only escape from his boring job and his persistent headaches, a consequence of his plane crash in Africa. His very first children’s book, *The Gremlins*, was published in 1943, and Walt Disney’s project to adapt it into a cartoon brought Dahl glory, although the animated movie never came to light. Dahl then published adult fiction for the next twenty years, novels and short stories that are today often considered “macabre” (Anderson, 2016), “outrageous” (Casulli, 2015, p. 4), “sardonic” and “gruesome” (Henfridsson, 2008, p. 6-7), before returning to children literature in the early 1960s.

The decade of 1960 was particularly atrocious for Dahl: his son was hit by a taxi and left brain damaged, his oldest daughter died of measles at seven, and his first wife Patricia Neal, pregnant, suffered a series of strokes that left her unable to speak or write. His writing was affected by these appalling events, and he was not able to prolifically write before the early 1980s, decade during which he published 15 books. At the same time, he divorced his first wife and married his years-long mistress, Felicity Crosland.

When he died in 1990, aged 74, Roald Dahl left an estate of more than three million pounds (Henfridsson, 2008, p. 5) and an incredible legacy of more than 30 books and anthologies, five screenplays, hundreds of short stories, thousands of characters, and even a cerebral shunt to relieve hydrocephalus developed in 1962 after his son’s accident. His patrimony, which also includes a charity and a museum, is now managed by The Roald Dahl Story Company and The Roald Dahl Family.

Sturrock (2010) describes Dahl as “a great entertainer – witty, subversive, and often risqué” (p. 11), “an outsider” (p. 14), “the most compelling of talkers” (p. 15), opinionated and picky (p. 15), “always smoking, always drinking, always controversial” (p. 16), “complex and extravagant” (p. 17), and, above all, a fantastic storyteller (p. 23), skill he had inherited from his Norwegian mother. Nevertheless, the biographer realises that Dahl had shown him the best aspect of his personality. He completes his description with a darker side of Dahl’s character that is more in accordance with what contemporary critics, editors, and writers would say: the children’s writer was “unbelievably grumpy and difficult” (p. 11), “a bully” (p. 17), pessimistic and depressive, cruel and insensitive (p. 21), “fascinated by wealth and glamour”, and “delighted in being controversial” (p. 22). These antithetical aspects of Dahl’s personality are reflected in the debate around the reception of his work.

3.2. Controversy around Dahl's Books

Roald Dahl's books were published more than 70 years ago, "yet he still ranks in the top five best-selling children's authors on Amazon's UK site ... alongside the modern day best-sellers" (BBC News, 2016). His books were and are still adapted into a dozen movies and the rights to his stories sell for billions of dollars.

His fame and popularity is undeniable, however, it is tainted with controversy and scandal. Dahl commonly reused the plots from his stories for adults in his children's books (Casulli, 2015, p. 5). Therefore, there are "dreadful, morbid, and macabre ... and even sadistic elements" in his writing for children (p. 5), and many critics have called his books "tasteless and brutal" (Sturrock, 2010, p. 21). Abusive parents, horrendous events, and violent children abound in each of Dahl's stories. Sturrock (2010) explains that many elements were erased from his drafts by his editors because they were "sombre and gloomy", in other words "too much for his young readers" (p. 62).

Another problematic aspect of Dahl's stories is the recurrence of racist comments. For example, *James and the Giant Peach's* Grasshopper says he would "rather be fried alive and eaten by a Mexican" (Dahl, 2001, p. 107), and the representation of *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory's* Oompa Loompas as "small black pygmies" has more than once been considered racist (Rosenthal, 2014). Consequently, both books were banned from primary classrooms and reading lists in different US states, and others were frequently on the verge of being banned.

Nevertheless, what mostly shocks about Dahl is his personality. The racist, anti-Semitic, and misogynistic representations in his books are only a projection of his opinions. From extremely racist comments about the population in Baghdad in his letters to his family (Sturrock, 2010, p. 128) and some "trenchantly anti-Israeli" and colonialist articles in the 1980s (Sturrock, 2010, p. 14) to anti-Semitic remarks during various interviews; from years of cheating on his first wife to earning his nickname as "Roald the Rotten" (Anderson, 2016), Dahl's integrity has frequently been questioned. And even though his books are not as racist, anti-Semitic, and misogynistic as one could expect, it is only due to his publishers' edition.

In reaction to the controversy associated with Dahl's personal opinions, his family released an official statement in December 2020 to apologise for his views and claims and to detach themselves and The Roald Dahl Story Company from the writer. In their declaration, the Dahl family regrets "the lasting and understandable hurt caused by Roald Dahl's anti-Semitic statements", adding that they do not support nor understand his opinions. However, this apology did not come from the author himself, and is therefore not completely valid. Many also

see it as a mere formality to get profitable deals with Hollywood and to sell more books; others point out the fact that the family waited for more than 30 years to apologise, and some see this declaration as useless, since it was not coupled to any action (McCluskey, 2021).

Combining all these elements give us a better insight into Dahl's personality and writing. They allow us to comprehend why the British author has been portrayed as "disturbing" (Casulli, 2015, p. 4), "a bigot" (Anderson, 2016), outspoken, indiscrete, gossipy, and leaky (Sturrock, 2010), a "troubling" genius (McLuskey, 2021), an influential, ingenious, sophisticated, and macabre writer (Henfridsson, 2008).

3.3. Anthropomorphic Animal Characters in Dahl's Books

Burke & Copenhaver (1990) notice that children's books commonly "involve animals possessing human capabilities and characteristics" (p. 206), a phenomenon known as anthropomorphism. They justify it by the fact that children are generally "curious about and fond of animals" (p. 206), thus more attracted and interested in the story. However, animals in children's books rarely behave like animals and almost always like humans. Therefore, their experiences and actions replicate reality by "put[ing] them to use in a purposeful distortion of reality" (p. 206). The use of anthropomorphic animal characters allows to indirectly deal with controversial or delicate topics with a "soften[ed]... didactic tone" (p. 210) and "a degree of emotional distance" (p. 213).

Animal characters abound in Roald Dahl's books. Many of them behave like normal animals, as in *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (1964) and its squirrels, cats, bunny rabbits, dogs, and caterpillars; in *The Twits* and its worms, frog, monkeys, and many types of birds – "buzzards, magpies, rooks, ravens, and many more" (Dahl, 1980, p. 32); in *George's Marvellous Medicine* (1981) and its hens, horses, sheep, pigs, and cows; or in *Esio Trot* (1990) and its army of tortoises. Many others are anthropomorphic, as in *James and the Giant Peach* (1961), *The Magic Finger* (1962), *Fantastic Mr. Fox* (1970), *The Enormous Crocodile* (1978), or *The Giraffe and the Pelly and Me* (1985). There are even cases of transmogrification, "people morphing into animals" (Burke & Copenhaver, 1990, p. 207), such as the unnamed protagonist changed into a mouse in *The Witches* (1983), or Mrs Winter turned into a cat and the Gregg family into ducks in *The Magic Finger* (1966, p. 13).

However, if anthropomorphic characters create some positive, emotional distance "when the story message is very powerful, personal, and painful" (Burke & Copenhaver, 1990, p. 213), it can also produce a dissociation between them and the reality that they mirror. As a

result, the young readers can misleadingly believe that the topic is not as serious as it would be with human characters and forget that the characters' behaviour actually copies our own behaviour. The seriousness of sexist behaviours is thus diminished.

3.4. Quentin Blake's Illustrations

Roald Dahl's work cannot be separated from Quentin Blake's illustrations. Even though Blake's illustrations of Dahl's books represent a very small part of all the books he has worked on over the years, 15 out of more than 400 in total, this is what everybody remembers him for.

Born in 1932 in Sidcup, now part of southeast London, Blake has always loved drawing, and he still does today. After studying English at Cambridge, he decided to make his living as an illustrator. From the publication of his very first drawings in the satirical magazine *Punch* when he was 16 to his last children's books published at age 88, Blake has never stopped drawing (Profile: Quentin Blake, 2012). His peculiar, recognisable stroke has given "some of children's literature's most cherished characters their visual identities" (Sturges, 2020), from his own characters Rosie and Stickorino, the five friends with extra-special abilities, Angelica Sprocket, and Mrs. Armitage to Dahl's ones, Willy Wonka to Matilda, the BFG, James, and George, who have all inhabited the childhood of thousands of young readers. His gargantuan work has won numerous prizes and awards, especially the extremely sought-after Hans Christian Andersen Award for Illustration, the greatest international honour given to creators of children's books (The Official Website of Sir Quentin Blake).

However famous and treasured Blake's characters are, they are based on Dahl's portrayal. And as we see it in the next chapter, his illustrations are not less sexist than his friend's written account.

4. AN ANALYSIS OF ROALD DAHL'S FEMALE ANIMAL CHARACTERS

4.1. Presentation of the Corpus

4.1.1. Books Selected

Since this study focuses on female anthropomorphic animal characters, it was necessary to identify all of Dahl's children's books that include them. Therefore, all books that only

contained non-anthropomorphic animals were discarded, such as *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (1964) and its squirrels, *The Twits* (1980) and its frogs and worms, *George's Marvellous Medicine* (1981) and its hens, cows, and horses, or *Esio Trot* (1990) and its tortoises. Among the ones that did include anthropomorphic animals, those that did not contain female characters were cast away, like *The Enormous Crocodile* (1978) and his all-male cast of characters. For its part, *Dirty Beasts* (1983) was rejected because of its format of short stories. As a result, four books were finally selected: *James and the Giant Peach* (1961), *The Magic Finger* (1966), *Fantastic Mr. Fox* (1970), and *The Giraffe and the Pelly and Me* (1985). These dates correspond to the original editions.

James and the Giant Peach was first published in 1961 and it was then reedited ten times. Quentin Blake illustrated the 1995 edition. The book was adapted in 1996 into a film and in 2010 into a musical that is still produced as of today. It tells the story of a young boy, James, who is bullied by his two awful aunts. After discovering a magic potion, James embarks on a fantastic journey inside an enormous peach that hosts a group of gigantic insects. Their incredible voyage involves a dive into the ocean, a shark attack, an army of seagulls, and a memorable impalement on top of the Empire State Building.

Written in 1962 but not published before 1966 because it went against the mighty US gun lobby (The Roald Dahl Story Company Limited, 2018), *The Magic Finger* stars an unnamed young girl who decides to use her magic finger to punish her neighbours, the Gregg family, who are avid hunters. As a result, they are transformed into half-human, half-duck creatures, and they are forced to build a nest and escape from revengeful ducks. The story was illustrated by Blake in 1995.

In 1970, *Fantastic Mr. Fox* gave life to a family of foxes that survive thanks to the cleverness of Mr. Fox, who outwits their three execrable neighbours Boggis, Bunce, and Bean by stealing their chickens, ducks, geese, and apple cider. This story was illustrated by Blake in 1996, and it was adapted into a theatre play in 2001, an opera in 1998 and 2010, a movie by Wes Anderson in 2009, and a musical in 2016 (The Roald Dahl Story Company Limited, 2018).

Finally, *The Giraffe and the Pelly and Me*, first published in 1985 with Blake's illustrations, narrates the adventures of a little boy who dreams of opening his own candy shop and the three members of the Ladderless Window-Cleaning Company, a giraffe, a pelican, and a monkey – who is the “me” of the title. Thanks to the pelican's retractable beak and the giraffe's magical neck, the three animals become extremely useful to the Duke by picking his cherries, cleaning his windows, and arresting a burglar.

4.1.2. *A Feminist Reading of the Books*

The books were analysed through a feminist reading that aims at revising the cultural codes in which a given literary work is embedded in order to explore the relationship between women in real life and their representation in literature (Mora, 1982, p. 3-4). In other words, it is questions the meaning of “masculine” and “feminine” as cultural myths and abstract entities (p. 4). Denouncing the unfair and unreal representation of women in literature then leads to efforts to build a new system that would recognise “le statut différentiel mais non-hiérarchisant des groupes opposés” (the *differential* but *nonhierarchizing* status of opposed groups), that is, each sex (Kristeva, 1968, p. 117). Gabriela Mora (1982) defines a feminist reading as follows:

... la estudiosa exige relacionar el texto con acciones y preocupaciones humanas, en el afán de descubrir las semejanzas, las discrepancias, lo alterado y lo borrado entre el objeto empírico mujer y los rasgos que los códigos le han impuesto en la literatura. (p. 4-5)

She also warns against the danger of falling into a blind position of antagonism in front of the masculine (p. 10). The goal is not to support any repressive or abusive reading but to point out biased representations and rebalance the relationship between men and women. To complete this definition, Patsy Boyer (1982) adds that a feminist reading does not refer to the sex of the reader or critic (p. 198). She characterises a feminist reading as opposed to a masculinist one:

By masculinist I mean that reading which focuses on the male protagonist and his fate, which often obviates serious consideration of the female character or casts her in a negative light. ... Similarly, feminist ... means a perspective that focuses on the nature and role of the female character and clarifies the impact of this image on the male and female reader.” (p. 198)

4.1.3. *Presentation of the Female Anthropomorphic Animal Characters*

The four books present female anthropomorphic animal characters. In *James and the Giant Peach*, there are four of them: Miss Spider, Ladybird, Silkworm, and Glowworm. In *The Magic Finger*, there is only one, the mother of the duck family. *Fantastic Mr. Fox* mentions several of them, but only one is recurrent and useful to the plot, Mrs. Fox. The others do not even have a name or an individual personality. Finally, *The Giraffe and the Pelly and Me* introduces one female character, the Giraffe. Not all female characters have the same importance in their respective plot, but they are all treated, described, and illustrated in a sexist way. The analysis focuses on two aspects of Roald Dahl’s female characters: first, the way they are portrayed, and in a second time, their relationships with men. The different elements of

sexism in children's books identified by Weitzman et al. in 1972 were also used for this study: the invisible woman, the activities of boys and girls, and the status of adult men and women.

4.2. A Misogynistic Portrayal of Female Characters

4.2.1. Representation of Female Animal Characters

Female animal characters are introduced and described in a misogynistic manner. The different elements of sexism in children's books identified by Weitzman et al. in 1972 can be found in the four selected books: the invisible woman, a stereotyped physical description, especially when clothing is concerned, activities reserved for male or female characters, and a tendency to confine female characters to indoor environments.

4.2.1.1. The Invisible Woman

First, female characters are mostly invisible in Roald Dahl's children's books. The most blatant examples would be *Dirty Beasts*, which gives life to one female and nine male animal characters, or *The Enormous Crocodile*, which was discarded precisely because the seven characters of the book were all male.

In the four books that were selected, female characters are either literally invisible or they are made unseen by their behaviour. In *Fantastic Mr. Fox*, all female characters except Mrs. Fox are absent from the storyline. They are simply referred to as "and all our wives and children" (Dahl, 1996, p. 48). In *James and the Giant Peach*, two female characters are present and part of the story, but their behaviour makes them invisible: Silkworm and Glowworm. The first one is "sleeping soundly and nobody [is] paying any attention to it" (Dahl, 2007, p. 47). At first, she is not even referred to as a female character, since the pronoun "it" is used. Later, as James realises he will need silk to carry out his project of escaping the sharks, the Old-Green-Grasshopper reminds him of the existence of Silkworm, whom everybody had forgotten:

'But my dear boy, that's exactly what we do have! We've got all you want!'

'How? Where?'

'The Silkworm!' cried the Old-Green-Grasshopper. 'Didn't you ever notice the Silkworm? She's still downstairs! She never moves! She just lies there sleeping all day long.' (p. 76)

The Silkworm is finally referred to as a female character with the pronoun "she", but she is still invisible. Her concealment, combined with a complete disregard from the male characters,

makes her go completely unnoticed. Her insubstantiality is reinforced by her silence, since she does not utter a single word in the entire story, and by her absence from the illustrations. Indeed, she never appears in any of Blake's drawings, even though her silk saves everyone when they need to escape from the sharks. Even the other female characters forget about the existence of the Silkworm, for instance when Miss Spider says, "None of us three girls" (Dahl, 2007, p. 68) to refer to herself, Ladybird, and the Glowworm, thus excluding –or forgetting– the Silkworm.

Similarly, the Glowworm is another neglected character in *James and the Giant Peach*. She is described as "a very shy and silent creature" (Dahl, 2007, p. 87). She is drawn twice, although only one half of her body is shown, and she is merely present as a lightbulb inside the giant peach. The other characters treat her as a "lighting system" (p. 65), and they take for granted that her only role is to illuminate the peach:

'Let's have some light!' shouted the Centipede.

'Yes!' they cried. 'Light! Give us some light!'

'I'm *trying*,' answered the poor Glowworm. 'I'm doing my best. Please be patient.' (p. 66)

In *The Giraffe and the Pelly and Me*, the Giraffe is more present than the female characters previously mentioned. However, her withdrawn behaviour and the fact that the male characters speak much more than her contribute to her invisibilization.

4.2.1.2. Stereotyped Physical Description and Clothing

Another important aspect of Dahl's misogynistic portrayal is the way they are physically described. Their appearance, their look, and the way they move and speak are all stereotyped and misogynistic.

In *James and the Giant Peach*, Ladybird is described as "obviously a kind and gentle creature" (Dahl, 2007, p. 56), "so beautiful, so kind" (p. 133), an insect who speaks "primly" (p. 71) and "modestly" (p. 95) and who blushes regularly when others address her. She is protective of James and has a motherly attitude towards him. She is not the only one to have a withdrawn behaviour, since Miss Spider does everything "calmly" (p. 87). The spider is illustrated with long eyelashes even though the text never mentions them. Furthermore, the female characters are all very sensitive: when James jumps to save the Centipede, "Miss Spider, the Glowworm, and the Ladybird all began to cry" (p. 100).

In *Fantastic Mr. Fox*, Mrs. Fox is portrayed as a woman who does not speak but sobs (Dahl, 1996, p. 16) or murmurs (p. 43). Throughout the book, while her husband is doing everything, she quivers (p. 16), cries (p. 17), and acts "tenderly" (p. 15) and "shyly" (p. 77).

The only female character of *The Giraffe and the Pelly and Me* has “big round dark eyes” (Dahl, 2009, p. 13) and is depicted by Blake with long eyelashes even though they are not textually mentioned by Dahl. Just like the other female characters previously mentioned, the Giraffe sings “so softly that [you can] hardly catch the words” (p. 28), she tiptoes “very gingerly” (p. 32), she whispers (p. 32), she murmurs (p. 42), and she does not want “to sound ungrateful or pushy” when she asks for some food (p. 42). Obviously, the only thing she can eat is “the pink and purple flowers of the tinkle-tinkle tree” (p. 18). The combination of colours typically associated with girls (pink and purple) and the light jingling sound strongly contributes to the stereotyped representation of the Giraffe.

Therefore, all female characters stay in the background. Their behaviour is constantly measured, and everything they do is somehow softened or toned down. Their portrayal shows a very conventional representation of female characters. As far as clothes are concerned, while the text itself actually never mentions anything about the way characters are dressed, the illustrations show the female duck wearing an apron in *The Magic Finger* (Dahl, 1997, p. 36), and Mrs Fox wearing a long dress in *Fantastic Mr. Fox*. Therefore, this confirms Weitzman et al.’s statement that the “girl’s clothes indicate that she is not meant to be active” (1972, p. 1137). Female characters look pretty, “too pretty to ride a bike, play ball, or visit the zoo” (p. 1137), which leads us to the next section about Dahl’s choice of activities for his female characters.

4.2.1.3. Girls’ Activities

As mentioned previously, Blake’s choice of clothes for the female characters perfectly illustrates their role and the kind of activities they engage –or do not engage– in. For example, Ladybird likes music (Dahl, 2007, p. 92) and gossiping (p. 139) in *James and the Giant Peach*, while Miss Spider makes the beds for everyone. She is even expected and asked to do so by the Old-Green-Grasshopper: “We really *must* get some sleep. ... We’ve got a tough day ahead of us tomorrow. So would you be kind enough, Miss Spider, to make the beds?” (p. 52). She immediately obeys him and makes the beds “as soft and silky as possibl[e]” (p. 53). Regarding the activities they cannot undertake, Miss Spider starts panicking when James suggests they should abandon the peach and swim: “None of us three girls can swim a single stroke” (p. 68). Swimming, and sport in general, is thus seen as reserved for male characters.

In *The Magic Finger* and *Fantastic Mr. Fox*, the female characters are cooking for the family. The female duck is alone in the kitchen, cooking at Mrs Gregg’s stove (Dahl, 1997, p. 36), and Mrs. Fox only comes into existence when the next menu is concerned: “I think we’ll

have duck tonight,’ said Mrs. Fox” (Dahl, 1996, p. 10), “My son ..., run back with these to your mother. Tell her to prepare a feast” (p. 42), “‘A feast it shall be!’ she said, standing up. ... Hurry up, child, and start plucking those chickens!” (p. 44), and finally, “My darlings ..., run back as fast as you can to your mother. Tell her we are having guests for dinner” (p. 57).

Mrs. Fox also performs the role of the caregiver. She protects her children: “She gathered her four children close to her and held them tight” (Dahl, 1996, p. 17), and she is extremely anxious about their safety and survival: “‘They’ll kill my children!’ cried Mrs. Fox” (p. 16). Furthermore, she also cares for her husband. When he comes home after being shot by the three farmers, she “tenderly lick[s] the stump of Mr. Fox’s tail to stop the bleeding” (p. 15), and she reassures him.

Another glaring example is the passive attitude of the female duck in *The Magic Finger*. While the three male ducks are holding rifles and shooting, she is standing next to them, with her hands on her hips (Dahl, 1997, p. 45-46). Shooting is seen as a male activity, and the female duck is excluded from it. Likewise, when the protagonist calls her neighbours, a male duck answers the phone (p. 41), as if this was reserved to men.

In *The Giraffe and the Pelly and Me*, the Giraffe is much less active than her male counterparts are. She carries her friends on her back and helps them clean the windows, reach the top of the trees, or arrest thieves, but she is mostly passive. Therefore, while she is involved in all the activities, which is better than being cast aside, her role is subordinate and derisory.

All in all, the female characters essentially stay indoors and engage in activities that are related to the household and to caregiving. They do not make decisions or take risks, and their depiction is limited and one-dimensional, as opposed to the “varied and interesting” representations of male characters (Weitzman et al., 1972, p. 1140). While female characters move, speak, and behave in a temperate way, male characters jiggle, shout, get excited or angry, jump, yell, and roar with laughter. This misogynistic portrayal of women as mild, quiet, hidden, and caring creatures confined to the inside, especially the kitchen, is strengthened by the way male and female characters interact with each other.

4.2.2. Female Characters in their Relationship with Male Characters

Interestingly, female characters do not interact with each other, either because they do not have another woman to talk to, for example Mrs. Fox, the Giraffe, or the female duck, or because they only address male characters, as in *James and the Giant Peach*. The dynamics between female and male characters is another aspect of Dahl’s misogynistic portrayal of

female animal characters. First, male characters considerably outnumber female characters. There are, respectively, four, one, one, and one active female animal characters in *James and the Giant Peach*, *The Magic Finger*, *Fantastic Mr. Fox*, and *The Giraffe and the Pelly and Me*, against three, three, seven, and two active male characters. Moreover, the male animal characters all adopt a paternalist and superior attitude towards women.

In *James and the Giant Peach*, the male insects see their female counterparts as objects or slaves that can be used and mistreated. For example, the Centipede says, “we can easily wake [the Silkworm] up and make her spin!” (Dahl, 2007, p. 76) when James decides he will need silk to carry out his project. He forces her, Miss Spider, and the Glowworm to work:

And far below, in the great stone of the peach, the Glowworm was lighting up the room so that the two spinners, the Silkworm and Miss Spider, could see what they were doing. The Centipede was down there too, exhorting them both frantically to greater efforts, and every now and again James could hear his voice coming faintly from the depths, shouting, ‘Spin, Silkworm, spin, you great fat lazy brute! Faster, faster, or we’ll throw you to the sharks!’” (p. 82)

The Centipede’s words towards the Silkworm are incredibly offensive and violent. When the caterpillar is running out of silk, the male characters force her to continue: “Tell them they’ve got to!” (Dahl, 2007, p. 85), and after being exhausted from spinning so much silk, the Silkworm still “did as she was told” (p. 100) and continued spinning so that James could successfully complete his plan. Earlier in the book, the Centipede had already mistreated a female character. As they all go to sleep on the first night, the Glowworm forgets to turn her light off. Consequently, the Centipede shouts, “Wake up, you lazy beast!” before throwing one of his boots at her (Dahl, 2007, p. 54). Such behaviours are toxic and violent, and they are typical of a patriarchal society in which women are considered inferior.

In *Fantastic Mr. Fox*, Mrs. Fox is not mistreated, but she is seen as feeble and dependent. After three days without any food or water, she is the weakest of all. She is even frailer than the children, who can still help their father while their mother is sitting on a chair, useless. Mr. Fox tells her, “We can handle this by ourselves” (Dahl, 1996, p. 36). Later, Badger says, “My poor wife up there is so weak she can’t dig another yard”, to which Mr. Fox answers, “Nor can mine” (p. 48). Women are inferior and less resistant to fatigue.

Interestingly, female characters act as if they had internalised their presumed inferiority. For example, as soon a problem arises, both Miss Spider and Ladybird start panicking:

‘Oh, we are finished now!’ cried Miss Spider, wringing her feet. ‘They will eat up the whole peach and then there’ll be nothing left for us to stand on and they’ll start on us!’

‘She is right!’ shouted the Ladybird. ‘We are lost forever!’ (Dahl, 2007, p. 75)

Instead of seeking a solution, the female characters turn to James: “‘Is there *nothing* we can do?’ asked the Ladybird, appealing to James. ‘Surely *you* can think of a way out of this.’ ‘Think!’ begged Miss Spider. ‘*Think*, James, *think*!’” (p. 75). Both women have no self-confidence, and they are convinced that only a man could save them from this critical situation.

Similarly, when the Giraffe notices the burglar in the Duchess’s room, she turns to the Pelican and the Monkey, and the two male characters provide the Duke with a solution to capture the thief (Dahl, 2009, p. 32). The Giraffe also requires the Pelican’s help when the protagonist meets them at the beginning: “Pelly, my dear, be so good as to fly down and bring that small person up here to talk to us” (p. 15), as if she were not able to do it herself.

In *Fantastic Mr. Fox*, Mrs. Fox is utterly captivated by her husband’s aura and intellect. Three times in barely 80 pages, she exclaims, “Oh, what a fantastic fox your father is!” (Dahl, 1996, pp. 19, 44, 77). The third time, her statement is even written in capital letters:

Then Mrs. Fox got shyly to her feet and said, ‘I don’t want to make a speech. I just want to say one more thing, and it is this: MY HUSBAND IS A FANTASTIC FOX.’ Everyone clapped and cheered. Then Mr. Fox himself stood up. (p. 77)

Mr. Fox undeniably appreciates his wife’s submissive and idolatrous behaviour because he “loved her more than even when she said things like that” (p. 19). To rephrase it, he enjoys his wife’s adoration, and he visibly takes pleasure in treating her as his subordinate. What is more, Mr. Fox receives all the credit in the end, since Badger proposes a toast to “our dear friend who saved our lives this day – Mr. Fox!” (p. 76). The fox himself disregards his wife’s help and claims, “This is *my* party, so *I* shall do the choosing” (p. 54) while they are stealing food from the farmers. One chapter title is even dedicated to his cleverness: “Mr. Fox Has a Plan” (p. 34).

Therefore, female characters are seen as physically and morally inferior to male characters. They are portrayed as weak, incapable, and dependent on men. They do not make decisions, and they need to be taken care of. Boyer (1982) denounces a “striking male-female polarity” (p. 188) that is clearly visible in Dahl’s children’s books. As Weitzman et al. (1972) suggest, female characters in children’s books do not spend time together, and their tendency to systematically turn to men in critical situations “impl[ies] that women cannot exist without men” (p. 1136). Their finding that “boys rescue girls” (p. 1135) in the majority of the children’s books they studied is also true for Dahl’s books.

4.3. Evolution of the Representation of Female Animal Characters

Even though the depiction of female animal characters is extremely misogynistic, a slight evolution and improvement can be noticed from *James and the Giant Peach* in the early 1960s to *The Giraffe and the Pelly and Me* in the mid-1980s. This betterment is observable on three levels: women's presence, involvement, and treatment.

First, female characters become more present as the years go by, both in the text and in the illustrations. For example, the Giraffe is in the title of the book along with her two male counterparts. Moreover, she appears in the great majority of the illustrations unlike Miss Spider, Ladybird, or Glowworm, who are seldom drawn, and when they do, are only half-visible, or Silkworm who is not once illustrated, although she saves everyone. Mrs. Fox would be midway between the two previous books, since she appears more regularly throughout the book, but she is still much less present than her husband or even children.

Then, it is undeniable that the Giraffe is more involved in the story and useful to the action than Miss Spider, Ladybird, Mrs. Fox, or the female duck. She speaks more, accompanies the male characters, and takes part in the group decisions. The female duck is also more involved in the story, since she leaves the house to escort the male ducks when they go hunting. Even though she only stands next to them while they are shooting, she later acts as a mediator between the Greggs and the ducks. This contrasts with the female characters in *James and the Giant Peach* and *Fantastic Mr. Fox*, who only stay inside the peach or the foxhole.

Finally, the way male characters treat women changes from the first to the last book. In *James and the Giant Peach*, the male insects insult, objectify, and bully women, creating a violent and toxic environment, while Mr. Fox wants the best for his wife, and the Pelly and the Monkey treat the Giraffe as their equal, worrying for her safety and asking for her opinion. Yet, men's behaviour remains paternalistic and condescending, even in the most recent books.

In conclusion, while the depiction of female characters is constantly misogynistic, there is an improvement from the early 1960s to the mid-1980s. Indeed, women are more present in the storyline and in the illustrations, they are involved and useful to the progress of the story, and they are treated better. Unfortunately, this does not compensate for the prevailing misogyny. Furthermore, it would be interesting to compare this evolution with the way human female characters develop under Dahl's pen.

CONCLUSION

Gender stereotypes, those that reinforce the masculine and feminine roles constructed by a given society, are very strong in children's literature, especially in Europe and in England. This binary, one-dimensional, predictable, conventional, and repetitive representation is extremely harmful to young readers because it negatively shapes their personality, behaviour, and vision of the world, and they limit their aspirations for the future. While our society is evolving as far as gender representation is concerned, children's literature has not changed much since the 1970s when experts started being interested in this topic. The findings of Hamilton et al. in 2006 were regrettably identical to that of Weitzman's et al. in 1972.

This is particularly detrimental in the case of world-renowned authors like Roald Dahl. Even though the majority of his books for children were published more than 30 years ago, his stories have constantly been revived thanks to successive reeditions, Quentin Blake's illustrations in the 1990s, and numerous adaptations into movies, musicals, or theatre plays. Today, countless YouTube read-aloud versions of Dahl's books gather millions of views, and The Roald Dahl Story Company Limited Website provides its users with audio versions read by famous actors and actresses, such as Hugh Laurie, Kate Winslet, Douglas Hodge, Miriam Margulies, or even Quentin Blake himself.

All in all, Roald Dahl is still one of the best-selling and most famous children's books' writers in the world. Therefore, the impact of his books are greater than many others. The aims of this research were to analyse his portrayal of female anthropomorphic characters, who are extremely common in his stories but neglected by previous studies that only take human characters into consideration (Mulders, 2016; Þórðardóttir, 2019; Stauri, 2020), and see to what extent this image changes over time. It was proven that animal characters significantly affect children's imagination and understanding of the world (Burke & Copenhaver, 2004, p. 213), which is why the representation of female animal characters is of so great importance for the young readers' cognitive development (Peterson & Lach, 1990, p. 193). This analysis was performed through a feminist reading.

Feminist literary criticism advocates for a thorough analysis of the way women and our society are depicted in books. Only by leaving the typical masculinist reading behind can we centre our attention on the nature and role of women in literature and how much resemblance they bear with women in real life. This was done with the female anthropomorphic animal characters present in four of Roald Dahl's books: *James and the Giant Peach* (1961), *The Magic Finger* (1966), *Fantastic Mr. Fox* (1970), and *The Giraffe and the Pelly and Me* (1985). It was

concluded that apart from being barely visible, female characters appear as inferior to male characters, both physically and emotionally. They are weaker, quieter, less active or adventurous, and confined indoors; at the same time, they are also dependent, unable to make their own decisions, and easily panic-stricken. Moreover, male characters regularly mistreat them with insults or mockery. Quentin Blake's illustrations reinforce this negative portrait by adding sexist elements with regard to their clothes and their physical attributes. Even though a very slight evolution can be noticed between the early 1960s and the mid-1980s, Roald Dahl's portrayal of female animal characters remains incredibly simplistic and misogynistic.

Having said that, does this mean that Roald Dahl's books should be censored, taken out of primary schools' reading lists, and banned from libraries and bookshops around the world? Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2021) defines the expression "cancel culture" as "the practice or tendency of engaging in mass canceling as a way of expressing disapproval and exerting social pressure". This is particularly common in the case of books, speeches, songs, movies, shows, or performances done by public figures, politicians, or artists in the past and that are not socially accepted nowadays – as is the case with Roald Dahl. For his part, Oppenheimer (2020) supports "condemning without cancelling". He questions the fact that the apology published by Dahl's family to recognise and reject the writer's anti-Semitism was unnecessary and even false, since they are not responsible for their ancestor's views. Moreover, a proper apology should have been accompanied by actual actions, i.e. donations. Obviously, "we should not ignore the public ugliness of a public figure", but in this case, "the perpetrator is gone" (Oppenheimer, 2020).

Therefore, what can be done to ensure that children's literature stops conveying gender stereotypes? Both male and female characters are portrayed in a stereotyped way, which is detrimental to all young readers, especially girls. To the question "Can an awareness of stereotypes in children's books, and an attempt to eliminate them from children's environments, make a difference?" Peterson & Lach (1990) respond categorically:

We have an obligation and the power, through the educational process, to employ children's literature in a way that demonstrates to every child the world of our dreams and visions, a world which challenges all children and maximises their potential to grow up fully human and fully alive. (p. 193)

Their findings show that children taught with non-sexist stories or books exhibited less sex-role stereotyping over time (p. 194). It is thus necessary for children's writers to create less caricatured characters and more complex, multi-faceted female characters in future books that reflect real women. Peterson & Lach (1990) affirm, "authors and illustrators should demonstrate an appropriate and respectful treatment of characters of all ages, of both genders,

and of all racial and ethnic backgrounds” (p. 191). The need for non-sexist, gender-fair literature is higher than ever. Now regarding the already existing books like Dahl’s ones, it is fundamental that parents and educators teach children how to interpret them and recognise the gender stereotypes and the misogyny.

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