



## When Fairy Tales Go Astray: The Dark Humour of Violence in Roald Dahl's *Revolting Rhymes*

Masallar Yoldan Çıkınca: Roald Dahl'ın *Revolting Rhymes* Eserinde Şiddetin Kara Mizahı

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### Öz

Ortaya çıkışlarının ve yazıya geçirilmelerinin zamanına bağlı olarak, Avrupa masallarının tarzı, teması, karakterleri ve amacı, toplumda ve kültürde mevcut egemen ideoloji kavramlarını yansıtmaya eğilimindedirler. Bazen kasıtlı bazen de bilmeden benimsedikleri bu egemen söylem, masalların yeniden yazımını teşvik eden ideolojik ikilikler arasındaki yaygın eşitsizliği de destekler. Çağdaş yazarları masallardaki ideolojik ve ciddi tonu değiştirmek için yeniden yazıma iten de bu yaygın eşitsizliktir. Anlatımlarının cinsiyetçilik, yaşçılık, fiziksel engel ayrımcılığı, ırkçılık gibi ayrımcı söylemlere dayandığı bu kaynak metinleri çağdaş yazarlar belli söylemleri gözden geçirmek amacıyla baştan ele alırlar. İngiliz çocuk edebiyatının başlıca yazarlarından biri olan Roald Dahl, *Revolting Rhymes* adlı eserinde “Külkedisi,” “Jack ve Fasulye Sırığı,” “Pamuk Prenses,” “Altın Bukle ile Üç Ayı”... gibi geleneksel Avrupa masallarını mizah, şiddet ve komik bir dille harmanlayarak kendi genel çerçevesi içinde yeniden anlatır. Özellikle üstün ve güçsüz karakterler arasındaki haksızlığı gidermek için Dahl intikam güden ancak komik örneklerle masallardaki güç dengelerini bozar. Dahl için komiklik kavramı bu eserde dehşet verici şiddetin neşeli ve komik bir şekilde ele alınmasında yatar. Şiddet klasik Avrupa masallarının yerleşik bileşenlerinden biri olduğundan, yazar yeniden yazımlarında bu özelliği adaleti yeniden tesis etmek ve okuyucuları eğlendirmek için faillelere karşı kullanır. Ek olarak, kullanılan dilin argo ifadeler ve komik bir kabalıkla yoğun bir şekilde işlenmiş olması da Dahl'ın masallara sağlamak istediği komik tiksindiriciliği yansıtır. Yazarın masalları tekrardan gözden geçirme girişiminde sadece karakterleri ve hikayeleri ele almakla kalmaz aynı zamanda mesajlarını daha beklenmedik, parodik ve isyankar bir hale sokarak altüst eder. Bu bağlamda bu makale, eserdeki şiddetin yarattığı şaşkınlık ve eğlenceyi irdelerken, Roald Dahl'ın klasik peri masallarını kara mizahla nasıl ve neden değiştirdiğini incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır.

**Anahtar sözcükler:** Roald Dahl, *Revolting Rhymes*, çocuk edebiyatı, Avrupa Peri Masalları, kara mizah, yeniden yazım, şiddet.

### Abstract

Depending on the time of their invention and transcription, style, theme, characters, and aim of the European fairy tales tend to reflect the notions of the current dominant ideology in society and culture. Either unwittingly or intentionally, dominant discourse of fairy tales endorses the overall inequality between ideological binaries which urges the contemporary writers into taking interest in rewriting these traditional tales to change the ideological and the

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serious tone. These source texts, whose expressions are based on discriminatory discourses such as sexism, ageism, ableism and racism, are revised by the contemporary authors who minds to be politically correct. Roald Dahl, one of the most significant writers of British children's literature, in his *Revolting Rhymes* retells the traditional fairy tales, such as "Cinderella," "Jack and the Beanstalk," "Snow White," "Goldilocks"... by blending humour and his whimsical style within the overall frame of these tales. In order to eliminate the injustice, especially between strong and weaker characters, Dahl disrupts the balance of power in fairy tales with vindictive yet funny examples. In this work, the concept of funny for Dahl lies in handling of horrifying violence with lighthearted and hilarious manner. Since violence has been one of the entrenched constituents of classic European fairy tales, Dahl in his rewritings employs violence against the perpetrators to re-establish the justice and to amuse the readers. Moreover, the fact that he densely crafts the language with slang expressions and amusing coarseness reflects the hilariously revolting side of the fairy tales he aims to provide. In his attempt to deviate the tales, Dahl not only deals with the fairy tale characters and their stories, but also he subverts their messages into more unexpected, parodic and revolting conditions. In this light, this paper aims to analyse how and why Roald Dahl alters those classical fairy tales with dark humour while examining the laughter and amazement of violence to the readers.

**Keywords:** Roald Dahl, *Revolting Rhymes*, children's literature, European Fairy Tales, dark humour, rewriting, violence.

## **Introduction**

Given their venerable quality and long lasting influence on the history of world literature, the relationship between fairy tales and the humankind can be accepted as tightly knit and reciprocal one which has developed in an ongoing interaction. Besides its long established literary position, one of the significant aspects of their relationship with humanity is their edifying aim and thus most of the fairy tales have been endowed with moralizing overtones. However, due to the fact that they had been transcribed generally by male scribes from oral sources and had undergone myriad of cultural and ideological changes, classic European fairy tales were not able to retain their untouched quality through the ages. Being at times politically incorrect, discriminative, racist, mostly sexist and violent, yet always carrying a message to promote good deeds and morality, fairy tales have always had a paradoxical nexus between their contexts and parables. Having seen the discriminative nature and paradoxical condition of these tales, contemporary writers took interest in rewriting these traditional tales in order to change the faulty sides that they wished to alter for the better (Bartu, 2014, p.vii).

Correspondingly, Roald Dahl, one of the prominent authors of British children's literature, in his *Revolting Rhymes* (1982) expresses his disturbance with the classical versions of the fairy tales through his revisited versions. In the collection, Dahl retells the traditional fairy tales of "Cinderella," "Jack and the Beanstalk," "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs," "Goldilocks and the Three Bears," "Little Red Riding Hood and the Wolf," "The Three Little Pigs" in verse form by blending humour and his whimsical style with the narrative frame of the tales. As an overall quality of Dahl's children's fiction, grotesque and dark humour constitutes his idiosyncratic narrative strategy. Thus, without being an exception, *Revolting Rhymes*, too, is weaved with a strong sense of dark humour for children which they are supposed to find hilarious. On another level, the workings of dark humour in the collection create a platform for equality for the fairy tale characters who lacked thereof in the traditional versions. Through reformulation, Dahl projects to subvert the moral, inequitable, and discriminatory aspects of the fairy tales in a more unexpected, parodic and revolting way. In this frame, this study scrutinizes Dahl's liberating subversive strategy of the most popular three fairy tales namesake of their heroines who are persecuted for their gender, age, economical status and good hearts.

## ***Revolting Rhymes* and Dahlesque Humour of Violence**

The title *Revolting Rhymes* is the biggest inkling revealing the aim and content of the work equivocally. Due to its homonym quality the word "revolting" in the title can be examined in two layers; the first one rising against the subjection of the entrenched rules describes the revisionist quality of the work. Although revisionist fairy tale retellings are no uncommon writing strategies for contemporary writers, such

as Angela Carter, A.S. Byatt, Robert Coover and many more, what Dahl's new retellings trying to accomplish is to overtly announce their aim of defying the authorial voice of the fairy tales. These tales are literally revolting against the rooted yet crooked traditional voice that endorses sexism, violence, and unfair treatment. The other layer of the equivocal title refers to the repugnancy and vulgarity of the events that take place in Dahl's revisited versions. Ironically enough, the violence that permeated deep into the classical tales have not disturbed the readers for ages, in Dahl's revisioned versions, playful twists and turns with the sickening but hilarious treatment of the characters do play a great role on the second layer of the title.

Despite Dahl's effort to subvert the tales for the better, the work sparks reaction due to the use of language and the irreverence of the once docile fairy tale hero and heroines who have been recast. In the 1990s, *Revoltin' Rhymes* was censored in U.S. state Virginia, for Dahl employed words such as "slut" and "hell" in some of the tales, illustration of gory violence of Cinderella's sister's decapitation by the prince and the giant's cannibalism in "Jack and the Beanstalk" (Green & Karolides, 2005, p. 139). The aim behind this censor in Virginia was for the fear that it can "encourage children to disobey their parents", similarly, the same sentiment in Massachusetts led to the removal of the book from elementary schools (Furniss, 2002, p. 352). However, this was not the first censor Dahl received due to his use of language and violence in his books. Especially his books for children are fairly loaded with the use of mildly vulgar language, graphic violence scenes and unruly characters that got *The Witches*, *James and the Giant Peach*, and *Matilda* similarly challenged.

Dahl's perception of humour occasionally bears some bleak undertones which can also be observed in his adult works, too. More like his trademark, the combination of humour and disgust creates "a low-brow and unsophisticated" type of fun "catering to the bases impulses of children" (Stallcup, 2012, p. 31). The reason why *Revoltin' Rhymes* was categorized under the type of childish humour can be explained through the ideas that "young children are interested in the way language works" and they find "rhythms, playful imagery of nursery rhymes very funny" (Mallan, 1993, p. 2). Although the perception and appreciation of the funny change throughout the years in one's life, some approaches and theories about humour, or what makes us laugh remain the same. One of these long-lasting theories defends the notion that incongruity is the key element of humour. The clash between what we know and what we expect provides the incongruity that amuses us, hence humour is "produced by the experience of felt incongruity" (Critchley, 2002, p. 2). In the light of this approach, humour of *Revoltin' Rhymes* highly depends on the incongruity between the rewritten and classical European versions. For this reason, it is possible to remark that Dahl's revisionist strategy is what makes these tales funny, not just for child readers but also for the adults. On closer inspection, the incongruity in Dahl's tales "relies on an irreverent humour to guy his targets and soften the impact of grisly events" (Mallan, 1993, p. 43). These events of concern, surely, are not just literary creations of Dahl, specifically fairy tales are of a genre that is notorious for its violent and grim content.

Popular knowledge of fairy tales can be traced back to early Disney film renderings whose plot elements are in total discrepancy with that of the classic ones. Contextually, the plots and violent parts of the tales were either watered down or altered to create a milder text for a wider audience. It would not be unreasonable to remark that "the name of Disney had become synonymous with fairy tale" (Hallett & Karasek, 2014, p. 116) when the story and the messages of the tales are in question. Mainstream perceptions of fairy tales tended to emphasize what Disney, as an enterprise, wished to attribute new meanings to the genre of fairy tale (Hallett & Karasek, 2014, p. 115). These new attributions constituted the new tenets of Disney concept of fairy tales, hence creating the incompatible popular perception of the tales. As Hallett and Karasek argue "what has since been identified as 'classic'" covers the notions that "the fairy tale as romantic wish fulfilment, the dramatic struggle between good and evil (complete with the tried-and-true chase sequence), the scene-stealing secondary characters, and the song-and-dance catchy tunes and memorable lyrics" (2014, p.116). Hence, the majority of the people who are at least acquainted with European fairy tales do not know the source versions of the fairy tales in the collections of the Grimms, Christian Andersen and Charles Perrault.

When the tales in these collectors' anthologies are reviewed, the stark differences and ghastly illustrations of violence, murder, mutilation, pain, and suffering are hard to be overlooked. With regards to the use of violence in many of the tales can be accepted as a way to prove their moral and didacticism with

a heightened sense of fear and pity. For Tatar, “in fairy tales, nearly every character – from the most hardened criminal to the Virgin Mary- is capable of cruel behaviour” (1987, p. 5) hence, in a more academic platform, it is a fact that fairy tales’ relation with violence and pain has been somehow tightly interwoven from the very beginning. The violence in the classical tales reaches such levels that these details are no less than that of any horror movie goriness. Examples cover various scenes in many different fairy tales such as at the end of Disney’s film *Cinderella* the the stepsisters disappear after the shoe-fitting scene and audience does not know what happens to them. (Disney, 1950, 1:12:57-1:14:29). Yet in the Grimm Brothers’ version, they cut their toes and heels to fit their feet in the shoe and the tale finishes with a dark vindictive end in which the step sisters are blinded by the birds that helped Cinderella in her house chores. (2009, p. 126-128). Again, in Grimms’ version, evil stepmother of Snow White cooks and salts the heart of a young boar to devour, thinking that it is Snow White’s heart and in the wedding celebration of Snow White and the prince, as a retribution she is forced to put on red hot iron slippers and dance until she drops dead (2009, p. 263-271). Therefore, when classic fairy tales and Roald Dahl’s retold versions are juxtaposed, having seen the violent nature of the tales, Dahl’s use of violence does not stand out as the worst example, contrarily it, indeed, bears one of the earliest features of the genre.

The innovative turn that Dahl has brought to his book is obviously not the use of violence, rather it is how he introduced violence to humour and satire as a means of consolidation of the dominant feeling of fun in the book. His combination of humour and violence serves the purpose of the book so well that Tatar also points out the case as follows:

Professional raconteurs report that children are rarely squeamish when they hear about decapitation or other forms of mutilation. Grisly episodes often strike them as amusing rather than horrifying. Vilma Mönckeberg, a notable teller of fairy tales, recalls that her young audiences found episodes in “Juniper Tree” to be “hilarious.” The cannibalistic tableau in that tale did not elicit disgust and outrage as she had feared. Another story teller reports that children “howled with delight” when hearing about the agony of [a character] in the tale. (1987, p.20-21).

Correspondingly, in the light of this information, while making the reader -adult or child- laugh, Dahl also “echoes the retributive violence” and the related concerns of violent acts “familiar to such stories.” (Thacker, 2012, p. 19). Nevertheless, the laughter of the readers carrying a cathartic effect does not side with perpetrating violence, it is just a physical reaction of taking delight in seeing how the justice is secured.

On the very first page of the work, Dahl is overtly disclaiming that his retold tales are the first examples of brutal violence. Assuming that the readers have been deceived by the sugar-coated popular renditions, he gives the preliminary information so as not to own the notoriety and responsibility of the gory representations.

I guess you think you know this story.  
You don't. The real one's much more gory.  
The phoney one, the one you know,  
Was cooked up years and years ago,  
And made to sound all soft and sappy  
Just to keep the children happy. (Dahl, 1982, p. 5)

After the short disclaimer, the tale-teller Dahl starts recounting the first rewritten fairy tale of the collection “Cinderella,” whose story is rather different from the source tale which is “about the agonies and hopes which form the essential content of sibling rivalry and about the degraded heroine winning out over her siblings who abused her” (Bettelheim, 1976, p. 236). Dahl’s version of “Cinderella” starts in medias res and gives no information about the former life of the heroine. Since the most significant motif of the fairy tale is sibling rivalry and the final merit is the marriage of the innocent heroine, the reader finds Cinderella left alone and the ugly sisters departed for the Prince’s ball. Later on, like in the source tale, fairy godmother

emerges to help Cinderella. Having been provided what she needed for the ball, Cinderella goes to the ball and dances with the prince till the midnight strikes. Dahl's witty and sardonic style reveals itself in the illustration of the major characters and scenes of the source tale. In the part where she wishes for things from the Godmother, Cinderella's language gives the first impression about her character. She commands Godmother to take her to the ball because she is "jealous"<sup>1</sup> and brazenly asks for a dress, a coach, earrings, a diamond brooch, silver slippers and nylon panty-hose (Dahl, 1982, p.6). At the ball she dances with the prince, when she has to leave the palace at midnight the scene is depicted with bawdy details that Cinderella does not take her leave elegantly and involuntarily, but she tries to run away from palace.

Then midnight struck. She shouted, Heck!  
 I've got to run to save my neck!  
 'The Prince cried, 'No! Alas! Alack!  
 He grabbed her dress to hold her back.  
 As Cindy shouted, 'Let me go!  
 The dress was ripped from head to toe.  
 She ran out in her underwear,  
 And lost one slipper on the stair. (Dahl 1982, p. 8)

In total contrast with the source tale, Cinderella is stripped off both her clothes and her dignity unlike a typical innocent persecuted heroine figure. Even though the scene in which she runs out semi-naked seems like a disgrace both for the heroine and the rooted fairy tale tradition, Dahl retells this part so amusingly that the reader laughs at the crude incongruity of ashamed semi-naked Cinderella they see on the regal setting. Another ridicule of the tale is on the trademark symbol, glass slippers, which determine the ultimate fate of Cinderella. Yet, in *Revolting Rhymes*, the silver slipper is stolen from the prince and "flushed. . . down to the loo" (1982, p. 8) by one of the ugly step sisters "whose face was blotched with blisters" (1982, p. 8). As a foreshadowing, it can be claimed that since the ticket to affluent and comfortable life is flushed down to the toilet in a tragi-comical way, the end of the tale will be in parallel with the fate of the silver slipper. With the passing days, the prince sets about finding the owner of the slipper. Due to the fact that the ugly sister swapped the silver slipper she stole with one her shoes, the prince is feels obliged to marry her. Yet, mocking the entrenched idea of longing for the perfect marriage and waiting for the male saviour, Dahl distorts the image of the dainty slipper in the tale along with the connotations it carries. Instead of the delicate and bright glass slipper, "long and very wide," (Dahl, 1982, 9) icky smelling slipper is carried by the prince around the country and in the end when the real owner, the ugly step sister, tries it, it fits her. Because of the ugliness of the girl the prince does not want to marry her and he orders her head to be chopped off. Apart from the hilarious moments in the tale, gruesome and violent aspects are presented at the utmost level with bloodshed and graphic descriptions of prince's cruelty as an evidence for the horrid humour of Dahl.

As a common motif, most of the princes in fairy tales emerge from the outer realms to save the princesses or damsels in distress. They function as tools to disenchant the wicked designs, demonic powers that put curses on the heroines and in the end they win the girls' hands to have a 'happily ever after.' Jack Zipes' opinion about this condition is that the goal of this "active, competitive, industrious hero" is "money, power, and a woman (also associated with chattel). His jurisdiction is the open world. His happiness depends on the just use of power" (2006, p. 70). However, the prince of Dahl in "Cinderella" does not display the traits of a stereotypical gallant prince since his objective is not to reach happily ever after, but to find the beautiful girl at the ball. Therefore, when the prince sees the possibility of marrying one of the ugly sisters, he escapes the consequences of his decision and exercises his power commanding: "Off with her head" (Dahl, 1982, p. 11). From another perspective, the prince has the sisters decapitated for his own happiness and this move, as a way to avert the unwanted and unexpected threats, is unquestionably disproportionate and ill-advised. Therefore, refashioning both Cinderella and the prince, Dahl, with a humorous but gory twist, shatters the former message of the source tale. Regarding the end of the tale, Murdoch contends that,

<sup>1</sup> Cinderella's poor language indicates her low-brow and rude new identity.

“Dahl follows the middle-class rationalist tradition by exposing the prince as a tyrant of Henry VIII tendencies” and marries Cinderella to a jam-maker of a modest and industrious quality (2006, p.167). Consequently, at the end of the tale Cinderella comes to a conclusion that she can no longer marry a man who chops off heads and realizes her folly in the first wish and ask for another one.

Oh kind Fairy,  
This time I shall be more wary.  
No more Princes, no more money.  
I have had my taste of honey.  
I'm wishing for a decent man.  
They're hard to find: D'you think you can?  
Within a minute, Cinderella  
Was married to a lovely feller,  
A simple jam-maker by trade,  
Who sold good home-made marmalade.  
Their house was filled with smiles and laughter  
And they were happy ever after. (Dahl, 1982, p. 12)

Cinderella notices that the prince has “spoiled morals by his wealth” (Murdoch, 2006, p. 167) and she relinquishes her dream of being princess and chooses a life with middle class standards in order to be truly happy. Supporting the idea of simplicity and giving out the main moral through the surprising ending of the tale, Dahl not only changes the solid content of the tale with dark humour but also aims to convey a new message for the readers that objects to the use of violence by means of Cinderella’s final choice promoting happiness over rank and wealth.

The third story of the collection, “Snow-White and the Seven Dwarves” begins similarly to the source tale and the evil stepmother becomes the major figure of the first part of the tale. If the tale is divided into two, the first part is particularly about the villain and the second part revolves around Snow White and seven horse-race jockeys who are also called seven dwarves. Miss Machlahose, Snow-White’s stepmother, marries the king, comes to live in the palace and brings her talking looking-glass with her. Having learned that Snow White is most beautiful woman alive, she gets enraged and threatens to “scrag that child,” “skin ‘er” and “have her rotten guts for dinner” (1982, p. 23). Her display of serious violence and cannibalistic tendencies can be considered to show the intensity of her rage and jealousy. However, when the Huntsman brings her a heart of a bullock purchased from the local butcher, she eats the heart thinking that it is Snow-White’s. Although the heart-eating scene has a shock value both for the adult and child readers, it is in fact a part taken from the Grimms’ version which is accepted as the source version. To ease the goriness with the following lines, tale-teller Dahl butts in and makes a funny comment: “I only hope she cooked it well/ Boiled heart can be tough as hell” (1982, p.24). Hence, by re-employing this brutal scene Dahl decides not to eliminate the crude nature of the tales, yet he adds his humour to mitigate the power of violence and shifts the focus to amusement. Since the real goriness of the nature of fairy tales is announced in the first lines of the book, Dahl also adds some other unpleasant and cruel aspects of vulgar language, possible cannibalism and fits of hysterics to make the character a more cartoonish figure and through these he prepares a well-deserved final justice.

In the second part, Snow-White released by the Huntsman is not illustrated as a helpless girl, on the contrary, she is able to find herself a job and continues her life with seven horse-race jockeys. The only common point between these men who are “no more than three foot ten” (1982, p. 26) and the seven dwarves is their shortness. They are not as diligent as the miner dwarves, as a matter of fact, they are hopeless gamblers who are penniless all the time because of their indulgence of horse-race. Discarding the traditional qualities, the second part of the tale gives the impression that Dahl carries Snow White and the seven dwarves to contemporary times. Mentioning butcher’s shop, horse-races and banks, the characters seem to be harmonized with the ways of the world. Plausible as it seems, the aim of these eight people is to earn their livelihood in a world where money is an important issue. Transporting the fairy tale characters into the

modern world dominated with financial concerns, Dahl attempts to establish “the spirit of the carnival” and “degrades almost all aspects of the classic script” (Flegar, 2015, p.174). His degradation pertains to the use of abusive language, representations of physical violence and distorts the dignity of the fairy tales to bring about their subverted and unexplored value. Therefore, in the tale neither an impending threat from the stepmother nor a gallant prince comes to look for her. Since Snow White is out of the traditional fairy tale universe, she and the jockeys need take care of their own problems of poverty. Hatching up a plot to steal Stepmother’s talking looking-glass, they find a solution for the biggest problem jeopardizing their livelihood. The function of looking glass for Miss Machlahose has been to ensure her beauty all along, however, streetwise Snow White contrives a way to use it for their own benefit and after stealing the mirror asks for some accurate tips for the upcoming race.

The Ascot Gold Cup Steeplechase?  
 The Mirror whispered sweet and low,  
 The horse’s name is Mistletoe.’  
 ...  
 Then rushed away to raise some dough  
 With which to back old Mistletoe.  
 They pawned their watches, sold the car,  
 They borrowed money near and far,  
 (For much of it they had to thank  
 The manager of Barclays Bank.)  
 They went to Ascot and of course  
 For once they backed the winning horse.  
 ...  
 Each Dwarf and Snow-White got a share  
 And each was soon millionaire (Dahl, 1982, p. 28)

Living in a society in which money is one of the prerequisites for independence and self-sufficiency, Snow White and the dwarves cheat on the race to sustain their livelihood. Contrary to the source tale, Snow White and the dwarves abandon their victimized and helpless roles. With the leadership of Snow White they retaliate against Miss Maclahose. Although the ‘tit for tat’ attitude is situated at the heart of the conflict between good and evil in the tale, what Snow White has done is not a threat to evil stepmother’s life but only to her looking-glass that can bring money. Dahl’s use of subversive power in the act of theft is evidently a counter attack to the stepmother to establish the equality between the oppressed and oppressor. Furthermore, the final lines “...gambling is not a sin/ Provided that you always win” highlights the fact that Dahl is a biased tale-teller who “aligns with the child reader” or the young fairy tale hero/ines to “take away the adult authorial power to caution” or disturb the justice system of the villains (Flegar, 2015, p. 176). Redefining gambling as an excuseable act, the incongruity lies in the denouement of the tale which show that theft has actually liberated the dwarves and Snow White. Hence, eradicating the malice of a powerful adult and prioritizing the liberation of the oppressed and powerless, Dahl irreverently plays with the proper and righteous means to have his characters prevail over the oppressors.

Another well-known tale that was retouched with a funny and surprising twist in the end is “Little Red Riding Hood”. Though the source tale is a cautionary tale for the girls about being aware of the outer dangers and threats that await them, its subtext is endowed with sexual connotations and innuendos between the wolf and the little girl. In Dahl’s “Little Red Riding Hood” the tale once again starts in medias res and Wolf knocks grandmother’s house’s door because he is hungry. In the first scene of the tale grandmother is eaten up by Wolf immediately and he is not convinced that he has had decent meal. Putting grandma’s clothes on, Wolf waits for Little Red Riding Hood for another feast. When Little Red arrives home, the famous question and answer part starts between the two and Little Red asks why grandma has great big ears and great big eyes. Yet, she doesn’t ask the final question of why she has big teeth that leads Wolf to his fatal attack. Instead, she expresses what a lovely furry coat she has on. Parodying the traditional and

significant parts of the tale, Dahl provides the characters with depth and humour. Through those given qualities, characters act with their free will in their speeches and behaviours. This creates an incongruity between what is expected and what happens in the trajectory of the tale and since this incongruity is fuelled with comical and striking retorts, the humorous tone is preserved. The wolf who is impatient with hunger sets an example to this unexpected incongruity when he demands Little Red to ask the final question to get to the point in which he can gulp her down quickly. Unlike in the source tale, Dahl's Wolf is not a cunning but an impatient and gullible character that is susceptible to be deceived by Little Red. This manipulation of the source tale and the juxtaposition of the basic traits of Wolf and Little Red create the humorous tone that stems from the subversion of the old order in the new version. Correspondingly, when Little Red does not ask the question that Wolf wants her to, the scene manifests funny and startling quality of the Dahlesque "Little Red Riding Hood":

That's wrong!' cried Wolf' Have you forgot'  
To tell me what BIG TEETH I've got?  
Ah well, no matter what you say,  
I'm going to eat you anyway.  
The small girl smiles. One eyelid flickers.  
She whips a pistol from her knickers.  
She aims it at the creature's head  
And bang bang bang, she shoots him dead. (Dahl, 1982, p. 40)

Caricaturing the seemingly small Little Red as a trouble girl with a gun, the tale gives opportunity to the innocent persecuted heroine to sort her problem out with her own rules. Without the hunter figure in the tale, Little Red is transformed into such an intrepid and anarchic child that she knows how to defend herself and even how to shoot a wolf. Not a helpless and innocent figure anymore, but a resilient and sardonic one, in Dahl's tale Little Red is depicted as more like character than a stereotypical fairy tale figure. Apart from the humour and twisted moral focus of the tale, Thacker states that Dahl "is able to point out that stories are told in different ways and that it is the story teller who makes that choice" (2012, p. 14). Therefore, similar to the attitude of the tale teller in "Cinderella", the author overtly takes side with the oppressed characters and provides them with power to rectify their stories for their own good and equity. Moreover, the aggressive attitude of Little Red is linked to such a final that as she reaches her aim without being devoured, she rewards herself as the tale-teller remarks as follows:

I came across Miss Riding Hood.  
But what a change! No cloak of red,  
No silly hood upon her head.  
She said, 'Hello, and do please note'  
My lovely furry WOLFSKIN COAT. (Dahl, 1982, p. 40)

The final representation of Little Red is more than violent for she not only kills Wolf but also flays him to make herself a wolf-skin coat. In accordance with the strategies of revisiting fairy tales, Dahl in this version establishes the transformation by changing the chief symbols of the tale and ascribing new meanings to it. Hence, as Dahl has stripped the symbolic red riding hood off the girl and granted the wolf-skin coat she flayed, the radical transformation of Little Red from her former timidity and innocence to the new bold identity is depicted playfully. Although she is the winner of the tale again, without the help of the hunter this time, Little Red's effort in saving herself with pistol and flaying do not add on to the existing violence of the tale. The only difference is that innocent heroine is not punished severely and then rescued by a male saviour, however she controls the trajectory of her own story and kills Wolf before she is devoured. Sharing the common denominator with the previous innocent persecuted heroines of the examined tales, Little Red does not wait for a saviour and deals with her own problem in her own way and restores the justice for her own case.



As the extra intertextual reference to the new identity of Little Red, the starving Wolf character again appears in the last tale “The Three Little Pigs” in which he is this time chasing after three succulent pigs to appease his hunger. Like in the source tale, the wolf devours the first two pigs by blowing off their houses which are respectively made up of straw and twigs. However, the third pig whose house is made up of bricks is informed that the wolf will blow his house up and urgently asks for help from Little Red as she is reputed for her perfect wolf-repelling qualities. Although, there is no such an interference of Little Red in the original tale, Dahl employs intertextual elements in the last tale to build the solidarity between oppressed figures of fairy tale tradition along with entertaining tone as follows:

He dialled as quickly as he could  
 The number of Red Riding Hood.  
 ‘Hello,’ she said. ‘Who’s speaking? Who?’  
 ‘Oh, hello Piggy, how d’you do?’  
 Pig cried, ‘I need your help, Miss Hood!’  
 ‘Oh help me, please! D’you think you could?’  
 ‘I’ll try, of course,’ Miss Hood replied.  
 ‘What’s on your mind?’ . . . ‘A Wolf’ Pig cried.  
 ‘I know you’ve dealt with wolves before,’  
 ‘And now I’ve got one at my door’ (Dahl, 1982, p. 46 )

Given her previous notoriety with wolves, Little Red is brought into the tale by the author’s own hand and the organic unity of the tale is again altered both by extra-textual characters and incongruent speeches. Therefore, the task of killing Wolf is successfully accomplished by Little Red and her famous pistol she has hidden in her knickers is utilized again as a source of laughter. However, with a shocking twist Dahl puts an end to the collection and with the last occasion he summarizes the gist of *Revolting Rhymes* through the major premises of humour and violence which create a shocking but hilarious text.

Pig, peeping through the window, stood  
 And yelled, ‘Well done, Miss Riding Hood!’  
 ‘Ah, Piglet, you must never trust  
 Young ladies from the upper crust.  
 For now, Miss Riding Hood, one notes,  
 Not only has two wolfskin coats,  
 But when she goes from place to place,  
 She has a PIGSKIN TRAVELLING CASE. (Dahl, 1982, p.47)

## Conclusion

Shattering the supposed solidarity between the oppressed characters of fairy tales, Dahl brings a new unexpected conclusion to the work that can represent what he has been attempting to do with fairy tales in a sentence. In this context, the statement on the back cover “Nursery tales with bite!” alludes to Dahl’s uncommon revisions of the tales for the reader who does not have an idea about the book. The bites provided by Dahl should not be confused with a condescending act of correction of all the erroneous sides of fairy tales or a literary revenge of the victimized hero/ines. Rather, the bites, or in other words Dahl’s retelling strategy, lays bare how the subversive power of the act of story-telling operates. Since every story teller recounts their stories in their own style, assuming the tale-teller role in the book, Dahl creates a new world of fairy tales whose atmosphere is nourished by the long-established traditional fairy tale heritage. Nevertheless, his subversive tale-telling also bestows the power to the characters and the stories to go astray. For Furniss, Dahl’s fairy tale characters are not the victims of violence like in the traditional stories (2002, p. 355) and the reason for this liberation is Dahl’s commitment to “writ[ing] one’s own story and refus[ing] to be subjected to others” (Thacker, 2006, p. 28). Another point that is crucial to the power is the playfulness

and hilarity of his style which “pokes fun at the impenetrable canon” (Murdoch, 2011, p. 171). Not giving the upper-hand to the stern didacticism which makes use of cruel violence, Dahl brings out his message along with a laughter that is created by the funny use of violence. Instead of prioritizing the didacticism of doing good and proper, he allows the fairy tales and characters transcend the limits of passivity to set a fair, liberated and active example for all the readers. Thus with his idiosyncratic style, Dahl’s combination of dark humour and moral message in the tales deliver the best of both worlds for the readers in familiar contexts with unexpected revisions.

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