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DR. SEUSS HAS NOT BEEN CANCELED

Unraveling the Evolution, Controversy and Literary Legacy of Theodor Seuss Geisel

Supervisor
Ch. Prof. Gregory Dowling

Co-Supervisor
Ch. Prof. Elisa Bordin

Graduand
Elisabetta Ciet
Matriculation Number 854540

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The more that you read,
The more things you will know.
The more that you learn,
The more places you'll go.

Dr. Seuss, "Oh, the Places You'll Go!"

ABSTRACT

This master's thesis delves into the legacy of Theodor Seuss Geisel, widely recognized as Dr. Seuss, a prominent and imaginative figure in children's literature. The study aims to examine Dr. Seuss's influence and significance within the historical landscape of the United States during the latter half of the twentieth century. Employing a comprehensive approach involving literature review and analysis of both his writing and illustrations, it scrutinizes Dr. Seuss's literary and artistic style, as well as his influence on subsequent generations of children's book authors and illustrators.

Beyond merely exploring Dr. Seuss's creative contributions, this research critically discusses the reception of his work, particularly in light of contemporary controversies related to representation, diversity, and cultural sensitivity. Drawing from a diverse range of sources, the study engages with the evolving criticism surrounding Dr. Seuss's stories and imagery, while exploring their complexity and impact on readers, educators, and society at large. Emphasis is placed on the phenomenon of "cancel culture" and its implications for Dr. Seuss's legacy, discussing the ongoing debates regarding censorship and reassessment through a modern lens. Additionally, the thesis investigates Dr. Seuss's responses to criticism and controversy, providing insights into his intentions and reflections. Ultimately, it reflects on Dr. Seuss's lasting influence on children's literature and Northern American popular culture. Finally, the study acknowledges more recent authors who contribute to a more inclusive literary landscape for children, contemplating the broader context of creating a richer and more representative literary world.

INTRODUCTION

The contemporary landscape of the book industry is undeniably shaped by the realm of children's literature, which is widely recognized as a fundamental component of publishing. The twentieth century witnessed widespread fascination with various aspects of childhood, encompassing both its mental and physical dimensions. Society places paramount importance on childhood, often drawing connections between these formative years and subsequent behavior. However, it is crucial to emphasize that both the conceptualization of childhood and its dedicated literature are recent phenomena. Indeed, the cultural perspective on children today markedly differs from that of two centuries ago. Townsend underscored this shift in 1965, stating that "[b]efore there could be children's books, there had to be children-- children, that is, who were accepted as beings with their own particular needs and interests, not only as miniature men and women" (17).

Additionally, children's literature emerged after the establishment of adult writing as a legitimate genre, specifically after the second half of the nineteenth century. Therefore, only recently have academic studies begun to acknowledge the diversity and complexity of children's literature, a fascinating field of study that examines the creation and consumption of literature geared toward young readers and its impact on their upbringing, while also offering new analyses and studies that reflect the most recent developments[1]. This is why this master's thesis embarks on a journey through the life and creative evolution of Theodor Geisel who, as Pease states[2], greatly contributed to children's literature and American popular culture in his sixty-five-year career that covered the second half of the twentieth century, when social pressures and commercialization shaped the stories written.

[1] See Shavit, Zohar. *Poetics of Children's Literature*. The University of Georgia Press, Athens and London, 1986.
[2] See Pease, Donald E. *Theodor Geisel: A Portrait of the Man Who Became Dr. Seuss*. Oxford UP, 1999.

This research examines the two sides of Dr. Seuss, delving into his enduring reputation as a cherished children's author and illustrator, alongside the controversies surrounding certain aspects of his work. The goal is to offer a comprehensive insight into his influence on children's literature in the United States. The exploration will unfold across four chapters, employing a critical analysis of both primary and secondary sources. Included in the investigation are six works by Dr. Seuss that will no longer be published "because of racist and insensitive imagery" (McCracken). Authoritative references, such as Pease (1999), Cohen (2004), Nel (2012), and Jones (2019) will also contribute to this nuanced analysis.

To lay a foundational context, this exploration starts with a delineation of children's literature which has historically been "regarded by other systems as inferior" (Shavit 33). Shavit elucidates how societal valuation of literary systems and their creators reveals the prevailing attitude towards this genre. As most children's novels are excluded from cultural history, national literary narratives rarely acknowledge their existence. This dichotomy establishes a divide between the category of children's literature and what is considered authentic literature. Yet, in the context of the United States, Dr. Seuss receiving the Pulitzer Prize in 1984 "for his contribution over nearly half a century to the education and enjoyment of America's children and their parents" (Shaw) serves as an illustration of how a children's author can attain one of literature's most prestigious honors. Simultaneously, this recognition underscores the notion that children's authors can be selected for such honors primarily because of the educational significance of their work.

By employing a blend of literary techniques and linguistic analysis, this study will shed light on the stylistic complexities inherent in Geisel's body of work. The objective is to reveal the underlying themes, narrative approaches, and artistic intentions that form the foundation of his writings, in pursuit of a deeper understanding of this author's legacy. According to Pease, Dr. Seuss's impact on reshaping the cultural and literary environment of the United States

manifests itself in his narratives, which connect diverse generations and embody liberal democratic values[3].

Thus, Geisel's career, from political activism to storytelling, represents a fascinating evolution, as he is still regarded as one of the most significant authors of children's books and illustrators of the twentieth century. His role in propaganda during World War II, touched upon in the first chapter, is an important aspect of the historical setting in which children's literature evolved in the United States. Even after the war was over, this event shaped his writing and style, giving him a distinct voice in children's literature, which will be analyzed in the second chapter. Using characters like Horton the Elephant and The Cat in the Hat to spread messages of support for the war, Dr. Seuss created a number of animated illustrations and picture books that encouraged patriotism and the struggle against Nazism. In addition, the third chapter explores various factors contributing to this phenomenon, where the works of Dr. Seuss have become a focal point of cancel culture discussions, prompting considerations about their alignment with cultural sensitivities and suitability within the dynamic landscape of today's diverse society. In fact, as Nel underlines, "the cultures of childhood play a prominent role in replicating prejudice" (*Was the Cat in the Hat Black* 4).

Therefore, the bulk of this thesis will approach the complex issues of "cancel culture" and evaluate some of Dr. Seuss's earlier works, such as *McElligot's Pool*, and *Scrambled Eggs Super!*, which have sparked extensive debate in today's academic circles in terms of diversity and representation. These discussions reflect the evolving landscape of literature, exploring questions of authorial responsibility, freedom of expression, and the role of art in shaping our cultural narratives. The fourth chapter will bring everything full circle by highlighting how Geisel was able to influence a generation of writers and illustrators who, in turn, explored fresh creative avenues in children's literature, mirroring the complexity of the real world.

[3] See Pease, Donald E. "Dr. Seuss's (Un) Civil Imaginaries" *NYLS Law Review 509*, Vol. 58. January 2014.

Undoubtedly, technological progress and increased media accessibility have expanded opportunities for children's literature. This evolution has established it as a legitimate and significant form of artistic expression and created an environment conducive to critical analysis.

As a consequence, this study positions itself within the broader critical discourse on the body of work of Dr. Seuss. The primary objective of this thesis is to trace Geisel's ethical development and the approach to the critiques through the legacy of Dr. Seuss Enterprises, at the same time drawing parallels with authors like Willems and Stocker. Alongside this analysis, a secondary goal is to introduce this figure to the Italian audience, contributing to the ongoing global conversation surrounding children's literature and its themes that resonate across generations.

CHAPTER I: FROM THEODOR GEISEL TO DR. SEUSS

"Children's reading and children's thinking are the rock bottom base upon which this country will rise. Or not rise. […] In these days of tension and confusion . . . books for children have a greater potential for good or evil, than any other form of literature on earth" (qtd. in Go). It was in 1960 that Theodor Geisel penned these words, which appeared in the *Los Angeles Times*. The journey to reaching this understanding was an extended one, filled with unexpected events and deviations. In fact, "the genius of Dr. Seuss was the outcome of a personal and artistic evolution that spanned every decade of the American century, and Geisel [would not] fully embrace his profession or achieve his most significant triumphs until midlife and beyond" (Go). Hence, this master's thesis will commence by providing an overview of the significant milestones in Theodor Geisel's life, tracing his evolution into the successful figure of Dr. Seuss.

1.1 The Life and Career of Theodor Seuss Geisel

Few names in the vibrant world of children's literature have the same resonance as that of Theodor Geisel, better known as Dr. Seuss, whose whimsical tales, enduring characters, and imaginative illustrations have inspired audiences of all ages. However, among the well-known tales and beloved classics, there lies a misconception that frequently sets people on the wrong course—a story that needs to be untangled to understand the true origins of the author. Many associate Dr. Seuss with Mulberry Street, a rather unremarkable street in the city of Springfield, Massachusetts, which is now a "major destination on a map of the American imagination"[4], as

[4] See Jones, Brian Jay. *Becoming Dr. Seuss: Theodor Geisel and the Making of an American Imagination*. New York, Dutton, 2019.

it has been portrayed in one of his earliest writings *And to Think That I Saw It on Mulberry Street* as a lively and enchanted setting (Jones 3). Despite being charming, this comparison is inaccurate. Contrary to popular belief, Theodor Geisel was not born or raised on Mulberry Street. Therefore, it is imperative to turn back the clock to examine Dr. Seuss's less well-known formative years in order to fully comprehend the journey that shaped him into the enduring personality he is today. Since, "[f]rom his birth at 22 Prospect Street on March 2, 1904, to his death in La Jolla, California, on September 24, 1991, Geisel's life was marked by the major events of the twentieth century" (Pease *Theodor Geisel: A Portrait of the Man Who Became Dr. Seuss* 2,3), this master's thesis will start with the analysis of Geisel's early life and his first milestones.

As Jones points out, he was born on March 2, 1904, in Springfield, Massachusetts, and grew up in Fairfield Street, a street that has not changed much since the time the Geisels lived there in the twentieth century. Springfield indisputably emerged as a "major landmark on the frontier of American inventiveness and imagination" with Dr. Seuss, one of its most famous sons, embodying the uniqueness of American minds, and illustrating the diverse spirit of Springfield's accomplished individuals (Jones 5). "Arms manufacture and breweries ranked high among the industries for which Springfield had acquired its reputation. The Geisel household had an interest in both" (Pease *Theodor Geisel: A Portrait of the Man Who Became Dr. Seuss* 4). In fact, Geisel's lineage can be traced back to skilled German jewelers who subsequently entered the American brewing industry, experiencing initial prosperity. It is noteworthy to mention how he would convey his story:

> My grandfather was a German cavalry officer who decided he didn't want to be one […]. He came here and started a brewery in Springfield. It was called *Kulmbach and Geisel's* and everyone knew it as 'Come Back and Guzzle.' He left the brewery to my father the day before Prohibition set in. So my father instead became Curator of Public Parks. He put in hundreds of tennis courts and built up the zoo, which is where I learned about animals. I used to hang around

> there a lot, and they'd let me in the cage with small lions and small tigers and I got chewed up every once in a while[5] (qtd. in Sullivan).

Interestingly, both his father, Theodor Robert Geisel, "a first-generation Springfielder", and his mother, Henrietta Seuss, were of German heritage (Jones 8). Following their elopement in New York as a young couple, they welcomed their first child in 1902, merely a year after their marriage. In 1904, Theodor Robert and Henrietta celebrated the arrival of their second child and first son on March 2. Continuing the family tradition, the boy was named Theodor, with the middle name Seuss, as a tribute to his mother's ancestry. In 1906, they had a third child, Henrietta, who passed away a few months after birth. This traumatic experience left its mark on Geisel's life[6].

Ted[7], as he was affectionately referred to by many, was raised in a household where German was commonly spoken, and he also attended the Episcopal Church. Jones underlines how, apart from its underlying moral significance, religion served more as an obligation than a source of inspiration for Theodor. However, during his childhood, he derived evident pleasure from crafting rhyming verses as mnemonic aids to remember the books of the Old Testament. This inclination was further nurtured by his mother, who fostered in Ted a deep appreciation for "the beat and intonation of words" and instilled in him a profound passion for reading and books in general (Jones 13). Consequently, during his early years, Ted demonstrated strong reading abilities. He would always acknowledge the importance of a family-oriented approach to teaching children to read, stating that "[t]eaching a child to read is a family setup" (Jones 13). As someone who played a crucial role in educating numerous children, he emphasized the value of having a variety of books easily accessible at home rather than enforcing reading on

[5] See Sullivan, Robert. "Oh, the Places He Went!" *Dartmouth Alumni Magazine. The Complete Archive*, Dec. 1991, archive.dartmouthalumnimagazine.com/article/1991/12/1/oh-the-places-he-went.
[6] Information retrieved from Jones, Brian Jay. *Becoming Dr. Seuss: Theodor Geisel and the Making of an American Imagination*. New York, Dutton, 2019. Page 11.
[7] Many authors refer to Geisel as Ted in their studies. Therefore, this name will be used in this thesis too.

the child. According to him, "[p]arents should have 20 books stacked up on tables or set around the living room. The average kid will pick one up, find something interesting. And pretty soon he's reading" (Sullivan). In light of this, if children are given the freedom to explore these books at their own pace, they are likely to discover something intriguing, which will naturally foster their love for reading and lead them to become avid readers.

During his school years, Seuss's passion for reading and writing continued to blossom. His creative mind and knack for storytelling soon became evident to his teachers and peers. As he navigated the world of formal education, he discovered the joy of expressing himself through the written word, a passion that would later define his illustrious career as an author. Despite this, "he was a typical if unexceptional student" (Jones 15). His lack of athleticism led him to find his true passions beyond the confines of school, whether it was engaging in imaginative play with his toy soldiers on the front steps, playing soccer, or eagerly delving into the comic strips featured in the pages of the *Boston American* newspaper brought home by his father each day. Naturally, he "always had a pencil in hand" and would endeavor to sketch the animals he saw each Sunday at the zoo, as his father had been appointed to serve on the Forest Park Board (qtd. in Jones, 17). Inspired and supported by his father T.R. Geisel, from whom he took the sense of humor and the imaginative prowess, little Geisel was taught to pursue excellence. According to Theodor, "[h]e was an inspiration" and, even many years later, despite having achieved worldwide fame and immense success as a writer, he continued to display one of his father's paper shooting targets in his office, as a constant reminder to always dedicate himself to the necessary effort and pursuit of excellence, no matter what the endeavor was (qtd. in Jones, 17).

As Pease points out, "in the period preceding the outbreak of World War I Springfielders turned against the German immigrant community", and young Ted Geisel and his family faced derogatory treatment (Pease, *Theodor Geisel: A Portrait of the Man Who*

Became Dr. Seuss 14). In response, they opted to embark on extended vacations, making use of the prosperity derived from the family brewery, at least until prohibitionism hit the United States. Nonetheless, as mentioned by Jones, young Geisel could not ignore the systemic injustices he observed. "During the fever of World War I, when I was about fourteen, everyone was angry at the German […]. I was not only known as the 'Kaiser,' but because of my father's job at the brewery, the 'Drunken Kaiser.' I sometimes fled home with coals bouncing off my head" Geisel recalled later (qtd. in Jones 24). As a consequence, since "World War I ruined [the Geisels'] social standing, and Prohibition deprived them of their primary source of income" Geisel's recollections of his early years would later shift between the sense of privileged stability derived from his paternal grandfather's standing within Springfield society and the apprehension he felt as a result of being subjected to anti-German bias (Pease, *Theodor Geisel: A Portrait of the Man Who Became Dr. Seuss* 16).

In his high school career, Geisel dabbled in various sporting activities. At his father's insistence, he gave dance classes a try, but it did not hold his interest for long. He also experimented with fencing and canoeing, although these pursuits did not prove to be his strengths. Consequently, he started writing and drawing for the *Recorder*, his high school magazine. This early venture into creative expression would play a crucial role in shaping his future as a cartoonist and author. Therefore, later in his career, he made it a central theme in his best work to address issues such as racism, anti-environmentalism, and cruelty, trying to overcome discrimination through perseverance, resilience, and a steadfast commitment to his passion for storytelling, which also served him as an outlet for self-expression. It is here that he started playing with variations of his name, "signing pieces as Ted Geisel, Theo S. Geisel, T.S. Geisel, T.S.G., and when the mood struck, as T.S. LeSieg" (Jones 27).

After having spent the first twenty years of his life in Springfield, in 1921 Geisel moved to New Hampshire to attend Dartmouth College, planning on majoring in English. Reflecting

on his choice to enroll at this university instead of Yale, he explained: "[t]he reason so many kids went to Dartmouth at that particular time from the Springfield high school was probably Red Smith, a young English teacher. He was a real stimulating guy who probably was responsible for my starting to write" (qtd. in Sullivan). According to Pease, "[i]t was Ted's work on the *Jack-O-Lantern* that defined his Dartmouth experience" (Pease, *Theodor Geisel: A Portrait of the Man Who Became Dr. Seuss* 26). In fact, during his time at Dartmouth, although not becoming a straight A's student, he successfully contributed to the college humor magazine *Jack-O-Lantern*, by creating visual and written humor, so much so that "for Ted, *Jacko*[8], and *Jacko* alone, would be the main priority" (Jones 40).

After dedicating himself to hard work, Ted earned the editor's chair of the magazine in his senior year at Dartmouth College in 1924. However, the following year, he faced a setback, as he "was prohibited from including any of his work in the final two issues of his senior year" after a scandalous party he hosted in his dorm room the night before Easter, on April 11 (Jones 51)[9]. This episode is worth mentioning as, due to this, he started using the renowned pseudonym 'Seuss', which, in Pease's perspective, represents his creative personality coming to life. In fact, as Jones points out, "if *Ted Geisel* wasn't allowed to have work in *Jacko,* the reasoning went, then *Seuss* and others would (Jones 52) .

Upon completing his degree in 1925, Geisel held aspirations of pursuing further education in graduate school and aiming to become an English professor. With this goal in mind, he submitted an application for the Campbell Fellowship in English Literature, and embarked on a ship to Liverpool to attend Oxford's Lincoln College. However, he quickly realized that the path he had embarked upon was not aligned with the career he truly desired to pursue, and never completed his studies. "The prevailing social ethos at Oxford after the war

[8] As Jones points out, *Jacko* is the nickname given to the Dartmouth humour magazine.
[9] On the evening before Easter, in fact, Ted Geisel and nine of his friends were found drinking gin in his room. As a result, they were all placed on probation for breaking Prohibition laws. Geisel was also removed from his role as the editor of *Jack-O-Lantern*.

supplied his British classmates with two grounds for excluding him from their clubs: his German ancestry and his American sense of humor" (Pease, *Theodor Geisel: A Portrait of the Man Who Became Dr. Seuss* 39). In fact, his German ancestry was viewed as contrary to British patriotism, while his comedic style was seen as a challenge to English propriety. Consequently, Ted found himself predominantly in the company of fellow American expatriates.

It was during this phase that he crossed paths with Helen Palmer, who would become his first wife in November 1927, and would inspire him to make a career in the realm of illustration and drawing: "[h]ere was a man [– she said –] who could draw such pictures; he should earn a living doing that" (qtd. in Jones 73). Her foresight proved accurate as evidenced by the acquisition and publication of one of Geisel's cartoons, bearing the signature *Seuss*, in *The Saturday Evening Post* in the same year the couple got married. Subsequently, Seuss started working for *Judge*[10], swiftly ascending to become one of the magazine's preeminent and celebrated artists by the year 1928, when he started creating ad campaigns for the Standard Oil Company's insecticide product called "Flit". As Pease underlines, he worked for Flit advertising for nine years, from May 31, 1928, to August 22, 1938, and the Flit contract provided him with a secure economic base. The campaign aimed to promote the use of Flit for insect control and pest prevention. Geisel's imaginative and whimsical drawings added a lighthearted touch to the advertisements, making them memorable and engaging, at the same time showcasing his talent for creating captivating visuals and using clever wordplay. These skills would later become central to his career as a children's author.

[10] *Judge* is a popular American satirical magazine founded in the second half of the nineteenth century. Seuss contributed cartoons and humorous illustrations to the magazine, showcasing his distinctive artistic style and wit, while addressing contemporary events and issues. For further information, see Mott, Frank Luther. *A History of American Magazines, Volume 3: 1865-1885*. Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1957.

Fig. #1

Source: Dr. Seuss, *Quick, Henry, THE FLIT!* 1928. From UC San Diego Library Digital Collections, https://library.ucsd.edu/dc/object/bb71339897.

Figure 1 shows one of Seuss's most renowned advertisements for the company. The catchphrase's remarkable popularity within the Flit campaign not only contributed to his financial success but also played a role in shaping his future. With his newfound prosperity, Seuss eventually relocated to the West Coast with his wife, specifically to the charming enclave of La Jolla. This picturesque coastal town would become his lifelong home, providing the backdrop for his continued artistic endeavors and literary achievements. However, as Jones emphasizes, "[t]o make any real money in publishing, [Geisel] had to be both the writer *and* the artist" (Jones 97).

While Geisel would later remark, "I would like to say I went into children's book work because of my great understanding of children, the truth was that this pursuit was the sole endeavor allowed beyond the confines of his contract with Standard Oil" (qtd. in Jones 98). Sullivan mentions that Ted's initial foray into writing for children took shape in 1936, "in the bar of the *MS Kungsholm*, [while making] up a rhyme that could ride the da-da-da-dum rhythm of the ship's churning engines" (Sullivan). It was here that the renowned rhyming couplet of

his first children's book *And to Think That I Saw It on Mulberry Street* emerged spontaneously, capturing the essence of his imaginative storytelling: "And this is a story that no one can beat/I saw it all happen on Mulberry Street" (qtd. in Sullivan).

This same spirit of creativity and adaptability extended beyond his literary endeavors, as Geisel, along with his wife Helen, faced unique challenges. These encompassed the couple's incapacity to conceive due to Helen's pre-existing health condition, Geisel's personal struggle to find his artistic voice amidst the backdrop of World War II, and his negative perception of the children's literature publishing industry as "the brat book business", as well as his striving for perfection. During this pivotal period of uncertainty – which mirrored the political and social situation of the country at the time - Seuss, who wanted to join the armed forces in 1942, employed his artistic talents to contribute to the war effort by creating powerful political cartoons and illustrations for the magazine *PM*[11], as well as working in the Hollywood film industry. These works, although subject to later criticism, demonstrated his ability to convey important messages of patriotism and unity through visual storytelling, showcasing a different facet of his creativity[12].

In the aftermath of World War II, Geisel moved to California and, in July 1949, he was invited to speak at the University of Utah at a writer's conference, where he would also be holding creative writing courses. Jones allocates several pages to discuss this conference, recognizing its pivotal role in shaping Geisel's career transformation into the renowned Dr. Seuss. As a matter of fact, this was "the first time he [ha]d ever had an opportunity to really think about what made a good children's story" (Jones 202). Geisel embarked on an exploration of his own literary aspirations and the factors driving book sales. This opportunity also

[11] Minear describes this magazine as "outspoken in its politics", therefore a publication unafraid to voice its opinions, engage in discussions, and advocate for its beliefs in a forthright manner. It was founded by Ralph Ingersoll, who had previously worked for *Life* and *Time* (Minear 12). Noteworthily, in 1941, Ingersoll sent a "Memo to the Staff", presenting the mission of the magazine to contribute towards achieving victory in the war (Minear 13).

[12] The ensuing chapter 1, sections II and III, will delve into these matters in further detail.

prompted him to consider the writer's obligations to their audience. Embracing this task with dedication, Geisel reexamined classic children's literature, drew insights from his own creative struggles, and meticulously transcribed extensive lecture notes and exercises. Upon the conclusion of this ten-day conference, he remarked: "[i]f you really know it, you can do a lot of good", further reinforcing his freshly re-discovered belief in the substantial importance of writing for children (qtd. in Jones 213).

May 1955 marked a significant occasion at Dartmouth College as they held their graduation ceremony, during which an honorary doctorate was conferred upon Dr. Seuss, in the company of Robert Frost, solidifying his status as a "Dr." in earnest. Subsequently, the release of Dr. Seuss's most famous books, including the 1957 *The Cat in the Hat*, acclaimed as a blockbuster and success "between pedagogy and pleasure", and *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* on consumerism, as well as the 1960 *Green Eggs and Ham*, represented transformative milestones in his literary journey (Jones 272). He had finally fulfilled his mission of aiding literacy, going back to his original aspiration of becoming an educator. Therefore, as Pease highlights, "[a]t sixty Ted believed that he had at least another twenty years of productive work", a conviction that ultimately proved accurate (Pease, *Theodor Geisel: A Portrait of the Man Who Became Dr. Seuss* 130).

At the age of sixty-four, after the passing of his first wife Helen, Geisel remarried with Audrey Stone Diamond. She would become a significant source of support and inspiration for him, especially during his later years. Amidst facing vision difficulties and various health challenges during his later years, Geisel maintained an unwavering dedication to his craft and a constant wellspring of creative energy. His second marriage to Audrey played a crucial role in fueling his drive, as she became a significant figure in preserving his legacy. Despite the challenges, his commitment to his work was evident in his creations. As an example, *You're Only Old Once!* humorously captured Geisel's take on the aging process, showcasing his wit

and perspective. His final publication, *Oh, the Places You'll Go!*, assumed the role of a heartfelt and benevolent farewell, resonating deeply with numerous admirers.

The concept of slowing down was foreign to him. Even as the years advanced, he remained resolute in his active pursuits. In 1976, he embarked on another adventure, journeying to the distant lands of Australia and New Zealand. His insatiable curiosity and thirst for new experiences continued to drive him forward, proving that age was no obstacle to his unquenchable wanderlust. Likewise, the "Seuss momentum" exhibited no decline, as "Geisel acquired a transcendent fame, a larger-than-life, multi-media, only-in-America fame", as his grand and encompassing notability transcended various media platforms and was distinctly American in nature (Sullivan).

Having finally received the coveted Pulitzer Prize in 1984, he also achieved the significant milestone of turning eighty years old in the same year. By this time, his birthday had evolved into a nationwide occasion, characterized by extensive festivities. As Jones recounts, people had started this tradition of engaging in a collective endeavor to raise toasts in rhyming verses, creatively expressing their well-wishes for Dr. Seuss and his continued good health. Yet, as he neared the end of his life, his disposition grew increasingly negative alongside a steady deterioration in his health and, on September 24, 1991, after having published "forty-eight books in more than twenty languages" and braille, "Theodor Seuss Geisel died peacefully in his sleep in his studio in La Jolla. He was eighty-seven years old" (Jones 428).

All in all, the life of Dr. Seuss stands as a testament to the enduring power of creativity, resilience, and innovation. From his early forays into advertising and editorial cartoons to the indelible mark he left on children's literature, Geisel's journey is a vivid narrative of transformation and impact, whose details will be further examined in the following sections. As the pages of his life turn, Dr. Seuss's legacy serves as an unwavering reminder that beneath the whimsical tales lies a profound commitment to spreading joy, instilling values, and

inspiring countless individuals to explore the limitless possibilities of their own creativity. In this way, his life story remains a source of inspiration for scholars, artists, and dreamers alike, illuminating the boundless potential that resides within the realm of imagination.

1.2 Geisel and World War II

In the upcoming section, this thesis will focus on the impact of the Second World War in Geisel's literary journey. It will examine how Geisel's creative output and thematic decisions were shaped by the wartime environment, with its socio-political difficulties and altering cultural dynamics. This section will reveal the subtle ways in which the war served as a catalyst for the development of Geisel's storylines, characters, and overall themes by digging into the deep interplay between historical events and his artistic representations, and how this was reflected in his legacy as a children's author.

In 1936, Geisel traveled to Germany, and this trip stirred poignant recollections of his family's persecution during the First World War. In fact, as stated before, the Geisel's were of German origin. In addition, Hitler's occupation of Paris in 1940 propelled him to assert authority over the stereotypes that American nativists had imposed upon him and his family. At the time, Seuss was writing *Horton Hatches the Egg* and Pease reported that he said: "I found that I could no longer keep my mind on drawing pictures of Horton the Elephant" (qtd. in Pease, *Theodor Geisel: A Portrait of the Man Who Became Dr. Seuss* 61). Thus, he set aside Horton's narrative for several months, opting to focus on crafting political cartoons instead. These latter, as Spiegelman points out, allowed him to demonstrate the abilities of an author gifted in showcasing his point of view through concise and powerful graphics. "These cartoons rail against isolationism, racism, and anti-Semitism with a conviction and fervor lacking in most other American editorial pages of the period" emphasizes Spiegelman (6). On the one

hand, these illustrations provide insight into the evolution of an author who aimed to convey ethical principles to a nation torn by a conflict. On the other hand, they capture the author's commitment to addressing important societal issues and shaping public consciousness. Consequently, the illustrations serve as a visual record of the author's journey towards becoming a communicator of moral values, reflecting their dedication to making a positive impact on their audience and the broader cultural landscape through "unique galumphing menagerie of Seussian fauna, the […] humor and themes that later enraptured millions […]" (Spiegelman 7).

Fig. #2

Source: Dr. Seuss, *Virginio Gayda Says:* January 30, 1941. From Minear, Richard H., editor. *Dr. Seuss Goes to War: The World War II Editorial Cartoons of Theodor Seuss Geisel*. New York, The New Press, 1999. Page 11.

Following the presentation of the cartoon shown in figure 2, which humorously depicted Mussolini's chief propagandist Gayda, Geisel shared it with his friend Zinny Vanderlip. This latter forwarded the cartoon to Ingersoll, the founder of the Popular Front newspaper *PM*, who promptly published Geisel's caricature in January 1941. This marked the inception of their collaboration, leading to the publication of numerous additional works by Geisel over the subsequent two years.

As Pease suggests, "[t]he vast majority of his cartoons directed his anger and political invective against the two social formations-German authoritarianism and American nativism – he considered responsible for creating the hostile environment of his Springfield childhood" (Pease, *Theodor Geisel: A Portrait of the Man Who Became Dr. Seuss* 62). Expanding on Pease's assertion, it becomes evident that, through his art, Geisel found a means to vocalize his discontent, portraying these social elements as the driving forces behind the adversities and biases he had encountered during his upbringing. This deliberate focus on targeting these specific aspects of society reflects Geisel's profound desire to confront the origins of the challenges he faced and to use his creative platform to bring awareness. In this context, Geisel's cartoons emerged not only as artistic expressions but also as powerful instruments for social commentary and a medium for processing his own experiences. Therefore, "[t]he PM cartoons were signed 'Dr. Seuss', but it was Geisel's very real rage that was emotionally responsible for their creation" (Pease, *Theodor Geisel: A Portrait of the Man Who Became Dr. Seuss* 63).

Employing a range of artistic techniques - including satire, caricature, invective, and parody, that he had honed during his time writing for *Judge* - he skillfully blended these abilities with those he had developed while crafting advertisements for Flit under the persona of Dr. Seuss. Geisel found satisfaction in the prospect of contributing to a magazine whose mission could be encapsulated in the subsequent proclamation: "We are against people who push other people around, in this country or abroad. We propose to crusade for those who seek constructively to improve the way men live together" (qtd. in Pease, *Theodor Geisel: A Portrait of the Man Who Became Dr. Seuss* 64). By dedicating his artistic talents to a cause that championed constructive endeavors aimed at enhancing human coexistence, Geisel found a meaningful avenue to channel his creativity for the betterment of society. This alignment between his own convictions and the magazine's mission not only motivated his contributions,

but also added a layer of purpose to his work, reinforcing his commitment to using his art as a tool for positive change.

Minear highlights how Seuss's initiation into drawing editorial cartoons stemmed from his powerful reaction against the rhetoric of the fascist publicist Gayda. In this context, Geisel's willingness to address and critique such figures as Lindbergh, Hitler, and Mussolini within the framework of this broader mission, underscored his belief in the power of artistic expression to advocate for a more just and harmonious world. In fact, according to Minear, "Hitler is the prime subject of all of Dr. Seuss's World War II cartoons. Without him, Dr. Seuss might well have remained a successful commercial artist with a sideline in children's literature" (80). Nevertheless, this also constituted a wake-up call for the author, who started to regret the anti-Semitic cartoons he had published in certain previous works.

Fig. #3

Source: Dr. Seuss, "*Come on, Sam…Try the Great German Manicure!* April 2, 1942. From Pease, Donald E. Theodor Geisel: *A Portrait of the Man Who Became Dr. Seuss*. Oxford UP, 1999. Page 65.

He "metaphorically severed himself from this collective prejudice" with the cartoon shown in figure 3, published in the 1942 issue of PM (Pease, *Theodor Geisel: A Portrait of the Man Who Became Dr. Seuss* 65). Here, the character which represents U.S. Nazis, is trying to convince

Uncle Sam[13] to have both of his hands cut off by the executioner called Anti-Semitism. The cartoon serves as a metaphorical representation of the individual's rejection of collective prejudice, as it implies a violent reaction against the harmful ideologies associated with U.S. Nazis and anti-Semitism that was prevalent at the time.

Not only did Seuss touch on issues such as propaganda and anti-Semitism in his cartoons, but also, he actively advocated for the rights of workers and Black people. According to Cohen, Geisel's reasoning behind the *PM* campaign against injustice lies in his firsthand encounter with anti-German bias during World War I[14]. This deeply rooted empathy and his determination to bring about positive change were pivotal in shaping the trajectory of his contributions to the *PM* campaign and his broader efforts to use his art as a force for social progress.

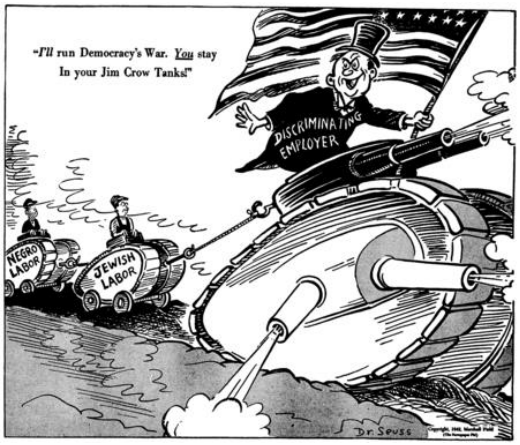

Fig. #4

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[13] It should be noted that the figure of Uncle Sam appears repeatedly in Seuss's creations. Always featured wearing a hat, later associated with Dr. Seuss's renowned Cat, the personification of the United States takes on the form of a bearded man. The beard, a visual marker of age and experience, aligns with the notion of the nation being guided by a collective wisdom gained through its history. This portrayal taps into the idea of the United States as a guiding force, a guardian of values and principles, and a beacon of freedom and democracy. Finally, this symbolic representation of the United States serves as a dynamic and recognizable figure, often associated with patriotic themes and national identity.

[14] See Cohen, Charles. *The Seuss, the Whole Seuss and Nothing But the Seuss: A Visual Biography of Theodor Seuss Geisel*. New York, Random House Books for Young Readers, 2004. Page 205-243.

Source: Dr. Seuss, *I'll run Democracy's War. YOU stay in your Jim Crow tanks*. April 14, 1942. From Minear, Richard H., editor. *Dr. Seuss Goes to War: The World War II Editorial Cartoons of Theodor Seuss Geisel*. New York, The New Press, 1999. Page 56.

Minear mentions the example, shown in figure 4, of the cartoon drawn in April 1942, which personifies the discrimination faced by both "Jewish Labor" and "Negro Labor" (23). The cartoon depicts an unsettling scene where the figure of an employer, infused with an unmistakable air of malevolence, assumes the role of orchestrating "Democracy's War". In stark contrast, the figure of "Negro Labor" gets relegated to the "Jim Crow Tanks", implying a gross injustice and segregation even within the broader context of a fight for democracy. By capturing the essence of discrimination through this visual representation, what stands out is Geisel's deliberate portrayal of the "Negro" and "Jew" figures in a strikingly similar manner, except for their distinct skin tones. This subtle yet impactful choice emphasizes a powerful message: discrimination, irrespective of its targeted group, shares a common core of injustice and prejudice. Geisel's keen artistic insight underscores the shared humanity of those subjected to discrimination and underscores the need for unity in the struggle against such inequities in society.

In Pease's perspective, while Dr. Seuss is known for his progressive stance and support for domestic minority communities, the complexities of wartime circumstances brought about a disheartening contradiction in his work. In fact, the conflict between the United States and Japan during this period introduced a challenging dynamic that tested his principles. Driven by the prevailing sentiments of the time, some of his cartoons resorted to using racist stereotypes that he had otherwise been vocally opposed to. Hence, this conflict emphasized how cultural settings and outside forces can have an influence on the creative journey. Even those with strong views could be persuaded by the zeal of wartime propaganda and the elevated tensions of the period. Like many others, Geisel struggled to preserve his morals while juggling the responsibilities of living in a war-torn country. It is therefore crucial to consider this

discrepancy in the larger historical context of the time. In fact, the difficulties artists encountered in trying to uphold a constant moral compass amidst the turmoil of war and the uncertainty of the future are poignantly brought to light by Dr. Seuss's experience. Despite his satire being described by *Newsweek* as "razor keen" at the beginning of 1942 (qtd. in Pease, *Theodor Geisel: A Portrait of the Man Who Became Dr. Seuss* 67), in May of the same year, "his patriotic work was awarded a Civilian Savings commendation", a prestigious accolade conferred by the United States Department of the Army upon civilian personnel in recognition of their outstanding contributions or accomplishments (Pease, *Theodor Geisel: A Portrait of the Man Who Became Dr. Seuss* 68).

Minear points out how, in Dr. Seuss's cartoons, the depiction of Japan ranks second in frequency among foreign countries, trailing behind Germany; usually, "Japan" is represented having a "piggish nose, coke-bottle eyeglasses, slanted eyes, bush mustache, lips parted (usually in a smile)", while "Germany" is personified in the figure of Hitler, an upright figure with a black mustache (Minear 119). An exceptionally impactful editorial cartoon stands out as a significant example of this juxtaposition between "Japan" and Hitler.

Fig. #5

Source: Dr. Seuss, *Don't Let Them Carve THOSE Faces on Our Mountains!* December 12, 1941. From Minear, Richard H., editor. *Dr. Seuss Goes to War: The World War II Editorial Cartoons of Theodor Seuss Geisel*. New York, The New Press, 1999. Page 146.

As shown in the cartoon portrayed in figure 5, Geisel illustrated Hitler and "Japan" as colossal visages on a newly envisioned Mount Rushmore. It is worth observing the inclusion of a swastika flag positioned above the U.S. flag, along with the presence of four figures standing before the statues and contemplating them. This artistic choice carries profound symbolism, illustrating the amalgamation of these two figures within the context of the time. Hitler and "Japan" are depicted on a par with revered American icons, underscoring the gravity of their impact on the world stage and the collective consciousness. Furthermore, the juxtaposition of the flags and the figures gazing upon the sculptures accentuates the complex dynamics and allegiances of the era, highlighting the nuanced perspectives that this artistic representation encapsulates. Minear explains how "perhaps it is no surprise that American cartoonists during the Pacific War painted Japan in overtly racist ways. However, it is a surprise that a person who denounces anti-black racism and anti-Semitism so eloquently can be oblivious of his own racist treatment of Japanese and Japanese Americans" (121). The author describes this as a "sobering experience", as viewers find themselves in a thought-provoking moment when they realize these types of cartoons were published in a prominent left-leaning newspaper of New York City, and they recognize that the creator behind them is the very same Dr. Seuss who is now celebrated for his creativity, open-mindedness, and expansive perspectives (Minear 121).

In contrast, in Spiegelman's analysis, Seuss was "more of a humanist than an ideologue", as his drawings, described by the cartoonist as "funny" and deriving from a "vaudeville tradition of early comic strips and gag cartoons", were created with the intense passion of real anger and the enraged feeling that fuels true political art (6). He also describes them as "ahead of their time in seeking to entertain as well as convince", explaining how humor proved insufficiently potent to deliver fatal blows to Hitler (Spiegelman 7). Perhaps, this is why there emerged a chorus of critics who cast doubt upon the sincerity of his wartime journalism efforts. These dissenting voices contended that his commitment to the cause was

selective, suggesting that he restricted his activism to the pages of PM's editorials. The criticism revolved around the notion that while Geisel may have conveyed his stance through the medium of the written word, his actions and contributions might have fallen short of the comprehensive engagement that the wartime context demanded. To the many critiques, Seuss would reply with sharp satire in a PM article published in 1942: "I believe in love, brotherhood, and a cooing white pigeon on every man's roof. I even think it's nice to have pacifists and strawberry festivals… in between wars. […] We can get palsy-walsy afterward with those that are left" (qtd. in Jones 148). He felt it was his duty to help the United States win the war through his cartoons, and, although it might come across as severe, the language used during that period could accommodate such unembellished discourse targeting Gayda, Hitler, or Japanese individuals, given the devastating impact of the Pearl Harbor attack and the pervasive apprehension regarding potential future incidents.

A couple of years after the Japanese attack, at the age of thirty-nine, Geisel joined the military, in order to have an active role in the conflict. He was assigned to work in the Information and Education Division and held a post in Frank Capra's Hollywood studios-based signal corps unit, which later came to be known as "Fort Fox". Pease mentions how Frank Capra laid down the foundational values of Fort Fox, centering on the idea of prioritizing collaborative endeavors rather than seeking personal acknowledgment. During his tenure at Fort Fox, Geisel took advantage of the opportunity to hone his proficiency in filmmaking and was thus promoted to the rank of major in March 1944. It was at this pivotal point that Capra entrusted Geisel with the task of crafting a film titled *Your Job in Germany*, aimed at clarifying the roles of soldiers in a post-Germany surrender scenario, when they would transition into occupying forces.

Another striking example of Geisel's creative work in the military is the animated cartoon *Private SNAFU*, whose character represents the average soldier. The acronym stands

for "Situation Normal: All…FOULED… Up[15]", highlighting the challenges and mishaps faced by soldiers in various situations. The cartoons were created to educate soldiers on proper behavior, security measures, and other important aspects of military life in an engaging and humorous way, making use of animation for wartime education and entertainment. Through the production of the *SNAFU* shorts, Geisel acquired the skill of blending instruction with entertainment. However, he became disillusioned with the impact of his propaganda efforts, believing that these had not succeeded in shaping democratic values among adults entrenched in their prejudices due to upbringing and education. He acknowledged that he might have underestimated the soldiers' perspectives, realizing that their reality differed significantly from his own. Geisel worried that his approach had been overly simplistic and patronizing, rather than engaging in a meaningful dialogue. Despite these reservations, Geisel's wartime experiences exposed him to a range of talents, leaving him uncertain about which ones to pursue. Returning home from the war brought about anxieties that rivaled those he faced after his time at Oxford in 1927. In his quest to find his path, Geisel explored various career avenues that tapped into different facets of his creative identity, which had evolved over the preceding two decades.

It is only in the 1950s that Theodor Geisel, feeling a sense of responsibility, took steps to rectify the impact of his previous political cartoons, and was finally able to achieve a "grand-scale success as a children's book artist" (Spiegelman 7). This process of reconciliation was a testament to his integrity and a reflection of his commitment to evolving as an artist and as a person. Hence, he found it necessary to offer apologies for the anti-Japanese content present in his earlier *PM* works and the 1945 film *Know Your Enemy - Japan*. This awakening prompted him to embark on a trip to Japan for *Life* magazine to "research the American occupation's

[15] The word "Fouled" is clearly a euphemism for the real word used, which is much more explicit, and therefore will not be reported in this research.

impact on educational and child-rearing practices and to learn how those practices changed the ambitions of Japan's children" (Pease, *Theodor Geisel: A Portrait of the Man Who Became Dr. Seuss* 93). He was driven by a desire to thoroughly understand the repercussions of the American occupation on Japanese education and its effect on the younger generation This journey to Japan proved to be a transformative experience for Geisel, allowing him the opportunity to make amends for the xenophobic and racially biased sentiments expressed in his World War II-era cartoons. He clearly experienced a fundamental shift in perspective as he worked to more fully understand how wartime acts had long-term effects. In fact, following World War II, both Japan and Korea integrated Dr. Seuss's works, *And to Think That I Saw It on Mulberry Street* and *The 500 Hats of Bartholomew Cubbins*, into their postwar elementary school curriculum. This unanticipated adoption underscored Geisel's efforts to foster young minds via literature and so contribute to a more accepting and understanding world.

As a conclusion, it is important to remark how Geisel's PM cartoons, shed light on the underlying political messages cleverly concealed within Dr. Seuss's characteristic whimsy. Throughout much of his later work, the tension between his didactic moral stance and his irreverent humor remains palpable.

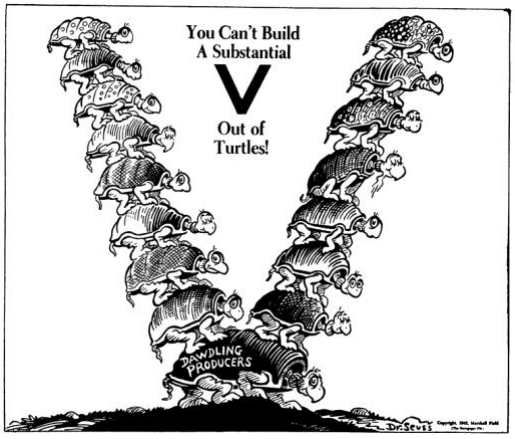

Fig. #6

Source: Dr. Seuss, *You Can't Build a Substantial V Out of Turtles!* March 20, 1942. From Minear, Richard H., editor. *Dr. Seuss Goes to War: The World War II Editorial Cartoons of Theodor Seuss Geisel*. New York, The New Press, 1999. Page 144.

As an example of this, Spiegelman firstly mentions *Yertle the Turtle* as a critique of fascism. Its origins can be traced back to the March 20, 1942 cartoon in figure 6, featuring a stack of turtles forming a victory V. Secondly, *The Sneetches* overtly advocates for racial tolerance, with the stars on the character's bellies resembling the Star of David. Thirdly, *The Butter Battle Book* confronts nuclear disarmament, causing significant controversy upon its release in 1984. Finally, the iconic red-and-white-striped stove-pipe hat worn by *The Cat in the Hat*, reveals itself as deeply entrenched in American culture. The original inspiration for the cat's iconic headgear is, in fact, a symbol often used in numerous political cartoons: Uncle Sam's unmistakable red-and-white-striped top hat. This connection suggests that "The Cat in the Hat is America" (Spiegelman 7). Therefore, these cartoons, which have now resurfaced after decades, offer a unique perspective, unearthing the political dimensions of Dr. Seuss's work that have long remained concealed.

1.3 Key Works and Contributions to Children's Literature

The first two sections of this thesis have thus far delved into one facet of Geisel's early career and the significant effects of his World War II experiences. This section will now focus on his major milestones and influence in children's literature, a field of unrestricted fantasy, where his stories continue to thrive over the years, captivating and shaping the minds of young and adult readers.

Over time, children's literature "has developed […] into an entire parallel universe" (Grenby and Immel, preface). As a matter of fact, similarly to adult literature, it includes picture

books, short stories, poems, novels, and plays, all of which were written with the goal of enlightening, inspiring, and engaging young readers' imaginations. Nonetheless, children's literature is defined by the "very polymorphous nature of its readership […], the infant being read to […], the teenager on the threshold of adulthood, not to mention those adults who delight in picture books, fantasy novels or fondly remembered classics" (Grenby and Immel). On the one hand, children's learning and development are profoundly aided by literature. First and foremost, children can improve their language and cognitive abilities by reading stories that have been especially written for them. Children's literature provides readers with vocabulary and grammatical structures that are appropriate for their age, facilitating reading comprehension and language learning. Additionally, children's book plots and characters can foster young readers' imagination, creativity, and critical thinking abilities. On the other hand, "grown-ups were all also once children and therefore may be very heavily invested emotionally and intellectually and financially in what children read" (Grenby and Immel).

That is why, according to Theodor Geisel, children's literature stands out as one of the most widespread and inclusive forms of literature, truly appealing to a broad audience "just to spread joy" (qtd. in Jones 430). In contrast to many adult-oriented books, almost everyone has experienced being the intended reader for children's literature. As Grenby and Immel bring forward in their study[16], literature aimed at young people is not just simple storytelling; it possesses layers of creativity and depth that are now being more thoroughly explored and appreciated within academic circles, and this research has the secondary aim to bridge this gap through the analysis of one of the most important authors of children's literature in Northern America.

[16] For further information, see Grenby, M. O. and Andrea Immel, editors. The Cambridge Companion to Children's Literature. Cambridge UP, 2009.

Within this realm, certain works stand as pillars of inspiration, captivating generations with their narratives and leaving an indelible mark on the literary landscape. In this section, we delve into Dr. Seuss's key works[17] and their profound contributions to the tapestry of children's literature. In Nel's perspective, in fact, "Dr. Seuss is more than an author of popular children's books. Dr. Seuss is an American icon [as he] represents children's literature, nonsense poetry, energetic cartoon surrealism, and the process of learning to read" (Nel, "Dr. Seuss" 1). That being the case, Dr. Seuss is an unmistakable American cultural figure. Despite his works being translated into multiple languages, his recognition primarily remains within the United States. This distinct status as an American icon is reflected by the fact that he has earned a public memorial dedicated to him. Nel mentions the fact that it is common for characters from children's books – and not their authors – to be immortalized in statues, such as Peter Pan in London, or Pinocchio in Collodi.

The question of why Dr. Seuss joins the ranks of celebrated authors like Hans Christian Andersen, Mother Goose, Astrid Lindgren, Charles Dickens, and Mark Twain arises spontaneously. Former first Lady Barbara Bush commended Seuss for his contribution to encouraging family reading, using rhyme and engaging artwork to make language appealing, by bringing "the beauty of language to life" (qtd. in Nel, "Dr. Seuss" 2). The diverse appeal of Dr. Seuss's books is another key factor. His narratives resonate across various political viewpoints, making his works universally relevant. Democratic Congressman Richard E. Neal described Seuss as a notable figure from Springfield, highlighting that "he stood against bigotry and he was patriotic" (qtd. in Nel, "Dr. Seuss" 2). Finally, Senator Kennedy reinforced this notion, praising Seuss's book H*orton Hears a Who!* for teaching people that "we should all be compassionate to others" at all times (qtd. in Nel, "Dr. Seuss" 2).

[17] Full list provided in Appendix One.

Initially, it is important to recognize that the iconic figure known as Dr. Seuss did not always bear that name, and the transformation of the name "Dr. Seuss" from its original form to the iconic moniker recognized today, carries a fascinating narrative of strategic decision-making in Theodore Geisel's early literary pursuits. In 1937, when he published his debut children's book, he still harbored ambitions of achieving greatness in the literary world. As a result, he chose to save his complete name for a forthcoming, substantial literary endeavor, and opted to use "the good Dr. Seuss" as his pen name for the "brat books business"[18] (Sullivan). The adoption of "Seuss" marked a departure from the signature he had previously used for his works, as detailed in Chapter 1, Section I, as it "neither concealed nor obliterated his identity. Initially it may have provided the guise needed to continue publishing his cartoons, but more significantly it created an extension of Ted by which he was able to liberate and realize his art" (Pease, *Theodor Geisel: A Portrait of the Man Who Became Dr. Seuss* 37). Indeed, the name "Seuss" held multiple connections to Geisel's life: it was not only his middle name but also his mother's maiden name. Given these associations, adopting the name "Seuss" seemed like a sensible and fitting choice for his literary endeavors. Later on, in 1927 "the [added] honorific [Dr.] supplied him with symbolic compensation for the doctorate he never received at Oxford, adding a somewhat ironic touch" (Pease, *Theodor Geisel: A Portrait of the Man Who Became Dr. Seuss* 43). Yet,"[w]hat began as an act of rebellion became one of self-expression, as it allowed him to give himself a recognizable identity" (Pease, *Theodor Geisel: A Portrait of the Man Who Became Dr. Seuss* 38).

Jones' remark "[w]hile Theodor Geisel may be gone, Dr. Seuss, of course, goes on" is a great starting point to tackle his so-called "recognizable identity" previously alluded to (Jones 428). This sentence perfectly captures the fascinating contrast that defines his recognition. On

[18] See Sullivan, Robert. "Oh, the Places He Went!" *Dartmouth Alumni Magazine. The Complete Archive*, Dec. 1991, archive.dartmouthalumnimagazine.com/article/1991/12/1/oh-the-places-he-went.

the one hand, 'Theodor Geisel' represents the individual behind the name, the author-illustrator who shaped and breathed life into the beloved characters and narratives. On the other hand, 'Dr. Seuss' emerges as an enduring and larger-than-life creation in the realm of children's literature—a persona that transcends the individual and becomes a cultural phenomenon. Having achieved sales exceeding 650 million children's books across seventeen languages and ninety-five countries, with over half of these sales occurring posthumously after his passing in 1991, Dr. Seuss holds the distinction of being deemed "the most popular children's author in America" (Nel, "Dr. Seuss" 3). The evolution from Theodor Geisel to Dr. Seuss spans a career that encompasses various roles, including serving as a propagandist and cartoonist for PM during World War II, developing the *Private SNAFU* series for US troops, and producing literary works that tackled the significant challenges of the 20th century. In some of his works, categorized as "Beginner' Books", he explored themes like civil rights in *Horton Hears a Who!* (1954), and *The Sneetches* (1961), environmental preservation in *The Lorax* published in the seventies, and the context of the Cold War in *The Butter Battle Book* (1984). Driven by the postwar baby boom and the nation's concern for children's literacy, Dr. Seuss also authored renowned titles like *The Cat in the Hat* (1957), and *Green Eggs and Ham* three years later. All in all, Dr. Seuss's well-deserved reputation as a celebrated figure in children's literature stems from his remarkable talent to both entertain, educate, and inspire young readers, alongside his unwavering commitment to advancing childhood literacy.

In his study, Nel analyzes the 2001 "All-Time Bestselling Children's Books" list by Publishers Weekly, where one can notice how "[s]ales of old favorites from Dr. Seuss, Shel Silverstein, Maurice Sendak, Laura Ingalls Wilder, and Stan and Jan Berenstain remain strong" (Turvey and Roback). In fact, two books by Dr. Seuss can be found in the top ten[19]. Beatrix

[19] The complete list can be found here: Turvey, Debbie Hochman. "All-Time Bestselling Children's Books." Edited by Diane Roback, PublishersWeekly.Com, *Publishers Weekly*, 17 Dec. 2001, www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/childrens/childrens-industry-news/article/28595-all-time-bestselling-children-s-books.html.

Potter herself deemed *And to Think That I Saw it on Mulberry Street* "the cleverest book [she has] met with for many years", appreciating the "swing and merriment of the pictures and the natural truthful simplicity of the untruthfulness" (qtd. in Nel, "Dr. Seuss" 4). Furthermore, Pease highlights how "[e]ach Seuss story connects an exemplar of a social dilemma to a dynamic, dramatic movement so as to provide readers with the resources to negotiate plural, often contradictory models of civic identity" (Pease, "Dr. Seuss's (Un) Civil Imaginaries" 510). By experiencing these characters' struggles, readers are not merely passive observers; they become active participants in the narrative. They witness the characters confronting their personal biases, overcoming obstacles, and ultimately making choices that align with the values of justice, equality, and compassion. This engagement provides readers with a repertoire of resources—empathy, critical thinking, and a sense of moral responsibility—that they can carry into their own lives when confronted with similar complexities. As an example, *How the Grinch Stole Christmas!,* illustrates the transformative journey of the character of the Grinch from a perceived threat to a catalyst for positive change. This narrative underscores the importance of the underlying factors that shape behavior and highlights the potential for individuals and communities to come together for the greater good.

In a 1952 article published in the *The New York Times*, Geisel brought forward his idea of removing the wartime mindset from both his own psyche and the collective consciousness of America, giving children's literature a new direction and reestablishing its value. He wrote: "[C]hildren never let their laughs out on a string. On their humor there is no political or social pressure gauge. That, I think, is why we maverick humorists prefer to write exclusively for children" (Dr. Seuss, "…But for Grown-Ups Laughing Isn't Any Fun"). Writing for children enables authors to craft stories that resonate on a deeply human level, embracing the liberating power of laughter to connect across generations and challenge established norms that transcend the complexities and constraints of adult life. The following quote from Dr. Seuss beautifully

captures his perspective on the significance of writing for children and the role of fantasy: "I like nonsense. It wakes up the brain cells. Fantasy is a necessary ingredient in living. It is a way of looking at life through the wrong end of a telescope, which is what I do! And that enables you to laugh at all of life's realities" (*In Search of Dr. Seuss* 00:04:06-00:04:22). He is not referring to trivial literature or frivolous diversions, but to the whimsical and nonsensical elements in his writing. Through the interplay of fantasy and reality, Seuss was able to create a realm where one can confront challenges with a light-hearted perspective. By mixing the fantastical with the familiar, he established a space where people can engage with life's intricacies without feeling overwhelmed, since "[c]hildren should be aware of what is happening around them. Everybody should" (*In Search of Dr. Seuss* 01:18:20-01:18:32).

Therefore, laughter, in this context, becomes a tool for engaging with the world's demands. In his article "…But for Grown-Ups Laughing Isn't Any Fun", Geisel highlighted the difference between adults and children. He criticized adults for their tendency to find amusement at the expense of others, even acknowledging his own guilt in this regard. On the contrary, he was fond of the fact that children can laugh without biases related to race, religion, or ethnicity. In a 1982 interview with Maurice Sendak, Dr. Seuss remarked how he wrote "for people" (qtd. in Jones 394): he was not aiming to reform adults only; his mission was mostly dedicated to children, endeavoring to ensure they experienced the most fulfilling childhoods possible.

Finally, it should be noted that he used to keep a present his father gave him in his twenties, a fossilized footprint of a dinosaur, to remind him of the fact that: "even though we might become extinct, we all have the opportunity to leave out footprint in the sand" (*In Search of Dr. Seuss* 01:24:35-01:24:44). Obviously, he left more than a footprint. He "hope[d] for the children a world of peace, and that they never lose their sense of wonder and discovery [as] [f]rom there to here, from here to there, funny things are everywhere" (qtd. in *In Search of Dr.*

Seuss 01:27:00-01:27:48). Hence, Dr. Seuss's primary objective was to address issues like illiteracy and a lack of appreciation for wit and culture. His vision was to inspire a deep and sincere love for reading, a force he firmly believed had the power to effect profound transformations. He held unwavering confidence in the "responsibility of children's authors to take their jobs seriously", advising writers of children's books to "work themselves harder than they do" and "make sure that everything is right" (qtd. in Jones 315), since books have the transformative potential of instilling a genuine passion for reading in individuals, thereby not only combating illiteracy but also enriching their lives with the joys of literature.

CHAPTER II: THE LITERARY AND ARTISTIC STYLE OF DR. SEUSS

As shown in the previous chapter, delving into the analysis of children's literature can be intricate, and "writing for children [is] actually the hardest kind of writing" (Jones 204). According to Dr. Seuss, adults can be easily impressed by clever and elaborate language, referred to as "linguistic acrobatics" or "verbal flights of fancy" (qtd. in Jones 204). However, the author points out that children are not as easily swayed by this kind of linguistic showmanship. Instead, a child's focus remains on the content and the story itself. This perspective suggests that successful children's literature should prioritize engaging storytelling, relatable characters, and compelling narratives over fancy language tricks. Children have a keen sense of what is happening in the story, and they are more likely to see through superficial language and stylistic choices. Therefore, writing for children requires a deep understanding of what captures their attention and imagination, and the heart of children's literature lies in the ability to convey meaningful stories that resonate with young readers.

Through storytelling, children can learn about various social and cultural viewpoints, which helps them to understand other people's ideas and be more tolerant of them. Additionally, difficult and delicate topics like love, friendship, diversity, equality, and justice can be addressed, giving young readers the skills they need to comprehend and deal with the problems they face in the environment they are surrounded by. Ultimately, this genre offers a valuable opportunity to create a bond between adults and children through shared reading. Reading stories to children fosters social interaction, strengthens emotional rapport, and promotes the development of listening and comprehension skills. This is where the analysis of Geisel's style commences. As a matter of fact, understanding the nuances of his approach offers valuable insights into the artistic choices, thematic richness, and enduring appeal of his storytelling.

2.1 Analysis of His Writing and Illustrations

Dr. Seuss is renowned as a master of imaginative narrative and alluring illustrations. According to A.E. Stallings, he is, "acknowledged or not, consciously or unconsciously" an influence on "[contemporary] metrical poets" (Stallings). This section delves into the artistry of his work, examining the subtleties of both his written words and the imaginative worlds he fashioned, from the rhythmic cadence of his text to his playful and inventive characters.

Curiously, he received minimal if any formal art education. Nevertheless, his talent, despite its initial simplicity, became evident at an early stage and only his consistent effort and dedication led to mastery. As an example, one of Geisel's earliest known cartoons, "'Frawncis' Blinn graduates", which appeared at the beginning of 1920, was a caricature of his classmate Francis Blinn, who took six years to graduate.

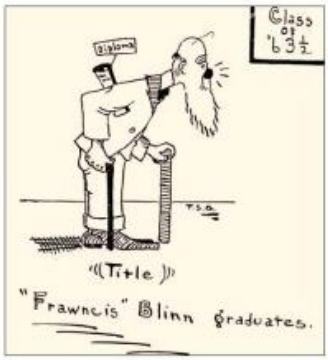

Fig. #7

Source: Dr. Seuss, *'Frawncis' Blinn graduates.* January 21, 1920. From Cohen, Charles. *The Seuss, the Whole Seuss and Nothing But the Seuss: A Visual Biography of Theodor Seuss Geisel.* New York, Random House Books for Young Readers, 2004. Page 29.

As shown in figure 7, the drawing imitated the rudimentary styles of comic strips in the *Springfield Union,* and it gave "very little indication of the unique and whimsical style to come" (Jones 29). It was during his time at Dartmouth College that Geisel's artwork gradually

progressed, though his human figures remained clumsy, without a distinct style. However, in the November 1923 issue of *Jacko*, Geisel was able to publish a one-page piece titled "Who's Who in Bo-Bo", which he both wrote and illustrated. This creation featured descriptions and drawings of "Bo-Bobians", which can be considered as the earliest predecessors of the Seussian[20] characters that would later define his work.

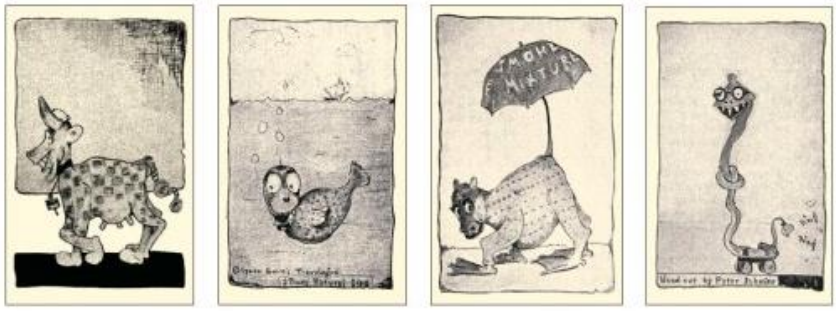

Fig. #8

Source: Dr. Seuss, *Bo-Bobians abound.* 1923. From Cohen, Charles. *The Seuss, the Whole Seuss and Nothing But the Seuss: A Visual Biography of Theodor Seuss Geisel.* New York, Random House Books for Young Readers, 2004. Page 41.

Despite the stylized drawings, The Bo-Bobians – shown in figure 8 – unmistakably contained elements that would later shape Geisel's distinctive style. Notably, they featured large eyes and wry smiles. Reflecting on this phase of his art, Ted acknowledged that he was learning through practice and experimentation. To *The Saturday Evening Post*, his first wife Helen said: "He puts the joints where he thinks they should be" (qtd. in Jones 318). He never studied anatomy. Nevertheless, he possessed an inherent talent for drawing and this is why "[h]is artistic vision emerged as the golden thread that linked every facet of his varied career, and his artwork became the platform from which he delivered numerous children's books, hundreds of

[20] According to Cambridge Dictionary, this adjective describes something that is "typical of or similar to the children's books written by the American author Dr. Seuss, which include rhyming language and funny pictures of strange creatures and objects". See "Seussian." *Cambridge Dictionary*, dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/seussian.

advertisements, and countless editorials filled with wonderfully inventive animals, characters, and humor" ("The Artistic Legacy of Theodor Seuss Geisel").

A notable feature in many of Ted's early drawings was the application of rich, deep black India ink as the background, effectively framing and accentuating the visual elements, thereby making them stand out prominently. This artistic approach seamlessly transitioned into his more advanced paintings as well. For each page of every illustration assignment he undertook, he worked meticulously, and crafted every stage of his projects, from the initial rough sketches and preliminary drawings to the final detailed line drawings and finished artwork. This commitment to a hands-on, detail-oriented creative process speaks to Dr. Seuss's dedication, as he maintained a high level of control and precision over every aspect of his artistic endeavors, ensuring that the end result met his exacting standards of quality and visual impact[21].

His distinct art genre can be situated "between the surrealist movement of the early 20th century and the inspired nonsense of a child's classroom doodles" ("The Artistic Legacy of Theodor Seuss Geisel"). In fact, his work can be said to share some qualities with surrealism, which aimed to tap into the unconscious mind, exploring dreams, fantasies, and the bizarre through a dreamlike, illogical, and challenged conventional representation of reality. This blend of influences resulted in an instantly recognizable style that characterizes Dr. Seuss's illustrations and contributes to his appeal across generations.

During his ten-day residency in Salt Lake City, Utah, mentioned in chapter 1.1., Dr. Seuss helped his students explore their potential as writers for children. He presented three distinct categories of writers: the first would be the "Torchbearers", who aimed to convey morals or messages, then the "Mrs. Mulvaneys" representing those who wrote children's books

[21] For further details, see "The Cat Behind the Hat." *The Art of Dr. Seuss Collection*, Published by Chaseart Companies, www.drseussart.com/.

solely for financial gain without concern for content, and the third category of "writers who want[ed] to make a profession of writing stories that children will like", both as forms of entertainment and education (qtd. in Jones 203). Here, he emphasized the importance of concentrating on the substance of the story and combining great style with meaningful content. He advised students to maintain a fast-paced plot and cross out unnecessary words and ideas.

While he provided valuable guidance, Dr. Seuss cautioned against adhering strictly to templates or rules, encouraging aspiring writers to make their own mistakes and find their unique creative paths. On this occasion, Dr. Seuss also discussed the state of children's literature, expressing concern that there were too many authors like "Mrs. Mulvaney", who produced books without genuine talent or meaningful content, emphasizing the detrimental effect of low-quality literature for both children and adults. In his lectures, he urged parents and writers to consider the reading materials they provided for children, encouraging them to learn from both good and bad examples, including comics, to improve the quality of literature for young readers. Geisel emphasized that the choices made in children's literature would influence the literary standards of the future.

Naturally, he faced some criticism because attempting to articulate a style that appeared closer to "inspired madness" could be perceived as counterproductive for aspiring writers (qtd. in Jones 210). Nevertheless, Geisel believed in his expertise in children's literature and saw his guidance as potentially valuable, even if not solely for inspiration. Admittedly, the criticism was not without merit, as describing such a uniquely distinctive style is indeed challenging, and attempting to emulate his writing style would not necessarily lead to achieving the same level of success as him. In 1982, for example, in *Pipers at the Gates of Dawn* by Jonathan Cott[22], Geisel provided readers with a rare glimpse into his creative mind:

[22] This work, published in May 1982, delved into the history and analysis of children's literature. The book includes essays and interviews with notable children's authors, among them Maurice Sendak, P. L. Travers, and Dr. Seuss.

> The difficult thing about writing in verse for kids is that you can write yourself into a box. If you can't get a proper rhyme for a quatrain, you not only have to throw that quatrain out, but you also have to unravel the sock way back, probably about ten pages or so ... And you also have to remember that in a children's book a paragraph is like a chapter in an adult book, and a sentence is like a paragraph (qtd. in Jones 397).

Thus, Dr. Seuss discussed the challenges of writing verse for children, explaining that finding the right rhyme was crucial.

Within the realm of Dr. Seuss's creative works, there exist some lesser-known treasures that are not widely recognized but can help with the understanding of his persona. One volume that compiles these artworks - sculptures, sketches and paintings - for the public to see is *The Secret Art of Dr. Seuss*. Here, one can enjoy an array of bizarre and fantastical creatures set in otherworldly landscapes, which were not intended for public display; rather, they were crafted purely for Geisel's personal enjoyment. In the introduction, Maurice Sendak notes how, through this volume, Geisel could "share with his fans another facet of himself — his *private* self" (Sendak). It is in this private realm, a testament to the complexity of his artistic identity, that he allowed his creative impulses to flow freely without the constraints of public expectations or commercial considerations.

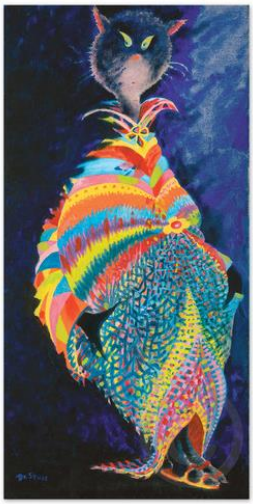

Fig. #9

Source: Dr. Seuss, *Joseph Catz and His Coat Of Many Colors*. The Art of Dr. Seuss Collection, Published by Chaseart Companies, www.drseussart.com.

As evident from the image in figure 9, Geisel's fondness for surrealism led to the creation of vividly hued scenarios and creatures. His artworks serve as a rich tapestry of symbolic narratives, inviting viewers to peel back the layers of whimsy and discover the deeper insights into the human psyche that Geisel so cleverly embedded within his seemingly nonsensical creations. This blending of imagination and introspection adds depth and complexity to his work, demonstrating that, "[d]isguised as a potpourri of nonsense", these pieces possess a profound and thoughtful understanding of what it means to be human ("The Cat Behind the Hat").

All in all, numerous attempts have been made to categorize Dr. Seuss's artistic style, yet there remains a lack of unanimous agreement among critics regarding the specific artistic school or movement to which he can be assigned. While he was not actively creating during the period when these artistic classifications were coined, it is likely that his work can be most aptly characterized as a fusion of early iterations of maximalism, and the principles of formalism, given the diverse blend of patterns and textures, the importance attributed to form, and the striking and lively color combinations. His works are different from those of his contemporaries: highlighting his unconventional approach, Nel draws a parallel between Seuss and the avant-garde movement of the twentieth century, emphasizing their shared aim of directly engaging with their audience to provoke thought. Jones recounts a moment from an NBC telecast on January 31st, 1954, where Ted Geisel expressed his limited understanding of modern art, asking: "When a modern artist paints a picture of a horse, why doesn't the horse *look* like a horse?" (qtd. in Jones 239). He added that *his* illustrations, "were processed in the

brain… where the artistry takes place" (qtd. in Jones, 240). His unconventional creatures were an unsuccessful attempt to represent reality because he discarded unnecessary parts of the animals he drew and exaggerated the ones he deemed essential. He would say of his own style: "I'm not a consecutive writer". In fact, he would draw and sketch up the scene and the sequence, put them together and "see how they fit" (qtd. in Jones 119).

As Dr. Seuss's artistic talents evolved and shaped his visual style, they also played a pivotal role in defining his approach to storytelling and writing. For this reason, this study will address them in a mutually complementary manner. Bailey sorts Dr. Seuss's works into three separate categories, in chronological order, each possessing unique characteristics related to its illustration style, writing style, and subject matter choices[23]. The first category encompasses Dr. Seuss's creations during his early experimental phase, before the outbreak of the First World War, which are the first four books listed in Appendix 1.

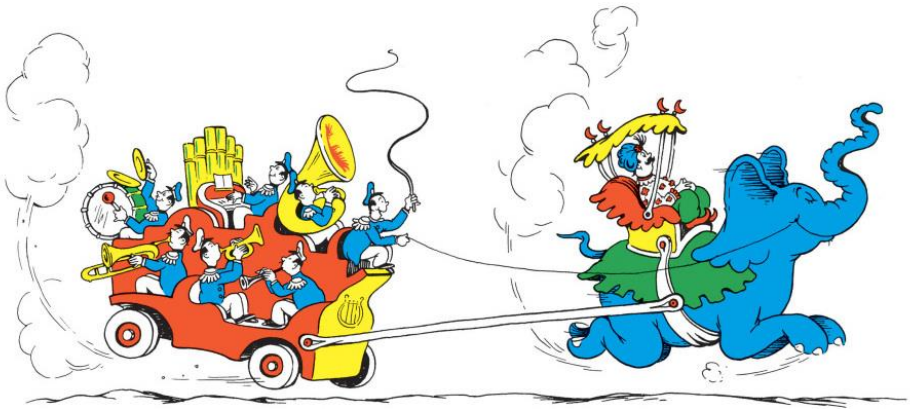

Fig. #10

Source: Dr. Seuss, *And To Think That I Saw It on Mulberry Street If I Ran the Zoo*. Page Random House, New York, 1950. Page 18-19.

In his debut work, *And To Think That I Saw It on Mulberry Street*, published in 1937, the illustrations are characterized by their simplicity[24]. To begin with, there is a lack of depth in

[23] See Bailey, John P. "Three Decades of Dr. Seuss". *Elementary English*, Jan, 1965, Vol.42, No.1, pp. 7-12.
[24] See figure 10.

the two-dimensional characters, whose facial expressions do not distinguish between humans and animals. Here, Geisel utilized exclusively primary colors, with no variation in shades or tints. Regarding the writing style, the verses adhere to anapestic tetrameter - albeit with intermittent disruptions in the metrical rhythm -, which complements the lively illustrations. Finally, the inclusion of a moral message is already evident. In his second book, *The 500 Hats of Bartholomew Cubbins*, it is possible to notice a transition from an "uneasy use of poetry" to a smooth and fluent prose style (Bailey 7).

Fig. #11

Source: Dr. Seuss, *The 500 Hats of Bartholomew Cubbins.* Random House, New York, 1938. Page 10.

As far as illustrations are concerned, and as exemplified in figure 11, "this book stands alone" (Bailey 8). This underscores the exceptional quality and significance of the visual elements within the book, as the black and white drawings featuring the red hat elevate the book to a level of artistic and storytelling excellence. However, what makes these first works particularly captivating, according to Pease, is the insight they provide into the earlier imaginative verse works and the subsequent masterpieces that would later emerge. Thus, the first group of Dr. Seuss's works commenced with unpolished poetry and simplistic primary illustrations in his

first work, continued with prose and the use of charcoal and pencil, occasionally accentuated by a touch of red, and culminated with a rhythmic verse and a dual-color scheme, red and aquamarine, in *Horton Hatches the Egg*. Interestingly, these first texts displayed a higher level of creative license in the story line than the accompanying visuals.

It is important to note that before the 1970s, Seuss's unorthodox style faced significant resistance from educators and librarians. Tarbox underlines how this resistance was partly fueled by the subversive themes present in many of his stories, such as the celebration of anarchy seen in *The Cat in the Hat*, as well as the use of anapestic meter[25]. However, Nel points out that this meter has often been deemed as "doggerel" by literary critics, a term typically referred to a verse that is considered simple, or lacking in artistic merit (Nel, *Dr. Seuss: American Icon* 20). Despite this potential criticism, Dr. Seuss effectively harnessed anapestic meter to create his engaging stories. The rhythmic and playful quality of this meter lends itself well to his whimsical storytelling, making it accessible and enjoyable for young readers. In this way, Seuss managed to transform what some might label as "doggerel" into a distinctive and celebrated style.

[25] Anapestic meter is a metrical pattern characterized by two unstressed syllables followed by one stressed syllable. Nel (2004) highlights how it was commonly found in limericks.

Fig. #12

Source: Dr. Seuss, *McElligot's Pool.* Random House, New York, 1947. Page 14-17

The second category, spanning from 1947 to 1957, marks the progression of his artistic style. It starts with *McElligot's Pool* from 1947. As shown in figure 12, the artwork in this book demonstrates a level of sophistication through improved perspective and character portrayal. The pages alternate between monochrome and color, with the illustrations complementing the text effectively. The use of various hues and shading techniques adds to the visual richness of the artwork. It was during these years that the distinct Seussian characteristics of the illustrations began to take shape: experimentation and creativity converged to shape a visual and recognizable identity. The narratives are conveyed through poetic verses, featuring playful rhymes and tongue-twisters, specifically crafted for reading aloud and to delight children. As an example, the 1955 *On Beyond Zebra!* features "odd groupings, just barely pronounceable, of random letters, like 'Thnadner', […] and word collections like 'Three-Seater Zatz-it Nose-Patting Extension" (Bailey 10).

The third and final category extends from the release of *The Cat in the Hat* in 1957 to his last works before his passing, encapsulating the definitive refinement of his distinctive style. Pease provides a comprehensive analysis of *The Cat in the Hat* by highlighting Dr. Seuss's profound understanding that reading goes beyond mere visual perception; Altschuler and Burns, in their review of Pease's work, mention some examples: when the cat in the story exclaims, "Look at me now/ With a cup and a cake/ On the top of my hat! / I can hold up TWO books! / I can hold up the fish! / And a little toy ship! / And some milk on a dish!", he captivates the children by drawing them into a quick discernment of his whimsical actions. The cat becomes a multi-dimensional entity, comprising "an image, a series of activities, a way of speaking that does what he says, and a way of correlating the words that he says with the

illustrations of him doing what he says" (qtd. in Altschuler and Burns 115). With each repetition of the phrase "Look at me now", the cat makes the depicted objects simultaneously audible and legible, blending the realms of sound and text within the narrative. Therefore, Dr. Seuss's storytelling technique is able to bridge the gap between visual perception and reading comprehension. The illustrations from this period make use of bright colors, and stylized characters.

Finally, with the Beginner Books series[26], which featured works like the 1960 *One Fish Two Fish Red Fish Blue Fish*, and the 1963 *Hop on Pop*, Seuss adhered to a restricted word list of around 220 words. Pease acknowledges that the popularity of Dr. Seuss's books can be attributed not only to their political or moral content but also to the clever linguistic devices he employed to make language enjoyable for young readers. He describes the Beginner Book series as follows:

> [they] are as much about words and syntax as about plotted events…. Dr. Seuss constructed comic devices that turned words into sources of pleasure. [His work] displays several language games—internal rhyme, onomatopoeia, assonance, consonance, alliteration—in which Dr. Seuss separates words from their normal function of making meaning and gives them over to linguistic fun *(*Pease, *Theodor SEUSS Geisel* 125).

Therefore, Dr. Seuss was able to amplify the presence and absence of meaning in his stories, creating linguistic enjoyment. For instance, he used rhyme and color cues to help children differentiate characters in *One Fish Two Fish Red Fish Blue Fish*. Additionally, he juxtaposed words like "fishbones", "wishbones", and "trombones" for "verbal entertainment as well as extralinguistic meaning" (qtd. in Altschuler and Burns 114).

[26] Jones reports how the "Beginner Books" is a series of children's books designed to help young children develop their reading skills through pairing selected images with specific words chosen from a restricted list. Geisel often challenged himself to write his stories using a relatively small set of words, typically around 200-250 unique words per book. This approach aimed to make reading fun and manageable for young readers while gradually introducing them to more complex words and concepts as they progressed through the series.

To conclude, after his passing in 1991, Seuss's legacy received significant recognition and praise. His art served a double function: on the one hand, *The New York Times*, for example, eulogized him for his unique meter and language, describing them as "irresistible, especially the Seuss-speak he created when English seemed too skimpy for so rich an imagination" (qtd. in Altschuler and Burns 112). The article remarked that Dr. Seuss would forever be recalled as someone who was able to manipulate words with finesse. It also emphasized that he made reading an enjoyable and engaging experience, and credited him with a "mercy killing of the highest order": the retirement of Dick and Jane, the didactic literary pair who had dominated children's literature for decades (qtd. in qtd. in Altschuler and Burns 112). The American contemporary poet A.E. Stallings describes Seuss's "breezily and distinctly American vernacular" as "usually metrically quite regular", with "rhythms [that] are highly varied--monosyllables and polysyllables, heavy and light nuggets of sound--as they are distributed over the metrical feet" (Stallings).

At the same time, as Pease remarks, his comic art served as a therapeutic and introspective outlet for him, allowing Geisel to confront and address the traumatic experiences he had endured during his formative years in Springfield, Massachusetts. In fact, through children's books which "recover, transform and conserve traumatic memories" *(*Pease, *Theodor SEUSS Geisel* 18), he found a means to process and cope with these challenging elements from his past, using his work as a form of catharsis to navigate and heal from his childhood traumas, including the difficulties faced as a person of German heritage on the eve of World War I.

2.2 The Influence of His Background in Advertising and Commercial Art

Moving on to another aspect of his style, Geisel's background in advertising and commercial art also played a significant role in shaping his endeavors. In fact, Geisel's exposure to this world not only gave him invaluable abilities, but also permanently altered his creative process. This section explains how his early career pursuits affected the works that have enthralled generations of readers, demonstrating the significant influence his commercial background had on his innovative narrative and distinctive aesthetic approach. To fully appreciate this influence, let us delve into the formative years of Geisel's career.

Following a year of academic pursuit at Oxford, Ted leveraged his Dartmouth affiliations to embark on a career in New York's advertising and cartooning scene during the late 1920s. It seems important to remark here how, according to Pease, the Nineteenth Amendment served as a target for Geisel's satirical works after college: "Dr. Seuss deftly circumvented moral inhibitions and logical constraints. His postwar art transformed overcoming prohibitions from the major theme of his caricatures and satires into a defining structural feature of his books" *(Theodor SEUSS Geisel* 80). He seized an unfavorable circumstance and transformed his life for the better, especially in the economically challenging climate of the early 1930s, when Ted managed to sustain himself by marketing his cartoons to publications like *Life, College Humor, Vanity Fair, and Ballyhoo.* Transitioning into the early 1940s, his editorial cartoons found a home in the daily newspaper *PM*. As he embarked on illustrating his children's books, his skills in crafting intricate and precise final-line drawings appeared remarkably effortless. This evolution in his career illustrates Ted's remarkable adaptability and artistic finesse, as he seamlessly moved from the world of adult-oriented humor to the enchanting realm of children's literature ("The Cat Behind the Hat").

Fig. #13

Source: Dr. Seuss, *Said a bird in the midst of a Blitz, "Up to now they've scored very few hitz, so I'll sit on my canny old star spangled fanny..." and on it he sitz and he sitz.* June 1941. From UC San Diego Library Digital Collections, https://library.ucsd.edu/dc/object/bb3720988x.

Figure 13 is important for the sake of this examination. In fact, according to Nel, "[t]he rollicking anapests in the caption lack the sparkle of the poetry in his children's books, but this cartoon does introduce the primary effect that World War II had on Dr. Seuss's post-war works" (Nel, "'Said a Bird in the Midst of a Blitz...': How World War II Created Dr. Seuss").

Throughout the war, and particularly during his time as a cartoonist for *PM*, Dr. Seuss not only developed a heightened concern for social matters but also aimed to instill a sense of concern and empathy for these issues within his readers, "even at the risk of offending them", urging them to question established power structures (Nel, "'Said a Bird in the Midst of a Blitz...': How World War II Created Dr. Seuss"). Therefore, the magazine *PM* played a major role in Seuss's career. While characterized by a certain degree of outspokenness and a touch of irreverent humor, his contributions to the magazine laid the foundation for the

confrontational style that he would later employ in his children's books, particularly those with overtly political themes such as *Yertle The Turtle and Other Stories*, and *The Butter Battle Book*. Also, in advertising, one has limited time for editing and refining, which differs from Dr. Seuss's meticulous approach in his later works, where he would use this style to engage young readers in important social and political discussions through a more accessible and entertaining lens.

Fig. #14

Source: Dr. Seuss, WHAT HAVE YOU DONE TODAY TO HELP SAVE YOUR COUNTRY FROM THEM? Mar. 5, 1942. From Minear, Richard H., editor. *Dr. Seuss Goes to War: The World War II Editorial Cartoons of Theodor Seuss Geisel*. New York, The New Press, 1999. Page 148.

Nel[27] emphasizes that the straightforward, provocative style found in many of Geisel's cartoons, exemplified by the question in the cartoon in figure 14, also finds its way into his children's books. In several of his works, this influence is evident as they conclude with a question. In *The Cat in the Hat*, for instance, the narrator asks: "What would you do / If your mother asked you?". Here, the children must grapple with whether to describe a real experience that their mother might believe is imaginary or an imaginary one that she would accept as real. For a child (and, ideally, for some adults), the conflict between the desire for honesty and the

[27] From Nel, Philip. "'Said a Bird in the Midst of a Blitz...': How World War II Created Dr. Seuss". *Mosaic: A journal for the interdisciplinary study of literature*, Vol. 34, Issue 2, University of Manitoba, June 2001.

desire to avoid trouble presents a genuine dilemma. While not all of Seuss's books end with such a direct question, they often conclude by encouraging readers to further contemplate the message. In this way, his cartoons and books alike directly engage the reader, urging them to take action. As a consequence, Dr. Seuss's aim was to "cross the boundary between the page and his reader […] by putting the matter in his reader's hands" (Nel, "'Said a Bird in the Midst of a Blitz...': How World War II Created Dr. Seuss").

The parallel between *Horton Hatches the Egg* and *Horton Hears a Who!* is particularly relevant in this context. The first work, published in 1940, tells the tale of Horton the elephant, who faithfully guards an egg while facing various challenges and adventures. This book imparts lessons of responsibility and commitment. *Horton Hears a Who*!, published more than a decade later and after the occurrence of World War II, is centered around the same elephant, Horton, and his efforts to protect the tiny world of the Whos. In this latter, the main themes are empathy, responsibility, and the importance of safeguarding the rights and voices of minorities.

The shift between the two works is clear: while the pre-war work focuses on a single egg, the post-war one deals with an entire civilization, which needs Horton's protection from imminent destruction. In his analysis, Nel underlines how Seuss wrote *Horton Hears a Who*!, described by the Des Moines Register as "a rhymed lesson in protection of minorities and their rights" (Morgan and Morgan 151), shortly after his return from Japan in 1953. In this trip, he witnessed the evolving perspectives of young people following the American occupation. He also dedicated it to Mitsugi Nakamura, a professor at Kyoto University whom he had met during his trip. The Whos in the story could symbolize children or any marginalized group. However, given the timing of its creation upon Seuss's return from Japan and his exposure to Japanese schools during that visit, Seuss might have had the Japanese people in mind when conceiving this fictitious population. Furthermore, continues Nel, although the Whos in *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*! may not have a direct connection to Japan, the grave peril faced

by Horton's Whos evokes a parallel with the atomic bombs that the United States dropped upon Japan in August 1945. This analogy is highlighted by Minear, who comments: "If Who-ville is Japan, Horton must stand for the United States" (263).

Nonetheless, there are many conclusion one could draw: when analyzing Ho*rton Hears a Who!*, the interpretation of the book's message may depend on the context in which it is considered. Rather than viewing it solely as a direct reference to American actions during World War II against Japan, it can be seen as a broader parable about protecting all people, regardless of their size. The book's refrain, "A person's a person, no matter how small", which could be interpreted as potentially condescending, can be considered as advocating an equal treatment for everyone, not just the Japanese. This perspective suggests that the story's focus on size mirrors real-world discrimination based on factors like race, creed, sex, or nationality, and Seuss's message transcends specific historical events and applies to the broader human condition, making amends for his previous racist cartoons. This hints at a potential evolution in Geisel's political stance as an artist. Aside from creating sporadic posters for various causes, such as his efforts to oppose billboards in La Jolla, Dr. Seuss refrained from engaging in political cartooning after the year 1943. This shift in his career trajectory marked a notable departure from his earlier involvement in this form of artistic expression.

Finally, his decision to cease political cartooning after 1943 reflected a change in his focus and priorities as an artist. While he had previously used his cartoons as a means of commentary on social and political issues, he redirected his creative energies towards other forms of storytelling, particularly children's literature. This transition allowed him to reach a broader audience, and to convey important messages through his narratives. Although he moved away from political cartoons, Dr. Seuss's dedication to advocating for social justice and equality remained evident in his later works.

2.3 The Relationship Between Text and Image in His Work

While Dr. Seuss's commitment to social justice persisted throughout his career, it also found expression in the intricate interplay between text and image within his works. This dynamic relationship serves as a significant aspect of his creative process and is integral to understanding the impact of his storytelling. It was only in his twenties, while in college, that Ted Geisel recognized this close association between words and pictures, comparing them to yin and yang and stating: "I began thinking that words and pictures, married, might possibly produce a progeny more interesting than either parent…[though a]t Dartmouth, I couldn't even get them engaged" (qtd. in Sullivan). He therefore started to envision a powerful synergy when words and pictures were combined.

While Dr. Seuss struggled to integrate these elements during his time at Dartmouth, his career as an illustrator showcased his ability to invent imaginative names for his characters, such as a "very fine beast called the Flustard/Who only eats mustard with sauce made of custard", a "family of Joats/Whose feet are like cows', but wear squirrel skin coats" or "a scraggle-foot Mulligatawny, a high-stepping animal fast as the wind" (Seuss, *If I Ran the Zoo 11,13, 17*).

Fig. #15

Source: Dr. Seuss, *If I Ran the Zoo*. Random House, New York, 1950. Page 25.

His answer would be: "Making up words is the simplest thing in the world. For instance, you draw something and look at it and it's an obsk[28]. There's no doubt about it. […] That's the way animals look to me and I just draw them" (qtd. in Jones 215).

Geisel's talent was evident in his ability to create complete stories with just a handful of verses or a limited number of illustrations, demonstrating his ability to convey narratives concisely. For instance, in *Green Eggs and Ham*, he only used fifty different words. On different occasions, though, he chose not to include illustrations in his short stories. An example is *Gerald McBoing-Boing*, which features a young boy named Gerald McCloy who communicates solely through sounds. Jones notes how Geisel astutely recognized that effectively conveying the story required utilizing sound effects rather than traditional written words. Afterwards, this tale was successfully transformed into an audio story by Capitol Records, where Gerald's communication mainly consisted of an unmistakable "BOING!" sound. Geisel's artistic contribution to the story was limited to the record's cover, which depicted a young boy in shorts exclaiming "Boing! Boing!".

While examining Seuss's works, Pease subtly suggests that his books foreshadow certain aspects of postmodernism. In Pease's rhetorical analysis, one can detect similarities to Derrida's idea of the precarious connection between sign and signified and Barthes' emphasis on the enjoyment derived from textual elements. In fact, "Dr. Seuss introduces and intensifies the unresolved tension between the presence and absence of meaning" (qtd. in Morris 162). The French philosopher Jacques Derrida, a key figure in poststructuralist thought, suggests that language is inherently unstable, and the relationship between words (signifiers) and the concepts they represent (signified) is not fixed but constantly shifting. Thus, Pease seems to

[28] See figure 15.

suggest that Seuss challenged traditional linguistic norms and played with the fluidity of language. This can be seen as a reflection of Derrida's ideas on the instability of meaning. Furthermore, Roland Barthes explored the pleasure that readers can derive from the act of reading itself, rather than solely from the narrative content. In the case of Dr. Seuss, his whimsical wordplay, plethora of nursery rhymes, and visually stimulating illustrations often provide readers with a delightful reading experience. This aligns with Barthes' notion of deriving enjoyment from the text as a physical and sensory experience.

As an example, in the Beginner Book series, Geisel applied his "unnamed educational theory[29]", according to which children can become better at recognizing familiar words if the related illustrations are positioned in close proximity to those words. Jones makes the example of the beginning of *One Fish Two Fish Red Fish Blue Fish*, where the author placed the text as close as possible to each of the named fish. However, as the book progressed, he deviated from this proximity principle, prioritizing rhymes that he believed would help children pronounce words correctly: "[f]or instance, if a youngster is sounding out the words, what a help when 'sing' is related to 'ying' and 'thing'?" (qtd. in Jones 294).

What Dr. Seuss was accomplishing with rhyme closely aligned with the practice of teaching phonics, which had fallen out of favor among many educators. According to Jones, these educators still preferred the "look-say" approach to reading, which was championed by *The Cat in the Hat*[30]. However, in recent times, education institutions had begun to shift towards a more balanced approach, combining "both phonics *and* the look-say method" (Jones 294). This approach involved teaching children to read by recognizing words by sight and also

[29] Jones reports Geisel's words: *One Fish Two Fish Red Fish Blue Fish* is "a book based on an educational theory I have, but one that unfortunately I can't define" (qtd. in Jones 293).

[30] The "look-say" is a method of teaching reading where students are encouraged to recognize and memorize whole words as visual units rather than breaking words down into individual phonetic sounds. This approach emphasizes the immediate recognition of words by sight, often using flashcards or repetitive exposure to frequently used words. *The Cat in The Hat* was associated with promoting the "look-say" approach to reading because it contains many frequently repeated words and phrases designed to help children recognize and remember them visually. This approach was one of the methods used to teach reading during a period when there was a debate about the most effective way to teach children to read.

understanding their phonetic sound. Unintentionally, then, Dr. Seuss found himself at the forefront of the ever-evolving and often controversial efforts to enhance student literacy.

In view of the next chapter dedicated to cancel culture, our research will now delve into an exploration of this relationship between word and image within the six books that have been withdrawn from circulation and will no longer see publication[31]. This investigation aims to shed light on how these books, which have faced criticism and calls for removal, engage with both written content and visual elements, and consider how this dynamic contributes to the ongoing discourse surrounding cancel culture. In Jones' opinion, Geisel faced challenges in avoiding simplistic portrayals of people from different cultures, whether he meant them to be fictional or not. For example, in *And to Think That I Saw It on Mulberry Street*, where "the rhythmic anapestic tetrameter […] in Geisel's ear-grabbing couplets is, like the drawings, unfailingly funny", the illustrations create a sense of wonder as the narrative becomes more elaborate and complex (Pease, "Dr. Seuss in Ted Geisel's Never-Never Land" 199).

However, "with longevity comes reexamination and scrutiny" (qtd. in Jones 116). In the mid-1970s, both Ted Geisel and *And to Think That I Saw It on Mulberry Street* became targets of criticism from the emerging women's movement. This criticism centered on Geisel's dismissive attitude towards the female perspective depicted in the book. As Marco's imaginative tale unfolds, he rejects the inclusion of a reindeer pulling a sleigh, casually remarking that even someone as common as "Jane" could come up with such an obvious idea: "Hmmmm…A reindeer and a sleigh…/ Say - *anyone* could think of *that*, / Jack or Fred or Joe or Nat- / Say, even Jane could think of *that* (Dr. Seuss, *And to Think That I Saw It on Mulberry Street* 9). Much later in life, Geisel acknowledged the well-intentioned nature of the protest but firmly defended his original wording, explaining that Marco's dismissal of Jane was merely a portrayal of sibling rivalry, a common theme among brothers and sisters.

[31] For the complete list, consult appendix 2.

Fig. #16

Source: Dr. Seuss, *And to Think That I Saw It on Mulberry Street*. Random House, New York, 1989. Page 26.

Another issue of concern was Dr. Seuss's use of a derogatory term for Asians: "… A Chinaman / Who eats with sticks…" (Dr. Seuss, *And to Think That I Saw It on Mulberry Street* 16). The accompanying illustration – shown in figure 16 – reflected the stereotypical portrayal of Asians prevalent in the 1930s, complete with "a conical straw hat, chopsticks, and slanted slits for eyes" (Jones 116).

Throughout his life, Dr. Seuss did not fully grasp the problem with such cartoonish depictions, believing he was adhering to the norms of his era. He likened it to his portrayal of other characters, such as "a Rajah, with rubies, perched high on a throne[32]", who wore traditional attire (Dr. Seuss, *And to Think That I Saw It on Mulberry Street* 9). However, these stereotypes have not aged well, and many modern readers find them objectionable and contentious, despite their historical context.

The story of *McElligot's Pool* takes readers on an adventure with a young boy fishing in a seemingly ordinary pool, but this pool holds the potential for an expansive underwater world filled with Seussian creatures. In Jones' opinion, this book represents a return to Geisel's

[32] See figure 10 for reference.

literary roots in more ways than one. Firstly, it evokes treasured childhood memories of fishing with his father. Secondly, it features the same character he depicted in *And to Think That I Saw It on Mulberry Street*, Marco. This story maintains the rhyming verse style seen in *And to Think That I Saw It on Mulberry Street*, with italics emphasizing stressed words or syllables, which is a technique Geisel would continue to use. As far as the illustrations are concerned, the artwork is characterized by "strong black lines with a careful gray wash, and every other full-page spread is in stunning full color, reminiscent of Ted's watercolor paintings" (Jones 197). Surprisingly, Geisel himself was dissatisfied with the book's overall look, feeling it lacked a consistent tone. Consequently, this unique coloring approach was abandoned after the book's release, setting this work apart within the Dr. Seuss library. Nonetheless, it received positive reviews and earned Dr. Seuss his first Caldecott Honor, a prestigious recognition from librarians for outstanding children's literature. It should be noted that, despite this, this book has recently faced criticism.

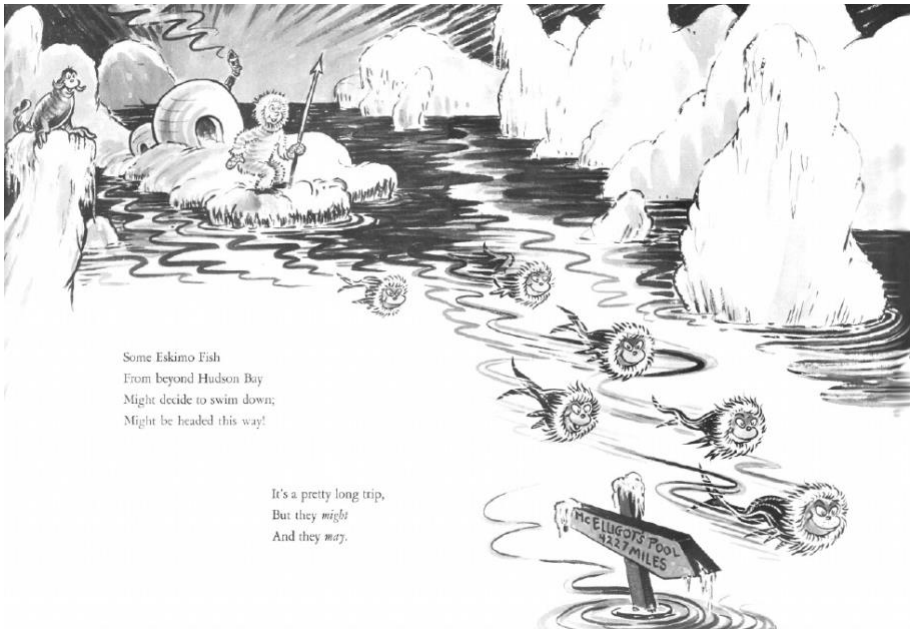

Fig. #17

Source: Dr. Seuss, *McElligot's Pool*. Random House, New York, 1974. Page 19.

Although it is not clear which specific images are considered offensive, one should think about the following verse[33]: "Some Eskimo Fish / From beyond Hudson Bay / Might decide to swim down; / Might be headed this way! (Dr. Seuss, *McElligot's Pool* 19). The use of the term "Eskimo" to describe a fictional type of fish can be considered outdated in American English and offensive in Canadian English.

Fig. #18

Source: Dr. Seuss, *If I Ran the Zoo*. Random House, New York, 1950. Page 11.

As far as *If I Ran the Zoo* is concerned, the description of the "helpers who all wear their eyes at a slant" and the image associated with this[34], a stereotypical bald figure wearing a wide-sleeves shirt and sandals, have been subject to critique (Seuss, *If I Ran the Zoo 11*).

However, it could be argued that, given that their facial features resemble those of the enormous Flustard they are carrying on their heads in a cage, Geisel may have intended for them to be inhabitants of the fictitious "mountains of Zomba-ma-Tant" (Seuss, *If I Ran the Zoo 11*). Nonetheless, after more than seventy years from its publication, this work is now subject to

[33] See figure 17 for reference.
[34] See figure 18 for reference.

cancelation, "a dramatic step to update and curate Seuss' body of work, acknowledging and rejecting some of his views while seeking to protect his brand and appeal"[35] (Alter and Harris).

Scrambled Eggs Super! "is the story of Peter T. Hooper, who decides that regular hens' eggs are too ordinary for his specialty dish called "*Scrambled eggs Super-dee-Dooper-dee-Booper, Special de luxe à-la-Peter T. Hooper!*" (Dr. Seuss, *Scrambled Eggs Super! 11*). The structure and story line are similar to *If I Ran the Zoo*. In *Scrambled Eggs Super!,* the main character Peter embarks on a quest to discover eggs laid by exotic birds, such as the Kwigger, Stroodel, and Mount Strookoo Cuckoo. Dr. Seuss crafted this tale in densely packed rhyming verse, "perhaps *too*[36] dense" and overly intricate, with artwork featuring alternating pages of red, blue, and red/yellow hues (Jones 234). While the reviews were generally positive, they did not overflow with praise. In a review published in *The New York Times*, Walt Kelly celebrated "the fertility rampant in the brain of Dr. Seuss" (qtd. in Jones 234). Here, the potentially problematic scene is illustrated in the figure below.

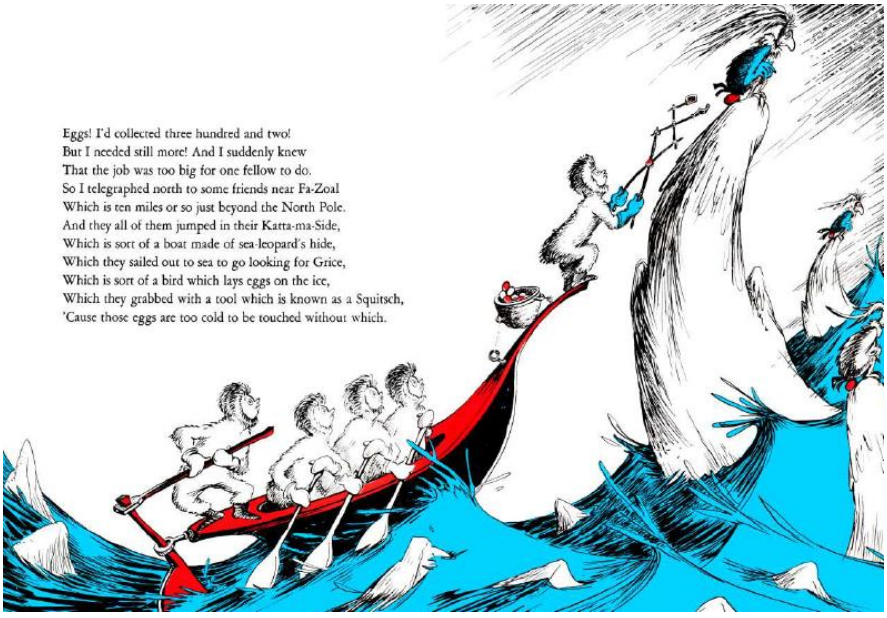

Fig. #19

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[35] The cancel culture controversy on some of Dr. Seuss's books will be examined in full detail in the third chapter.
[36] Emphasis on the adverb "too" is placed by Jones himself.

Source: Dr. Seuss, *Scrambled Eggs Super!*. Random House, New York, 1953. Page 17-18.

In figure 19, it is possible to see five characters in a boat, dressed in hooded fur parkas. This scene takes place in a fictional location called "Fa-Zoal / Which is ten miles or so just beyond the North Pole" (Dr. Seuss, *Scrambled Eggs Super! 17*). This scene can be perceived as potentially insensitive due to the portrayal of these characters and their attire, which may be seen as stereotypical or culturally inappropriate, especially considering the context of the North Pole and the concept of collecting eggs from unique birds. Therefore, the decision to withdraw the book from publication may have stemmed from concerns about the depiction of these characters and their actions in this illustration.

On Beyond Zebra!, published in September 1955, was dedicated to Ted's first wife Helen and was a "Dr. Seuss version of the traditional alphabet book, but "for people who don't stop at Z" – pronounced as /ziː/ (zee) in American English (Jones 252). It showcased Ted Geisel at the peak of his imaginative creativity. He introduced and named nineteen entirely new letters for the alphabet, each associated with creatures whose names could only be spelled using these unique letters. As far as the illustrations are concerned, the book featured a menagerie of fantastical and anatomically-impossible animals, a theme that had been a consistent part of Geisel's work since his days at *Judge magazine* working on the Flit campaign. *On Beyond Zebra!* is characterized by its rapid pace, clever rhymes, and some of Dr. Seuss's most energetic and inventive verse, as demonstrated in lines such as: "And SPAZZ is a letter I use to spell Spazzim / A beast who belongs to the Nazzim of Bazzim. / Handy for traveling. That's why he has 'im." (Dr. Seuss, *On Beyond Zebra*! 17). Upon its publication, the book received widespread acclaim, often described as "delightful" by critics (qtd. in Jones 253). T*he New York Times* praised its indescribable yet enjoyable Seussian letters and creatures. This notwithstanding, Jones mentions how not everyone was entirely pleased with the book's

concept. For example, a reviewer for the *Boston Globe* playfully accused Dr. Seuss of "alphabetical treason" for introducing new letters to the alphabet. Geisel himself humorously agreed, noting the excessive seriousness found in academic settings. More recently, on March 2, 2021, Dr. Seuss Enterprises, the entity that holds the rights to Dr. Seuss's literary works, made the decision to stop publishing it, also due to the same sentence (and related image) that Jones praised.

Fig. #20

Source: Dr. Seuss, *On Beyond Zebra!* Random House, New York, 1955. Page 35.

In fact, as shown in figure 20, this character, "Nazzim of Bazzim", whose nationality is not specified and who rides a creature called the "Spazzim", is presented in a way that conforms to stereotypes typically associated with Asian characters, and this portrayal has prompted discussions about the lack of diversity and cultural awareness in the book.

Ultimately*, The Cat's Quizzer* is the most recent and least favorably received among the six books we have discussed so far regarding the cancel culture issue. This book is "largely a collection of brainteasers, puzzles, and trivia questions" (Jones 375). Despite the visual impairment that Geisel faced while writing this book, the illustrations are still vibrant and colorful. Audrey Geisel, Ted's second wife, even remarked: "So many colors […] So much on

every page" (qtd. in Jones 376). This work appears to have been removed from publication due to the specific illustration shown below.

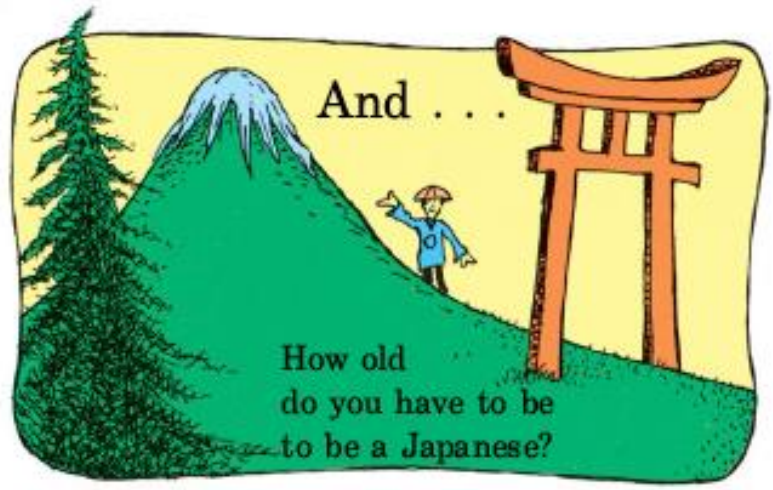


Fig. #21

Source: Dr. Seuss, *The Cat's Quizzer.* Random House, New York, 2004. Page 11.

Illustration 21 shows a yellow character who is depicted wearing a coolie hat, accompanied by the caption: "How old / do you have to be / to be a Japanese?" (Dr. Seuss, *The Cat's Quizzer*, 11). This specific illustration and caption have been considered offensive or insensitive as it appears to stereotype a Japanese person and therefore suggests a questionable criterion for determining a person's nationality or identity.

All in all, this chapter served as the starting point for a more in-depth investigation of Dr. Seuss's legacy and the influence of modern culture on how his work is perceived. The reactions, discussions, and outcomes that have followed these disputes will thus be examined in Chapter III, as well as their relevance in influencing the current conversation about cultural representations and censorship in the fields of literature and art.

CHAPTER III: CANCEL CULTURE AND DR. SEUSS'S LEGACY

A significant portion of children's literature in North America has historically catered to an audience that is primarily made up of white, middle-class, and heterosexual people, as noted by Grenby and Immel[37]. This prevailing norm raises the question: did Theodor Geisel reflect this demographic bias in his literary works?

The emergence of cancel culture is a notable and ever-expanding cultural phenomenon which has stirred considerable controversy, often leading to sharp divisions among scholars with varying perspectives, particularly regarding public figures or politicians. Some argue that cancel culture encroaches upon the fundamental principle of free speech, adding an extra layer of complexity to the ongoing debates surrounding its implications and consequences. The primary objective of this chapter is to delve into the phenomenon of cancel culture, particularly within the context of Dr. Seuss's legacy and issues related to inclusivity, diversity, and cultural awareness in his body of works, considering whether it is possible to separate the artist from their work, finally analyzing the author's own response to criticism. By dissecting the ongoing discourse surrounding Dr. Seuss's creations and their influence on society, we can gain profound insights into the contemporary conversation surrounding cancel culture and its repercussions on the enduring legacy of this esteemed author and illustrator.

3.1 The Debate over Censorship and Canceling

In both academic discourse and public discussions, the concept of "cancel culture" and the scrutiny of Dr. Seuss's works are subject to debate. On the one hand, some scholars argue that

[37] See Grenby, M. O. and Andrea Immel, editors. Preface. *The Cambridge Companion to Children's Literature*. Cambridge UP, 2009.

the decision to withdraw certain Dr. Seuss books over concerns of racist or culturally stereotypical depictions represents a meaningful stride toward fostering greater awareness and accountability in the portrayal of these themes in children's literature. On the other hand, some contrary views or arguments emphasize the importance of preserving Dr. Seuss's works as part of the literary and cultural heritage, separating the author's intent from the interpretations that can be made of his body of work today. As a matter of fact, some researchers look at the historical and cultural contexts in which Dr. Seuss's works were produced and make the case that, despite some problematic representations, these works have helped shape children's literature and can still offer opportunities to engage young readers in difficult conversations.

However, one should start from the very definition of cancel culture to understand the discussion around this topic. According to Cambridge Dictionaries, "Cancel culture" is "a way of behaving in a society or group, especially on social media, in which it is common to completely reject and stop supporting someone because they have said or done something that offends you" ("Cancel Culture"). By broader definition, it describes a social phenomenon in which a person or piece of art is condemned, disregarded, or left out of consideration by the public due to specific beliefs, actions, or content that is judged objectionable or troublesome. Since it is a contentious idea, there is no universal agreement on its limitations. Before the term "cancel culture" gained prominence, conservative rhetoric had long been engaged in this type of discourse, predating the popularization of this label within discussions on liberal societal issues. This phenomenon extends to various domains, but it is particularly noteworthy within the book-publishing industry, especially concerning the controversy surrounding banned books, which reflects the tension between the protection of free expression and societal sensibilities. However, as Fan underlines in his article, shifts in society, particularly in response to heightened awareness of racial trauma and the delineation between opinion and fact, have contributed to the emergence of a new wave of cancel culture, influenced by the changing

dynamics of an evolving society. As an example, in 2019 Ishizuke and Stephens published their research which showed that characters of color accounted for a mere 2% of the representation in children's literature, and worse yet, they were often portrayed in racist and stereotypical ways. This troubling revelation prompted publishers to re-evaluate and modify images in numerous books, resulting in the discontinuation of six specific Dr. Seuss titles, as highlighted in the previous chapter. This rising awareness about diversification has ignited an extensive dialogue within academic and literary communities, as well as among readers, addressing the question of whether retaining these books in circulation is justified and, more specifically, whether Dr. Seuss's entire body of work warrants the scrutiny of cancel culture. Therefore, this chapter has the aim of confronting critical questions about the responsibility of Dr. Seuss and Dr. Seuss Enterprises in addressing such concerns.

This research will adopt Clark's definition of "cancel culture", which characterizes it as a process involving public condemnation, boycotts, and the holding of individuals accountable for making offensive remarks or engaging in objectionable actions directed at minority or marginalized communities. According to Norris, these individuals experience ostracism and endure reputational damage, which, in some cases, can be long-lasting, including the damaging of careers, the imposition of accountability, and even the establishment of grounds for legal action. In Meesala's perspective, "[c]ancel culture has proven to be an effective method to identify the actions taken by individuals and corporations to rectify mistakes" (Meesala). In essence, facing public condemnation and boycotts due to offensive actions or remarks often triggers a process of accountability and rectification. The scrutiny and consequences that come with cancel culture compel those in the spotlight to take steps to address their errors, whether through apologies, policy changes, or other corrective measures.

This is in line with Meesala's perspective, according to which "[m]ore often than not, free speech is not infringed upon" (Meesala), indicating that the issue is not about violating

free speech but rather about defining the boundaries for public discourse and determining whether these boundaries are acceptable. She remarks that, while one should remain open to opposing viewpoints, these perspectives may not align with the majority's beliefs. As a consequence, she introduces a different approach, where the public can engage in "call out culture" as an alternative to "cancel culture". However, she continues, responses should prioritize education, acceptance, and forgiveness over cancelation, suppression, or removal. Furthermore, Strossen introduces the concept of "counter-speech". This latter, which consists of "more speech, not silence" (Strossen), has proven to be a highly influential method for driving political and social change within society. Instead of resorting to censorship and suppressing dissenting voices, individuals maintain the fundamental right to express both their support and disapproval of various figures or ideas. This approach emphasizes that silencing voices is not the most effective means of combating hateful speech. In fact, it is the power of counter-speech, the voices of tolerance and dissent that stand against bigotry, which has the potential to foster mutual respect and drive the transformation within society.

Hence, understanding the dynamics of cancel culture and the role of counter-speech is essential, as it provides a framework for addressing contentious issues on a case-by-case basis. Counter-speech emerges as a modern and highly effective strategy that encourages open and constructive dialogue and fosters greater understanding and tolerance. This approach is particularly relevant if one considers the persistent and concerning trend of a lack of diversity within the entertainment and book-publishing industries. The examination of diversity[38]within these sectors underscores the need for a thoughtful and multifaceted system to address long-standing disparities and promote a more inclusive and equitable society.

In this regard, the study of diversity in the entertainment and book-publishing industries

[38] For the sake of this study, diversity is defined as encompassing "the range of human difference, including but not limited to race, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, social class, physical ability or attributes, religious or ethical values system, national origin, and political beliefs" ("Diversity and Inclusion").

reveals a persistent and concerning trend. As an example, in 2019, the independent children's book publisher Lee & Low Books conducted an analysis based on the Diversity Baseline Survey. This survey, initiated in 2015 by Laura M. Jiménez and Betsy Beckert and called DBS 1.0, aimed to provide empirical evidence of the prevalent lack of inclusion within the book-publishing industries (Leeandlowbooks). According to the study:

> 79 percent of respondents identified as White. 78 percent were women. 88 percent were straight. 92 percent were non-disabled. At a time when readers of all backgrounds were demanding to see themselves in books, the publishing industry came nowhere near to reflecting the rich diversity of the United States[39] (Leeandlowbooks).

The significance of this survey lies in the fact that it was the first extensive study dedicated to examining the demographic composition of staff within publishing companies. The findings were particularly startling, revealing deep-seated disparities within the industry, thereby highlighting the urgency for change.

This serves as a pertinent backdrop to the cancel culture discussion surrounding Dr. Seuss, where concerns about diversity and inclusion intersect with the broader conversation about canceling certain aspects of his work. In fact, according to Albrecht, "literature and other arts have been used as reflections of the fundamental reality of a culture, variously called "culture mentality", "Weltanschauung", "spiritual principle", or "soul", and of the different stages in the development of a culture" (Albrecht 427). Essentially, these terms allude to the core beliefs, values, and worldviews that shape a culture. As a result, through an examination of literature and the arts, researchers can gain insights into the unique characteristics and perspectives that define a culture's identity. Moreover, these forms of artistic expression also serve as valuable markers of a culture's evolution over time. They document the different

[39] For the Diversity Baseline Survey 2019 Results, see Appendix 3.

stages in the development of a culture, illustrating how it has adapted and transformed throughout history. This dynamic relationship between culture, literature, and the arts highlights their significance as both reflections of the past and indicators of cultural development. It underscores the importance of studying these creative outputs to gain a deeper understanding of the intricate tapestry of human societies.

At the same time, though, this perspective has shifted the focus from viewing artists solely as exceptional individuals or brilliant creators driven by imaginative genius. Instead, it underscores their role as active agents within broader social dynamics. In this view, authors are not isolated figures but rather participants in a larger context. In addition, "[i]t has provided social and historical modes of analysis as alternatives to exclusively biographical and aesthetic approaches and offered concepts of cultural relativism in place of absolutist aesthetic principles and social determinism in place of artistic determinism" (Albrecht 431). What Albrecht points out is an approach that looks beyond the individual artist's life and artistic qualities, as it examines their work within the historical period in which they lived.

Furthermore, Albrecht's perspective advocates for a shift from absolute aesthetic principles towards a more culturally relative viewpoint. It acknowledges that artistic value and significance can vary across different cultures and contexts, emphasizing the importance of understanding art within its specific cultural milieu. Similarly, it challenges the notion of artistic determinism by promoting social determinism. Rather than attributing an artist's work solely to their internal artistic impulses, this perspective considers the impact of external social factors on the creation of art. It recognizes that societal influences can shape artistic expression and should be taken into account when analyzing creative works.

Albrecht's research, which dates back to the 1950s, offers valuable insights that can help elucidate the context of Dr. Seuss and the contemporary phenomenon of cancel culture. In fact, on Tuesday, March 2, 2021, the day that would have marked Theodor Seuss Geisel's

birthday, Dr. Seuss Enterprises revealed the discontinuation of six titles, which were carefully selected after consultations with a panel of experts. These books, analyzed in the previous chapter, will cease to undergo further printing or licensing, which essentially means that they will no longer be available for purchase in any format. This decision to discontinue the printing and licensing of these titles stems from various considerations, including concerns about the content and its cultural relevance in contemporary times.

As part of the ongoing dialogue surrounding the influence of cancel culture on literary legacies, it becomes essential to recognize the action taken to address and adapt to changing perspectives and sensitivities, ensuring that Dr. Seuss's literary legacy aligns with evolving norms and values. The examination of Dr. Seuss's works will be enriched by acknowledging similar debates that have arisen in the context of cancel culture, including discussions around the works of the British author Roald Dahl[40], whose works have been criticized for allegedly having racist, anti-Semitic, or sexist content. Concerned about these troubling elements, some proponents of cancel culture have suggested casting doubt on Dahl' s legacy or encouraging a critical reading of his writings. According to Sands-O'Connor, "publishers have three choices: stop publishing the work and lose money while risking another publisher releasing the works, leave it as it is and face accusations of sexism, racism, classism, or tailor it to a present-day audience" (qtd. in Syed). While Dr. Seuss Enterprises opted for the first choice as "part of a broader plan for inclusivity" (Syed), Dahl's British publisher Puffin Books has favored the third, which seems to be the "least problematic option", although it is less common (qtd. in

[40] Roald Dahl, who passed away in 1990, can be considered one of the most accomplished writers in the realm of children's literature. His collection of works, spanning over 250 million copies sold globally, includes renowned novels like the 1964 *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, and the 1983 *The Witches*. Dahl's tales are renowned for their blend of dark humor and unexpected plot developments.Information gathered from Cumming, Ed, Buchanan Abigail, Holl-Allen Genevieve, and Smith, Benedict. "The Rewriting of Roald Dahl". *The Telegraph*, 24 February 2023,https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2023/02/17/roald-dahl-books-rewritten-offensive-matilda-witches-twits/?.

Syed).

In an article for *The New York Times,* Walther highlights how, in response to recent edits made to Roald Dahl's works to make them less offensive, the public reaction has been rather intense, although the revision of children's literature due to changing sensitivities is not an isolated case. The debate over such revisions in the context of cancel culture, similar to the Dr. Seuss situation in 2021, has sparked intense discussions about ethics in children's literature. Authors like Dahl and Dr. Seuss seem to be the focal points of these debates, raising questions about the popularity and readership of their works. Despite the extensive arguments, the alterations made to Dahl's books seem to be of minimal importance: "[m]any are slight (replacing "old hag" with "old crow") or inscrutable ("taught him how to spell and write sentences" for "volunteered to give him lessons"). Others are needlessly "sensitive" (changing "black" to "dark," even when the connotations are not racial, or "attractive" to "kind") but do not seriously affect the author's meaning" (Walther).

This calls into question the actual urgency and significance of these debates. These revisions in Dahl's books were proposed by "consultants at an organization called Inclusive Minds", in order to foster "inclusion, diversity, equality and accessibility in children's literature" (qtd. in Walther). The Roald Dahl Story Company, responsible for managing the author's copyrights and trademarks, approved these edits. However, it is essential to note that these changes were made in a profit-seeking corporate context, as the company later was acquired by Netflix. While critics express their concerns, it is worth acknowledging that altering literary texts to suit various needs and sensibilities of readers has long been a norm in the literary world. Walther notes that, throughout history, various works of literature have seen alterations and adaptations to match contemporary norms and sensibilities. As an example, he mentions Alexander Pope who, "[i]n his edition of Shakespeare published in 1725 […] regularized the meter and cleaned up the grammar ("more headier" became "more heady") in

an attempt to bring it in line with the decorous norms of 18th-century prosody; countless lines that Pope considered unworthy of the author were relegated to a footer at the bottom of the page" (Walther).

The core question of Walther's analysis is not whether changes should ever be made to classic works of literature but who should be entrusted with this responsibility and the purpose and spirit behind these alterations. In the case of Dahl's works, the edits were not the result of academic deliberation or a mix of scholarship and financial incentives. Instead, it was a company treating the author's creations as corporate assets. This raises questions about how literary estates should be managed and whether they should be turned into profit-driven franchises.

Consequently, if Roald Dahl's works have undergone editing, why have Dr. Seuss's works been entirely discontinued? According to Puffin's latest editions of Roald Dahl's books "words matter. […] The wonderful words of Roald Dahl can transport you to different worlds and introduce you to the most marvellous characters" (qtd. in Cumming, Buchanan, Holl-Allen and Smith). Yet, publishers have chosen to authorize alterations, including cuts, revisions, and additions, to his works to conform to contemporary sensibilities, especially as far as body weight, mental health, violence, gender, and race are concerned. For example, "[t]he Oompa-Loompas, the diminutive employees of Willy Wonka's chocolate factory, have been extensively reimagined over the years" (Cumming, Buchanan, Holl-Allen and Smith) as they were originally described as pertaining to an "African Pygmy tribe" (Syed). The revision of Dahl's works is indicative of a broader pattern known as "sensitivity readings" (Cumming, Buchanan, Holl-Allen and Smith), in which books undergo scrutiny before they are published to identify potentially distressing content. This practice originated within the realm of children's literature and is most prevalent there. It entails a thorough examination of texts to assess their potential to evoke discomfort or offense, particularly when read by young

audiences.

All in all, the practice of quietly updating books, a common occurrence in the publishing world, extends to many authors and publishers, often without attracting significant public attention. Notably, even a celebrated author like Dr. Seuss made modifications to his works while he was alive. This discreet process of revision can have far-reaching implications, influencing which books continue to be printed and read, and which authors remain relevant over time. For those authors and publishers who engage in this practice, the revisions are often aimed at adapting the content to meet changing requests. These alterations can serve to address concerns about objectionable or outdated material and keep a work accessible to contemporary readers. In doing so, they help preserve the book's appeal and relevance, contributing to its continued presence in the literary landscape. Conversely, books that do not undergo such updates and do not align with evolving sensibilities may become less popular or even be removed from circulation entirely, and this is what happened to Dr. Seuss's *And to Think That I Saw It on Mulberry Street, McElligot's Pool, If I Ran the Zoo, Scrambled Eggs Super!, On Beyond Zebra, and The Cat's Quizzer.* Adapting stories to mirror contemporary perspectives is, in fact, an integral part of our literary history. Nel suggests that it is more appropriate to view Dr. Seuss Enterprises' decision as a "product recall" rather than labeling it, as some argue, as an instance of cancel culture (qtd. in Helmore). In fact, according to the scholar, "Dr. Seuss Enterprises has made a moral decision of choosing not to profit from work with racist caricatures in it and they have taken responsibility for the art they are putting into the world" (qtd. in Helmore). It should be noted that Nel pointed out that discontinuing the publication of books containing racist caricatures represents just one approach to handling problematic content. Yet, he clarified that "[The books are] not going to disappear. […] They're not being banned. They're not being cancelled. It's just a decision to no longer sell them." (qtd. in Helmore). This emphasizes the distinction between removing certain titles from circulation to

protect Dr. Seuss' legacy, and completely erasing them from existence, which would have had a detrimental impact on the author's reputation. Finally, according to Nel, this choice should underscore the urgent necessity for more diverse literature and a critical examination of the problems within the existing body of published works.

3.2 Criticisms of His Work Regarding Representation, Diversity, and Cultural Sensitivity

As Dijk asserts, narratives serve a dual purpose beyond mere entertainment: "they may also have persuasive functions, and more generally, they may contribute to the reproduction of knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, ideologies, norms, or values of a group or of society as a whole" (Dijk 125). This means that authors employ their artistic expressions as a means of influencing their audience, and this practice carries the potential for both positive and negative consequences. This insight underscores the importance of examining the influence and impact of narratives like Dr. Seuss's works within the context of cancel culture. While delving into the controversy surrounding the cancellation of six of Dr. Seuss's titles, it is imperative to address certain aspects of his early career that have generated extensive discussion. The research conducted by Ishizuka and Stephens regarding Anti-Blackness, White Supremacy and Orientalism in Dr. Seuss's body of work, as well as Nel's book *Was the Cat in the Hat Black?* which contributed to initiating a dialogue regarding racial issues within children's literature, serve as a noteworthy illustration of the criticism directed at his literary career concerning issues of representation, diversity, and cultural sensitivity.

Ishizuka and Stephens's research analyses "fifty […] Dr. Seuss children's books using a mixed method research design" (Ishizuka and Stephens 10). Their finding shows how, among the 2,240 human characters featured in the books inspected, there are a mere forty-five characters of color, accounting for just 2% of the total human character count. Moreover, "[o]f

the forty-five characters of color, forty-three are identified as having characteristics aligning with the definition of Orientalism" (Ishizuka and Stephens 14). Within the framework of Orientalism, the analysis identifies fourteen characters exhibiting stereotypical East Asian traits and twenty-nine characters wearing turbans. Characters associated with Orientalism are often depicted without a specific ethno-racial identity, situated within a colorblind perspective, and typically lacking attributes of nationality, race, or ethnicity. Of the forty-five characters, only two are explicitly labeled as "African", both of whom conform to anti-Black themes (Ishizuka and Stephens 14). The prevalence of White supremacy is evident through the central focus on Whiteness and White characters, which constitute 98% of the total. Ishizuka and Stephens also add that every character of color is male, highlighting the absence of feminine characters of color. Females are consistently portrayed in "subservient, exotified, or dehumanized roles", particularly in relation to White characters (Ishizuka and Stephens 14).

As far as racial stereotypes are concerned, in their research Ishizuka and Stephens point out that as early as three months of age children start classifying and revealing racial preferences, and, by the age of three, they already demonstrate explicit negative attitudes toward individuals from different racial backgrounds. This early exposure to racism and prejudice can lead them to unconsciously accept these biases, even before they fully grasp the associated emotions. By the time White North American children reach the age of six, they have already developed a preference for White individuals over Black individuals (Ishizuka and Stephens 6). A substantial body of research highlights the role of text and images in children's books in influencing their racial attitudes: in fact, according to Santora, "[c]hildren's books provide impressions and messages that can last a lifetime, and shape how children see and understand themselves, their homes, communities, and world" (qtd. in Ishizuka and Stephens 6). When these books predominantly focus on Whiteness, exclude people of color and marginalized groups, or depict people of color in stereotypical, degrading, or subservient

roles, “they both ingrain and reinforce internalized racism and white Supremacy” (Ishizuka and Stephens 6). In Rudine Sims Bishop’s opinion:

> Children from dominant social groups have always found their mirrors in books, but they, too, have suffered from the lack of availability of books about others. They need the books as windows onto reality, not just on imaginary worlds. They need books that will help them understand the multicultural nature of the world they live in, and their place as a member of just one group, as well as their connections to all other humans. In this country, where racism is still one of the major unresolved social problems, books may be one of the few places where children who are socially isolated and insulated from the larger world may meet people unlike themselves. If they see only reflections of themselves, they will grow up with an exaggerated sense of their own importance and value in the world — a dangerous ethnocentrism. (qtd. in Ishizuka and Stephens 6,7).

This need for “windows onto reality” extends to help children comprehend the multicultural and diverse world they inhabit. Therefore, in the context of Dr. Seuss’s works Bishop’s perspective becomes highly relevant, especially since a notable research gap exists concerning Seuss’s portrayals of characters of color in his works for young readers, and “thorough critical analyses of Dr. Seuss are a relatively recent phenomenon” (Nel, *Dr. Seuss: American Icon* 11).

Philip Nel characterizes Dr. Seuss as “racially complicated”, acknowledging the intricacies in how Seuss approached racial themes in his work (qtd. in Wilkens). Moreover, Ishizuka and Stephens highlight that “Seuss’ anti-Blackness and White supremacy are evident in his portrayal of Black people as monkeys, apes, and cannibals in his children’s books, political cartoons, and advertisements” (28). This further emphasizes the importance of critically evaluating Seuss’s depictions of characters of color, as these themes have been identified in his literature, adding to the recent shift towards a more comprehensive analysis of his work.

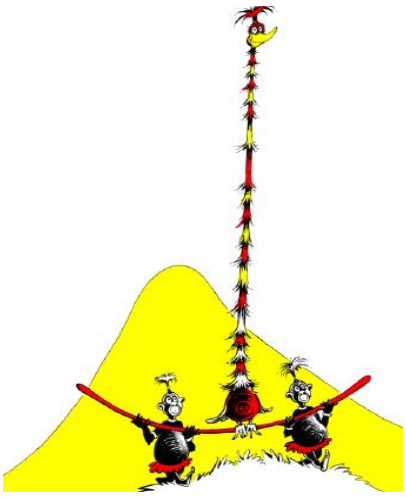


Fig. #22

Source: Dr. Seuss, *If I Ran the Zoo*. Random House, New York, 1950. Page 21.

Figure 22 exemplifies the degrading portrayal of Black individuals as primates. This visual depiction is coupled with the corresponding sentence: “I’ll go to the African island of Yerka / And bring back a tizzle-topped Tufted Mazurka (Dr. Seuss, *If I Ran the Zoo* 21). Therefore, in Dr. Seuss’s earlier works, Black characters are frequently marginalized, dehumanized, and subjected to harmful stereotypes, serving to reinforce harmful racial biases. This is a troubling contrast to White supremacy, where Black individuals are either rendered invisible or, when they do appear, are depicted as subservient and dehumanized. As a consequence, continue Ishizuka and Stephens, extensive research demonstrates that the absence of empowering portrayals of Black individuals, or the presence of anti-Black biases, can result in the internalization of racist attitudes and the perpetuation of systemic racism, significantly influencing the minds of young individuals.

As far as Orientalism goes, which “refers to the ways that Western cultures view Eastern, or “Oriental” cultures”, Dr. Seuss’s representation of the “Orient” aligns with the viewpoint proposed by scholars that the notion of the “Orient” and its definition as being

"Oriental" were initially shaped by European and Western outlooks (Ishizuka and Stephens 29). Edward Said's research is particularly illuminating in this context, as it highlights how White supremacist depictions of the Eastern or Middle Eastern narrative rely on stereotypical and exoticized racial imagery. These depictions fail to accurately portray the authentic cultures and complexities of these regions, further emphasizing how Western ideals and biases have had a profound impact on shaping these portrayals. In addition, "the lack of specification of the ethnicity or nationality of characters wearing turbans, conical hats, or even of Black characters, reveals the complex ways in which Seuss marginalizes and silences these communities" (Ishizuka and Stephens 29). Therefore, by failing to provide specific information about the backgrounds and identities of these characters, Dr. Seuss leaves room for a form of generalization that reduces these individuals to mere stereotypes and one-dimensional characters.

Among these controversial issues are his first misogynistic cartoons, mentioned in the first chapter, which have drawn attention and criticism in recent years. By examining these early works, one can gain a deeper understanding of the evolving perspectives on representation within Dr. Seuss's creations. Jones reports how, at the dawn of his career as an illustrator, in particular during his time at *Jacko,* Geisel and the staff discovered that they could elicit effortless laughter by targeting women, as misogynistic jokes were a constant feature of college humor.

Fig. #23

Source: Dr. Seuss, *Gems, Games and Gin.* 1922. From Cohen, Charles. *The Seuss, the Whole Seuss and Nothing But the Seuss: A Visual Biography of Theodor Seuss Geisel.* New York, Random House Books for Young Readers, 2004. Page 38.

As shown in figure 23, signed Ted Geisel, "[e]ven as early as his freshman year [at Dartmouth college], Ted had indulged in the kind of randy humor typical of the era" (Jones 46). The term "randy" is significant in this context, as Jones implies that Geisel's humor possessed an element of risqué and bawdy characteristics. This alignment with the prevailing humor trends of the era underscores its influence in shaping his comedic sensibilities.

Figure 23 depicts a woman who approaches a hotel clerk and informs him of an issue with the keyhole in the door to her room, to which the clerk responds suggestively: "I'll look into that tonight" (Dr. Seuss, *Gems, Games and Gin*). This kind of humor was not unique to *Jacko*; rather, it was emblematic of the broader comic culture of the time. Nevertheless, Jones underlines how this attitude was partially a performance, embodying the image of a rebellious, countercultural leader who defied convention and challenged authority. At that time, in fact, Ted saw himself as an "enemy of Culture", disapproving of politeness, good manners, and respect for women (qtd. in Jones 47). Decades after feeling uneasy about his early portrayal of women as a young Dartmouth student, Seuss offered a retrospective insight in 1976, defending himself against claims of misogyny in his works. He remarked: "You have to look at these things in the perspective of 50 years ago. […] These things may have been considered funny then…but today I sort of wonder" (qtd. in Jones 47). In fact, the same research by Ishizuka and Stephens mentioned above analyses how "this marginalization of White women and absence of women of color are rooted in hegemonic notions of White supremacy and patriarchy" (Ishizuka and Stephens 30). This observation aligns with existing research that extensively documents the prevalence of sexism, patriarchy, and the marginalization of women across a

wide spectrum of major media platforms, and authors of the 20th century.

Although the readers of Dr. Seuss's children's books may find themselves dismayed by the racial imagery they encounter, Nel points out that, during the time in which these books were created, such images were not only considered acceptable but were also "all too common" among cartoonists (qtd. in Wilkens). This widespread acceptance of racist caricatures in the popular culture of the early twentieth century had a significant impact on Seuss, as they became deeply ingrained in his subconscious mind, becoming a commonplace and unremarkable element of his visual imagination. Therefore, Nel suggests that "[i]t's not aberrant, it's ordinary. It's not strange, it's everyday. […] Most people who aren't targeted by racism don't think about it. He was not unusual in that respect." (qtd. in Wilkens). This means that the racial biases present in Dr. Seuss's early works can be considered a reflection of the broader cultural landscape of that time, where such depictions were alarmingly common and normalized, especially if influenced by the White paradigm of the time. Similarly, Martin[41] points out how "Seuss, like any other author, was a product of his time. […] Fortunately, some authors grow and figure out that maybe some of the things they wrote early on were harmful and they try to make amends. Seuss did that." (qtd. in Wilkens).

In the 1950s, Dr. Seuss authored several books with problematic racial depictions. This research has analyzed, among others, *If I Ran the Zoo* with its mention of Asian workers with a description of their slanted eyes, as well as *Scrambled Eggs Super!* and its stereotypical representation of different cultures. However, during the same time frame, Dr. Seuss wrote *Yertle the Turtle*, "an anti-fascist sendup of Hitler", and *Horton Hears a Who*! which can be interpreted as a form of apology for his racist wartime cartoons (Wilkens). This dual narrative suggests an evolution in Dr. Seuss's thinking and an increasing awareness, influenced by his

[41] Michelle Martin, who "grew up in South Carolina [and] attended all black schools" is now a professor at the University of Washington and is specialized in African-American children's literature (Wilkens).

experiences in World War II, of the harm caused by prejudice and his role in speaking out against it. Despite this, as Nel points out, there remains a paradox in that his creative imagery still contains recycled racist elements. According to Ishizuka and Stephens, later in life Seuss authorized only minor alterations, which did not eliminate the racism in some of his works. Instead, they selectively modified certain aspects while retaining other explicitly racist elements.

As a case in point, Kerry reports how, in 2017, at the Amazing World of Dr. Seuss Museum in Springfield, Massachusetts, a mural depicting the "Chinaman" mentioned in *And to Think That I Saw it on Mulberry Street*[42], later revised as "Chinese man", but still with "his chopsticks, bowl of rice, slanted eyes, wooden shoes and pointed hat", attracted significant criticism (Ishizuka and Stephens 34). In fact, several prominent children's book authors, including Mo Willems, Mike Curato, and Lisa Yee, refused to participate in a book festival at that very museum, citing the character depicted in the mural as a "jarring racial stereotype", and conveying their concerns about the potential negative impact on children who encountered this caricature (qtd. in Ishizuka and Stephens 34). In response, Dr. Seuss Enterprises agreed to remove the mural. However, this decision sparked dissent, with the Mayor of Springfield and some members of Dr. Seuss's family referring to it as "extreme" and dismissing it as an overreaction (qtd. in Ishizuka and Stephens 34). Among others, Theodor Owens[43] defended the original portrayal by explaining that:

> In 1937, China was as far from the U.S. as you could get. It was not culturally connected. It was an exotic distant land. What he did was shorthand. […] Taking down the whole mural to me seems extreme. […] I think it's a lot of hot air over nothing -- and that comes from someone who knew him for years. […] What was [Geisel's] intent? It was not to be racist about people from a different land. His books are about being inclusive. […] It was the first time he had changed

[42] For further reference, see chapter 2.3, figure 16.
[43] Theodor Owens is Dr. Seuss's great-nephew.

> one of his books. 'Chinaman' was acceptable in 1937, but by 1978 that was not the case. […] Art and humanity are always evolving. […] 1937 was a long time ago, and Ted Geisel is not here to defend himself (qtd. in Kelly)

However, according to Ishizuka and Stephens, it is important to recognize that not all "white people of his time […] used their platforms to disseminate racist narratives and images nationally, and globally, as he did" (Ishizuka and Stephens 35). Some of them actively opposed racism.

On the one hand to downplay, erase, or simply overlook Dr. Seuss's consistent racial transgressions across his entire publishing career is to "deny the very real historical impact they had on people of color and the way that they continue to influence culture, education and children's views of people of color" (Ishizuka and Stephens 35). By acknowledging the existence of those who actively resisted racism during Dr. Seuss's time, we can appreciate that his choices and actions were not predetermined by the prevailing attitudes of the era. They were deliberate choices on his part, with consequences that continue to reverberate today. Understanding this history is vital for addressing the enduring impact of his work on society and ensuring a more inclusive and informed perspective for future generations.

On the other hand, Seuss Enterprises released a statement acknowledging the evolution in Dr. Seuss's body of work, describing his personal journey as one of progression. It acknowledges that some of his early works included hurtful stereotypes, but it also highlights his later creations, such as *The Sneetches*, which carry messages of tolerance and inclusivity. The statement draws from a quote attributed to Dr. Seuss himself, which reads: "It's not how you start that counts. It's what you are at the finish." (qtd. in Wilkens). This passage underscores the idea that personal growth and development should be measured by one's final contributions and the positive impact one makes, regardless of any early missteps. It suggests that individuals, including authors like Dr. Seuss, have the capacity to learn, evolve, and leave

a more inclusive and compassionate legacy through their creative works. Therefore, for Nel, the decision of Dr. Seuss Enterprises to stop publishing a limited number of Geisel's works "suggests that they have, quite likely for financial reasons, come around to the position that racism is bad for their business. […] The results are good. If capitalism is what causes you to have a change of heart, we can go that route" (qtd. in Onion).

As a suitable conclusion for this section, the wisdom embedded in Ebony Elizabeth Thomas's assertion, "curation isn't cancellation", provides an apt and resonant note. This statement underscores the idea that these books have not been banned and Dr. Seuss has not been canceled. However, curators have a responsibility to engage with and present diverse perspectives, even if some of those perspectives may be controversial, uncomfortable, or challenging. It implies that they should not automatically dismiss or eliminate content simply because it may be seen as problematic or objectionable. Instead, they should provide opportunities for critical discussion, contextualization, and examination of the content within a broader framework. As Nel points out, having an uncomfortable conversation is better than dismissing the issue altogether:

> It's okay to be angry at a book. It's okay to criticize a book, and to recognize that a classic author maybe shouldn't be quite so revered. If you are a child of color seeing yourself ridiculed in a book, it's really important for you to know that you can be angry at that book. You can argue with that book. (qtd. in Westenfeld)

Finally, by advocating for this balanced approach, one that prioritizes the preservation and presentation of cultural artifacts and expressions to foster critical analysis and meaningful dialogues instead of hasty condemnation or erasure, this section can actively contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of representation and sensitivity within the realm of scholarly discourse.

3.3 Dr. Seuss's Own Responses to Criticism and Controversy

In the preceding sections, we explored both the appeal of Dr. Seuss's works and the critical scrutiny they have faced. This next phase of the investigation turns its focus on the author himself and his individual reactions to the mounting criticism and controversies surrounding his works. It is within the sphere of his declarations and adaptations that one finds the compelling narrative of an author who was trying to come to terms with the complexities of his own body of work and the changing sociocultural landscape.

In their biography, Judith and Neil Morgan point out that Geisel himself, in his last years of life, dedicated time to "poring through his books" (Morgan 277). Despite having a list of requested amendments, he "made remarkably few revisions in ongoing editions of his books", especially because "sometimes his stubbornness was involved" (Morgan 275). As a matter of fact, Nel mentions how such revisions "were imperfect but will-intentioned efforts that softened but did not erase the stereotyping" (qtd. in Helmore). As an example, Morgan reports how, when asked to change "his sexist line in *And to Think That I Saw It on Mulberry Street*, "Even Jane could think of *that*," Seuss refused to change it, stating: "[i]t remains in my book because that's what the boy said" (qtd. in Ishizuka and Stephens 33).

However, with the bulk of the criticism emerging in recent years, after Geisel's passing, the responsibility of defending or, at the very least, offering explanations for his actions rests with intellectuals, among them Philip Nel, one of the major leading Seuss scholars in North America. In a 2021 interview with Rebecca Onion, he claimed:

> It's a trope in Seuss books more generally to treat ethnic and "foreign" others as comic, even if he doesn't mean it in an aggressively malicious way. He's not thinking about how making an entire group of people the subject of a joke has that effect. […] He was doing in some of his books what he was trying to oppose in others (Onion).

In fact, according to Nel, it is important to consider his body of work as a whole: if one takes into account his earlier cartoons and works, as well as considering *Horton Hears a Who* as advocating "for the protection of minorities and their rights" (Onion), and *The Sneetches and Other Stories* as inspired by Seuss's opposition to anti-Semitism, it is clear how the notion that racism is often perceived in binary terms can be argued:

> Some people look at that and think, "We just must be wrong about Seuss." That's because they see racism as an either/or—like, you're on Team Racism or you're not. But you can do anti-racist work and also reproduce racist ideas in your work. And Seuss wasn't aware that his visual imagination was so steeped in the cultures of American racism. He was doing in some of his books what he was trying to oppose in others (qtd. in Onion)

Theodor Owens revealed to *The New York Times* that his great-uncle had grown increasingly troubled by the anti-Japanese panels he created in his earlier years. He recalled a conversation where Geisel expressed his discomfort with those cartoons, noting that they were products of a different era, and said: "When I look at them now they're hurriedly and embarrassingly badly drawn, and they're full of many snap judgements that every political cartoonist has to make" (qtd. in Donovan). Thus, later in his life, Dr. Seuss felt a sense of regret and unease regarding these cartoons and, in a 1976 interview with *The College*, he even acknowledged that he had created those wartime cartoons impulsively. This suggests that, as he matured, he came to recognize the shortcomings and biases present in his earlier work. It should be noted that many creative individuals, like him, were influenced by the passions of war and may have created materials that, when evaluated in contemporary terms, fall short of modern standards of inclusivity and respectability. Understanding this context is crucial in assessing the legacy of creators from that era. For example, Nel suggests that it is possible to actively promote anti-racist principles while simultaneously unintentionally perpetuating racist ideas in one's work.

Hence, in Nel's view, Seuss appeared unaware of the extent to which his creative imagery inadvertently drew from the well of American racism. This led to instances in some of his works where he unintentionally reproduced the very ideas he aimed to challenge in others.

In addition, Geisel turned the changes into a source of humor, "which served only to trivialise the importance of the alterations" (Helmore). In response to a critique by Alison Lurie[44] regarding the gender representation in Seuss's characters, Nel recalls that Geisel's response was along the lines of: "Tell her most of my characters are animals, and if she can identify their sex, I'll remember her in my will!" (qtd. in Onion). If one considers that most of his characters often have characteristics and traits that may not neatly align with human concepts of gender, Seuss was here adding a layer of complexity to the notion of gender, arguing with the idea that identifying the sex of these animal characters would be a challenging or even absurd task. Nel adds that "nonsense and the avant-garde are both ideological", suggesting that even the most fantastical imaginations are rooted in cultural backgrounds (qtd. in Onion). Sendak observes that Seuss deliberately took little interest in analyzing his work, emphasizing his commitment to a non-serious approach: "Dr. Seuss was serious about not being 'serious'" (Sendak).

In his essay titled "… But for Grown-Ups Laughing Isn't Any Fun", Seuss argued against racist humor and "conditioned laughter":

> This conditioned laughter the grown-ups taught you depended entirely upon *their* conditions. Financial conditions. Political conditions. Racial, religious and social conditions. You began to laugh at people your family feared or despised—people they felt inferior to, or people they felt better than. (Dr. Seuss, "…But for Grown-Ups Laughing Isn't Any Fun").

According to the author, adults are "culturally conditioned" and therefore it is easier to make a

[44] Allison Lurie is a professor of American Literature at Cornell University.

child laugh with one's writing (qtd. in Onion). Therefore, concludes Nel, Seuss "had the capacity to reflect, but that capacity was curtailed by the fact that he, like everyone, lived in a universe that has influence over our thinking in ways that we're not fully aware of" (qtd. in Onion).

And he did indeed reflect, especially with the publication of *The Sneetches and Other Stories* in 1961. Despite the author's reluctance to overtly discuss the moral lessons within his tales, many readers grasped the underlying message of this story. He would argue: "Adults and children build their own moral into my books" (qtd. in Jones 309). According to Jones, *The Sneetches* stands as Dr. Seuss's unequivocal statement against bigotry and racism, especially considering the ending lines: "The Sneetches got really quite smart on that day, / The day they decided that Sneetches are Sneetches / And no kind of Sneetch is the best on the beaches. / That day, all the Sneetches forgot about stars / And whether they had one, or not, upon thars" (Dr. Seuss *The Sneetches and Other Stories* 27). These lines serve as a poignant reminder that beneath outward appearances, we are all fundamentally the same. Although Dr. Seuss had faced criticism for insensitivity regarding matters of race in his earlier works, as Jones points out, "the fifty-seven-year-old Ted Geisel was making it clear that Dr. Seuss had evolved" (Jones 309). Glassman underlines that Geisel taught his readers "not through fear and warnings, but through joy and laughter, that what makes us different on the outside is not important […] For in one way or another, we're all Sneetches" (qtd. in Schulman and Goldsmith 264).

The emergence of the contemporary cancel culture phenomenon can be contextualized within a broader historical and sociocultural framework. For the 25th anniversary of the publication of Dr. Seuss's *And To Think That I Saw It on Mulberry Street*, his works were "publicly rediscussed, reexamined, and reappreciated, which sent sales of nearly every Dr. Seuss book soaring during 1962" (Jones 315). This occasion gave Geisel the opportunity to underline the importance of writing for children, and the responsibility of a children's author

to shape curious minds: “The whole effect has to be just right” he said, as “writing a kids’ book [is] precision work” (qtd. in Jones 315). He emphasized the necessity for a clear and logical development of the story, including a valid problem and a suitable solution. Additionally, he insisted that even the most eccentric characters must be vibrant, believable, and consistent.

Dr. Seuss subtly imparted life lessons in many of his books, with his artistic touch allowing these messages to enter his readers’ consciousness almost unnoticed. While some of his works, such as *The Lorax*, are overtly didactic, others, like *The Cat in the Hat*, carry more concealed lessons. *Yertle the Turtle* falls somewhere in between, with its message neither overt nor completely hidden. It tells the story of John Q. Public, personified by Mack the turtle, who confronts the authoritarian King Yertle. Minear highlights the fact that many readers may not have realized that Yertle symbolizes Adolf Hitler. It was the same Dr. Seuss who confirmed this in an interview in 1987 saying that “originally Yertle had a moustache” (qtd. in Schulman and Goldsmith 190). Although Dr. Seuss had used turtles in his editorial cartoons during World War II, representing various figures - including Hitler - in this children’s book, the Hitler reference becomes more explicit.

With the publication of *The Lorax* in September 1971, Geisel anticipated potential controversy surrounding its pro-environment stance, as he thought it might alienate some readers due to its implicit critique of big business. Therefore, he patiently participated in numerous interviews, responding to common questions about his creative process. Nonetheless, as Jones points out, the backlash he feared did not materialize to the extent he had anticipated. Some reviewers initially objected to a “Dr. Seuss book with an explicit agenda” (Jones 360), others acknowledged the ecological theme and moved on. Certain communities, among which one in Jackson Hole, Wyoming[45], embraced the conservation message, while

[45] Jones reports the comment of a reviewer from the community, who identified a strong resonance between her community and the story of *The Lorax*. In her interpretation, Jackson Hole was depicted as a “last bastion of beauty” that remained unspoiled by pollution (Jones 360).

others criticized it as an anti-logging agenda. In at least one logging community, the book was removed from shelves amid claims of brainwashing.

In this case, Geisel, sympathetic to critics, clarified that *The Lorax* did not deem lumbering as immoral; instead, it promoted a message of environmental responsibility and anti-pollution. Over time, Geisel came to regard this book as his personal favourite among his works, despite its initial modest sales. He believed in the book's power to effect change through the dissemination of ideas and information. Indeed, he stated: "I'm naive enough to believe that society will be changed by examination of ideas through books and the press, and that information can prove to be greater than the dissemination of stupidity" (qtd. in Jones 361). Therefore, Dr. Seuss's books can be said to reflect his dedication to teaching important values. He believed that society could be transformed through the exploration of ideas in books and the press, and he placed a premium on information over the dissemination of ignorance, especially with the slogan: "We can … and we've got to … do better than this" emphasizing that the message was for all readers, not just children (qtd. in Schulman and Goldsmith 190).

With the publication of *The Butter Battle Book*[46] in 1984, Seuss faced further criticism. *The New York Times* criticized it as "bleak" and dismissed it as "an arms control polemic that has no happy ending", failing to grasp that the ambiguous ending was an intentional choice by the author himself (qtd. in Jones 403). *The New Republic* also seemed to miss the book's deeper message, suggesting that real-world issues were of greater importance than the side of the bread

[46] *The Butter Battle Book* tells the story of two communities, the *Yooks* and the *Zooks*, who live on opposite sides of a wall. The central conflict revolves around the different ways in which the *Yooks* and *Zooks* butter their bread. The *Yooks* butter their bread side up, while the *Zooks* butter their bread side down. This seemingly trivial difference escalates into a fierce and absurd arms race as both sides develop increasingly destructive and absurd weaponry to protect their way of buttering bread. This book explores the senselessness and dangers of such escalation and the futility of conflicts driven by ideological differences. It ends on an ambiguous note, with both sides poised to drop their ultimate and devastating weapon, the Bitsy Big-Boy Boomeroo, which has the potential to destroy both communities. For this reason, it has been considered a commentary on the Cold War and the nuclear arms race, using a simple and whimsical story to convey the gravity of the situation and the potential consequences of unchecked aggression and militarization. See Jones, Brian Jay. *Becoming Dr. Seuss: Theodor Geisel and the Making of an American Imagination.* New York, Dutton, 2019.

one buttered. A lukewarm review in *Kirkus* suggested that the book felt somewhat outdated. Not only did Seuss receive negative critical reviews, but he also received hate mail from parents who accused him of frightening children by not providing a happy ending. On this occasion, he admitted that he was tempted to provide a happier conclusion but felt it would be dishonest. He saw the book's ending as a reflection of the real world, a "situation as it is" (qtd. in Jones 403).

However, newspaper columnist Ellen Goodman challenged his decision, arguing that "what children need from the good doctor, from all adults, is a dose of hope" (qtd. in Jones 403). Dr. Seuss refused to explain himself: "Since this is the hottest topic in the world, if kids are at all intelligent and read anything, of course they're facing it" (qtd. in Jones 403). In fact, he believed that children could write their own happy endings, since "adults haven't been able to do it so far" (qtd. in Jones 403). Moreover, he felt that the children of the 1980s were more inclined to discuss difficult problems compared to when he was a child. Therefore, he wanted to leave the resolution in their hands. Nonetheless, continues Jones, *The Butter Battle Book* soared to the top of fiction bestseller lists, even competing with works by authors like Stephen King and Robert Ludlum. Reviewers praised its significance, and it was regarded as one of Dr. Seuss's finest works. Although it encountered censorship due to its perceived political content, the book was eventually celebrated for its allegorical depth, especially as the Cold War drew to a close. Dr. Seuss had guided his readers through a daunting period, offering them support.

Finally, Dr. Seuss found that his books were being taken more seriously by college students who had grown up with his works. These students, now pursuing graduate studies and academic careers, were delving into his books with a scholarly eye, analyzing them for hidden or deeper meanings. Dr. Seuss himself had once been a graduate student, so he could empathize with the inevitable and sometimes exaggerated academic analysis of his own work. He found it mostly amusing, even if at times it was misinformed. He remarked that graduate students

often did extraordinary things, like attributing deep significance to the choice of a single color in one of his books, when in reality, it was a decision made for practical reasons, such as financial constraints. Jones underlines how Joan Knight, who briefly served as his secretary, recalled that fans often wrote to him as if he were a philosopher, attempting to extract hidden messages from his work, but "all he wanted was for people to read" (qtd. in Jones 380).

CHAPTER IV: DR. SEUSS: YESTERDAY, TODAY AND TOMORROW

In the ever-changing field of North American children's literature, Dr. Seuss's influence goes beyond his own lifetime. This final chapter will navigate the past, present, and future of his legacy, illuminating various aspects of his work. As these following sections unfold, the life and times of Dr. Seuss spring to life, crafting a vivid portrait of his contributions, the lasting enchantment of his tales, and the evolving literary landscape he played a pivotal role in shaping. Moreover, this chapter will explore the wellspring of inspiration found in Dr. Seuss's imaginative genius, the mechanisms that perpetually renew the relevance and resonance of his stories in contemporary society, and the profound influence of his work on the broader movement striving for inclusivity in children's literature, aiming for a brighter and more open future.

4.1 The Continued Relevance and Popularity of His Work

From the time when John Locke first expressed his ideas on education, according to which "the little, and almost insensible impressions on our tender infancies, have very important and lasting consequences", the puzzle of what to inscribe on the blank slate of a child's mind has persisted (qtd. in Go). As Geisel assumed the role of Dr. Seuss, he evolved into an emblematic figure who could represent one of the distinctly American reimaginings of reflections on childhood. To understand his influence, it is essential to consider the educational and literary environment of his time.

During the mid-20th century, children's literature and illustration were undergoing significant changes. First of all, the baby boom phenomenon played a pivotal role in Seuss's accomplishments. In 1952, the United States experienced an extraordinary surge in births, with

3.9 million babies welcomed into the world[47]. In 1957, year of the publication of *The Cat in the Hat*, the children born during that baby boom had all reached the age of five. Secondly, in 1954, an increasing apprehension emerged within the American population regarding the reading abilities of children. Jones mentions how, in an article featured in *Life magazine*, John Hersey proposed an alternative approach to addressing the concerns surrounding the literacy skills of children. Hersey suggested that a new reading primer should be crafted by Dr. Seuss, positioning him as the ideal candidate for this task. At that time, Dr. Seuss had already authored nine children's books and garnered significant recognition and accolades for his work. However, a turning point came with the publication of *The Cat in the Hat*, whose remarkable success paved the way for him to dedicate himself entirely to writing for young readers. Thus, as noted by Nel, Dr. Seuss played an active role in what can be considered the "moral education of children" (qtd. in Tarbox 130). His aim was not merely to entertain but to guide young minds towards becoming thoughtful citizens capable of contributing to the creation of a better and more just society.

The issue of *U.S. News & World Report* dated August 13, 2007, proclaimed 1957 a "Year That Changed America", also thanks to Dr. Seuss. "Greece had Zeus—America has Seuss" remarked the article (qtd. in "Publishing"). *The Cat in the Hat* not only became a literary sensation but also catapulted Dr. Seuss into the ranks of household names, also owing a significant part of his success to the book's alignment with an emerging phonetic learning philosophy. The book, which drew extensively from a list of 220 basic words, showcased Ted's storytelling in anapestic tetrameter, establishing a rhythm that young readers could easily comprehend. Parents, concerned about their children's reading abilities, passionately embraced the book. In fact, *The Cat in the Hat* was selling at a remarkable rate, reaching over a thousand

[47] Data from Jones, Brian Jay. *Becoming Dr. Seuss: Theodor Geisel and the Making of an American Imagination*. New York, Dutton, 2019. pp. 268-280.

copies sold per day. By Christmas of 1957, it had sold 250,000 copies, and within three years, more than a million copies were in the hands of eager young readers (Jones 268, 269). Guided by this approach, Ted, along with Helen, his future wife of four decades, and Phyllis Cerf, the spouse of Random House's president Bennett Cerf, would later establish Beginner Books at Random House ("Publishing"). In 2004, Random House initiated a year-long commemoration in honor of Geisel's one hundredth birthday, given that he was the author with the highest book sales for the publishing house. This extensive celebration spanned one hundred days and unfolded in forty cities across the United States, featuring a range of events. These events encompassed live theatrical performances, readings of his works, appearances by costumed characters, and interactive workshops. Judith Haut, an executive at Random House, highlighted the celebration's scope, emphasizing that it celebrated Geisel's entire life rather than focusing solely on his role as a children's book illustrator. She noted how he had revolutionized the way children learned to read, making it imperative for the celebration to match the enthusiasm people felt for his books ("Theodor Geisel (Dr. Seuss)").

Beyond this monumental achievement in the realm of young readers, another equally vital facet of Geisel's legacy emerged. While *The Cat in the Hat* and Sam-I-Am have been instrumental in teaching generations of children how to read, iconic characters like the Grinch and the Lorax have played a pivotal role in shaping young minds and nurturing their emotions. Even as Beginner Books became more widespread, Geisel persisted in creating what he fondly referred to as "big books" (qtd. in Go). Many of these big books have solidified their status as timeless parables for the contemporary era.

In addition to his successful literary career, Ted Geisel led a life of intriguing duality. Throughout his lifetime, he had the opportunity to relish his success, while concealing his identity behind the pseudonym Dr. Seuss. This allowed him to seamlessly integrate into society without attracting significant personal attention. His picture appearing in newspapers

nationwide and on the back covers of his books notwithstanding, very few children could accurately identify the actual appearance of Dr. Seuss. He had an introverted nature and would always fear that his real identity as Ted Geisel might appear uninteresting in comparison to the whimsical Dr. Seuss ("Theodor Seuss Geisel: The Real Dr. Seuss"). Following a series of uncomfortable speeches at elementary schools, he made a significant decision to abandon his natural self and assume the persona of "Dr. Seuss". This transformation involved delivering speeches in a whimsical, rhyming manner, and pre-scripting clever responses to common inquiries. By essentially adopting this character, he found a newfound sense of ease and confidence. As Dr. Seuss, he crafted a unique and engaging public image, distancing himself from his identity while connecting with his audience through his imaginative and rhyming style. This shift in approach not only made public appearances more comfortable for him but also contributed to his success as an author and speaker. As a consequence, his influence is evident even after his passing. In 1999, The *Cat in the Hat's* iconic face graced a U.S. postage stamp. Five years later, the U.S. Postal Service issued a stamp featuring Dr. Seuss's portrait, further cementing his place in American culture. In 2002, Springfield, Ted Geisel's hometown, dedicated a Dr. Seuss National Memorial, commemorating his contributions to literature and art[48].

Furthermore, in a pivotal moment of his career, Dr. Seuss even faced an extraordinary offer that could have catapulted him into the annals of literary history for an entirely different reason: he was presented with the opportunity to commercialize his cherished characters, a deal that would have undoubtedly made him the highest-paid writer per word, securing a coveted spot in the *Guinness Book of Records*. Nonetheless, his response to this tempting offer was nothing short of remarkable. He boldly declared: "I would rather be in the Guinness Book of

[48] Data from Altschuler, Glenn C. and Burns, Patrick M. "He Murdered Dick and Jane" Review of *Theodor SEUSS Geisel,* by Donald E. Pease. The *John Hopkins University Press,* March 2012, Vol. 40, No. 1, p 112.

Records as the writer who refused the highest amount of money per word" (In Search of Dr. Seuss, 01:19:18-01:19:34). This anecdote goes beyond mere financial decisions; it offers a profound insight into Dr. Seuss's deep attachment to his literary creations. To him, these characters were not just figures on paper. They were an extended family, as important as the children he never had. This dedication to his craft was unwavering, blurring the lines between his personal life and his creative endeavors, making his legacy even more secure (In Search of Dr. Seuss, 01:19:35-01:19:50).

In this regard, Nel focuses on Dr. Seuss's impact as both a commercial and ideological force. Talking about the intricate domain of copyright law, he points out the substantial importance of this framework of trademark and property rights on the marketing of Dr. Seuss's literary works since his passing in 1991. Dr. Seuss's status as an "American icon" (qtd. in Tarbox 130), not only left a profound mark on literature but also extended to other realms of popular culture, thanks to television adaptations and various merchandise, as well as in the cinematic adaptations of several of his iconic books, such as *How the Grinch Stole Christmas!*, and the immensely successful *The Cat in the Hat*. Jones mentions how this expansion was notably facilitated through the partnership with Bernstein, a zealous sales manager at Random House, who actively pursued a close working relationship with Dr. Seuss[49]. Upon meeting Geisel, he was charmed by his personality, and immediately recognized the potential in promoting Dr. Seuss as a brand. He proposed the idea of sending Dr. Seuss on a book tour across major Midwestern and Northeastern cities, which was not a common practice at the time. Bernstein believed that generating publicity through word of mouth would be more effective than traditional advertising. With this plan in motion, Geisel embarked on a tour of ten cities, conducting press conferences, luncheons, and book signings, which attracted

[49] For further information, see Jones, Brian Jay. *Becoming Dr. Seuss: Theodor Geisel and the Making of an American Imagination*. New York, Dutton, 2019. pp. 280-287.

increasingly larger crowds as he traveled from one city to another. Despite his initial reluctance to make public appearances, Dr. Seuss "found he enjoyed meeting with his readers, who came in all ages, colors, and sizes" (Jones 285).

In addition, it was Bernstein's persuasion that led Geisel to consider licensing his characters for merchandise, a decision that had been limited in the past. Bernstein saw the potential in officially branded Dr. Seuss merchandise and worked with fervor to make it happen. In 1958, the Revell company was granted permission to produce a line of small, colorful plastic Seussian animals with interchangeable parts. Although initially skeptical, Dr. Seuss became deeply involved in the production process, overseeing even the smallest details: "[he] would sculpt them, and the engineer would work them, and [he] would resculpt them, and the engineer would change them" (qtd. in Jones 286). The plastic figures turned out to be a hit and quickly became a bestselling product. It became evident that there was a significant demand for Dr. Seuss merchandise. Throughout this period, Bennett Cerf also arranged for Geisel to make an appearance on television shows[50].

Hence, the collaboration between Bernstein, Cerf, and Geisel fostered an environment of creative exploration and enthusiasm for new possibilities in the world of children's literature and marketing. Yet, in the latter part of 1968 and early 1969, Dr. Seuss found himself in a courtroom, engaged in an unexpected legal battle with *Liberty Magazine,* which had tried to launch a line of "cheap and badly made plastic figures based on some of Dr. Seuss's whimsical creatures" (Jones 352). Geisel's reaction to this infringement was one of considerable frustration, and he promptly took the producers to court. Unfortunately, the outcome was far from favorable, serving as a costly lesson for Dr. Seuss and other artists, as he had signed a contract with *Liberty* which granted it all rights. In the end, the legal battle only fueled his

[50] For further information, see Jones, Brian Jay. *Becoming Dr. Seuss: Theodor Geisel and the Making of an American Imagination*. New York, Dutton, 2019. pp. 285-290.

determination to maintain strict control over subsidiary rights to his work and tightly govern any merchandising ventures. Nevertheless, this stance made Geisel "one of the most despised people in the toy industry" due to his refusal to permit most Dr. Seuss merchandise (Jones 352). Finally, he signed one last significant merchandise deal in 1983, with Coleco. Despite uncertainty about what the deal would bring, Geisel agreed to a ten-year, ten-million-dollar contract for marketing Dr. Seuss plush toys and video games, while insisting on having final approval for all products, including computer games. Ultimately, however, Seuss chose to initiate negotiations for an exit from the contract, driven by his frustration with the difficulties encountered in transitioning to three-dimensional products (Jones 395).

When it came to adapting his books into animated cartoons, Geisel placed his trust in Chuck Jones, with whom he had previously worked on Private Snafu cartoons during World War II. Jones provided a nearly perfect rendering of *The Cat in the Hat* to prove his dedication to the project. Despite his initial skepticism about having his books turned into films, Geisel agreed after a persuasive pitch from Jones, who shared Geisel's commitment to quality and discipline in animation. This collaborative effort would lead to the production of *How the Grinch Stole Christmas!* as a Christmas special, which required selecting the right book to adapt. Geisel consented to using *The Grinch,* with the condition that he would serve as a producer alongside Jones to closely oversee the filming. Geisel was adamant that the animation should not look mass-produced, and Jones assured him of a high-quality production, featuring 25,000 individual drawings in thirty minutes, and the expertise of background artist Maurice Noble, who was "an admirer of Ted Geisel, but *loved* Dr. Seuss" (qtd. in Jones 333). To fill the extended running time of twenty-four minutes, they incorporated Max, the Grinch's dog. They also added songs to the special, with Geisel eagerly taking on the task of writing lyrics, which

included what Jones called " 'Seussian Latin' [51] to fit his rhyme schemes" (Jones 334). Jones mentions how, as the December airdate drew near, Chuck Jones negotiated a deal with the CBS network, securing the rights to air *How the Grinch Stole Christmas!* in 1966 and 1967 for a substantial sum of $315,000 (Jones 337). CBS continued to broadcast it annually during the Christmas season until 1987. It has since been broadcast on many television channels worldwide. Television critics initially raised eyebrows and mocked the network, believing that the investment in a cartoon would be a wasteful extravagance destined for obscurity. On the evening of Sunday, December 18, 1966, *How the Grinch Stole Christmas!* made its CBS debut, initially receiving mixed reviews from some TV critics like Jack Gould of *The New York Times* and Hal Humphrey of the *Los Angeles Times*, who felt that it fell short of expectations and should have been left on the printed page[52]. However, the dissenting voices proved to be in the minority. Most critics and viewers fell in love with the Grinch's television adaptation. Cynthia Lowry of the Associated Press praised the transition from the printed page to television. The *Indianapolis News* called it "beautiful", the *Orlando Sentinel* described it as "whimsical and tuneful" and the *Philadelphia Inquirer* hailed it as a "classic" (qtd. in Jones 338). *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*! would go on to become a cherished and enduring holiday classic. Moreover, in La Jolla, the Grinch became a local treasure, with volunteers from the La Jolla Museum decorating their building to resemble the "pre-Grinched Whoville" (Jones 338).

After the remarkable success of *The Grinch*, Geisel and Jones wasted no time in striking a deal for their next project. At this point, Ted was driven by his passion for writing songs. As an example, *The Cat in the Hat Songbook* was entirely composed of songs featuring his lyrics, set to music by Eugene Poddany, the same composer who had orchestrated the music for *The*

[51] According to Jones, this term is used to describe the nonsensical, whimsical language created by Dr. Seuss in his books. It often consists of made-up words, rhyming phrases, and playful language, a hallmark of Dr. Seuss's writing style that contributes to the charm and humor of his books. It is not a real language but rather a creative and playful use of words and sounds.

[52] For further information, see Jones, Brian Jay. *Becoming Dr. Seuss: Theodor Geisel and the Making of an American Imagination*. New York, Dutton, 2019. pp. 337-338.

Grinch. However, it appeared that parents were not seeking songbooks from Dr. Seuss; they were looking for humorous stories with playful rhymes that could be recited without the need for a musical accompaniment. Consequently, *The Cat in the Hat Songbook* failed to gain traction upon its release, and Bernstein quietly allowed the book to go out of print. This was a rare fate for any Dr. Seuss book during Ted's lifetime (Jones 339). In addition, in 1971 the animated version of *The Cat in the Hat,* which expanded upon the original book's storyline, aired on CBS (Jones 359). This adaptation received positive reviews from critics and became a recurring favorite over the next twenty years; It marked the beginning of a fruitful collaboration between Geisel and DePatie-Freleng, leading to their joint efforts on six more Dr. Seuss specials in the subsequent nine years.

These cartoons played a pivotal role in spreading his creative genius beyond national borders. Nevertheless, Dr. Seuss's popularity "was still something of a head-scratcher to readers in the United Kingdom" (Jones 376). This might have stemmed from cultural differences, varying literary tastes, as well as a slower initial reception to the whimsical and imaginative nature of his works. Most importantly, his vocabulary, rhyming scheme and storytelling traditions can be considered distinctly American. All things considered, Dr. Seuss seemed to have a robust fan base in Australia and New Zealand, where the sales figures were remarkably impressive, with Australians alone purchasing nearly 1.5 million Dr. Seuss books (Jones 376).

All in all, he can be said to have achieved remarkable success, resonating not only with his young readers, but also earning the appreciation of teachers and parents alike. In fact, "teachers adored him, as he gave them books they could put into the hands of even the most stubborn readers" (Jones 389). In fact, Dr. Seuss's works were crafted with a keen understanding of the challenges educators and parents faced in captivating the attention of reluctant readers. Therefore, by creating a literary world that served as an effective gateway to

literacy, he earned the admiration and gratitude of educators who saw firsthand the positive impact of his books on their students. “Parents revered him” (Jones 389), as they were provided with a source of content that instilled a sense of satisfaction about their children’s reading choices, especially after managing to divert them from television. Finally, “kids were crazy for him” (Jones 390), as Dr. Seuss’s books spoke directly to them, avoiding a condescending tone.

While publicly downplaying the importance of awards, privately, Geisel desired acknowledgment as an artist. Jones notes that, despite Dr. Seuss’s widespread popularity and acclaim, he did not receive any prestigious literary awards such as the Caldecott Award or the Newbery Medal until later in life. The American Library Association, eventually honored Dr. Seuss with the Laura Ingalls Wilder Award, recognizing his lasting and substantial contribution to literature over the years. Finally, in 1984 he won the Pulitzer Prize, which put him under the spotlight on national television. Among many subsequent awards, in 2010, *Life Books* released a publication titled “100 People Who Changed the World”, which examined influential figures and their historical trajectories leading to the present day. According to *Life*, which acknowledged Dr. Seuss’s lifelong dedication, he went beyond mere entertainment. Remarkably, Dr. Seuss stood as the sole children’s author featured in the book, earning a place in the esteemed “cultural icon” section alongside influential figures such as Michelangelo, Shakespeare, Beethoven, Dickens, Le Corbusier, Chaplin, Chanel, Picasso, and Elvis (“Accolades and Honors”).

4.2 Influence on Subsequent Generations of Authors and Illustrators

Numerous writers have drawn inspiration from Dr. Seuss’s storytelling and imaginative prowess. Among them is Maurice Sendak, celebrated for his work *Where the Wild Things Are*, published in 1963, who admired Seuss’s adeptness at connecting with young readers through

a playful use of language. Shel Silverstein, known for his whimsical poetry, acknowledged Seuss's impact on his own writing, recognizing a shared talent for creating stories that resonate with children. Similarly, Jon Scieszka and his humorous approach, as well as Mo Willems, the mind behind the *Don't Let the Pigeon* series, have openly expressed admiration for Dr. Seuss's legacy in shaping the genre.

In her *The New York Times* article, Paul mentions Dr. Seuss, Maurice Sendak[53], and Shel Silverstein[54] as children's authors whose "stylistic eccentricities […] are so much a part of the childhood vernacular today that it is hard to imagine their books were once considered by some to be wholly inappropriate for children", as they questioned the traditional idea of what constitutes a children's book (Paul). In fact, before them, in a more conservative era, children's books served the purpose of exemplifying proper conduct. Their intention was to instruct and inspire young readers to embody the ideals desired by parents. The characters depicted were well-mannered, dressed appropriately, and were free from any signs of distress. The primary aim of children's literature was not to reflect the reality of children's lives or to

[53] Maurice Sendak, a self-taught artist born in 1928 in Brooklyn to Polish Jewish immigrant parents, gained renown for illustrating over 150 books in a career spanning six decades. Notable for both his writing and illustrating, he created classics such as *Where the Wild Things Are*, *In the Night Kitchen*, and *Higglety Pigglety Pop!*. Collaborating with esteemed authors, Sendak brought his unique illustrations to various literary classics. In the late 1970s, Sendak embarked on a second career as a costume and stage designer, contributing to operas like "The Magic Flute" and "Hansel and Gretel", and the musical "Really Rosie", where he wrote the book and lyrics. Settling in Ridgefield, Connecticut, in 1972 with his partner, Dr. Eugene Glynn, Sendak became one of the most honored children's book artists in history, receiving prestigious awards including the 1964 Caldecott Medal, the 1970 Hans Christian Andersen Award, the 1983 Laura Ingalls Wilder Award, and the 2003 Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award. In 1996, President Bill Clinton even awarded him the National Medal of Arts. Following Sendak's 2012 passing, The Maurice Sendak Foundation has since overseen the release of new editions of his beloved picture books. For further information see: "Biography". *The Maurice Sendak Foundation*, 2020, www.sendakfoundation.org/biography.

[54] Shel Silverstein, born in 1930, was a prolific and versatile American creative, excelling as an author, poet, cartoonist, songwriter, and playwright. Widely celebrated for his whimsical and emotionally resonant creations, Silverstein entered children's literature with classics like *Lafcadio, the Lion Who Shot Back* in 1963 and *The Giving Tree* in 1964. Beyond children's literature, Silverstein explored various artistic forms. In the late 1970s, he delved into stage design while consistently producing humor-infused books with imaginative illustrations. Notable works include *Where the Sidewalk Ends*, published in 1974 and the 1981 *A Light in the Attic*. His creative breadth extended to songwriting, contributing hits like "A Boy Named Sue" for Johnny Cash, earning him a Grammy for Best Children's Album in 1984. Even after his passing in 1999, Silverstein's legacy endured through posthumous releases such as *Runny Babbit*, published in 2005, and *Every Thing On It*, released in 2011, which features 140 previously unreleased poems and drawings. For further information see: "About Shel". *ShelSilvertein.com*, www.shelsilverstein.com/about-shel/.

revel in the defiant aspects of their personalities. In their own way, Seuss, Sendak, and Silverstein boldly broke away from the established conventions of children's literature, introducing a sense of rebellion to the genre by questioning the notion that children's books should steer clear of themes like fear, silliness, or sophistication. Rather than scolding young readers for deviating from expected behavior, their works embraced a level of mischievousness, acknowledging what could be perceived as inherent in human nature. Notably, both Silverstein and Sendak were under the editorial guidance of Ursula Nordstrom at Harper & Row, a woman committed to publishing what she deemed as "good books for bad children" (Paul). In a *TIME Magazine* interview in December 1980, Sendak enumerated the components he thought a children's narrative should have, such as "warnings to behave, punishment for failure to do so, and a resolution that shows that everything comes out all right in the end" (Stoler).

Despite adhering to a traditional structure in his earlier works, in 1963, he published *Where the Wild Things Are*[55], a book both written and illustrated by Sendak himself.

and made him king of all wild things.

[55] At the heart of this narrative is Max, a child who, after misbehaving at home, faces the consequence of being sent to bed without supper. However, within the confines of his room, Max's vivid imagination transports him to the enchanting realm of the Wild Things. Assuming the role of their king, Max undergoes a series of adventures with these untamed creatures. Ultimately, he returns home, marking a symbolic reconnection with the familiar comforts and security of his own world, where he can finally eat his awaited dinner. This narrative beautifully delves into themes of imagination, emotions, and the solace found within the haven of home. Sendak's illustration style shares a whimsical and fantastical quality reminiscent of Dr. Seuss, characterized by imaginative creatures and dynamic compositions. The facial expressions of the characters are rather detailed and convey a wide range of emotions. Finally, Sendak predominantly uses an earthy color palette, often favoring shades of yellow, brown and gray, which enhances the dreamlike atmosphere of the book.

Fig. #24

Source: Sendak, Maurice. *Where the Wild Things Are*. Red Fox, 2000. Page 24.

As shown in picture 24, this work strongly echoes the stylistic influence of Dr. Seuss, drawing inspiration from childhood disobedience and subversion. Here, the protagonist, Max, engages in unruly behavior, chasing his dog with a fork and confronting his mother, only to be rewarded with the title of king and a hot dinner. Sendak, drawing from his own childhood and the spirited nature of Brooklyn children, portrayed Max either as a "normal child" or a "little beast" (Paul). Sendak appreciated authors like Dr. Seuss, who fearlessly depicted children rebelling against conventional norms. According to Seuss, his *Cat in the Hat* "is a revolt against authority" (qtd. in Shannon 657). Moreover, in *And to Think That I Saw It on Mulberry Street*, Seuss's Marco seeks refuge in his imagination as a means of confronting the uninspiring nature and conformity of the adult world. Similarly, Sendak's Max uses his imagination to distance himself from the adult world that imposes rules he wishes to avoid. In addition, both Seuss and Sendak's characters are distinguished by individualistic traits, concealed in their behavior and attitudes. The characters of Marco and Max are longing for a sort of individualism, which, according to Shannon, "includes the propositions that people act in their own best interest" and whose "goal of life is to secure the maximum personal freedom" (Shannon 659).

In Paul's opinion, these authors reveled in absurdity, encouraging children to find humor in unconventional situations. Silverstein, for example, in his poem "Crowded Tub" played with grammar in his rhymes and found comedy in scenarios like a crowded bathtub using humorous and incorrect language. As happened with Seuss, one term employed to characterize Silverstein was "whimsical", though it was often accompanied by the additional descriptor "weird" (qtd. in Paul). In Sendak's work *In the Night Kitchen,* published in 1970 and inspired by the Holocaust, he crafted a dream world with bakers reminiscent of Hitler,

attempting to place a boy named Mickey in an oven. The book, with its controversial imagery and nudity, faced challenges and criticism, earning a place on the American Library Association's list of the "most challenged books" in the 1990s (Paul). Interestingly, just as Seuss, Sendak considered himself not just an author but also an illustrator who emphasized the delicate balance between words and images.

In the realm of Silverstein's literary contributions, *The Giving Tree*[56] defied its early critics by selling a remarkable 8.5 million copies (Paul). Fraustino's analysis takes into consideration the various interpretations of this work. From one perspective, the "self-proclaimed parable of love and consolation" (Fraustino 287) found favor among Christians, who embraced it as a parable of selflessness, emphasizing Mother Nature's care for humankind. However, a closer examination reveals a different interpretation: the tree as a symbol of motherhood and the curse on women in Judeo-Christian faith. Therefore, the tree's sacrifice of reproductive capabilities and eventual death contradicts this idea of sustainability, suggesting a darker narrative and emphasizing the need to read the book literally rather than sarcastically. Fraustino acknowledges the potential for deconstructive exercises but argues that most readers, especially children, perceive the story straightforwardly, lacking the irony needed for alternative interpretations. According to her:

> At first glance, the jacket image that introduces readers to *The Giving Tree* seems simple, as picture book images often do, but cultural complexities always lurk between the covers. If Wendy R. Katz is correct in saying, "Food may be, in fact, the sex of children's literature"[57], then we are looking at an intimate

[56] *The Giving Tree* is a classic children's book written and illustrated by Shel Silverstein. It tells the story of a unique relationship between a boy and a tree. The tree, portrayed as a generous and selfless entity, provides the boy with everything he needs at different stages of his life, from apples to branches and even its trunk. The boy, in turn, takes from the tree to fulfill his desires and needs. The narrative unfolds as a poignant exploration of themes such as selflessness, sacrifice, and the consequences of one-sided relationships. The illustrations are simple yet powerful, characterized by a minimalistic style which uses black-and-white ink sketches. Like Seuss's, Silvestein's distinctive style of illustration contributes significantly to the overall impact of the book, enhancing the emotional resonance of the narrative and allowing readers, both young and old, to connect with the story on a visual and emotional level.

[57] Citation from Katz, Wendy R. "Some Uses of Food in Children's Literature". *Children's Literature in Education,* Springer, 1980. 192.

relationship here. From a bright green tree, its trunk slightly arched like a back, its lowest branch drawn to resemble an arm, a red apple drops toward the outstretched arms of a small human child. The tree gives an apple, a child receives (Fraustino 285-286).

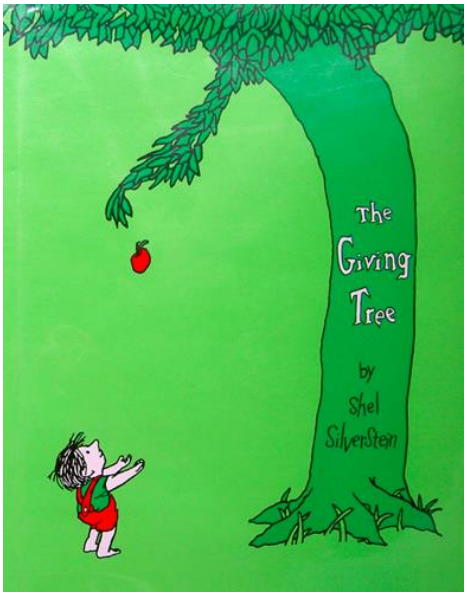


Fig. #25

Source: Silverstein, Shel. *The Giving Tree*. Harper Collins Publishers, 1999.

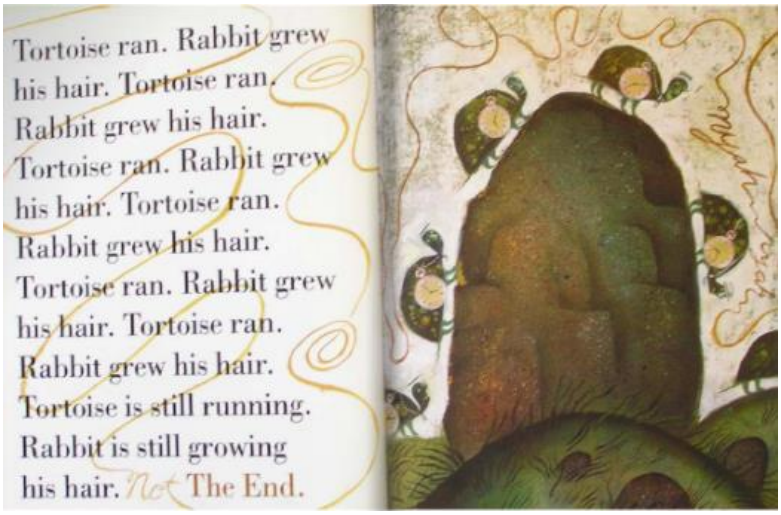
Her examination begins with the cover image of the book[58], which, despite its simplicity, seems to establish a metaphorical matrix that perpetuates traditional gender roles. According to Ellen Handler Spitz, the narrative itself "perpetuates the myth of the selfless, all-giving mother who exists only to be used and the image of a male child who can offer no reciprocity, express no gratitude, feel no empathy — an insatiable creature who encounters no limits for his demands" (qtd. in Paul). The male protagonist performs actions associated with power and dominance, while the female tree is depicted as nurturing and self-sacrificing. In addition, Fraustino highlights the gender-specific language used, the pronouns "he and she [that] behave in

[58] See figure 25 for reference.

traditionally sex-typed ways from the start" (Fraustino 286). At the heart of the symbolic imagery explored here lies the tree, serving as a central element in this vegetative symbolism. Representing the fruit-bearing tree of life, it embodies a feminine essence characterized by its capacity to bear fruit, facilitate transformation, and provide sustenance. The various components of the tree, such as its leaves, branches, and twigs, exist within its encompassing structure, reliant on its nurturing presence. In the context of Shel Silverstein's narrative, the fruit-bearing tree "equates with a Feminine that nourishes, generates and transforms" (qtd. in Fraustino). In fact, through the provision of apples and undivided attention, the tree nurtures the human boy by utilizing its own bodily resources. This maternal figure also plays a pivotal role in the boy's social evolution, facilitating his transformation into a family-oriented individual within the framework of patriarchal norms.

All in all, this negative critique raises valid concerns about the perpetuation of gender stereotypes and the potential impact on young readers, as well as its status as a classic. If read through the lens of "feminist and cultural criticism" (Fraustino 299), although varied perspectives are still valid, a reevaluation of traditional motherhood tropes in children's literature is needed in light of a more nuanced portrayal of motherhood, embracing the complexity of the "mythic Great Mother" encompassing both her nurturing qualities and her capacity for power and ambivalence (Fraustino 301). Focusing on the structure of the book, Silverstein's narrative simplicity and emotional resonance echo Dr. Seuss's ability to convey complex themes with accessible language, making them relatable to children. Finally, while Theodor Geisel can be regarded as the foundational precursor in nonconformist children's literature, it is evident that Sendak and Silverstein, being notably connected to the counterculture movement, were directly influenced by Geisel's innovative approach.

Beside these authors, Jon Scieszka[59] has also consistently voiced his deep admiration for the unique and receptive audience of young readers. In a 2015 interview he said: "Someday I might write for adults, but I think kids are the greatest audience for a writer. No one can believe a story or love one as much as a kid does" (qtd. in Barrett). Scieszka holds a profound belief that children are the most open and enthusiastic audience for a writer. In acknowledging his literary influences, he credits the impactful role played by Dr. Seuss, along with other childhood favorites like Rocky and Bullwinkle and *MAD magazine*, in shaping his creative sensibilities. Considered a literary successor to Dr. Seuss, Scieszka draws inspiration from an array of sources, including books, his own children, students he has taught, and the broader world around him. His creative process involves weaving these diverse influences into alluring narratives that resonate with young readers. While Scieszka's writing possesses a distinctive style and voice, the influence of Dr. Seuss is discernible in his dedication to eliciting laughter from children and nurturing a love for reading. This commitment echoes the whimsical and imaginative spirit found in Seuss's iconic works.



[59] Jon Scieszka, born on September 8, 1954, in Flint, Michigan, is a prominent American author and educator. His distinct and humorous storytelling style, often subverting traditional fairy tales, has made him a well-known figure in the literary world. A standout work is "The True Story of the Three Little Pigs", where he provides an alternative perspective by narrating the wolf's side of the classic tale. This book is part of the collection *The Stinky Cheese Man and Other Fairly Stupid Tales*. Beyond his writing, Scieszka served as the National Ambassador for Young People's Literature in the United States from 2008 to 2009. For further information, see "About Jon Scieszka". *Jon Scieszka*, www.jonscienszka.com/author.

Fig. #26

Source: Scieszka, Jon. *The Stinky Cheese Man and Other Fairly Stupid Tales*. Penguin Random House, 1993. Page 35-36.

For example, an excellent illustration of Jon Scieszka's commitment to the style reminiscent of Dr. Seuss is found in his work *The Stinky Cheese Man and Other Fairly Stupid Tales*, with illustrations by Lane Smith[60]. This collection of fractured fairy tales stands out for its irreverent and comical take on traditional storytelling. Scieszka playfully deconstructs well-known fairy tales, introducing unconventional characters and absurd twists into the narratives. Furthermore, Lane Smith's unique illustrations perfectly complement Scieszka's irreverent style, which propels children to view familiar stories from a fresh and imaginative perspective. In an interview with Barrett, Jon Scieszka nostalgically recalls the literary influences that fueled his early love for writing. Dr. Seuss emerges as a significant source of inspiration, evoking vivid memories of enjoying classics like *Green Eggs and Ham*, and *And to Think That I Saw It on Mulberry Street*. Finally, what captivated him most about these stories was their humor, a quality conspicuously absent in the textbooks and Dick and Jane readers of his school years (Barrett).

In a similar fashion to Silverstein, Mo Willems[61] is celebrated for his "whimsy, slapstick and emotional matter-of-factness" (Marchese). His works establish him as a distinctive combination of Dr. Seuss and Charles Schulz, a comparison that brings with it

[60] See figure 26 for reference.

[61] Born on February 11, 1968, in Illinois, Mo Willems is a versatile creative spirit, who gained acclaim as an author, illustrator, animator, and playwright. His notable achievements include serving as the Kennedy Center Education Artist-in-Residence. His renowned series, including the *Pigeon Series* and *Elephant & Piggie books*, have garnered widespread praise for their simple text and expressive illustrations. With numerous awards to his name, Willems is recognized for his ability to connect with young readers, and his multifaceted career extends to animation and scriptwriting for television, notably on "Sesame Street", thanks to which he received six Emmy Awards for writing. For further information, see "About Mo Willems". Mo Willems Workshop, mowillemsworkshop.com/bio.

significant expectations and responsibilities. Willems does not believe in using writing only as a way for parents to control and educate their children, but also as a way for children to appreciate reading and simply *be* children.

On the one hand, his alignment with Dr. Seuss extends to the belief that the essence of creativity lies in allowing the creative process to develop spontaneously, welcoming the inherent unpredictability of the ultimate outcome. In a 2020 interview, he noted:

> If you have a child, you have a leg up to rediscover that magic. Magic is the wrong word. It's not magic. It's gleeful exploration. It's also hard work. Kids are asking about issues of control and why is the world the way it is (qtd. in Marchese).

This perspective underscores the interplay between the imaginative process and the inquisitive nature of children, emphasizing the dual aspects of joyous discovery and the challenges inherent in the creative endeavor. Created with seemingly straightforward pen-strokes, and woven into narratives that extract profound meaning from the everyday adventures of childhood, his characters make a lasting impression from the moment they are introduced. Moreover, the characters crafted by Willems radiate a specific liveliness and a unique urban allure that mirror the dynamicity of the Big Apple: in fact, "You can take Mr. Willems out of New York, but you can't take New York out of his characters" (Russo). Their approach to overcoming obstacles, coupled with their cleverness and steadfast determination, encapsulates the unyielding essence of the city that played a pivotal role in shaping their creator. For example, in his *Don't Let the Pigeon* series of early reader's books, the pigeon's distinct personality is a direct product of the vibrant atmosphere of New York:

> Take the wily, insistent, hopped-up pigeon, who spends five books trying to find a way around various unavoidable truths, like the fact that birds cannot drive buses or have pet puppies. "His personality came from New York," Mr. Willems says on the show's audio tour, which he narrates. "There is no way I

could have created the pigeon if I had spent my life living somewhere else (qtd. in Russo).

On the other hand, Willems does not overtly incorporate political themes into his children's literature as Seuss did. However, there is subtle evidence that such themes exist, albeit beneath the surface.

Fig. #27

Source: Willems, Mo. *Don't Let the Pigeon Drive the Bus!.* Hyperion Books, 2003. Page 39-40.

In *Don't Let the Pigeon Drive the Bus*![62], published in 2003, a resolute pigeon earnestly implores the reader for permission to take the wheel of a bus, even in the face of the narrator's logical and firm denial. At first glance, the narrative appears to be a lighthearted story showcasing the tenacity of the pigeon. Beneath the surface, though, some readers and critics have detected a nuanced exploration of themes such as authority, the art of persuasion, and the deliberation over social norms.

All in all, it should be remarked that each of the authors mentioned thus far, though undoubtedly influenced by Dr. Seuss, has infused their unique styles into the landscape of stories for young readers. Nonetheless, Dr. Seuss's lasting influence on children's literature resonates far beyond the confines of his own era, as the pleasure derived from reading Dr.

[62] See figure 27 for reference.

Seuss transcends time, forming a literary continuum that weaves together readers of different ages. As a matter of fact, his legacy lies not only in the explicit influence on contemporary authors like Mo Willems, but also in the perpetual joy and fascination his books bring to readers. His contributions to children's literature have not only stood the test of time but have also shaped the literary landscape in a profound way, ensuring that his whimsical tales will continue to be cherished and celebrated for generations to come.

4.3 Rise of Multicultural and Diverse Representation in Children's Literature

To conclude this discussion, the final section will delve into the evolving landscape of children's literature, shedding light on the ongoing revolution toward diverse representation and examining the role Dr. Seuss has played in shaping this transformative narrative. The field of education often turns to Dr. Seuss's literary works with the intent of promoting values of fairness and acceptance. However, Walter highlights how this not only seems to hinder the creation of inclusive representation for marginalized communities, but also obstruct the engagement and input of individuals from these same communities, who could offer valuable perspectives in addressing the perpetuation of social biases (qtd. in Ishizuka and Stephens 31). Therefore, "[t]his scenario carries profound implications on a broad scale, emphasizing the critical necessity of promoting diverse and representative authorship from underserved groups within literature and the broader media landscape" (Ishizuka and Stephens 31).

Even more than thirty years after his passing, Dr. Seuss's impact persists, prompting the question about its relevance. In a time when society is increasingly valuing diverse voices and perspectives, the role of literature, particularly in the case of children's literature, holds profound significance. The call for diversity in storytelling transcends a mere quest for representation; it is a call to nurture inclusivity, understanding, and empathy. Yet, this

imperative is not confined to Seuss's era; it underscores the ongoing need to ensure that literature mirrors the intricate richness of the world in which we reside. As an example, the National Education Association (NEA), the organization behind Read Across America[63], is transitioning to a year-round calendar that emphasizes a diverse range of books. Despite the population's increasing diversity, statistics from the Cooperative Children's Book Center reveal a stagnant representation of people of color in children's books from 1994 to 2014. Efforts to address this disparity gained momentum in 2014 when Walter Dean Myers and Christopher Myers wrote about "the apartheid of literature" in *The New York Times*, leading to the formation of initiatives like "We Need Diverse Books" (Wilkens "Dr. Seuss' racial history draws controversy").

Wilkens points out that, while there has been progress, with the percentage of books featuring people of color increasing to 28 percent in recent years, challenges persist. Scholars emphasize the importance of diverse representation in shaping children's perceptions and self-concept. Moreover, as Nel emphasizes in *Was the Cat in the Hat Black?*, the abundance of white characters in children's literature fails to mirror the actual diversity of the world. According to Wilkens, projections indicate that by 2045, white people will constitute less than half of the American population. However, due to persistent racial segregation across various facets in society, notably in housing, education, and workplaces, many white people may not

[63] In 2021, the National Education Association shifted its attention from Dr. Seuss to an emphasis on diverse children's books, a move that sparked debate on social media. An article published on *USA Today News*, mentioned how President Joe Biden, in his "Read Across America Day presidential proclamation" acknowledged that "for many Americans, the path to literacy begins with story time in their school classroom" (qtd. in Aspegren). Nonetheless, while emphasizing the significance of the day as a renewed commitment to the national goal of improving reading comprehension, President Biden distinguished himself from Presidents Donald Trump and Barack Obama by omitting the mention of Dr. Seuss's name. In fact, from its introduction in 1998 and until then, Read Across America Day coincided with March 2nd, which commemorated Dr. Seuss's birthday. This alignment was not only a tribute but also a reflection of the robust partnership between the NEA and Dr. Seuss Enterprises, a collaboration that endured until 2019. See, Aspegren, Elinor. "Read Across America Day, once synonymous with Dr. Seuss, is diversifying. Here's why things have changed". *USA Today News*, Mar. 2021.

fully grasp the true racial diversity within their own country (Wilkens “Dr. Seuss’ racial history draws controversy”).

According to Thomas, various labels have been employed to categorize books reflecting diverse experiences. While “multicultural” was the term initially used to describe culturally diversified books, it fell short in addressing gender, religion, sexual orientation, immigration, linguistic differences, and ability. Therefore, the term “diverse” has subsequently gained broader usage to encompass differences in race, ethnicity, gender, and disability, overcoming the limitations of “multicultural”. In addition, in contemporary discussions about literature, the term “critical texts” has emerged to signify a more expansive approach that surpasses the concepts of diversity and multiculturalism. It “highlight[s] salient categories of difference, give[s] voice to those who have been historically silenced, provide[s] examples of social action, explore[s] systems of oppression, and include[s] opportunities for posing questions about how and why societal positioning is maintained” (Riley and Crawford-Garrett 94). This is to say that critical texts delve deeper into the exploration of social dynamics and power structures, amplifying the voices of those historically marginalized or silenced. These writings go beyond being mere stories; they serve as catalysts for social change.

Therefore, by presenting these perspectives, they offer readers a chance to introspect and challenge the intricate mechanisms sustaining societal hierarchies. This engagement nurtures a more profound comprehension of the influences shaping our outlooks and life experiences. Consequently, these texts contribute to an enriched and thoughtful approach to literature, surpassing simple representation to actively involve readers in a broader socio-cultural discourse. Finally, Everett questions the classification of books as diverse, contending that diversity is a subjective concept contingent upon the reader’s interpretation. He believes that what one student views as diverse may not be perceived in the same way by another.

To better represent this nuanced realm of children's literature, where representation plays a pivotal role, there are several prestigious awards, such as the Newbery Medal, the Caldecott Medal, and the Theodor Seuss Geisel Award, which commend exceptional accomplishments. In particular, the John Newbery Medal is an annual recognition bestowed "by the Association for Library Service to Children, a division of the American Library Association, to the author of the most distinguished contribution to American literature for children" ("John Newbery Medal"). The evaluation process places a premium on literary and presentation quality for young readers, encompassing various forms of writing like fiction, non-fiction, and poetry. Despite the detailed criteria, the selection process does not explicitly consider diversity or inclusive themes, although some of the acknowledged books do showcase these characteristics. Similarly, the Randolph Caldecott Medal[64] honors "the most distinguished American picture book for children" ("Randolph Caldecott Medal"). The recipient is chosen based on the excellence of illustrations, prioritizing the value of images over the book's popularity.

Like the Newbery Medal, the Caldecott selection process lacks explicit criteria concerning diversity or inclusive elements in the illustrated content. This is particularly significant given the considerable impact that illustrations can have on shaping children's perspectives. As far as the Theodor Seuss Geisel Award is concerned, first established in 2004 and then presented two years later, it is "given annually to the author(s) and illustrator(s) of the most distinguished American book for beginning readers published in English in the United States during the preceding year […] who, through their literary and artistic achievements, demonstrate creativity and imagination to engage children in reading" ("Theodor Seuss Geisel Award"). It recognizes the impact that these authors have on early readers, paying homage to Geisel and his cultural heritage.

[64] In addition to the Caldecott Medal, the committee recognizes a fluctuating number of commendable runners-up, referred to as the Caldecott Honor Books. Dr. Seuss received an Honor Book three times: in 1948 for *McElligot's Pool*, in 1950 for *Bartholomew and the Oobleck*, and finally in 1951 for *If I Ran the Zoo* ("Randolph Caldecott Medal").

The absence of considerations of inclusivity is significant, especially in light of discussions by scholars like Wilkens and Nel, who stress the importance of diverse representation in shaping children's perceptions. Hence, in 2017, the Association for Library Service to Children decided to introduce various awards that specifically recognize children's books that do highlight something that could be considered as uncommon by the mainstream white population. These accolades celebrate diversity in its broadest sense, encompassing aspects such as ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion and ability. Notable examples of these awards include the Coretta Scott King Book Awards, which commend books that spotlight African American culture ("Amina Luqman-Dawson, Frank Morrison win 2023 Coretta Scott King Book Awards"), and the Schneider Family Book Award, which is dedicated to books portraying the disability experience ("2023 Schneider Family Book Awards recipients named").

For example, Amina Luqman-Dawson[65], author of *Freewater*[66] is the 2023 Newbery Medal winner. Her book also received the Coretta Scott King Book Award in the same year for "best children's story by a Black author" (Italie). According to the Coretta Scott King Book Awards Jury Chair Jason Driver, "*Freewater* is a beautifully written and captivating historical novel [in which] Ms. Luqman-Dawson explores the complexities of the slave plantation and living in a secret maroon community" (qtd. in "Amina Luqman-Dawson, Frank Morrison win 2023 Coretta Scott King Book Awards"). In a recent interview, Amina Luqman-Dawson shared

[65] Amina Luqman-Dawson is a contemporary American writer. She is passionate about using writing as a means to narrate stories and foster an understanding of race, culture, and community. With a BA in Political Science from Vassar College and a Master of Public Policy from UC Berkeley, Luqman-Dawson has achieved academic excellence. She is now living in Virginia, along with her husband and son. She has always been a reader, however never considered writing as a career. Finally, upon discovering Virginia's rich African American history, she noted an absence of accessible literature on the subject. This realization prompted her need to start writing. For further information, see "More About Amina". *Amina Luqman-Dawson*, www.aminaluqman-dawson.com/more-about-amina.

[66] It narrates the story of Homer, who is twelve years old and has to escape the Southerland Plantation with his younger sister Ada. Despite his deep love and concern for his mother, whom they left behind, Homer recognizes the irreversible nature of their journey. Navigating through tangled vines, concealed doorways, and a sky bridge, the siblings discover a hidden community named Freewater nestled deep within the swamp. Within this society formed by formerly enslaved individuals and some freeborn children, Homer establishes new connections, momentarily distancing himself from his origin. However, when he uncovers a peril that threatens Freewater, he devises a plan to reunite with his mother and safeguard his newfound home.

her decision to present the story of slavery in a way tailored for young readers. She said that this choice stemmed from the acknowledgment that addressing the history of slavery poses significant challenges for adults, eliciting emotions such as fear, pain, shame, and discomfort in the process. To envision a future where conversations about slavery are more comprehensive she felt the need to instill new and healthier perspectives in children:

> "I offered myself a challenge" she said "use storytelling about enslaved Black people in a way that would leave a child reader with feelings of connection, hope, positivity, and exuberance that would last a lifetime. […] I want kids to walk away feeling totally inspired and thrilled by the strength, ingenuity, and humanity of this nation's enslaved people. I want them to feel unencumbered by the awkwardness, pain, and fear that past generations have carried on the subject of slavery and instead feel a zing of hope and excitement when they even hear the name 'Freewater' "(qtd. in Yao).

This reflects her dedication to transforming the narrative around slavery into one that empowers and enlightens, leaving a positive and lasting impact on young minds and their parents. As far as the style is concerned, the author envisions a captivating world within the swamp, highlighting not just the survival challenges but also the emergence of a nurturing society with a thriving culture. Family and community support are central, involving tasks like weaving vines into rope, constructing shelters and boats from colossal trees, tending to crop, and participating in hunting and fishing. To ensure safety from potential threats like slavers or militia, the community employs sky bridges made of rope and ingeniously constructs protective partitions woven from branches and leaves to close off specific swamp areas. Luqman-Dawson introduces well-rounded characters and vividly portrays the setting, depicting it as simultaneously beautiful and perilous.

For the Schneider Family Book Award, the title in 2023 went to *Listen: How Evelyn Glennie, a Deaf Girl, Changed Percussion*[67] by Shannon Stocker[68] and illustrated by Devon Holzwarth, who are on the opinion that that disabled children are still insufficiently represented in the literary landscape. According to award co-chairs Susan Hess and Mary-Kate Sableski, "[t]he committee was impressed by the coordination of the expressive art and lyrical text to depict Evelyn Glennie's perseverance in expanding access to music education" (qtd. in "2023 Schneider Family Book Awards recipients named").

In crafting this book, the author deliberately adopted a lyrical prose style, a choice that aligns seamlessly with the representation of various percussion instruments through onomatopoeia. The use of this literary device is not arbitrary but rather a purposeful decision to evoke the rhythmic and melodic qualities of music. Furthermore, the central theme of the verb *to listen* takes on profound significance within the narrative. It becomes a powerful symbol of Evelyn's unique ability to connect with sound using her entire body, a skill she cultivated after the loss of her hearing. While reading this book, one should notice how the author skillfully integrated poetic devices like alliteration, assonance, and rhythm, demonstrating a keen understanding of how language can mirror the harmonies found in music.

[67] This picture book biography for early readers revolves around the character Evelyn Glennie. During her childhood, she developed a deep passion for music. However, as the nerves in her ears deteriorated, she lost her hearing. Despite doctors' predictions, Evelyn defied the odds and found an inventive way to both listen to and play percussion, ultimately achieving recognition as an award-winning musician. The text and illustrations in the book vividly capture the rhythm and movement of her extraordinary journey.

[68] Shannon Stocker describes herself as a "fighter, a survivor, a writer, a dreamer, and a believer" ("About me"). In fact, Shannon Stocker's journey is one of resilience and transformation. Originally aspiring to be a musician or journalist, she shifted gears to the University of Louisville's combined graduate/medical school program, earning an M.S. in Anatomical Sciences and Neurobiology. A benign tumour in 2000 led to Reflex Sympathetic Dystrophy, evolving into Chronic Regional Pain Syndrome by 2007. This challenging period included wheelchair-bound years. Pursuing an experimental ketamine-induced coma treatment overseas in 2007 brought about remission. In 2008, after a seven-year struggle, Shannon celebrated the birth of her first child. Transitioning from a twelve-year career in financial consulting for physicians, she became a full-time mom in 2015, aiming to impact her family's lives positively. This shift ignited her passion for writing, envisioning a world where anything is possible for her children, featuring whimsical elements like chocolate growing on trees and mermaids inviting humans to swim with dolphins. For further information, see "About Me". *Shannon Stocker*, www.shannonstocker.com/about.

Every word seems to have been carefully chosen, contributing to the creation of evocative sentences such as: “She had found a sea of sound that belonged only to her” (qtd. in Sanchez).

Fig. #28

Source: Devon Holzwarth in Shannon Stocker’s *Listen: How Evelyn Glennie, a Deaf Girl, Changed Percussion,* 2022. From Sanchez, Kaitlyn Leann. “Author Interview and GIVEAWAY with Shannon Stocker, author of LISTEN: How One Deaf Girl Changed Percussion, illustrated by Devon Holzwarth”

The meticulous selection of language serves to immerse the reader in a sensory experience, showcased by the powerful illustration shown in figure 28, allowing them to feel the essence of music through the text. In this case, lyrical prose, appreciated by the author for its readability, becomes a vehicle for readers to not just comprehend but truly sense the music as it unfolds in the narrative.

Finally, in light of the recent focus on diversity in children’s literature, there may be speculation about the continuation of Dr. Seuss’s legacy. However, Dr. Seuss Enterprises has introduced an innovative initiative called Seuss Studios. This project aims to produce a new series of children’s books, drawing inspiration from previously unreleased sketches by the author. Collaborating with Random House Children’s Books, Dr. Seuss Enterprises is dedicated to this new venture, focusing on early reader books crafted by emerging authors and

illustrators. Seuss Studios is committed to upholding Dr. Seuss's legacy by engaging with a diverse community of creators to produce books that can capture the essence of creativity and imagination associated with the Dr. Seuss's style. The source material for these books consists of carefully chosen sketches from the Dr. Seuss Collection archives at UC San Diego, curated by Dr. Seuss Enterprises and Random House Children's Books. Each Seuss Studios book will feature the original Dr. Seuss sketch that inspired it, accompanied by a note from the creators detailing their inspiration and creative process ("Dr. Seuss Graphic Novels to Launch").

Fig. #29[69]

Source: Dr. Seuss Collection archives at UC San Diego. From O'Connor Caroline. "Seuss Studios". *Penguin Random House*, www.penguinrandomhouseretail.com/2022/03/03/seuss-studios/.

The launch of Seuss Studios, expected by the end of 2024, pays homage to Ted Geisel's commitment to supporting new writers and artists. The debut graphic novel program introduces three-chapter book series, each authored by comic book creators, spotlighting iconic characters such as the Cat in the Hat, the Grinch, and Sam-I-Am in fresh adventures. The first work *Cat Out of Water* by Art Baltazar, is scheduled for release on April 30, 2024, followed in the fall

[69] Figure 29 exemplifies the type of sketches that will serve as inspiration for the upcoming releases.

by a Grinch-themed story by Kaeti Vandorn and, in spring 2025, a Sam-I-Am adventure inspired by *Green Eggs and Ham*, narrated by James Kochalka ("Dr. Seuss Graphic Novels to Launch"). Therefore, these upcoming books, authored by celebrated talents and featuring beloved characters, provide children with an exciting new way to engage with the magic of reading. Whitney Leopard, Senior Editor at Random House Graphic, highlights the growing popularity of chapter book graphic novels and anticipates that bringing Dr. Seuss's iconic characters to life in this format will not only captivate kids but also encourage more children to embrace reading ("Dr. Seuss Graphic Novels to Launch").

The endeavor aims to perpetuate Dr. Seuss's legacy of inspiring young readers, continuing a tradition that commenced with the launch of the Beginner Books imprint in 1957, which also opened "new doors for creators who were either at the beginning of their publishing careers or who worked in other creative industries" ("Dr. Seuss Enterprises and Random House Children's Books Announce Seuss Studios, Original Line of Early Readers Books"). While the majority of the contributors are yet to be disclosed, Dr. Seuss Enterprises emphasizes the inclusion of emerging talents from diverse racial backgrounds, ensuring a broad representation that resonates with various families for the new Seuss Studios books, designed for readers aged four to eight. According to Susan Brandt, President and CEO of Dr. Seuss Enterprises, their aim is to give relevance to "a new generation of talent who [they] know will bring their unique voices and style to the page, while also drawing inspiration from the creativity and imagination of Dr. Seuss" (qtd. in "New Dr. Seuss-inspired Books Will Feature Diverse Writers and Illustrators").

Despite the decision to shelve certain Dr. Seuss titles in light of their controversial content, the initiative to rejuvenate the author's legacy through this new project signals a commitment to inclusivity and a thoughtful approach. The company's focus on celebrating diversity and embracing young authors is viewed positively by literacy advocates, such as

Pamela Good, President of Beyond Basics, a Michigan-based nonprofit enterprise promoting literacy. Talking about this project by Dr. Seuss Enterprises, she said: "literacy is for everyone. […] And as you try to find solutions that really are thoughtful and are heartfelt, they really do embrace everyone and allow everybody to be celebrated. And I think that what they're doing right now is a step in the right direction" (qtd. in "New Dr. Seuss-inspired Books Will Feature Diverse Writers and Illustrators").

2023 marked the 30th anniversary of Dr. Seuss Enterprises as a prominent "global children's entertainment company focusing on promoting literacy, education, self-confidence, and the wonderful possibilities of a child's imagination through the works of Dr. Seuss" ("Dr. Seuss Enterprises Prepares for Brand Licensing Europe"). In fact, Dr. Seuss's enduring popularity, evident in continued book sales and his position as the "fifth-highest paid dead celebrity of the year [2022] according to Forbes", Roald Dahl being number one, underlines the significance of this initiative in ensuring that his legacy evolves in a manner that aligns with contemporary values ("New Dr. Seuss-inspired Books Will Feature Diverse Writers and Illustrators"). Furthermore, during the 2023 Brand Licensing Europe event[70], held at the beginning of October, Dr. Seuss Enterprises unveiled further innovative initiatives, among which the introduction of new consumer product lines, and the expansion of their partnerships. This would suggest a commitment to the core values of promoting diversity by showcasing a variety of authors to promote inclusivity in various sectors.

Beyond the tangible pages of his books, the essence of Dr. Seuss still resonates in the hearts and imaginations of those enchanted by his whimsical worlds. The contemporary Dr. Seuss brand is making an earnest and tangible effort to acknowledge the imperative of inclusivity and diversity, while removing from publication the most controversial titles.

[70] The Brand Licensing Europe, launched in 1998, stands as the singular yearly occasion exclusively devoted to licensing and brand extension ("Dr. Seuss Enterprises Prepares for Brand Licensing Europe").

Therefore, initiatives such as Seuss Studios and the forthcoming graphic novels underscore a dedicated effort to preserve the enchantment of Dr. Seuss for today's readers and our globalized society.

CONCLUSION

In the culmination of this master's thesis, the intricate narrative of Theodor Seuss Geisel unfolds as a compelling tapestry interwoven with creativity, criticism, and lasting influence. Notably, the strategic decisions behind the adoption of the Dr. Seuss pen name marked a departure that liberated and realized Geisel's artistic vision, creating a cultural phenomenon reflected in remarkable sales and a posthumous legacy that is now under reevaluation in the context of the recent "cancel culture". To demonstrate this, this exploration has traversed the life and career of Dr. Seuss, capturing the rich heritage of his upbringing in Springfield, Massachusetts as the "son of a brewer who ran a zoo during Prohibition" ("Obituary for Theodor Seuss Geisel") and the significant factors that molded his character from an early age. Born in 1904, Geisel's exposure to the diversity of North American minds and the unique spirit of Springfield, together with his family's legacy and early encounters and passion for reading and drawing animals, set the stage for a future enriched with a primacy in the field of children's literature.

Geisel's educational journey, from the magazine *Jack-O-Lantern* at Dartmouth College to Oxford, unveiled his blossoming passion for storytelling, a flame that grew stronger in the face of prejudice and the hardships of World War I. Earlier in his career, he worked on commercials for brands such as Essomarine motor oil and Flit insecticide, before turning his attention to early readers, encouraging "children and adults to look at the world in different ways, whether this means upside-down, from the top of a tree or from inside a tiny speck" (qtd. in Porter). His marriage to Helen Palmer and their relocation to the West Coast, as well as the University of Utah's writer's conference in 1949, became significant turning points in his life, which propelled him into the advertising and illustration industries and laid the foundation for his success in children's books later on. The ensuing decades witnessed the birth of his most

famous characters and tales, many of which "were award winners, and all were models of craft, fusing a unique voice and artistic style" (Denver). Several of his books, such as *How The Grinch Stole Christmas!,* made their way to the big screen, while others, like *The Cat in the Hat,* were transformed into storybooks and inspired a variety of merchandise, showcasing the versatile impact of his creative legacy across different media.

Beyond professional triumphs, this research has analyzed the author's personal challenges, including the loss of his first wife, Helen, and his health issues in later years, demonstrating Dr. Seuss's unwavering commitment to creativity and inspiration despite the incessant passing of time. The consequences of the wartime period catalyzed shifts in his thematic choices, as seen in his early cartoons addressing German authoritarianism and American nativism. Geisel's commitment to positive change was portrayed in his editorial cartoons for PM magazine, which reflected real anger and a dedication to justice. However, delving further into the analysis of Geisel's body of work - through the work of Minear, Philip Nel's book *Was the Cat in the Hat Black?* and Ishizuka and Stephen's research "The Cat is Out of the Bag: Orientalism, Anti-Blackness, and White Supremacy in Dr. Seuss's Children's Books" - the complexities within some of these wartime cartoons and the characters portrayed in his earlier children's books have been used to underscore the challenges artists faced in navigating moral compasses during tumultuous times, as well as the influence of such depictions in childhood, given children's susceptibility to forming racial attitudes from an early age.

The historical context of Dr. Seuss's early career, influenced by the prevalent comic culture, has added complexity to the analysis, suggesting that his racial biases also reflected broader societal norms. As has been demonstrated, reflecting on the aftermath of his propaganda efforts post-war Geisel partially sought reconciliation for the impact of his earlier political cartoons, mainly demonstrating a commitment to promoting acceptance through

literature and humor. In fact, his philosophy on writing for children emphasized the liberating power of laughter to connect generations.

The immortality of Dr. Seuss as a children's author through Dr. Seuss Enterprises endures in the ability of books to inspire a genuine love of reading. As a matter of fact, the whimsical world he created continues to inspire wonder and discovery, leaving in its wake a reverberation that conveys the sentiment: "[f]rom there to here, from here to there, funny things are everywhere" (qtd. in In Search of Dr. Seuss 01:27:00-01:27:48). Dr. Seuss crafted books that urged his readers to question rather than blindly accept answers, instilling the idea that even seemingly insignificant characters, like the Whos, have the power to speak out and effect change. His works offer readers a foundation for navigating the complexities of the real world, whether they are readers who are familiar with these stories from their childhood or are discovering them for the first time. He once said: "You make 'em, I amuse 'em", demonstrating his pride in trying to bring joy to young minds despite not having children of his own from his two marriages (qtd. in "Obituary for Theodor Seuss Geisel"). Therefore, the author's main objective, which was fighting problems such as illiteracy and fostering respect for learning and culture, remains permanently engraved in the fossilized dinosaur footprint given to him by his father as a constant reminder of the power of literature to positively influence the world.

Furthermore, the exploration of Dr. Seuss's artistic evolution began with a deep dive into his early years, where his unique style emerged despite minimal formal art education. From caricatures at Dartmouth College to the publication of "Who's Who in Bo-Bo" in 1923, his progression showcased the birth of Seussian characters and his commitment to learning through practice and experimentation. The distinct use of black India ink and a genre between surrealism and childlike doodles contributed to the recognizable style that would define the author. Influenced by his background, Dr. Seuss skillfully navigated economic difficulties, sustaining himself through marketing cartoons to notable publications. His role as a cartoonist

for *PM* was pivotal in shaping both his adaptability and the confrontational style that would characterize his later children's books. Subsequently, this thesis explored Seuss's early recognition of the potent synergy between words and images, a dynamic akin to yin and yang. His ability to convey narratives concisely, exemplified in his use of a limited word list, demonstrated a mastery that aligned with a broader recognition of alternative storytelling approaches, such as sound effects in *Gerald McBoing-Boing*. Following the analysis of Pease in his work *Theodor SEUSS Geisel*, this research also touched on the foreshadowing of postmodernism in Seuss's works, challenging linguistic norms and playing with language fluidity.

Nevertheless, when delving into an author's controversial career, it is inevitable to confront problematic aspects, especially if one focuses on the six books withdrawn from circulation due to insensitive portrayals and the scholarly discussion advocating for inclusivity in the realm of children's literature. Consequently, the aim of the discourse surrounding Geisel's earlier illustrations and books was to promote a more sophisticated comprehension of his creations and contribute to the conversations regarding a broader representation of children's books. In fact, *And to Think That I Saw It on Mulberry Street* and *McElligot's Pool*, were two of the six works that faced criticism for perpetuating stereotypes, prompting discussions about cultural awareness and evolving standards of acceptability.

A crucial component of this reassessment has been the critical examination about Dr. Seuss's moral development and impact over the years, as explored in Brian Jay Jones's biography, *Becoming Dr. Seuss,* and investigated by Nel as well. Jones delved into Geisel's journey, highlighting his ability to answer to his conscience about the misogynistic humor and stereotypical portrayals of foreigners present in his earlier body of work, decades before so-called "cancel culture" emerged, confronting these works and placing them in a specific

historical context. As a consequence, the six canceled books provided a lens through which the evolving standards of cultural representation and sensitivity have been analyzed.

Dr. Seuss's journey from advertising to children's literature has not only demonstrated a career transition but also a metamorphosis that can be said to reflect his evolution in political stance. Contemporary scholar Stallings describes Seuss as "subversive", as "what could be more subversive in a Puritan society than to announce to kids that 'Fun is good?'" (Stallings). Diving deeper into this "subversiveness", this research has critically evaluated the importance of the responses, arguments, and outcomes of the controversies brought against him, in shaping the current conversation about censorship and cultural depictions in literature and art. Indeed, Dr. Seuss's entire career serves as proof of storytelling's power to convey meaningful messages, prompt contemplation on societal issues, and leave a lasting impact on successive generations of readers and in the context of the broader book-publishing industry. This discussion unfolded through various lenses, including the definition and implications of cancel culture, presented as a multifaceted phenomenon, counter-speech as an alternative approach that prioritizes education and acceptance, diversity within the publishing industry, comparisons with other authors like Roald Dahl, historical context, the role of artists in broader social dynamics, and the practice of quietly updating books. As a result, the contentious nature of this exploration should contribute to the critical reflections on literature, cultural sensitivity, and the responsibilities of literary estates, such as Dr. Seuss Enterprises.

Diversity, or rather the lack thereof, within the book-publishing industry, has therefore emerged as a significant backdrop. The industry's predominant demographic of white, non-disabled, and straight individuals, as revealed by the thorough research carried out by Lee & Low Books, has been investigated to underscore the urgency for transformative change. In fact, the examination of diversity within the industry is posited as essential for addressing long-standing disparities and fostering a more inclusive and equitable literary landscape, drawing

on Albrecht's perspective that portrays artists as active agents within broader social dynamics. Furthermore, the comparisons with Roald Dahl's works, which underwent edits to conform to contemporary sensitivities, added layers to the ethical debates in children's literature. Finally, the practice of quietly updating books has been explored as a means of adapting content to meet changing expectations while preserving a work's appeal and relevance. The conclusion of this segment has thus navigated the position between acknowledging Dr. Seuss's historical impact and advocating for critical engagement.

Dr. Seuss Enterprises' acceptance of the need for evolution in its body of work over time suggests a complex narrative of change. Therefore, the discussion on curation, rather than cancellation, aligns with Ebony Elizabeth Thomas's assertion, which emphasizes the importance of engaging with diverse perspectives and fostering critical dialogue. Exploring how Dr. Seuss responded to criticism of his works has revealed a nuanced narrative of a writer grappling with evolving opinions about his writing and cultural shifts. As a consequence, modern scholars, such as Philip Nel and Donald Pease, play a crucial role in critically interpreting Dr. Seuss's actions, emphasizing the importance of considering his entire body of work. Despite Dr. Seuss reviewing his books in later years with minimal revisions, Nel sheds light on the author's actions: if, on the one hand, he recognized his own impulsivity, on the other hand, he contested critiques of gender representation and infused humor to deflect criticism, even in the face of resistance to altering his books. This comprehensive approach promoted discussion as a means of comprehending and contextualizing cultural artifacts within a broader framework of representation and sensitivity.

As far as his heritage is concerned, Dr. Seuss became an iconic figure in the realm of children's literature, synonymous with a distinctly American interpretation of childhood contemplations, particularly during the transformative mid-20th-century period and the baby boom phenomenon of the 1950s, along with the growing concerns about children's reading

abilities. The significance of *The Cat in the Hat*, published in 1957, has been highlighted as a pivotal moment in influencing phonetic learning and rhyming patterns for children. Furthermore, Dr. Seuss's steadfast commitment to his characters and creative vision, even amidst legal challenges and lucrative offers, emphasized his profound attachment to literary creations that surpassed mere financial considerations.

Dr. Seuss was a trailblazer in the transformation of educational children's literature in the United States, moving away from the sterile and excessively clean primers that were common for a long time. Since the idealization of childhood is sometimes driven by a desire to escape the responsibilities of adulthood, he "set out to liberate children's imaginations from adult shackles and, in short order, won a following among rebellious spirits of all ages" (Schulman and Goldsmith 14). His books are recognized for enticing readers and assisting young readers in gaining an important life skill. Therefore, Geisel's impact extends beyond his well-known children's books; he has left a significant legacy in preschool and elementary school education. Consequently, the National Education Association commemorated National Read Across America Day on his birthday, recognizing his contributions, at least until 2019.

Despite the initial lack of prestigious literary awards, Dr. Seuss's contributions were eventually recognized with honors such as the Laura Ingalls Wilder Award and the Pulitzer Prize in 1984. Figures like Maurice Sendak, Shel Silverstein, Jon Scieszka, and Mo Willems have been shown as openly acknowledging their debt to Dr. Seuss, celebrating his ability to break away from conventional norms and infuse children's literature with a sense of rebellion. These authors, while maintaining distinctive styles, carry forward Seuss's legacy by incorporating mischievousness, humor, and a celebration of individualism into their works.

Finally, in the evolving landscape of children's literature, this discussion has emphasized the critical necessity of promoting diverse authorship from underserved groups. Therefore, initiatives like "We Need Diverse Books" have highlighted the ongoing efforts to

address the lack of representation in children's literature, and ensuring that literature reflects the diverse richness of the world, also through the works of such contemporary authors as Luqman-Dawson and Shannon Stocker. The scrutiny of Dr. Seuss's racial history has led to the culminating investigation of efforts to revitalize his legacy with Seuss Studios in 2024, thanks to the engagement of emerging authors and illustrators from various racial backgrounds to upgrade Dr. Seuss's stories to modern sensibilities.

In conclusion, when the literary world decides to rewrite classics and stories that have enchanted generations, spontaneous questions arise: is it worth canceling authors who have left a mark on an era or removing certain books that have been widely criticized in favor of new authors and stories that would seem more attuned to our society? Thanks to this project, it has been brought to light how this recent issue of "cancel culture" has underscored the need for a more critical approach to the literary realm of children's literature. However, this does not mean that authors should be canceled. This is evident in the case of the six Dr. Seuss's books removed from publication for inappropriate and offensive imagery. It has been highlighted how the opinions of devoted readers of Dr. Seuss, partially influenced by the fact that these books marked their childhood, often clashed with media noise and scholars. Hence, awareness and discussion, as well as critical thinking, without detracting from the charisma and impact of the storytelling of one of the most important authors in North American children's literature of the second half of the twentieth century, are the two main tools that scholars and readers should use to reflect on this author and his body of work.

Therefore, Dr. Seuss has not been canceled. His ability to play with grammar, coupled with his whimsical narratives, has allowed readers of all ages to engage with his work, since "[n]obody is ever too old for Dr. Seuss" (Schulman and Goldsmith 24). His rhymes can be considered not only memorable and pleasurable to read aloud but also not excessively sentimental or obnoxious, and this is partly responsible for his legacy. Moreover, the quality

of Dr. Seuss's works is attributed to their seamless fusion of lyricism and playfulness, which is what makes them so appealing (Porter). However, it is crucial to acknowledge that, as Philip Nel highlights, "[t]here are parts of his legacy one should honor, and parts of his legacy that one should not" (qtd. in Alter and Harris). There are aspects of his work that warrant both celebration and critical examination.

In today's context, the call for diversity and inclusivity in literature is stronger than ever. The fact that some of Dr. Seuss's earlier works contain elements that might be considered insensitive or outdated by contemporary standards presents an opportunity for thoughtful discussions and a thorough exploration of his complete body of work, especially in academic or educational settings and within the context of reading to and with children. Diverse literature, encompassing stories from various cultures, backgrounds, and perspectives, can effectively address any gaps left by aspects of Dr. Seuss. On one hand, this enriches children's literary experiences; on the other hand, it fosters conversations about the evolution of literature, cultural sensitivity, and the importance of embracing diverse voices. This approach ensures that Dr. Seuss's legacy and popularity, testifying to the appeal of his whimsical tales, are not canceled or concealed, but rather transformed into a platform for meaningful discourse and growth, an influence that will continue to be cherished and celebrated for generations to come.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Chronological list of Dr. Seuss's publications

	Year of Publication	**Title**
1	1937	*And to Think That I Saw It on Mulberry Street*
2	1938	*The 500 Hats of Bartholomew Cubbins*
3	1939	*The King's Stilts*
4	1939	*The Seven Lady Godivas*
5	1940	*Horton Hatches the Egg*
6	1947	*McElligot's Pool*
7	1948	*Thidwick The Big-Hearted Moose*
8	1949	*Bartholomew And the Oobleck*

9	1950	*If I Ran the Zoo*
10	1952	*Gerald McBoing-Boing*
11	1953	*Scrambled Eggs Super!*
12	1954	*Horton Hears A Who!*
13	1955	*On Beyond Zebra*
14	1956	*If I Ran the Circus*
15	1957	*The Cat in the Hat*
16	1957	*How The Grinch Stole Christmas!*
17	1958	*Yertle The Turtle and Other Stories*
18	1958	*The Cat in The Hat Comes Back!*
19	1959	*Happy Birthday to You!*
20	1960	*Green Eggs and Ham*
21	1960	*One Fish Two Fish Red Fish Blue Fish*

22	1961	*The Sneetches and Other Stories*
23	1962	*Dr. Seuss's Sleep Book*
24	1963	*Dr. Seuss's ABC*
25	1963	*Hop on Pop*
26	1964	*The Cat in the Hat Beginner Book Dictionary*
27	1965	*Fox in Socks*
28	1965	*I Had Trouble in Getting to Solla Sollew*
29	1967	*The Cat in the Hat Song Book*
30	1968	*The Foot Book*
31	1969	*I Can Lick 30 Tigers Today! And Other Stories*
32	1969	*My Book About Me*

33	1970	*I Can Draw it Myself*
34	1970	*Mr. Brown Can Moo! Can You?*
35	1971	*The Lorax*
36	1972	*Marvin K. Mooney Will You Please Go Now!*
37	1973	*Did I Ever Tell You How Lucky You Are?*
38	1973	*The Shape of Me and Other Stuff*
39	1974	*Great Day for Up*
40	1974	*There's a Wocket in my Pocket!*
41	1975	*Oh, The Thinks You Can Think!*
42	1976	*The Cat's Quizzer: Are you Smarter Than the Cat in the Hat?*
43	1978	*I Can Read with My Eyes Shut!*

44	1979	*Oh, Say Can You Say?*
45	1982	*Hunches in Bunches*
46	1984	*The Butter Battle Book*
47	1986	*You're Only Old Once!: A Book for Obsolete Children*
48	1987	*The Tough Coughs as He Ploughs the Dough*
49	1987	*I am Not Going to Get Up Today*
50	1990	*Oh, The Places You'll Go!*

Appendix 2: Chronological list of Dr. Seuss's publications that will be discontinued

	Year of Publication	Title
1	1937	*And to Think That I Saw It on Mulberry Street*
2	1947	*McElligot's Pool*
3	1950	*If I Ran the Zoo*
4	1953	*Scrambled Eggs Super!*
5	1955	*On Beyond Zebra*
6	1976	*The Cat's Quizzer*

Appendix 3: Diversity Baseline Survey 2019 Results by Lee and Low Books

Data retrieved from: Leeandlowbooks. “Where Is the Diversity in Publishing? the 2019 Diversity Baseline Survey Results.” *Lee & Low Blog*, 10 Feb. 2020, https://blog.leeandlow.com/2020/01/28/2019diversitybaselinesurvey/.