

## CANCEL BOOKS (AND PEOPLE)

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**Abstract:** *The present article is part of a larger work aiming at approaching the recently all-encompassing phenomenon of Cancel Culture through the lens of interdisciplinarity. I intend to highlight the totalitarian/ dictatorial aspects of Cancel Culture, starting from a grid of similarities with literary dystopias imagined by various authors. **Cancel Books (and People)** presents some recent requests for cancelling books or authors based on a critique concerning their political correctness and exemplifies with two worldwide known authors: William Shakespeare and Dr Seuss, also highlighting the dystopian aspects of recent events.*

**Keywords:** *Cancel Culture, cancelled literature, Shakespeare, children's literature, Dr Seuss, dystopia*

### **Introduction**

The narrative of Paradise in the Bible represents an idealized version of humanity, often seen as the most iconic utopia. Over time, humans have sought to attain perfection by creating various societal systems aimed at achieving equality and eliminating discrimination. Totalitarian regimes initially pursued the goal of a flawless society, promising equality for all. Nevertheless, numerous factors led to the unintended transformation of these utopian aspirations into dystopian realities. In contemporary democracies, where decision-making is based on the will of the majority, efforts are made to safeguard the rights of minorities by ensuring their inclusion in the decision-making process and protection in all spheres of life. However, the pursuit of perfection in practice has made political correctness a potential dystopian aspect of democracy. Cancel Culture is wielded as a tool within this context to enforce political correctness.

In principle, political correctness seeks to prevent the marginalization of minority groups. In the nineteenth century, Americans employed this term to evaluate the appropriateness of legal, administrative, or political language concerning constitutional or civil law. In Europe, the term was used in response to the emergence of left-wing Leninism to describe someone excessively devoted to adhering to the party's ideology. Subsequently, the concept of political correctness evolved to describe individuals who adhered to the party line to an unbearable extent<sup>1</sup>.

Michael Williams traces the roots of political correctness back to the Frankfurt School theorists, including figures like Theodor Adorno and Herbert

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<sup>1</sup> Michael William, *The Genesis of Political Correctness: The Basis of a False Morality*, New York, CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, p. 45.

Marcuse. Williams identifies two primary foundations of political correctness: the avoidance of language that may offend minority groups and the substitution of such language with neutral terms to prevent discrimination<sup>2</sup>.

According to numerous dictionaries, such as Oxford, Cambridge, Collins, and Merriam-Webster, political correctness is described as a stance or policy discouraging the use of language that could be considered offensive to specific minority groups. The Routledge Dictionary of Philosophy offers a broader definition encompassing curriculum changes, campus speech regulations, anti-harassment policies, affirmative action in educational admissions and hiring, the adoption of new terminology for minority groups (e.g., African American, Native American, learning disabled), the establishment of new standards for interactions with women and racial or cultural minorities (e.g., departing from traditional "ladies first" practices), and, more generally, any modifications in language, policy, social conduct, and cultural representation aimed at addressing or rectifying a Eurocentric worldview and the historical subordination of particular social groups. Originally emerging from discussions about the content of higher education, the terms "politically correct" or "PC" are now commonly employed beyond the academic sphere<sup>3</sup>.

Cancel Culture constitutes a movement designed to revoke or undermine the career of a public figure who has made a controversial statement, typically of a sexist or racist nature. Oxford Learners Dictionaries defines this term as "the practice of excluding someone from social or professional circles by refusing to engage with them online or in person due to something they have said or done that others disagree with."<sup>4</sup> Eve Ng further delineates cancel culture as comprising "cancel practices (cancelling)," which involve actions directed against a target of cancellation, whether an individual, brand, or company, and "cancel discourses," referring to commentary and discussions related to the act of canceling<sup>5</sup>.

My paper's definition extends its use for the cancelling of books or other types of narratives (e.g. visual), which can contain ideas that can be labelled as sexist or racist. In the name of an alleged cause of social justice, cancel culture uses techniques of contempt, marginalization, and censorship similar to those in totalitarian regimes. In my approach, cancel culture represents a tool for achieving political correctness and its manifestation, present and possible future results enter the field of the dystopian worlds.

To correlate cancel culture with dystopia, a definition of the latest is necessary. The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms defines it: "A modern term invented as the opposite of utopia, and applied to any alarmingly unpleasant imaginary world, usually of the projected future. The term is also applied to fictional worlds depicting such worlds"<sup>6</sup>. Beyond literature, dystopias found inspiration in

<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 112.

<sup>3</sup> A.R. Lacey (ed), *The Routledge Dictionary of Philosophy*, London, Routledge, 2009, p. 318.

<sup>4</sup> Oxford Learners' Dictionaries, *Cancel culture*, retrieved 01.06.2022 from <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/cancel-culture>.

<sup>5</sup> Eve Ng, *Cancel Culture: A Critical Analysis*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2022, p.1.

<sup>6</sup> Chris Baldick, *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2015, p. 108.

totalitarian regimes; most of the time, there is equality between totalitarianism and dystopia in the human mind. Table 1 presents dystopian elements identified in cancel culture.

Table 1 Common elements of dystopia and cancel culture

Dystopia	Cancel Culture
A concept's veneration	Equality and inclusiveness
Continuous monitoring of citizens	Digital platforms allow constant surveillance of speech. Professors are subject to surveillance by the audience during classes.
A citizen's apprehension about the external world, frequently seen as a potential adversary or absence of civilization,	Citizens fear not conforming to the opinions of political correctness, representing the "civilised" world.
Adherence to societal norms; deviation from these norms is viewed as incorrect.	Individuality is encouraged only in agreement with politically correct expectations. No opinions against minorities.

Every dystopian landscape uses education to maintain its control over the citizens, an education built on selected lectures or, better said, on selecting which books reach the peoples' minds. Censorship in totalitarian regimes also takes the form of cancelling books. Inspired by the communist regime, well-known for its appetite for controlling the editorial market and the citizens' readings, many imaginary dystopian regimes use the idea of cancelling books or limiting access to books as an essential feature of building obedience through lack of knowledge.

### Shakespeare - to be or not to be cancelled?

William Shakespeare has been known in the history of English literature as the greatest writer/ playwriter. However, other labels have recently been attached to his name: a racist and an antisemite.

Huxley's *Brave New World* depicts Shakespeare's texts locked away due to the fear of miseducating people. Shakespeare is considered outdated regarding men-women relations by promoting courting, emotional love, and associated behavioural patterns. In contrast, the "new world", considered the real civilisation, is based on free sexualised love; emotions are considered a crime. *Soma*, the substance used as a happiness drug distributed to all citizens, is symbolically representative of the society's key-value promoted to people, who are expected to have as many sexual partners as possible and never attach emotionally to any. To feel is a crime unless it is not a sensorial experience offered as leisure by the governing bodies. With his love dramas and high emotions displayed in his texts, Shakespeare is just a decadent example of the old society's flaws. In Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*, all books are forbidden and burned. Still, pieces of knowledge reach people. Montag's change from a fireman to a regime's opponent is mediated, among other factors, by some loose pages from Shakespeare.

Nowadays, perception of Shakespeare includes opinions of the author's texts as dangerous for society and promoting an outdated way of behaving and thinking. In the academic landscape, there is even a course called Cancel Shakespeare at the University of British Columbia. The course's presentation states:

Should Shakespeare be cancelled? While Shakespeare's works have long been understood as 'necessary' reading, many question Shakespeare's dominance within the study of literature written in English and his enduring cultural influence. On one side, some argue that there is still much to be gained from reading, watching, and studying Shakespeare; on the other side, some argue that Shakespeare's works are carriers of racism, misogyny, and other forms of violence that we need to leave behind. We will read a number of Shakespeare's plays—*Taming of the Shrew*, *The Comedy of Errors*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *Othello*, *Measure for Measure*, and *The Tempest*—closely and use our close reading to examine debates on social media and in the news about cancelling Shakespeare<sup>7</sup>.

The instructor of this course, Professor Dennis Britton, interviewed by CBC, shows that Shakespeare used the dichotomy of white and black to symbolise good and evil. No women played the parts during Shakespeare's time, while coloured skin characters are usually depicted as negative, and so on. He concludes, "we want more women and more writers of colour in our curriculum, so something has to go, and Shakespeare should equally be on the chopping block. You can't make room for new voices without getting rid of some of the old"<sup>8</sup>.

Dennis Britton also discusses the initiative of Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) theatre-makers. They issued a public statement signed by over 300 persons titled *We See You White American Theatre*. The statement accuses the world of white theatre-makers of using only white contributors, supporting racism, exclusively funding white initiatives, covering management mistakes, and promoting anti-Blackness. The entire world of the theatre, with all its positions where white people are in charge, is considered a house of cards that will fall. The statement finishes in an almost menacing voice: "This ends TODAY. We are about to introduce you to yourself. Signed, The Ground We Stand On"<sup>9</sup>. The movement's tenets mention that the initiative is centred on love. Still, the precedent paragraphs state that the petitioners' representatives will not stay at a discussion table; instead, they will shake the table and sit wherever they desire, together with a self-description as "We are not 'well-behaved'. We are sarcastic and a movement with attitude"<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> University of British Columbia, *Cancel Shakespeare Course*, retrieved 01.06.2022 from <https://english.ubc.ca/section/engl-241-2021w-001/>.

<sup>8</sup> Bridgette Watson, *To cancel or not to cancel Shakespeare? Meet the English professor flipping the script on the Bard*, retrieved 01.06.2022 from <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/shakespeare-theatre-colonial-history-1.6372904>.

<sup>9</sup> BIPOC, *Statement*, retrieved 01.06.2022 from <https://www.weseeyouwat.com/statement>.

<sup>10</sup> *BIPOC Tenets*, retrieved 01.06.2022 from <https://www.weseeyouwat.com/about-1>.

Dennis Britton and BIPOC are not the only ones asking for Shakespeare's cancellation. Far from it. Amanda MacGregor, a freelance writer, librarian, and one of the contributors to *School Library Journal*, dedicates an article to this theme, quoting the views of other literature teachers. Where some refuse to teach Shakespeare, others propose to change the Shakespearian texts to be more inclusive. E.g. Romeo and Juliet can be taught, according to Sarah Mulhem Gross, through the lens of "adolescent brain development with a side of toxic masculinity analysis"<sup>11</sup>.

The universality of Shakespeare's plays is also questioned with regard to the flaws depicted in the texts by contemporary society. If universality addresses universal human themes, easily enumerated as love and hate, friendship, loyalty, life and death, betrayal, and many others, the answer does not disqualify Shakespeare. Amanda MacGregor writes: "Shakespeare's works are full of problematic, outdated ideas, with plenty of misogyny, racism, homophobia, classism, anti-Semitism, and misogynoir. Which raises the question: Is Shakespeare more valuable or relevant than myriad other authors who have written masterfully about anguish, love, history, comedy, and humanity in the past 400-odd years?"<sup>12</sup>

Do these flaws erase Shakespeare's value in the History of English Literature? Some aspects must be considered to establish the context for William Shakespeare's creation and its value. Since ancient times, acting was an exclusively male occupation, and this tradition encompassed all the civilised societies of those times. The same coordinates applied to the Elizabethan society in which Shakespeare lived and created. The theatre companies had only male employees. Women as actresses rarely appeared in street representations, but a woman on stage was illegal until 1661. Acting on a stage was connected to prostitution and immorality for women. Women's legal condition in Elizabethan times was inferior compared to men's<sup>13</sup>. At the same time, castrated men, known as *castrati*, interpreted women's parts in operas. Nonetheless, there are no requirements nowadays (still!) to cancel Verdi for *Nabucco*. The contemporary Shakespeare's Globe company occasionally continues the tradition of travesty, which, in terms of gender fluidity, should be considered a bonus for Shakespeare, even if this was not the reason behind the travesty of his time, as mentioned above.

Shakespeare's value does not reside only in the content of his plays according to the contemporary mentality and social expectancies. He played a vital role in shaping modern English. Through his work, he helped standardise spelling and pronunciation. Thousands of new words and phrases were introduced into

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<sup>11</sup>Sarah Mulhem Gross apud Amanda MacGregor, *To Teach or Not To Teach: Is Shakespeare Still Relevant for Today's Students?*, retrieved 01.06.2022 from <https://www.slj.com/story/to-teach-or-not-to-teach-is-shakespeare-still-relevant-to-todays-students-libraries-classic-literature-canon>.

<sup>12</sup> Amanda MacGregor, *To Teach or Not To Teach: Is Shakespeare Still Relevant for Today's Students?*, retrieved 01.06.2022 from <https://www.slj.com/story/to-teach-or-not-to-teach-is-shakespeare-still-relevant-to-todays-students-libraries-classic-literature-canon>.

<sup>13</sup> A.R. Brownmuller, Michael Hattaway (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to English Renaissance Drama*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003, pp. 108-126.

English because of his work<sup>14</sup>. Shakespeare innovated theatre and literature and developed the dramatic potential of intrigue, characterisation, and literary genre. The question remaining in terms of the history of English literature is: is this field can be appropriately taught after erasing the Elizabethan period and, in extenso, all the periods and writers bearing the fault of unconformity to the contemporary social landscape? Would not this mean erasing the history and the representation of past societies?

Other accusations are related to Shakespeare's antisemitism in *The Merchant of Venice*. For clarification, the Jews' expulsion from England took place in 1290. Until then, they were allowed to loan money with interest, an activity forbidden to the Christians. In 1275, King Edward I gave a decree forbidding Jews from lending money. In need of money, the King negotiated with the Parliament the expulsion of the Jews receiving in exchange a tax of 116,000 £. The Jewish population returned to England only in 1650, in Cromwell's time, long after Shakespeare's death<sup>15</sup>.

Therefore, Shakespeare's depiction of Jews cannot be a literary representation of his direct experience, but one based on things he had known from his contemporary social imagery. Moreover, the Christians are no better represented in the play since Portia has no mercy. However, preaching it and her language denotes discrimination when disguised as a judge by using the dichotomy merchant-Jew. Shakespeare's play is based on his time's mentality, which seems antisemitic based on the historical period coordinates. Still, he does not favour Christians either in the *Merchant of Venice*.

In Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, Cassius addresses Brutus such: "You have no such mirrors as will turn/ Your hidden worthiness into your eye,/ That you might see your shadow"<sup>16</sup>. (Shakespeare, 2010: 364). Perhaps contemporary society finds it difficult to look in the mirror of the human past for fear of recognising and accepting the perennity of the human condition's flaws. Covering the mirror may be the solution it proposes.

### **Cancel Seuss (and other work of children's literature)**

Theodore Geisel Seuss, or Dr Seuss, is one of the most loved authors of children's books. His rhymes and illustrations were appreciated by generations, which brought him, in 1984, a special Pulitzer Prize for his unique contribution spanning nearly five decades to the education and delight of American children and their parents. Ironically, the year of his award is also the year titling Orwell's well-known dystopia representing a totalitarian regime where the minute of hate is

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<sup>14</sup> Margreta de Grazia, "Shakespeare and The Craft of Language", in Margreta de Grazia, Stalney Wells (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003, pp. 49-63.

<sup>15</sup> Emily Amt, Katherine Allen Smith (eds.), *Medieval England: 500-1500*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2018.

<sup>16</sup> William Shakespeare, "The Tragedy of Julius Caesar", Act 1 Scene 2, in *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*, Glasgow, Geddes and Grosset, 2010, p. 364.

managed as a tool by the Ministry of Love. Dr Seuss's books pass now through a minute of hate in the name of love (of political correctness).

In the new politically correct competition, the winners are *And to Think That I Saw It on Mulberry Street*, *If I Ran the Zoo*, *McElligot's Pool*, *On Beyond Zebra!*, *Scrambled Eggs Super!* and *The Cat's Quizzer*. These are the books Seuss wrote, which were retired from libraries due to a stereotypical representation of African, Asian, and Arab people. Some of the images presenting people in stereotypical manners are presented as follows.

The Arabs appear in traditional clothing, the Asian people carry chopsticks, and the African males wear leaves skirts and their hair up. Indeed, the physical features of African people, in many images of Dr Seuss, resemble drawings of monkeys, which is inappropriate. On the other hand, chopsticks are nowadays used in Chinese restaurants even in the Western world, while their physical appearance is specific to the eyes. The camels and the traditional clothing are still observable in many parts of the Arabian world and are often visually depicted in touristic commercials.

It is not only Dr Seuss illustrated books which suffered retiring from libraries. The New York Times shows: "Editions of illustrated series like *Tintin* and *Babar*, which have long been accused of promoting colonialist and imperialist viewpoints, have been withdrawn from some libraries following criticism that their European authors depicted nonwhite characters as savages"<sup>17</sup>.

The company founded by Dr Seuss's family after his death agreed on retiring the books from the libraries and no longer editing them in the original form, expressing the commitment to working with specialists to select the titles no longer licensed for a new edition based on their portraying of people "in ways that are hurtful and wrong"<sup>18</sup>.

In an interview, Philip Nel, a Distinguished Professor at Kansas State University who specialises in Children's Literature, refused the label "banned" attached to Seuss's books: "They're not being banned. They're not being cancelled. It's just a decision to no longer sell them"<sup>19</sup>. Roland Barthes wrote that the authentic existence of a text is when the reader approaches it. Without new readers, one can conclude that the text enters the non-existential zone<sup>20</sup>. The author's death is not his physical death but the death of his literary production. By cancelling the texts, the author is also cancelled.

Other authors already experienced the cancel culture, too. The images in Richard Scarry's books, another well-known children's literature author, became

<sup>17</sup> Alexandra Alter, Elizabeth A. Harris, *Dr. Seuss Books Are Pulled, and a 'Cancel Culture' Controversy Erupts*, retrieved 01.06.2022 from <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/03/04/books/dr-seuss-books.html>.

<sup>18</sup> Dora Mekouar, *Is It Time to Cancel Dr Seuss Duet o Racist Imagery?*, retrieved 01.06.2022 from [https://www.voanews.com/a/episode\\_it-time-cancel-dr-seuss-due-racist-imagery-4630596/6115578.html](https://www.voanews.com/a/episode_it-time-cancel-dr-seuss-due-racist-imagery-4630596/6115578.html).

<sup>19</sup> Philip Nel apud FrontList, *'It's a moral decision': Dr Seuss books are being 'recalled' not cancelled, expert says*, retrieved 01.06.2022 from <https://www.frontlist.in/frontlist-its-a-moral-decision-dr-seuss-books-are-being-recalled-not-cancelled-expert-says>.

<sup>20</sup> Roland Barthes, *The Death of The Author*, London, Taylor&Francis, 2018.

more gender-inclusive by changing images of a bear police officer with a female bear police officer and by presenting a father cat with a stroller instead of a mother<sup>21</sup>. Road Dahl, an author widely translated, modified his book *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* to eliminate the accusations of racism for using characters such as coloured skin pygmies<sup>22</sup>.

As a reaction to Dr Seuss's cancelled books and the cancelling series in children's literature and movies, Jon Robson composed an ironic poem in the style of Dr Seuss's rhymes. David M. Weinberg, the vice president of the Jerusalem Institute for Strategy and Security, cites the poem in an article:

There is nothing, no nothing, that (the woke) find in the past,  
That they won't burn to ash with a self-righteous blast.  
When they're done with their work then a wasteland you'll see,  
Not a book will be standing, and not a movie.  
There are some who once thought they could gain from PC,  
It will strike down my foes but it won't target me.  
Sadly now it is clear that its rage knows no bounds,  
And upon its old friends it will set its hell-hounds...  
I'm no racist, no hater, but this I decree,  
Others too had their faults but all's not well with me.  
So please fix what you can and repent what you can't,  
But don't ever let loose with a paranoid rant.  
That the past was a plot and that all things were wrong,  
Until history ended and you came along.  
Thus to Seuss at the close of this poem I return,  
And I say with conviction his books must not burn<sup>23</sup>.

There is, in exchange, another phenomenon manifesting in parallel: the replacement of "outdated" narratives for children, sometimes in a manner that reminds once again of a dystopian social landscape. Concerning the world of children's stories, I signal the presence of double language books that, in their drawings, are destined to belong to the children's imagination, but the language is related to sexuality. *Would you like to play with my ass?* and *Would you like to play with my balls?* are examples of inviting questions in what may seem to be, at first glance, children's literature. Image 1 presents the cover of the books. The content is similar in terms of drawings and more sexualised as language.

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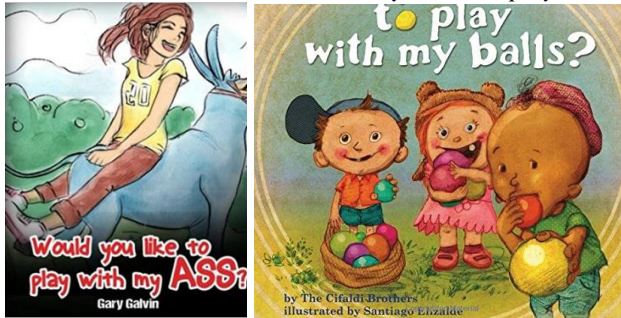
<sup>21</sup> Alexandra Alter, Elizabeth A. Harris, *Dr. Seuss Books Are Pulled, and a 'Cancel Culture' Controversy Erupts*, retrieved 01.06.2022 from <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/03/04/books/dr-seuss-books.html>.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>23</sup> Jon Robson apud David M. Weinberg, *Could The Bible Be the Cancel Culture's Next Victim? – opinion*, retrieved 01.06.2022 from <https://www.jpost.com/opinion/could-the-bible-be-cancel-cultures-next-victim-opinion-661732>.



Image 1: Books with dual language: Gary Galvin, *Would you like to play with my ass* and The Cifaldi Brothers, *Would you like to play with my balls?*



Source: [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com)

In some cases, Amazon warns the reader that the books can be inappropriate for children. The question of their availability to children remains and evokes, in my opinion, the teaching of sexual games to children in Huxley's *Brave New World*, where there were "the playrooms where, the weather having turned to rain, nine hundred older children were amusing themselves with bricks and clay modelling, hunt-the-zipper, and erotic play"<sup>24</sup>. Erotic play is the activity the children are taught and pushed into, in opposition with the times before Ford (the establisher of the new world), when "erotic play between children had been regarded as abnormal (there was a roar of laughter); and not only abnormal, actually immoral (no!); and had therefore been rigorously suppressed"<sup>25</sup>.

In another case, Amazon includes in the recommendations the following text:

Every now and then there comes a book that awakens the spirit of childlike joy and laughter in young and old alike. *Do You Want to Play With My Balls?* is just that kind of book, full of innocence and irreverence and sure to make every member of your family vomit with glee. At once shockingly direct, unabashedly sentimental, and totally asinine, *Do You Want to Play With My Balls?* is a visually stunning treat, embellished with brightly colored images by award winning illustrator Santiago Elizalde. It's a book for all occasions: baby showers, birthday parties, bedtime readings, brisses... No coffee table, nursery, or kindergarten is complete without a copy. Go ahead, read it to the kids! They'll love it, but won't have a clue as to why you're turning blue with laughter<sup>26</sup>.

Apparently, phrases such as "Girls don't like hairy balls."<sup>27</sup> have no negative impact on a child, whereas the artistic visual narratives of *Peter Pan*, *The Aristocats* and *Dumbo* are dangerous to children's proper development. They promote

<sup>24</sup> Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World* in *Complete works*, Hastings, Delphi Classics, 2018, p. 1426.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 1332-1333.

<sup>26</sup> The Cifaldi Brothers, *Do you want to play with my balls*, retrieved 01.06.2022. from <https://www.amazon.co.uk/Do-You-Want-Play-Balls/dp/098594871X>.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibidem*.

dangerous social and racial stereotypes, according to the reasons behind the process of removing the classic animated movies from the Disney Plus Channel children's profiles and allowing them for adults with a disclaimer related to the inappropriate content. Redirecting viewers to their site Stories Matter, the Walt Disney Company transmits to viewers:

As part of our ongoing commitment to diversity and inclusion, we are in the process of reviewing our library and adding advisories to content that includes negative depictions or mistreatment of people or cultures. Rather than removing this content, we see an opportunity to spark conversation and open dialogue on history that affects us all. We also want to acknowledge that some communities have been erased or forgotten altogether, and we're committed to giving voice to their stories as well<sup>28</sup>.

Which are the mentioned flaws? According to WDW (Walt Disney World) News Today, *The Aristocats* includes a cat character which depicts the Asian people irreverently by playing the piano with chopsticks, having slanted eyes, and singing with a bad English accent. In addition, *Peter Pan* presents the Native Americans stereotypically and uses the term "redskin", while *Dumbo* perpetuates the tradition of black minstrels through the act of a crow singing<sup>29</sup>. The question is if these stereotypes the cartoons are accused of are more dangerous for the children's minds than the books sold on Amazon and presented above.

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A statistic issued by Pen America shows that in the period between 1<sup>st</sup> of July 2001 and 31<sup>st</sup> of March 2022, there were 1,586 banned books<sup>30</sup>. I know no statistics on a worldwide level. Jonathan Friedman, in charge of free expression and education fields to Pen America, declared: "unprecedented in its scale, and in the proliferation of organised groups who are trying to remove whole lists of books at once in multiple school districts, across a growing number of states."<sup>31</sup> Moreover, Debra Caldwell-Stone, director of the American Library Association's Office for Intellectual Freedom, stated: "From my place in the world, I've never seen anything like it"<sup>32</sup>.

Pen America signalled attempts to physically destroy banned books<sup>33</sup>. Washington Post advances another dystopian landscape. The journal mentions the

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<sup>28</sup> Walt Disney Company, *Stories matter*, retrieved 01.06.2022 from <https://storiesmatter.thewaltdisneycompany.com>.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>30</sup> Angela Haupt, *The rise in book bans explained*, retrieved 01.06.2022 from <https://www.washingtonpost.com/books/2022/06/09/rise-book-bans-explained/>.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>32</sup> Caldwell-Stone apud Angela Haupt, *The rise in book bans explained*, retrieved 01.06.2022 from <https://www.washingtonpost.com/books/2022/06/09/rise-book-bans-explained/>.

<sup>33</sup> Pen America, *South Dakota School District May Physically Destroy Its Banned Books*, retrieved 01.06.2022 from <https://pen.org/press-release/vote-ahead-by-south-dakota-school-district-to-physically-destroy-its-banned-books-a-move-pen-america-says-reflects-uncompromising-extremism/>.

ensorship applied to the students, which shows that the Republicans proposed that students will only be allowed to search for online resources only some books, or, in other words, they will not be allowed to search for specific books. CNN shows: “Though battles over access to controversial titles traditionally have been fought district by district, and even school by school, Republican-controlled states including Florida, Georgia, Tennessee and Texas are now pushing statewide rules that make it easier for critics to remove books they dislike from school libraries in every community.”<sup>34</sup>. The same article shows the possibility of extending the banning to adult readers and public libraries.

Cancel culture variously operates on books, from changing contents to cancelling publication of new editions, from refusing to teach the respective books to the desire of physically cancelling the author. Therefore, besides the legitimate question of when books will become undesirable for contemporary society due to various human behaviours and attitudes reflected in their pages, there is also a question of self-censorship concerning the writers. Are they in danger of creating within the limits of the new paradigm, or will they have the courage to continue to represent human life with its flaws and according to the times they depict?

As Pen America shows, “divisive book bans and censorious threats have taken hold in schools, academia, and the public square, particularly regarding books that center racism, history, and diversity. This has raised questions: Who is allowed to be heard? Who decides?”<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Ronald Brownstein, *Book Bans to Move to Center Stage in The Red-State Education Wars*, retrieved 01.06.2022 from <https://edition.cnn.com/2022/04/05/politics/republican-states-book-ban-race-lgbtq/index.html>.

<sup>35</sup> Pen America, *Banned Books Week 2021. Suppressing The Freedom to Learn*, ed. cit.

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