

YOUTH ANXIETIES

Living up to BEAUTY STANDARDS



ILLUSTRATION: SALMAN SAKIB SHAHRYAR

Looking back at the whimsical, witty, and wonderful world of Roald Dahl

Amidst my hazy childhood memories, one terrifying phase stands out vividly: the time I was on the lookout for witches. Whenever I went out with my family, I would scan the room for these sinister beings — women with bald heads wearing wigs to hide their baldness and gloves to conceal their claws. They'd have blue spit and extraordinarily large nostrils. This was how Roald Dahl described witches in his book *The Witches*, and taught his readers to identify and stay safe from them. Since common sense often escaped my nine-year-old self, the practicality of women wearing gloves in Dhaka city did not occur to me. After all, how could Mr Dahl be wrong?

SIWAT QUADER

Roald Dahl's master storytelling captivated every child across the world. With his work selling over a million copies, being translated into 60 languages, and adapted into hundreds of movie and theatre productions, Dahl's contribution to children's literature is nothing short of legendary. He originally wrote most of his stories as bedtime tales for his children before they eventually made their way into the hearts of millions as published books.

Dahl's stories create a world of their own. His writings are whimsical, heart-warming, and easy to picture, which makes the reader feel like they are part of the storyteller's universe. Hidden in the simplicity is a message that is as meaningful as it is timeless, one that he never failed to relay to his young readers.

Through his storytelling, he reminds us that we are not just confined to any space but one that is brimming with opportunities, where anything can happen at any time. You might find a giant magical peach growing in your garden, come across a big friendly dream catcher giant, or even a wicked Grand High Witch.

Coming across such interesting characters and ideas as a child was fascinating. It seemed well within the bounds of reality, especially with Dahl's creative stroke, through which he drew parallels between fantastical characters and real people.

In his books, Dahl introduces quirky characters like Willy Wonka in *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* and Miss Trunchbull in *Matilda*. Willy Wonka, though an atypical genius, innovator, and owner of an otherworldly chocolate factory, was a self-absorbed man who did not bode well with criticism. The evil headmistress — Miss Trunchbull — enjoyed scaring and punishing her students.

Through such characters, Dahl conveys to his young audience that the world is filled with people of varying temperaments — some admirable, others flawed, and a few downright villainous. He presents the darker aspects of human nature in a way that is both accessible and understandable to children. In contrast, Dahl, through his protagonists, also influenced young readers to believe in their own abilities and feel empowered in their skin.

My first encounter with Dahl was through *Matilda*. At the time, the 200 something pages seemed never ending and were overwhelming for my younger self. However, the scrawny cartoon image of a girl standing on a pile of books in a dark pink coloured book cover was what intrigued me. The illustration of Matilda made me eager to

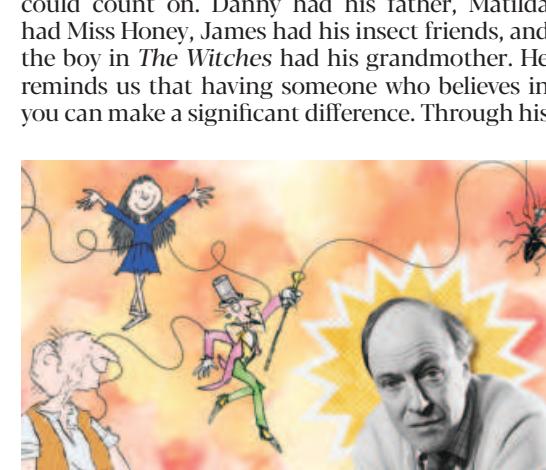


ILLUSTRATION: SYEDA AFRIN TARANNUM

find out the story behind it. The loosely sketched illustration that I am referring to was, of course, the work of Quentin Blake. It would be an injustice to talk about Roald Dahl without also mentioning the brilliant illustrator of his books. Blake's illustrations gave life to Dahl's characters and made sure that his books left a lasting first impression on the readers.

One other thing that resonated with me was how the protagonists had someone with whom they shared a special bond, a companion they could count on. Danny had his father, Matilda had Miss Honey, James had his insect friends, and the boy in *The Witches* had his grandmother. He reminds us that having someone who believes in you can make a significant difference. Through his

stories, he highlights the importance of love, trust, and friendship over the course of one's life.

Although many of us have now become mechanical adults trying to decode Kafka and Dostoevsky, a wave of nostalgia resonates with Roald Dahl's works. Whenever I catch sight of Dahl's vibrant coloured volumes with loosely sketched humorous figures peeking out among my monochrome novels, I am transported back to afternoons spent with my *nani*. She was lost in the trance of the cassette playing *Lalon Geeti*, and I wandered in Mr Willy Wonka's chocolate factory.

Like many things I wish to experience for the first time again, reading Roald Dahl's books is one of them. His books are reminders for shy, quiet kids such as myself that a vast world of imagination exists, where magic is real and there are no limits. His books are a reminder that there is more to life than societal norms, expectations, and the eternal longing for more.

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TINATH ZAEBA

If you've been on social media recently, you've most likely heard about the different aesthetics people are now making tutorials for. One moment, it's the clean girl aesthetic — dewy skin, slick bun, and gold hoops, because for some reason that's supposed to be the standard for hygiene. Next, it's old money energy — highlights, glossy hair, and striped sweaters. Then comes the doe-eyed look, with eyeliner tricks promising bigger, softer, more innocent eyes. You don't even ask yourself if you're pretty. You ask yourself, "Am I deer pretty?" or "Am I Hailey Bieber Strawberry Dewy pretty?"

It might sound like satire, but all of these trends are quite popular on TikTok and Instagram now. I will never forget how my ten-year-old student said she

requires a lot of effort to maintain. The "I woke up like this" glow usually comes after three serums, two concealers, and a bit of editing dressed up as natural. That's the trick: what looks spontaneous is really curated, and what's sold as minimalism ends up demanding maximum effort.

The aesthetics blur into values. "Old money energy" isn't just about beige cords; it hints at class, superiority, and restraint. The "clean girl" appearance suggests that looking unkempt is somehow unclean, that a single hair out of place is a character flaw, so you must use a spray or gel and also carry them with you in your bag when going out.

These standards aren't only about appearance. They sneak into one's identity, teaching young people that their worth is tied to whether they can pull off a look.

Moreover, in the 1950s, you knew when you were looking at an advert. Today, on TikTok or Instagram, the ad doesn't even look like an ad. Instead, it looks like your favourite influencer sharing their 12-step morning routine. Basically, instead of looking like advertising, it looks like advice from someone like you.

What makes this all the more complicated is how beauty standards themselves don't just pop out of nowhere. They have a history, often tied to power and money.

Back in the colonial era, pale skin was prized because it meant you weren't out in the sun working the fields. It was a sign of wealth, leisure, and superiority. Fast forward to now, and suddenly tanning is what screams luxury, because if you can afford long holidays or spray tans, you must be doing well.

The rules have flipped completely, but the game stayed the same: beauty is never just about aesthetics; it's about status. This is probably why it feels so absurd. One year, it's all about snatched eyebrows, and the next, it's about micro needling. One decade pale and powdered, the next bronzed and glowing. Even a year back, slicked buns were the craze, and now, it's a bouncy blowout.

None of it is fixed. It's a moving target designed to keep people chasing, because if trends don't change, industries don't profit. When you realise that the rules themselves make no sense, the anxiety hits harder.

And then there's the constant comparison. Social media doesn't just

show you a trend. It shows you thousands of faces doing it better. It's not just that the standard is impossible, because most influencers and celebrities can afford the expensive maintenance, but it's that you're reminded of it every few seconds.

But the fatigue doesn't end with comparison. Rather, it seeps into consumption. Every aesthetic comes with its own shopping list: gloss for one look, a serum for another, and the exact shade of blush that will make you "caramel latte" cute (yes, these are actual terms).

The pressure isn't only to look a certain way but to constantly prove you're investing in yourself through purchases. Comparison makes you anxious about how you look; consumption makes you anxious about what you own.

So what does this mean for young people? The *Barbie* movie monologue is true. Beauty feels like both armour and target at the same time. Conforming can feel safe but expensive; resisting can feel bold but isolating. Either way, the anxiety simmers. It's not just about whether eyeliner wings are foxy or deer; it's about whether you fit in, whether you'll be noticed, and whether you're enough.

That's why the backlash matters. You can see it in acne positivity TikToks, bare-faced selfies, and people openly joking about how ridiculous these reinventions are. These small acts of rebellion chip away at the illusion that beauty is a test you can pass or fail. They remind us that not everyone is buying in, and not every face has to look like it belongs to a trend. But even so, it takes courage to go bare-faced when everyone else seems filtered.

In the end, beauty standards today leave many young people in a constant performance loop: act effortless but work for it, look natural but curate it, be unique but also trendy. While it has always existed to a certain extent, it is a lot more prevalent now thanks to the influencers and social media revolution.

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wasn't "fox pretty", and she had bought the perfect liner to change that.

Trends arrive like waves, faster than ever, handing out new "looks" like fast fashion — trendy one week, cringe the next.

The cost of keeping up isn't only money; it's the constant worry of falling behind. If you don't match the latest vibe, don't worry; let's fix it. There's foundation for "glass skin", lip liner for "quiet luxury", and serums that promise the perfect glow. Suddenly, your makeup bag just doesn't seem enough. Industries are making money not just off insecurity, but off how fast one craze gets ditched for another.

And the irony is just there. Take the "clean girl" aesthetic — it's meant to be simple, natural, and effortless. Yet, it

Animals you should not keep as pets and why

TARANNUM KHONDKAR

Pets have become increasingly common across Bangladeshi households. With that, a fixation on owning a "foreign" or exotic pet has also taken over the population. People now pay hundreds, if not thousands, of taka to own an animal whose physical and emotional needs they cannot possibly meet.

As the trend of keeping exotic pets becomes normalised, pet owners have forgotten a simple truth — these animals were never meant for captivity, nor are they suited for Bangladesh's tropical climate.

But where do we draw the line? Once you start uncovering the pain and exploitation these poor animals endure, that line starts becoming painfully apparent.

Do not keep foreign cats or dogs
Cats and dogs are the most common pets in this country. Yet, an abundance of strays are still on the streets, starving and unwanted. This can be attributed to the fixation on high-end breeds, on which people spend a fortune. Not only does it do a disservice to the equally lovable local animals, but the foreign breeds, too, are not suited to live in the hot and humid climate of Bangladesh. They struggle silently, constantly sick or dehydrated, while their unwanted local counterparts go on begging for a home.

The exploitation is taken a step further with these animals being mercilessly bred through unethical practices. Breeders, with little to no knowledge regarding their needs, often force them to reproduce repeatedly until they pass

away. This practice persists due to the lack of regulation by authorities and the ever-increasing demand from people.

If you take away anything from this article, let it be this: stop buying foreign breeds.

Do not keep birds

Socially accepted to be a regular pet, but is a life bound in a cage all that they deserve? One glance outside your window — birds gliding freely without bounds — should give you the answer.

Most of the birds you see being showcased in pet shops are stolen from their habitats; their wings are clipped so that they cannot fly away to freedom. This scenario is not just the norm in the torturous streets of Katabon but also the local pet shops, where these animals are kept in disastrous conditions — cramped in cages. They soon fall victim to stress and anxiety, and pluck out their own feathers as a coping mechanism. Through our selfish desires of "owning" them, they are robbed of their innate natural gift — the right to fly.

Do not keep pets labelled "exotic"

The list for what can be considered "exotic" is far from exhaustive. Naturally, it includes tigers, monkeys, and snakes, but it also includes the small tortoises that people keep cramped in a fish bowl or the common hill mynas illegally poached from the hills to be sold as domestic pets.

Let us also not forget the "cute" rabbits and hamsters that are sold on the streets in too-small cages. Bought for a measly BDT 500, they are soon discarded once people realise how much effort is needed to raise them properly.

Being able to

afford an exotic animal does not mean that one should purchase it. A large number of them are illegally poached, causing them to slowly become extinct. They also carry dangerous diseases, such as salmonella in tortoises, risking the health of multiple lives, including children. These animals deserve the freedom to thrive in their natural habitat and should not be confined in the living rooms of humans.

The best way to enjoy the companionship of a pet while conserving wildlife is to adopt strays or rescue at-risk animals. Cats and dogs have evolved to live alongside humans; they are the perfect domestic companions and actually thrive with their human counterparts.

If you are looking for a more unique pet, pigeons are also an excellent choice. The only species of bird that mankind domesticated on a huge scale, pigeons thrive in a well-made house, which allows them to be free and your loveable pet at the same time.

As humans, we have a moral responsibility to let these animals live in their ecosystem, and not just as showpieces we call pets. Remember that every time you buy a wild or foreign animal, you snatch away a life they can thrive in, perpetuating the cycle of abuse that is inflicted upon them. Love for animals should not come at the cost of their own freedom or health. Instead of owning, taking a step back and simply admiring them goes a long way in protecting them from a world full of pain.

Tarannum Khondkar is a struggling student, a fur mom, and a contributor at the Daily Star.



PHOTO: UNSPLASH