Changing *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*
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B.A. Essay

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May 2014
Abstract

In this essay the various underlying themes in the two film adaptations of Roald Dahl’s book Charlie and the Chocolate Factory (1964) are examined. These film adaptations, Charlie and the Chocolate Factory (2005) directed by Tim Burton and Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory (1971) directed by Mel Stuart are discussed, in order to refute critical views such as found in a review by Bernard Beck. Beck states that Tim Burton’s film is darker and closer to Dahl’s original tale, whilst Mel Stuart’s film is light-hearted and benign. An examination of significant differences in characterisation as well as the themes of war, nationalism, sugar and racism shows that Tim Burton’s film, whilst dark, is not a return to Dahl’s original story. Similarly, closer scrutiny shows that whilst Mel Stuart’s film appears light-hearted, the inclusion of political commentaries intended for adults rather than children means that much of its content is actually very dark indeed.
# Table of Contents

Introduction ........................................................................................................................................ 1  
Adapting Characters to the Big Screen ............................................................................................. 2  
Augustus Gloop and the Theme of War ............................................................................................ 5  
Control of Sugar Consumption ........................................................................................................ 8  
Racism and the Oompa Loompas ..................................................................................................... 13  
Conclusion ....................................................................................................................................... 17  
Works Cited ...................................................................................................................................... 21
Introduction

*Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* was completed by Roald Dahl in 1964 and has gone on to sell “over 20 million copies worldwide” being “available in 55 languages” (“Charlie and the Chocolate Factory”). The book has become part of the canon of English children’s literature and remains hugely popular to this day. In writing *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* Dahl was influenced by memories of his past when he and other students “were engaged as ‘taste testers’ for a chocolate company” (“Charlie and the Chocolate Factory”). Dahl’s fascination with chocolate shines through in the book and it is unsurprising that he manages to captivate children so powerfully in the abstract world of Willy Wonka’s factory. However the book was not well received by all and in her criticism of some of the less tasteful aspects of Dahl’s story, including the enslavement of the Oompa Loompas, Eleanor Cameron stated: “Popularity in itself does not prove anything about a book’s essential worth” (Cameron). Nevertheless the story has remained immensely popular with its film adaptations continuing Dahl’s legacy on screen.

In *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* Dahl presents a fascinating environment to the reader. Willy Wonka’s factory appears to be a world containing endless contraptions of all shapes and sizes that create mysterious sweets in novel ways. The book presents an ostensibly happy tale of the pleasurable journey that Charlie Bucket takes through Wonka’s factory and when Charlie eventually reaches the end of this journey he is informed that he will in fact be given Willy Wonka’s factory, a dream come true for any child. It is only when one remembers that the other children have not fared so well that some of the more complex issues of *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* become clear. The punishment of the children is an issue that highlights a desire to show that good children are rewarded and bad children are not. Other interesting features of the book include the tone of racism shown towards the fictional Oompa Loompas as well as Dahl’s deliberate avoidance of telling the reader which countries his characters come from. The book is often read in its simple form, as it can be quite easy to overlook its deeper messages. However if one considers the story for a little longer it is apparent the Dahl’s book often provides commentaries which children may not fully understand. Sometimes these commentaries have been carried over to the
films that followed whereas sometimes they have been changed by their adaptation to film. With this knowledge in hand a discussion of the deeper meanings of the film adaptations of Dahl’s story provides a logical basis for the debate that follows.

“The book [Charlie and the Chocolate Factory] has been made into movies twice with different flavors. […] The recent one is supposed to be closer to [Roald] Dahl’s dark vision than the earlier one, which seemed more benign and light-hearted in its punishment of the brats” (Beck, 27). This is an assertion of Bernard Beck’s in his discussion of the treatment of misbehaving children in film and on television, and it is this statement which forms the focal point of this essay. In particular, the aim of this study is to challenge the assumption that the earlier film adaptation of Charlie and the Chocolate Factory was somehow light-hearted in its treatment, not just of children but in the broader sense of other subject matter as well.

As one delves into the story and progression of key themes in Mel Stuart’s 1971 film, it becomes clear that whilst the earlier adaptation does have its light-hearted moments, the story is far from the benign and light-hearted moniker which Beck gives it. Issues of race, nationalism and war, as well as the treatment of the children themselves, show depth and complexity; these issues are, if anything, more substantial than in Tim Burton’s adaptation. Upon consideration, the differences between the two film adaptations of Charlie and the Chocolate Factory clearly reveal that the earlier adaptation, Mel Stuart’s Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory (1971), is not in any way light-hearted and benign. Furthermore, Tim Burton’s Charlie and the Chocolate Factory (2005), far from being “closer to Dahl’s dark vision”, in many ways updates itself away from the original story of Charlie and the Chocolate Factory.

Adapting Characters to the Big Screen

Charlie Bucket, the protagonist of Charlie and the Chocolate Factory, is adapted in a number of ways as he goes through transitions from the book to the 1971 film adaptation and finally to the more modern 2005 film version. One of the most notable changes to Charlie’s story is his lack of a father in the first film adaptation. This change is in stark contrast to the complete family of the book and its later adaptation. The lack
of a father changes Charlie and sets him up as a child that is even more impoverished and unlucky compared to the other stories. Charlie’s bad luck and poverty are confirmed as Grandpa Joe complains, “He works too hard for a little boy,” and Grandma Josephine explains the woes of the family as being caused by the father’s death, saying, “If only his father were alive” (Stuart). Aside from the effect upon the characterisation of Charlie, the missing father and his replacement by Charlie as the head of the family represents a highly patriarchal society where Charlie’s mother washes clothes for money and makes soup but Charlie brings home the bread and complains that cabbage water is “not enough.” Whilst Tim Burton’s adaptation from 2005 returns Charlie’s father to his original position within the story (a poor worker at a toothpaste factory), it is interesting that the same adaptation simultaneously changes Willy Wonka’s position in the story by showing the ways in which his childhood is affected by his father. The character of Willy Wonka’s father does not exist in the other versions of Charlie and the Chocolate Factory and in this way it appears that even as Tim Burton’s adaptation does away with the change that makes Charlie fatherless, the film also creates complications in the issues that Willy Wonka inherits from his regimented upbringing. Beck notes that Tim Burton’s adaptation “is supposed to be closer to Dahl’s dark vision” (Beck, 27). Yet the creative license used simply in the introduction of Willy’s father and the important role that he plays in the story are the first signs that Burton’s fidelity to the original is debatable, especially when one considers that the end of the film resolves any “dark vision” with a conciliatory embrace between Willy and his father.

One of the most remarkable things about Charlie’s character in Mel Stuart’s adaptation is that he is just as mischievous as any of the other children. In fact it is a display of hypocrisy that Charlie is allowed to win anything at all. This is clear when Wonka says, “You stole fizzy, lifting drinks. [...] You get nothing. You lose” (Stuart). However despite this apparent punishment of Charlie for behaving like the other children and drinking something that should not be consumed, Charlie is almost instantly released from any blame, supposedly because he returns the everlasting gobstopper that he has. In reality it is vital that Charlie win the contest because Charlie’s success is central to the happy conclusion of the story. The importance of a happy ending in Stuart’s adaptation is obvious as Willy Wonka concludes the film by
telling Charlie: “Don’t forget what happened to the man who suddenly got everything he ever wanted”; “he lived happily ever after” (Stuart).

The fact that Charlie breaks the rules but still lives “happily ever after” in Stuart’s adaptation has an important impact on the message of the story. Beck argues that “Much of the charm of the book and the two movies is the way it produces the joyful thrill of retribution [...] to make the monsters and their feckless parents suffer” (Beck, 27). Charlie’s exemption from punishment in the first adaptation focuses this message as it becomes more important that the “monsters” and their parents be punished rather than the thoughtless Charlie who makes one error in judgement. Charlie is therefore free of obligation because he has been good in the past whilst the other children who constantly misbehave are punished. Tim Burton’s adaptation removes Charlie’s misbehaviour entirely, on the other hand, leaving Charlie as the seemingly perfect child. There are no fizzy lifting drinks and there is subsequently no reason for Wonka to be angry with Charlie, even for an instant. In this sense the second adaptation shows the characters of the children as being more polarised, either completely perfect in Charlie’s case or absolutely terrible in the case of the other children; there is no in between and there is no room for misbehaviour from Charlie.

Of the other children in Charlie and the Chocolate factory there are two who stand out as being adapted to the new medium in significant ways. The first of these characters is Mike Teavee who should really have been renamed in the 2005 adaptation in light of his new interest in video games as opposed to television. This change is another example of a shift away from the book, as the Mike Teavee of Burton’s adaptation updates the film to bring it “closer to the audience’s frame of reference” (Sanders, 21). In fact, not only is Mike Teavee a video game addict, but he is also highly intelligent, explaining his method of finding the golden ticket by stating: “All you had to do was check the manufacturing dates, offset by weather and the derivative of the Nikkei index” (Burton). Clearly this Mike Teavee is a long shot from the Mike Teavee of Roald Dahl’s book and Stuart’s film, whose only true desire is to watch television and acquire a gun. Ultimately their fates are the same, but though there is nothing wrong with adaptation, the updated Mike Teavee of Burton’s film is not a character that proves Tim Burton’s faithfulness to the original, particularly as regards his heightened intelligence.
**Augustus Gloop and the Theme of War**

One of the most heavily altered characters in the adaptations of *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* is Augustus Gloop. The importance of Augustus Gloop cannot be overstated as he has a big influence on the thematic focus and the audience’s perceived danger to other characters. Gloop is introduced in Stuart’s film as an overweight boy from Dusselheim and it is here that the transformation begins. The Augustus seen in the book is not identifiable as being from any particular country; instead his hunger, greed, and bad health are the focus of our introduction to the unsavoury ticket-holders to come. In contrast, the introduction of the adapted character seen in Mel Stuart’s version is constantly interlaced with markers that enforce his link to Germany. Examples include: Strong German accents, Augustus’ Father’s profession as “Pork Butcher” and of particular note, the description of Augustus as “The fame of Western Germany” (Stuart). In these ways Augustus is demarcated as a true German by association with German stereotypes. Augustus’ German Nationality may seem harmless to begin with but there are important implications that prove how dark and deep Stuart’s adaptation can become as the story progresses. First of all, as a symbol of the German people, Augustus’ size and greed mirror an expansionist Germany fresh in the mind of the adult audience. Though twenty-six years had passed when Stuart’s film was released, the devastation of World War Two would certainly not have been forgotten. Augustus’ description as “The fame of Western Germany” highlights this fact as the separation of Germany was a direct and lasting result of the end of the war. Of course, thanks to what one could call the transnational tone of Dahl’s original story, which assigns none of the children a set nationality, any of the characters could have been made German. The choice of Augustus is therefore undeniably specific with his hunger and, importantly, greed shown by association to be German failings.

Aside from politicising the film, another significant result of Stuart’s choice to turn Augustus into a representation of Germany becomes clear when one considers his exit from the chocolate factory. Augustus is the first to leave the chocolate factory in the book and this is no different in the films that follow. The important distinction is, however, once again that Stuart’s adaptation made Augustus a German – the only German of importance in the story. Augustus’ immediate expulsion from the
supposedly happy world of the chocolate factory segregates the perceived ill-doers of World War Two from the heroes, preventing bad countries from receiving any of the comforts deserved by the present victorious countries of the United States and Great Britain. As if the results shown so far from Augustus’ transformation into a German are not enough, the boat which emerges on his exit in Stuart’s adaptation contains an important, if subtle, message. This message is concealed in the seating, or rather, the lack of seating on board. There are very clearly eight passenger seats in the boat, no more and no less. This leaves no room for Augustus Gloop and his mother. Such an image is a clear and dark augur for the remaining children since it suggests that there was, in some way, knowledge that one child would be lost before the trip down the chocolate river. If one expands on this knowledge it may not be a certainty, but Augustus’ failure in the one room of the story packed with edible candies in all directions certainly seems more likely than the failure of any of the other characters, who, though flawed, are not greedy in the same manner as Augustus. Thus it is clear once again that the choice to depict Augustus as a German and his immediate disappearance are designed as confirmations of German guilt and failure.

It is worth noting that Tim Burton maintained the German nationality of Augustus Gloop as well as the nationalities of the other children in his film adaptation of the book but removed other references to war, some subtle and some less so. Though never overtly discussed, the theme of war is clearly enunciated in Stuart’s adaptation. The change of Augustus from someone without nationality into a German would not have been enough by itself to suggest the theme of war but it is this change, in combination with several others, which makes the case clear.

One example that suggests the theme of war is the inclusion and development in Stuart’s film of the character of Mr Wilkinson disguised as Mr Slugworth, the spy. The representation of Mr Slugworth provides a clear metaphor for the spies that proved so important in conflicts such as World War Two and the Cold War (the latter still in progress at the time when Stuart’s film was released). Slugworth (the fake identity of Mr Wilkinson in Stuart’s film) is only mentioned in passing in Dahl’s book, but in Stuart’s adaptation he emerges as a mysterious and worrying character, speaking to each of the children as they acquire their ticket and whispering something unheard by the audience. This scarred figure is another example of the dark undercurrent in Stuart’s
film. Slugworth (Mr Wilkinson) the spy is so convincing that when the opportunity arises the children jump at the chance to acquire the everlasting gobstopper that he is seeking: “I want an everlasting gobstopper,” “me too,” “and me” (Stuart). A quick glance from Veruca Salt to her father upon seeing the gobstopper confirms the audience’s suspicions that Slugworth (Mr Wilkinson) has compromised at least one child and probably others. In terms of war rhetoric the power of the spy to subvert and influence people to act against the state is powerfully evoked in the everlasting gobstopper scene with the chocolate factory representing the state. In addition to his representation as a spy, Slugworth’s (Mr Wilkinson’s) control over the children and ability to manipulate them is wicked. Wonka’s decision to send an employee, Mr Wilkinson, disguised as Slugworth to pretend to spy on himself makes matters even worse for the children. Such powerful manipulation of the children before they even meet Wonka clearly demonstrates how highly precarious the situation of the children has been from the start of Stuart’s film.

Another indication of the importance of war and nationalism in Stuart’s adaptation is the evocative image of the flag-wavers outside the gate of Wonka’s chocolate factory. The flags being waved are of three nations: The United States, the United Kingdom and West Germany. It is understandable that people would show up to the factory to cheer the contestants on, but the use of flags, and in particular these flags, has important implications for the depiction of the children. The results of this intentional change are twofold. Firstly, as a representation of Stuart’s main stresses in his film, the flags shown reinforce the strong Anglo-centrism (British-American) of the film. The only real mention of anything outside of Germany, Britain and North America is during the hunt for the golden ticket, but nobody outside of this select group is given more than a brief moment on stage before deferring once again to the more important countries which in time claim all available tickets. Indeed a clear confirmation of this bias is the forged ticket which is the product of a greedy Paraguayan. The choice of a Paraguayan sharpens the film’s focus, making it seem unthinkable that the law-abiding citizens of Europe and the USA could have performed such an act. This is clear in the dialogue of Americans following the Paraguayan’s discovery: “Can you imagine the nerve of that guy, trying to fool the whole world?” “He really was a crook” (Stuart). The second result of the focus of Stuart’s adaptation upon the USA, Great Britain and
Western Germany is that it reinforces the theme of war, where once again, World War Two and the Cold War have strong and undeniable links to these countries. If one remembers that Augustus is from Western, rather than Eastern, Germany the association with the western bloc of the Cold War becomes even clearer.

As was previously mentioned, Tim Burton’s adaptation does away with most if not all references to war, reducing the presence of spies in the story to their original capacity in the book. Burton’s decision to keep the nationalities of the children the same as those of the first adaptation seems more an acknowledgement of the legacy of Stuart’s film than an attempt at any particular thematic effect. Burton also depicts a different world view and tones down the nationalism that is so distinct in Stuart’s earlier version by removing the presence of any flags. While an improvement, there are still no ticket winners from Asia, South America, the Middle East and Africa and the film remains focussed on the western audience.

With regard to its return to the “dark vision” of Dahl’s book, Burton’s film takes half steps concerning war and nationalism. In removing the commentary on war Burton is removing a theme which is not present in the book and subsequently brings the film closer to the original. However, in choosing not to return the children to characters from somewhere as opposed to characters from Britain, Germany and North America Burton chooses to continue a thematic focus on the developed western world which seems in opposition to Roald Dahl’s deliberate attempts to avoid identification of his characters by nationality. On the other hand the effects on the tone of Stuart’s adaptation are clearer as the discussion of war, and in particular spies, deepens the content and darkens the mood of the film. Finally it is worth noting as a possible influence that the Vietnam War was a highly contentious subject at the time that Mel Stuart produced his adaptation. A subject of such national importance is one possible explanation for the powerful thematic placement of war in Stuart’s adaptation.

**Control of Sugar Consumption**

Different approaches to sugar in the two film adaptations of *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* are highly important and these variations show that the first adaptation is not
light-hearted and the second is not always the return to Dahl’s book that one might expect. Stuart’s film shows addiction to sugar through the madness that ensues not only amongst children but also adults when it is announced that the finders of the golden ticket will receive a lifetime supply of chocolate. Tim Burton’s adaptation removes this prize and whilst the rush for chocolate bars is depicted in Burton’s adaptation the degree of madness is not the same, with the earlier film showing the last box of Wonka bars in Britain being auctioned off for an extortionate fee and a kidnap victim’s wife asking, “How long will they give me to think it over,” when told, “It’s your husband’s life or your case of Wonka bars” (Stuart). In this way it is clearly shown that the moral boundaries become skewed when a lifetime supply of chocolate is involved. To confirm the madness which ensues on screen, the only people who do not go crazy for Wonka bars are Charlie and his family. Charlie is too poor to go and buy more and more chocolate bars and because of his poverty he hardly ever eats them anyway. This situation is depicted in both films and the madness of other characters in the films is shown to be the result of the over-consumption of chocolate and other sweets. The heightened madness of the first film is simply stronger because there is the chance of winning an unending supply of chocolate, a strong motivation in a world crazy for sugar.

The maddening power of sugar having been displayed, there is rather little direct discussion of the topic in Stuart’s film. Before the hunt for the golden tickets is announced the love of sugar is clearly set in the audience’s mind as they see the candy man and his shop full of blissful children. However, where the discussion of sugar seeps away into the background, its danger becomes most profound, as is demonstrated in a number of ways in Stuart’s adaptation. For one thing, the removal of Charlie’s father from the story has an impact upon not only Charlie but also our perception of sugar. In Dahl’s book this impact is due to the profession of Charlie’s father, who attaches caps to toothpaste tubes for a living. A job at a toothpaste factory within the context of a story focussed on candy is no coincidence and provides sensible counterpoint to the mass consumption of sugar. The fact that Charlie’s father loses his job because the toothpaste factory goes out of business is ironically juxtaposed to the success of Willy Wonka’s factory and is a warning to the reader not to forget their teeth in the joyful consumption of sugar. This implicit advice in favour of moderate consumption of sugar
in Dahl’s book disappears in Stuart’s film, as there is no father working at a toothpaste factory and therefore there is no toothpaste factory. Uncontrolled sugar consumption becomes more pronounced as the children enter the first stage of Wonka’s chocolate factory, the chocolate mixing room. The group having seen the Oompa Loompas is told by Wonka that, “It must be creaming and sugaring time” (Stuart). The audience sees little of the “creaming and sugaring” because of Augustus’ fall into the chocolate river. However, when the process is shown, ironically during the Oompa Loompa’s cautionary song about eating too many sweets, the image of sugar dominates the screen with the Oompa Loompa’s exit dwarfed by bags bigger than themselves, marked “Cane Sugar.” The strong presence of sugar here would not be of great significance were it not for the following scene, where one sees the group experience what is effectively a kind of drug-induced trip. The group, after having unsuspectingly explored Wonka’s chocolate mixing room and eaten various sweets, boards a boat down the chocolate river. Wonka himself consumes a bar of chocolate briefly before the voyage and the effects of the sugar soon become clear as everyone on the boat starts to freak out. Wonka’s Oompa Loompas are the exception to this, having presumably built up a strong tolerance for his sweets or not eaten any, but as they travel down a river laced with the stuff that is causing such strong visions, two subtle metaphors are suggested. The first of these metaphors is that sugar is an uncontrollable substance which can, in the wrong hands and when over-consumed, have powerful drug-like effects. The second metaphor is more directly related to the drug trade with the sugar-induced trip and the control that Willy Wonka and his Oompa Loompas exert over the sweets within the factory, a symbol for the effort to control drugs all over the world. Mr Salt’s statement that “I never saw anybody with an orange face before” when he sees the Oompa Loompas supports this metaphor as one sees the unknown foreigners from some far away land mixing small white granules into chocolate exported around the world.

In its subtle treatment of sugar Stuart’s film adaptation makes a statement against this sweet ingredient. This powerful substance is displayed as a madness-inducing drug, whose addicts are the entire world and whose dealers are the chocolate factories. By removing Charlie’s father and any other image of dentistry, the picture is painted of a world with no escape and no control over a substance desired enormously around the globe. In addition, the missing toothpaste factory also suggests a lack of
awareness about sugar since there seems to be no effort to engage with sugar by any means other than consumption. Such an image has a bearing on adults and children alike and casts a dark hue on the supposedly bright and happy place of sugar in Stuart’s film.

In contrast to the power that sugar holds in the earlier film, Tim Burton’s adaptation takes sugar firmly under control, restricting its influence and raising awareness of its danger through the implementation of Willy Wonka’s father, the dentist, and reintroduction of the toothpaste factory. A growing awareness and concern, in recent years, about the health issues associated with sugar serves to highlight the importance of sugar in Burton’s adaptation and as recently as the fifth of March 2014 an article displayed on the front page of the BBC news website highlights the importance of sugar in society by announcing that “People will be advised to halve the amount of sugar in their diet, under new World Health Organization guidance” (Briggs). The modern concern about sugar is in fact so popular that a lecture by doctor Robert H. Lustig, giving in-depth scientific explanations of health problems caused by sugar, has been watched four and a half million times. This is more than four times the audience of any other lecture on the University of California Television channel, four million more, indeed, than an interview with Noam Chomsky, one of the most eminent professors in the world (“Sugar”).

In comparison, sugar in the early 1970s was more controversial, with people holding conflicting views on the benefits or hazards of its consumption. An ad from a 1971-edition of Woman’s Day tried to persuade the reader that sugar was a dieting method by stating that “sugar is the fastest energy food around. And when your energy’s up, there’s a good chance you’ll have the willpower to undereat at mealtime” (Oatman). The difference between these times and ours is clear and provides an additional explanation for the unchecked consumption of sugar in the 1971 adaptation of Dahl’s book.

With the modern concern about sugar in mind, Burton’s changes in the approach to sugar become clearer. The decision to make Willy Wonka’s father a dentist provides a strong caution against sweets with phrases such as “Lollipops, what we call cavities on a stick” (Burton), emphasising the point. Although Willy’s father is initially demonised for his strict treatment of Willy as a child, he is eventually vindicated in the
eyes of the audience. The validity of Willy’s father’s view is shown in a couple of ways. The fact that Willy never tastes his own sweets in Burton’s adaptation shows that having, as a child, experienced and gorged on chocolates once, Willy has moved on to the correct adult position; sweets are bad for you and children who may desire them should be prevented from overindulgence. Wonka’s chocolate factory subsequently seems to act more as a workplace than as a source of joy for Wonka and the fact that he plans to hand over control of the factory to Charlie only strengthens this notion. With this knowledge Willy Wonka’s reunification with his father is unsurprising since the basis of their initial conflict, Willy’s desire to taste candy, has become void due to his agreement with his father’s view. Finally, as a subtler and more constant reminder of the success of Willy’s father’s view, Willy Wonka’s teeth are in pristine condition in Burton’s film. Having gorged on sweets only briefly Willy is in good physical shape and has the teeth one would expect of a dentist’s son.

Whilst the introduction of Willy’s father in Tim Burton’s adaptation acts as one form of criticism for sugar, another form can be seen in the reintroduction of Charlie’s father, whose job attaching caps to tubes in a toothpaste factory provides a reminder to the audience that sugar consumption needs to be controlled. In fact the consumption of sugar becomes so high during the rush for the golden ticket that the audience is told: “the upswing in candy sales had led to a rise in cavities, which led to a rise in toothpaste sales” (Burton). In a move that is again contrary to the original source text, the toothpaste factory becomes highly profitable thanks to increasing chocolate sales. This is quite different from Roald Dahl’s version of events, where the factory “suddenly went bust and had to close down” (Dahl, 46). As a result of this change, awareness and simultaneously, the danger of sugar, are highlighted, as there is a clear indication that more toothpaste is being bought in order to combat more cavities. Mr Bucket’s replacement by a machine is also interesting because of the issues it raises regarding the more general fear of being made redundant by technology. However, Burton alleviates this fear cleverly, as the audience sees that the machine designed to replace Mr Bucket breaks down and he therefore regains his job. Mr Bucket’s return to work also serves the purpose of fulfilling Charlie’s happy ending – an aspect of the film which is vital.

One final consideration in the difference between the ways in which the two films approach candy is their opening credits. The opening for Tim Burton’s adaptation
shows a cold tone with the chocolate on screen a dark shade of brown, almost approaching black. The soundtrack is fast-paced and sounds like something that might be played in a movie about aliens upon the discovery of said aliens. In other words, the opening is unsettling and the metallic robots which process and ferry the chocolate around the factory strengthen this perception. Mel Stuart’s opening is the complete opposite of this worrying environment. The audience is greeted by the warm hue of liquid chocolate and the opening of a light-hearted orchestral piece; as the audience follows the cocoa bean on its journey to becoming chocolate there is almost no visible metal, most machines being entirely covered in liquid chocolate. This difference in introduction is representative of the remainder of the two films in question, with the 1971 adaptation appearing light and cheerful and the 2005 adaptation being cold and unwelcoming. In a focussed viewing however, this proves very little. Sugar in the earlier adaptation appears harmless enough but is shown to be a powerful substance that characters are unable to control; Stuart depicts a world where nothing is done to encourage caution and there is therefore no way of counteracting the drug-like effects of sugar. Burton’s adaptation, on the other hand, makes the case that sugar is an important social concern and to deal with this there are cautionary dentists and toothpaste factories in a film supposed to be about candy. Furthermore the icon of the chocolate factory, Willy Wonka, is uninterested in any of his sweets, having moved on from his youthful obsession with them. Most importantly, in terms of closeness to the original, when it comes to sugar, the number of references to the vices of sugar and its control through toothpaste and dentistry mean that Burton’s adaptation moves away yet again from Dahl’s original story which included a cautionary toothpaste factory but little more as a warning about sugar.

**Racism and the Oompa Loompas**

Whilst sugar has an important influence in all versions of *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, racism and colonialism are also highly important themes which have been commented on by a number of academics. Emma Robertson, for example, notes that “What we may not remember […] is the sense of the tamed exotic, and the power
relations of colonialism, embodied in Wonka’s secret workforce, the Oompa Loompas” (qtd. in Manktelow, 853).

Regarding racism in Dahl’s story, the Oompa Loompas are of primary concern and Eleanor Cameron highlights this fact in her criticism of *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, writing:

I find a certain point of view […] felt in *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* […] to be extremely regrettable when it comes to Willy Wonka’s unfeeling attitude toward the Oompa-Loompas, their role as conveniences and devices to be used for Wonka’s purposes, their being brought over from Africa for enforced servitude, and the fact that their situation is all a part of the fun and games.

(Cameron)

Dahl’s approach to the Oompa Loompas was clearly controversial, but the fact that the racist and imperialistic suggestions of Dahl’s book were not remedied in the films that followed is even more fascinating. Stuart’s failure to deal adequately with racist and imperialistic overtones in his adaptation seems almost certain to reduce the light-heartedness of the film and for once this is true in Tim Burton’s adaptation as well which, even as it attempts to counter some of the problems with the Oompa Loompas of the past, continues to undermine and devalue people with a different skin colour, from a different place. The first thing to observe about the Oompa Loompas is their skin colour. Both film adaptations of Dahl’s novel included Oompa Loompas with non-white skin tones. However, these tones and their implementation differ between the films. In the first adaptation white actors were employed as the Oompa Loompas and their faces were painted orange in a fashion reminiscent of the blackface minstrels of the early twentieth century. The resulting characters are supposed to be mysterious as Mr Salt remarks “I never saw anybody with an orange face before” (Stuart). The association with blackface minstrelsy, however, means that any mystery created is quickly joined by wonder at why it was necessary to create the Oompa Loompas in this controversial way rather than simply finding darker skinned actors or using the white actors without face paint. Mystery in Tim Burton’s adaptation is just as desirable and this is highlighted by the exclamations heard when the Oompa Loompas are first seen: “‘Where do they come from?’ ‘Who Are They?’ ‘Are they real people?’” (Burton). However, in an effort to improve the treatment of racism, Burton does away with the
face paint that was intended to create mystery and instead uses Deep Roy, an Indian-English actor to represent the Oompa Loompas. One would imagine that such a move improves respect for other cultures by using actors whose skin colour does not need to be visually altered in order for them to perform their role. However, Tim Burton manages, simultaneously, to take a step backward as he uses Deep Roy to represent not just one, but every single Oompa Loompa in the film. The lack of understanding for other cultures in this respect seems even greater as one repeatedly watches all the Oompa Loompas dancing in unison, with exactly the same faces, as if there can be no variation between them because all Oompa Loompas are the same.

Whilst the choice of skin tone used in adaptations is one way of gauging problems with racism, another is the way in which Willy Wonka communicates with the Oompa Loompas. In Tim Burton’s film one scene is of particular concern in this regard. The troubling scene is unsurprisingly the one in which the audience sees Wonka communicate in a made up language supposed to be that of the Oompa Loompas. Wonka’s efforts to convince the Oompa Loompas to join him involve some hand signs, a short ululation and finally the production of farting noises using his armpit. If the audience was expected to perceive this as anything but a joke language then the language’s inventor was extraordinarily naïve. As a joke language, however, the dancing movements and farting noises are amusing and work well. The problem which emerges is in the understanding that the Oompa Loompas have been whisked away by Wonka under the premise of being saved. With this knowledge, the imprisonment of the Oompa Loompas in the chocolate factory is exacerbated by the use of a joke language which dehumanises Wonka’s slave-like workers and makes their situation appear much funnier than it should be to anyone watching the Oompa Loompas toil for Wonka. In this way the audience is encouraged not to engage with the Oompa Loompas on a human level but to laugh instead with the masses at an amusing race of people whose place is set within Wonka’s chocolate factory. Such an approach to the Oompa Loompas is deeply troubling as it has historically been the case that the dehumanisation of persecuted people, and the choice by the masses to ignore this persecution has allowed it to continue uncheckd. The persecution of the Jews prior to and during World War Two is an obvious example that springs to mind. Mel Stuart does not make the same mistake as Burton in his treatment of language and does not attempt to invent
a language for the Oompa Loompas. Nevertheless the scenes in which a child drops out of the group highlight another language issue that is present in both films. The Oompa Loompas sing in perfect English and have therefore clearly learned the language to a fairly usable extent. It becomes very interesting therefore that whenever a child leaves the group Wonka communicates with the Oompa Loompas in English, but they say nothing back and simply obey. It does not matter that the Oompa Loompas can speak English because they are not expected to think; they are expected to follow. The submissiveness of the Oompa Loompas is heightened by their diminutive size and the camera perspectives, which are used in both films to create Oompa Loompas that appear very small.

Although skin tone and language creation have an important influence on the theme of race in Dahl’s tale, the greatest issue remains the fact that Willy Wonka has trapped the Oompa Loompas in his factory and treats this as natural and unproblematic. In both films Wonka explains to the group that he saved the Oompa Loompas from a terrible place and pays them for their work with their favourite substance, cocoa. Wonka’s explanation makes him out to be some kind of saviour. However, the connotations of slavery and imprisonment are simply too strong as the Oompa Loompas blindly obey Wonka and receive no money for the work they do. Such payment would be considered forced labour in any normal work environment, a fact that Eleanor Cameron pointed out in the quote above. Ultimately Wonka’s story is simply not believable and the audience is left watching a children’s story unfolding in the presence of imported forced labour, a fact the makes each of the film adaptations much more ominous than they would otherwise be. Finally it is interesting that Burton, in updating the Oompa Loompas, chose to use an Indian-English actor due to the strong historical association this raises with colonialism in India and Britain’s use of India for commodities such as tea.

In their own ways it appears that both film adaptations of Charlie and the Chocolate Factory fail to rectify an inherent issue with racism originally found in Dahl’s book. The face paint of the first film is offensive in its connotations with past blackface minstrelsy and the 2005 adaptation, attempting to fix this error, uses only one Indian-English actor in an accidental indication that there is no variety of character in the foreign race of the Oompa Loompas. Stuart’s film fails to make the Oompa
Loompas anything more than Willy Wonka’s slaves who appear foreign and strange to the tour group. Astonishingly, things do not improve in Tim Burton’s 2005 film adaptation and although there are attempts, such as the removal of face paint, to better the situation of the Oompa Loompas, they consistently fail or are met with new mistakes including the creation of a joke language, as that of the imprisoned Oompa Loompas. As one would expect, neither film is made more light-hearted by these motifs and the issue of racism is therefore the only issue discussed that has shown a consistent darkening of tone in Tim Burton’s adaptation in line with Dahl’s original. In Stuart’s adaptation the inclusion of this motif follows expectations and creates a darker world than one would expect upon starting to watch the movie.

**Conclusion**

Adaptations inevitably alter their original source in some way. If they did not do this there would be little point in their existence since they would be an exact copy of something already in existence. Bernard Beck’s argument that the treatment of children in Stuart’s adaptation was benign and light-hearted is as problematic as his assertion that Tim Burton’s adaptation is a return to Dahl’s dark original. The problem with these statements is that they are simply not true, as has been shown in many instances in this study. The adaptation of some of the children characters provided the first evidence of the falsehood of Beck’s statement with Stuart’s adaptation, using Charlie’s poverty and lack of a father to foster a dark and gloomy setting. Things only get darker when it becomes clear, with Charlie’s consumption of fizzy lifting drinks, that children are punished based on their past misbehaviour rather than their behaviour at the chocolate factory. Moving on to Mike Teavee and Augustus Gloop the former of these two remains much unchanged in Stuart’s adaptation; however, Augustus Gloop is dramatically transformed into a West German national. This transformation darkens the atmosphere of Stuart’s adaptation greatly as it suggests a strong thematic overtone of war. War and nationalism are indeed two of the most powerful themes in Stuart’s film with the presence of spies and Wonka’s employment of them confirming the theme of war already suggested by Augustus Gloop’s nationality and character.
Burton’s adaptation conversely removes much of the darkness implied in Stuart’s film and fails to make any significant return to Dahl’s novel. In Burton’s film Mike Teavee is adapted to be an intelligent video gamer rather than the stupid television viewer of Dahl’s book and Stuart’s film. Augustus Gloop’s implication in the theme of war is removed by Burton, but Burton retains the nationalities which were assigned to the children in the first adaptation, a strong move away from the nationless status of the children in Dahl’s book. Finally, in the adaptation of Charlie’s character, Burton’s film returns Charlie to his position in the original story, but whilst doing this Burton alters the meaning and context of the story by inserting into his film the new character of Willy Wonka’s father, a dentist who has a huge and novel effect on the film, found nowhere in the original story.

In regard to the theme of sugar Beck’s statements concerning these two films is no truer than previously and this becomes more apparent as one sees that Burton’s film approaches sugar in a cold and dark way that is in stark contrast with the love of candy felt in Dahl’s book. The inclusion of Wonka’s father, the dentist, heightens the control that is shown over sugar consumption in the film and combined with the modern concern for the health issues associated with sugar it is clear that Burton’s movie puts a far greater effort into keeping sugar at bay than it does into replicating the feeling for sugar displayed in Dahl’s story. Stuart’s film, on the other hand, shows a deep and dark concern for the uncontrollable substance of sugar. With no toothpaste and no dentist, sugar flows freely in the chocolate river and when the boat ride in Stuart’s film turns into a hallucinatory ride, the power of sugar is shown to be immense and uncontrollable, an idea that is far from being benign.

What is perhaps the most troubling aspect of the two film adaptations is their failure to adequately deal with racist overtones found in Dahl’s book, which leaves one final and very dark tint on both adaptations. Use of face paint in Stuart’s earlier adaptation raises concern about lack of respect for people with different skin colours and efforts by Burton to deal with these concerns backfire when he uses one actor to represent an entire race. Communications with the Oompa Loompas prove just as dark, with the Oompa Loompas obeying Wonka’s every command despite holding a concise command of the English language. Finally Wonka’s supposed heroism in bringing the Oompa Loompas back to his factory is nothing more than a charade in both films and
leaves an unsavoury flavour in the audience's mind as they see imprisoned Oompa Loompas dancing and producing sweets for Willy Wonka and his guests. Because of the treatment of racism, Stuart’s adaptation once again seems darker than suggested by Beck. The failure to deal with racism and imperialism in Burton’s film shows continuation from Stuart’s failure and the result is that Burton’s film is again made more ominous, but not more close to Dahl’s original.

As a result of these differences in the film adaptations of Dahl’s story the audience is presented with two outcomes. In Stuart’s adaptation there is a clear attempt to deliver to the audience important messages about important issues. Stuart’s film presents the themes of war, sugar and imperialism in the hope that the adult viewer will take note and consider these issues. It seems that Stuart hoped that by keeping these themes in the background of his film, he would be able to satisfy the needs of children in search of a happy story as well as adults seeking a film with more depth and this works extremely well. Burton’s film makes an effort to dull down some of the adult conversations that Stuart started. Through the adaptation of the themes mentioned Burton directs his film more towards children who are his primary audience. Though he fails at times in removing themes such as racism towards the Oompa Loompas, Burton’s film succeeds for the most part in adapting its content for children.

In closing there are two things in particular that are worth remembering about these film adaptations. The first is an interview with Mel Stuart in which he says: “I made this movie for adults. I didn’t make it for children […] they still can find values in it that you wouldn’t find in another children’s movie” (Chuck the Movieguy). Stuart succinctly explains the fact that his adaptation is often a very dark film. Many themes in Stuart’s film were designed for the adult audience and include adult discussions which are not always light-hearted and enjoyable and sometimes require thought and consideration about uncomfortable issues. Such a film simply cannot be described as benign and light-hearted just as Burton’s film makes too many changes to ever be capable of being described as a return to Dahl’s dark original. Finally it is the little things that matter and as a visual representation of the difference that has been discussed between these two films, the reader should not forget that in Tim Burton’s adaptation the naughty children are shown exiting the factory in their various stretched,
squashed and otherwise somehow changed forms. In Stuart’s adaptation these naughty children are never seen again.
Works Cited


