Food and Power in Roald Dahl’s Children’s Fiction

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Declaration

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Jennifer Trieu
Summary

This thesis examines the representation of food and power in Dahl’s children’s fiction published between the years 1961 and 1990. During this period, British food culture was changing significantly with the increased industrial production and manufacturing of processed food and the popularisation of convenience foods in the form of frozen entrées and ready meals. This thesis argues that the representation of food in Dahl’s major children’s works functions didactically, often revealing contradictory messages about the power dynamics between humans and animals, adults and children, and humans and the natural world. Each chapter closely examines the connections between Dahl’s life and works and the historical and cultural changes in the British food industry after the Second World War.

This study considers debates related to food issues from the period in which Dahl was writing as well as the influence of children’s texts from a wide range of genres, including folk tales and fantasy literature, on food’s function in Dahl’s children’s fiction. This thesis examines several of Dahl’s interviews, biographical texts, and personal letters to gain deeper insight into the prolific author’s perspectives on food and the transformations in the British food industry. The first chapter explores animal welfare and meat and the power dynamics between humans and animals in *The Magic Finger* (1966), *Danny the Champion of the World* (1975), and *Fantastic Mr Fox* (1970). Sweets and the notion of cautionary consumption form the focus of the second chapter, which will examine *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (1964), *Boy* (1984) and *The Witches* (1983). The third chapter considers the effects of convenience food on mealtimes and notions of proper consumption in *The Twits* (1980), *The BFG* (1982), and *Matilda* (1988). The thesis concludes with an analysis of the representation of futuristic foods in *James and the Giant Peach* (1961), *George’s Marvellous Medicine* (1981) and Willy Wonka’s factory in *Chocolate Factory* and *Charlie and the Great Glass Elevator* (1972).
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Introduction

In Roald Dahl’s 1932 school essay, “Food and Drink”, written while he was attending Repton School, Dahl extols the importance of food and drink and insists that “eating and drinking is a necessary [sic] duty” and “it is a duty to be enjoyed by all, and not to be regarded as the evil habit of those with gluttonous instincts” (“Food and Drink”, RDMSC RD 13/3/2/1/1). Even in Dahl’s youth he considered the consumption of food and drink with careful thought and attention as both a vital part of the minutiae of everyday life and, perhaps just as significantly, an essential duty and an important commitment not to be taken lightly. Here, Dahl’s reference to eating and drinking as a “necessary duty” rather than simply a necessity is important: the term “duty” is a particularly interesting word to use in this context because it connotes serious obligation and committed responsibility. In this essay, Dahl, at sixteen years of age, emphatically laments, “how few appreciate really good food and drink and how few do not regard it as a crime to appreciate it” (“Food and Drink”, RDMSC RD 13/3/2/1/2). Dahl’s insistence that his appreciation of food and drink did not stem “from a kind of misguided asceticism” and that it was not “a plea or an exoneration for the drunkard or the gourmand, but rather it is a whole hearted expression of approval of the true gourmet” (“Food and Drink”, RDMSC RD 13/3/2/1/1), should strike a familiar chord with readers of his fiction: these comments express a defensiveness and a pre-emptive challenge of authority, which would become characteristic of many of his later works. Here, Dahl constructs a straw-man argument, deflecting perceived criticisms of those who appreciate food and drink and those who derive a great deal of pleasure from eating and eating well. This essay offers significant insight into the famed author’s preoccupation with food and drink as a teenager, a preoccupation that would continue for all his life, as evidenced by numerous interviews, biographies,
autobiographical accounts, non-fictional works and his personal letters throughout his long and illustrious career.¹

While Dahl’s views about food certainly changed throughout his life, his keen interest in food and foodways remained consistent, as demonstrated by the fixation on many pleasures associated with food and eating in his novels.² Indeed, as Jodie Slothower and Jan Susina note, “Dahl’s stories reveal an author obsessed with food” (28). The publication of the majority of Dahl’s children’s texts in the years between 1961 and his death in 1990 coincided with many significant developments and transformations in British food culture.³ Food in Dahl’s texts symbolise a great deal about the complexity of consumption pleasures, mealtime mores, etiquette, and a general sense of taste. One of the most effective ways to understand food in Dahl’s texts is to also understand how power functions in his works. Power and food go hand-in-hand in Dahl’s novels as concerns such as who eats whom and who feeds whom are central in his texts. Using the methodologies and critical theories typically invoked in food and cultural studies and children’s literature respectively, this thesis explores the representation of food and power in the children’s works of Roald Dahl. After all, “Food is political [and] is embedded in power relations, including [those] between adults and children” (O’Connell and Brannen 12). This thesis explores the complexities of food and power’s respective functions in children’s literature historically, and also examines the complicated connections between

¹ Dahl’s fascination with food was expressed in his penchant for cooking elaborate meals and consuming fine wines. In later years, Dahl, along with his wife Felicity Dahl, catalogued many memorable cooking experiences and recipes collected throughout his life in a posthumously published cookbook called *Roald Dahl’s Cookbook* (previously titled *Memories of Food at Gipsy House*) (1991).

² Food anthropologist Carole Counihan defines foodways as “beliefs and behaviors surrounding the production, distribution, and consumption of food [which] reveal race-ethnic, class, gender, and national identity and power” (Counihan “Introduction: Food and the Nation” 3). Foodways are also defined as “the eating habits and culinary practices of a people, region or historical period” (Merriam Webster Dictionary Online) while the *OED Online* defines foodway as “[t]he traditional customs or habits of a group of people concerning food and eating” (“foodway”, *OED Online*).

³ Although Dahl’s first publication for children was *The Gremlins* (1943), for the remainder of the 1940s and 1950s Dahl focused solely on writing short stories for adults.
both concepts in Dahl’s texts. This thesis argues that the relationship between food and power in Dahl’s works for children is worth careful examination because it provides valuable insight into how the author’s biographical and literary works reveal a series of contradictions about food which allows for a deeply nuanced understanding of Dahl, an author closely associated with controversy and contradictions throughout his long and illustrious career. I have chosen to analyse Dahl’s authorial intention primarily because, in a study focused on children’s literature, “the implied impact of the adult on the child audience—ha[s] long been inextricably associated with critical practice” (Beauvais 83). It is also crucial to explore how the author’s life experiences have influenced his work, as Mark West explains, “The connections between Dahl’s autobiographical works and his fictional works transcend similarities in writing style. Many of the places, people, and events described in his autobiographies have parallels in his short stories and children’s books” (Roald Dahl 125).

As some of the most popular children’s fiction of the twentieth century Dahl’s texts have enthralled young readers with fictional fantasies crossing many genres for over five decades. Despite his enduring popularity and enormous commercial success, Dahl’s children’s works, to say nothing of his adult fiction, have often been overlooked by scholars of children’s literature. While there has been some critical analysis of Dahl’s most popular children’s texts, it was not until very recently that Dahl’s fiction underwent significant scholarly study in Ann Alston and Catherine Butler’s important collection of essays, Roald Dahl, part of Palgrave Macmillan’s New Casebooks series, published in 2012. Alston and Butler’s critical study of Dahl explores various topics including family, education, the role of humour, as well as crime and violence in his oeuvre and provides an important foundation for new scholarship on Dahl. Although there has been increasing critical interest in Dahl’s works in recent years, there is still a great deal left to do. In this
thesis, I contend that Dahl’s representation of food, food culture, and the power relationships in his novels are some of the most important aspects of his cultural legacy. Food in Dahl’s children’s novels is perhaps one of the most memorable, and deeply symbolic, subjects in his literary works: the fantastical confectionery in *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (1964), the soft and juicy peach in *James and the Giant Peach* (1961), the BFG’s unappetizing snozzcumbers in *The BFG* (1982), the Wormwood family TV dinners served in floppy aluminium trays, as well as Bruce Bogtrotter’s chocolate-cake eating scene in *Matilda* (1988), and Mr Twit’s disgusting food-filled beard in *The Twits* (1980) are only a few of many examples where food is described vividly and embedded with multiple, complex and highly-charged meanings related to power and social control.

This study contends that one of the key ways in which power is translated in Dahl’s works for children is through food. As Carolyn Daniel explains, “[i]n common with other human practices that are constructed as normal, obvious, and legitimate, eating behaviors can often be based on historically and culturally specific ideologies” (186). As I will uncover in this thesis, the representation of food in Dahl’s children’s texts is reflective of numerous culturally and historically specific ideologies about food, and ideology is, according to Perry Nodelman and Mavis Reimer, “always a matter of politics” and ultimately, “relates to the ways in which people get and maintain power over one another” (*Pleasures of Children’s Literature*, 80). Dahl uses food not only to categorise people and differentiate between the civilised and the uncivilised, but he also uses food to determine who has power and control over another person or being, who feeds whom, and who eats whom. Power relationships, the struggle for power, the resistance to power—all of these issues connected to power are represented in a myriad of ways in Dahl’s children’s works. There is an endless push and pull between these two or more forces for power: whether it is between young and old, weak and strong, big and
small, rich and poor, humans and animals, the struggle for power is a central concept in Dahl’s children’s texts. Often, it is powerless children struggling against adults who abuse their power over those around them, typically children and animals—this is evidenced in the power dynamics between James and his Aunts Sponge and Spiker in *James*, between the eponymous Matilda and her parents as well as Matilda and Ms. Trunchbull in *Matilda*, and in narratives in which anthropomorphised animals and humans come into conflict over power such as *The Magic Finger* (1966) and *Fantastic Mr Fox* (1970). While the power dynamics often show the powerful abusing or harming the powerless, the novels typically resolve in “situations in which the powerless and oppressed defeat their oppressors” (Butler 4).

Before unpacking the connections between food and power in Dahl’s texts, it is important to first briefly consider the debates concerning power’s function in children’s literature among children’s literary critics. As children’s works have traditionally been (and continue to be) written by adults for children, Maria Nikolajeva asserts that there is an inherent power relationship built into children’s literature: “Indeed, nowhere else are power structures as visible as in children’s literature, the refined instrument used for centuries to educate, socialize and oppress a particular social group. In this respect, children’s literature is a unique art and communication form, deliberately created by those in power for the powerless” (Nikolajeva, “Theory, Post-Theory, and Aetonormative Theory”, 16). This in-built power structure in children’s literature is what Nikolajeva describes as ‘aetonormativity’, which occurs when “adult normativity that governs the way children’s literature has been patterned from its emergence until the present day” (Nikolajeva, “Theory, Post-Theory, and Aetonormative Theory”, 16).  

4 While “aetonormativity” is a useful term in that it encapsulates the power struggle between adult and child specific to children’s literature, critics including Clémentine Beauvais argues that the concept is “in need of more nuanced fine-tuning [beginning] with a complete reconceptualisation of the word that is truly
Nodelman asserts that “adults write books for children to persuade them of conceptions of themselves as children that suit adult needs and purposes […] allowing adults to indulge in nostalgia for the not-yet-civilised and keeps children other than, less sensible than, and therefore deserving of less power than, adults” (Nodelman, “Picture books and illustration”, 161).

In Jacqueline Rose’s influential *The Case of Peter Pan or the Impossibility of Children’s Fiction* (1984), she notes how, “Increasingly, children’s writing is being talked about in terms of ‘tradition’ […], ‘culture’ […], and ‘trust’ […] Although these may seem to be neutral enough terms (nothing but the best for our children we might say), once again they carry a very specific ideology of writing and its function” (Rose 61) and it is within this context that children are problematically “valued because of the ease with which they slip into the book and live out the story” (Rose 62-3). For Kimberley Reynolds, the author-child relationship in children’s literature is certainly seen as somewhat suspect, “one in which writers seduce and entrap young readers in ways that make them less likely to challenge adult authority” (Reynolds, *Short Introduction*, 113). Reynolds goes on to assert that “Thinking specifically about YA fiction, Roberta Seelinger Trites (2000) similarly argues that children’s literature attempts to contain young people’s power and autonomy by emphasizing the risks of challenging the status quo” (Reynolds, *Short Introduction*, 113). I would argue that the notion that children’s literature attempts to contain young people’s power and autonomy is certainly applicable in Dahl’s children’s works. In fact, as Deborah Cogan Thacker observes, “The recognition of the power of the teller may be the most vital aspect of Dahl’s distinctive style […] Dahl’s own sense of himself is delivered by his own writing acts” (Thacker, at the core of its concerns: power” (Beauvais 78). Kimberley Reynolds has also acknowledged the relevance of aetonomativity in studying children’s literature, but notes how “Nikolajeva’s observation is more valuable for the sets of questions it engenders than as a defining feature of children’s literature” (Reynolds, *Short Introduction*, 30).
“Fairy Tale and Anti-Fairy Tale”, 28). I will explore later on in the introduction how the blurred boundaries between didacticism and subversion in his novels obscure his readers’ autonomy and emphasises his authorial power and control within his texts.

Dahl’s novels for children are known for both their didactic and subversive messages, both of which serve to reinforce the power of the adult over the child reader in the text.\(^5\) In some instances, as in fictional works such as *The Twits* and *The Witches* (1983), the child reader is addressed directly by the narrator, thereby emphasising the power of the author over the young audience. In *The Twits*, the narrator attempts to persuade young readers to believe that hairy men are foul and dirty by insisting that “You and I can wipe our smooth faces with a flannel and we quickly look more or less all right again, but the hairy man cannot do that” (3). At the beginning of *The Witches*, the narrator outlines the physical traits of a witch and insists to young readers that “if you know about these, if you remember them always, then you might just possibly manage to escape from being squelched before you are very much older” (5). In both examples, the narrator confers “insider knowledge” to young readers, emphasising the author’s omnipotent role in the text in which the author performs what Reynolds describes as a “duty of care” in children’s storytelling (Reynolds, *Short Introduction*, 113). Reynolds notes that for critics and adults involved with children’s literature, “those who write for children keep in mind that they have a duty of care to their readers, meaning they should do them no harm emotionally (by, for example, making them extremely frightened or depriving them of hope) or educationally (through such things as misinformation or the use of poor grammar)” (Reynolds, *Short Introduction*, 113). With this sense of responsibility, the author possesses a great deal of power and control over what young readers have access

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to in picture books, poetry, and novels for children. This brings about challenges that are unique to children’s literature: Reynolds highlights that, “‘Caring’ for readers may involve exercising power in ways that disadvantage young readers” (13) while Hunt asserts that this denies children the ability to “acquire literary competence” and develop their own confidence when interpreting texts (Hunt, “Poetry, response and education”, 136). What is problematic about Dahl’s works however is that he leaves little room for readers to question his authority and to form their own judgments about the messages presented in his works.

Before we examine the complexities of power in Dahl’s texts, it is worth briefly outlining the limitations of analysing power in children’s literature. Given the prevalence of many critical voices on power’s function in children’s literature including Rose, Reynolds, Nikolajeva, and Nodelman to name just a few, power does not have a clear overarching definition within children’s literary criticism. Instead, as Clémentine Beauvais points out, there are many diverging definitions of power within the discipline:

While Nikolajeva’s adult power is oppressive, Trites’s is repressive; while Tatar’s power is an ambiguous mix of manipulation and reading pleasure, Pinsent’s is aesthetic and celebratory. All of them concur, however, that it is the adult, both inside and outside the children’s book, that is the main “power holder.” The issue lies in the problematically value-ridden concept of power, loaded with a cacophonic abundance of divergent meanings (Beauvais, “The Problem of ‘Power’”, 78).  

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6 For more on power in children’s literature, see Maria Tatar’s *Off with Their Heads* (1992), Pat Pinsent’s *The Power of the Page* (1993), and Roberta S. Trites’s *Power and Repression in Adolescent Literature* (2000).
Because power, as Beauvais explains, “can mean authority, ability, domination, strength, impact, influence, potential, importance, prominence, superiority, energy” it begins to function as a “dubiously overused umbrella term [which] has to be explicated and dissected” (79). Given the overwhelming voices in children’s literary criticism about power, this thesis will certainly explore children’s literary critics’ many theories about power’s function in children’s literature. However, it will primarily analyse how power in Dahl’s texts and his authorial power does not fit neatly into any one critic’s interpretation of power. Instead, I argue that power in his works for children is far too complex to be tied to one narrow understanding of power in children’s literature, but is ultimately connected to the blurred boundaries between didacticism and subversion in his storytelling.

What this thesis proposes is that critics’ difficulty in grappling with whether or not many of Dahl’s messages in his works for children are didactic or subversive is in fact foundational to Dahl’s power as an author. However contradictory or convoluted his messages have been in his texts, these aspects are precisely what gives him authorial control, leaving critics the difficult task of unravelling and untangling decades’ worth of conflicting messages in his biographical and literary works. This thesis argues that Dahl’s use of contradiction in his non-fictional and fictional works, as well as in his carefully crafted public persona, has enabled him to exercise authorial power over his implied readers, ultimately putting them in what Butler refers to as “an effective arm lock, conscripting them to the views of the narrator in a way that can feel coercive” (Butler 3). This “arm lock” that Butler refers to is particularly problematic because it undermines children and their ability to think for themselves and it also limits young readers’ freedom to develop their own views and to determine their own stances on a number of different issues. The ways in which didacticism and subversion are expressed in Dahl’s children’s
works are suspect because they are integral to a process in which children “[enter] into a partnership with a stronger party [that] raises the spectre of coercion: perhaps the younger, weaker party is not acting as a self-motivated colleague but instead merely [unknowingly] collaborating with the enemy” (Gubar 8).

Although this thesis will explore Dahl’s authorial power through his complicated didactic and subversive messages, it will also highlight how one of the most effective ways in understanding the blurred boundaries between didacticism and subversion of Dahl’s texts is through the representation of food in his novels. Food has been, historically, an important vehicle for didacticism in children’s literature since its inception and the representation of food in children’s literature has been a major way in which adults have exercised authorial power over child readers. Over the centuries, there was a gradual change within the genre from explicit moralising to a didacticism tinged with subversion. Unlike his predecessors and contemporaries, Dahl’s texts show a complete blurring between didacticism and subversion, making the messages in his works incredibly difficult to pin down. Dahl’s authorial power rests on the impossibility of fully knowing the degree to which Dahl’s works are didactic or subversive. An extensive assessment of Dahl’s biographical and literary works reveals that the representation of food in his novels cannot be fully understood without analysing how power functions through didacticism and subversion in his texts. Similarly, fully understanding power through didacticism and subversion in Dahl’s novels is not entirely possible without exploring the representation of food in his children’s works.

Food lessons are essentially about social control and within the context of children’s literature, food lessons identify the boundaries of what children may or may not be permitted to consume at table. Food lessons in children’s literature are grounded upon the contradictory views of the child in children’s literature, as individuals who are
capable of exercising restraint on the one hand, and who are easily consumed by greed, on the other hand. In children’s literature, control is often represented in two distinct ways: if children are angelic, then they must be protected (sometimes in extreme cases) from corrupt forces and if they are wicked, then they must be transformed or prevented from corrupting others. Nodelman and Reimer outline how this problematic view of the child is “impossibly contradictory”:

A child cannot at the same time be innocently angelic and cruelly wild, limited in understanding and quick to learn evil. Perhaps that means merely that some of the assumptions are right and some are wrong. But in our experience, people who express ideas like these tend to hold beliefs that contradict each other, without any apparent consciousness of the contradictions (Nodelman and Reimer, Pleasures of Children’s Literature, 88).

A similarly contradictory view of the child is represented in Dahl’s texts through dualistic characterisations of well-behaved children such as Charlie, Sophie, and James in contrast with the four other golden ticket winners in Chocolate Factory, Bruce Bogtrotter, and Bruno Jenkins. Dahl appears to be on the side of the reader through his characterisation of seemingly independent and autonomous children such as Matilda or George in his works, but their contrast with wild children in the texts and his contradictory representation of children in general reinforce the problematic idea that children need to be controlled. These contradictions ultimately “ignore how children themselves understand their experiences” (Nodelman 89) and make the author’s understanding of children absolute.

Adults are not exempted from Dahl’s critical eye, however. In fact, most adults are villainised in his children’s texts and are represented as those that are most deserving
of come-uppances. Dahl reverses power from the hands of wicked adults to “worthy” well-behaved children in his texts. The dynamic between children and adults are complicated by the complex representation of both groups of people in Dahl’s works and in children’s literature more generally. Nodelman and Reimer explain how, within the children’s literary tradition,

Thinking of children as wild and uncivilized requires adults to see them as a threat to adult society, and to work to protect society from the threat by changing dangerous children into safe adults. Thinking of children as innocent encourages adults to worry about them as potential victims of other adults, and to work to teach them ways of being more adultlike and therefore less likely to be victimized (Nodelman and Reimer 89).

Dahl’s texts are a mix of the ideas above: children are often wild and uncivilized if they are the victims of other adults and this view of children and adults frames a very complicated view of both groups which as a result, makes analysing Dahl all the more complex.

Dahl’s texts were indeed, according to Peter Hunt, “iconoclastic” yet they were also “designed for an audience in need of civilising” (178): here, Hunt’s assertion that Dahl’s novels were designed for an audience in need of civilising cannot be divorced from the food lessons used to manipulate and coerce children into a very specific type of behaviour at table. Hunt’s quote crucially sheds light on the contradictions in Dahl’s texts: Dahl challenges cherished beliefs and institutions by insistently prescribing his own ideologies to young readers. Of course, Dahl denies explicitly intending to slip morality in his novels. In an interview in December 1985 on BBC’s Bookmark, Dahl was asked whether he sees himself as an entertainer or as an educator and he replied, “Totally an
entertainer […] and a little bit of morality slipped into, for example, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. But it only happened to slip in, I wouldn’t ever attempt it” (“Roald Dahl in His Own Words”, *Bookmark*, BBC Television, 1985). Dahl’s insistence that he supposedly “slips in” morality in his novels is a complete understatement: Dahl’s ideological positions and his views on human behaviour (particularly in relation to food) permeate his texts. Dahl often used humour and contradiction to give the impression that he was on the child’s side (as opposed to the parents and adults in his novels) and to also to give the appearance of a subtle exploration of morality that was more coincidental than completely intentional. Yet, the punishments that befall the antagonists in Dahl’s texts suggest an overt and often rather unsubtle handling of morality in his novels: Dahl’s sense of right and wrong, good and bad, are ultimately what frames his narratives and move them forward. The conflicts in his texts remain unresolved and protagonists do not prevail until the baddies receive their comeuppances. I contend that Dahl’s denial contradicts with the numerous “moral” lessons found in his works and that this is problematic because it lends to a rather manipulative and, to some degree, a coercive form of expression in his texts. Dahl’s insistence that he empathized with children and made the effort to understand them on their level, (Hunt, “Roald Dahl and the Commodification of Fantasy” 177) is fraught with complications because his role as author can problematically “function as a seductive mirage that curtails the agency of children” (Gubar 8).

Of course, Dahl does not defy convention in children’s literature by moralising in his texts, as there is a long tradition of overt didacticism within the genre. What distinguishes Dahl’s works, and what makes assessing his works so complicated is his explicit denial of intentionally moralising and expressing didactic messages in his texts—this is what makes Dahl so complex and the messages in his texts puzzling. David Rudd
comments on the complex and often unclear or blurred boundaries between “didactic” and “subversive” messages in children’s literature, highlighting how,

to designate a certain text [in children’s literature] ‘didactic’ and another ‘subversive’ carries certain consequences, each label throwing up different facets. Roald Dahl, for example, is regularly described in terms of the latter; however, he can also be seen as remarkably didactic in, for instance, his disapproval of television (Mike Teavee and the Wormwood parents) and of badly behaved children in general (e.g. all those in Charlie and the Chocolate Factory except Charlie himself) (Rudd, “The Development of Children’s Literature”, 6).

I contend that the view of Dahl as either/both didactic and subversive is complicated by the broader and complex relationship between didacticism and children’s literature more generally. Charles Sarland outlines how debates about didacticism’s place in children’s literature “was lively in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and has continued on and off ever since” but by the twentieth century, “considerations either of moral purpose or of didacticism did not appear to be at issue” (Sarland 58). Sarland continues, noting that debates about the purpose of didacticism “had never gone away [but had] rather gone underground” (Sarland 58) within the discipline. There is a division on how to interpret Dahl’s works not only because his views tend to be contradictory nor simply because critics disagree about the extent to which his works are didactic and subversive, but primarily because of the unresolved and ongoing debates about how didacticism and subversion are defined within children’s literary criticism. These concepts are largely understood under specific socio-cultural and historical contexts; these contexts are constantly in flux, therefore making the concepts incredibly difficult to pin down. The absence of clear definitions for didacticism and subversion within children’s literary
criticism and Dahl’s own blurring of both concepts in his novels only further obscures the meaning behind the messages in his texts, bolstering his authorial power in the process.

This thesis will uncover how didacticism and subversion come to define authorial power in Dahl’s works and how food is an important and effective way towards understanding how power functions in his texts. The connections between these concepts are deeply complex and intertwined—as Mervyn Nicholson notes, in literature, “[f]ood demarcates power relationships” (M. Nicholson 38). The foods in Dahl’s literary works for children are highly symbolic of the complex relationship between food, power, and control. As Carolyn Daniel notes, “As far as adult culture is concerned, children must internalize very precise rules about how to maintain a “clean and proper” body, what to relegate to abjection, and how to perform properly in social situations” and the power dynamics associated with the notion of “who eats whom” (12). Food and power in children’s literature tend to go hand-in-hand. As Holly Blackford explains, “Food lies at the center of socialization rituals for children” and “Foodchains of power are constructed and expressed by activities of food consumption and production” (Blackford, “Recipe for Reciprocity and Repression” 41-2, 41). At its most basic level, proper food consumption is presented in Dahl’s children’s works as both immensely pleasurable, but also bound by tradition and mealtime mores, stressing the importance of restrained consumption habits. Traditional food is idealised through the negative examples of non-traditional takeaway and ready meals in Matilda as it is implied that these foods are unhealthier than traditional fare. Although the idealised meal described in Danny and the English breakfast scene in The BFG are certainly unconventional and unusual, respectively, these dining

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Nicholson explains how, “[Sir Walter] Scott provides an important example in Ivanhoe, where he explicates the power relations subsisting between conquering Normans and vanquished Saxons by pointing out that in French the words for the food object and the animal it is cut from are the same (“boeuf”), whereas the word for the animal is Old English (“cow,” “steer”). The language preserves the power relations: the powerful ate the animal, the weak produced it” (M. Nicholson 38). Here, Nicholson reminds readers how power relationships are foundational to the development of a language for food and to the development of language in general.
sequences place importance on manners and conviviality at table. As Marina Warner explains, in his texts, Dahl “worked with uncommon accuracy on children’s food fantasies, their pleasures, their terrors, their fundamental ambiguities and confusions” (155-56). Dahl traversed the areas of fantasy, pleasure and terror in the many eating rituals and food-related sequences in his novels but more importantly, many of the didactic food sequences in Dahl’s children’s works are marked with ambiguity and confusion. Greedy and consumeristic children are often represented negatively yet, consumer power and excess is celebrated in novels such as Charlie. These contradictions, between pleasure and terror, and controlled appetites and greed, are central in understanding how Dahl uses food to judge his characters and categorise people: for the most part, good characters consume healthy, wholesome food in a mannerly way while bad characters are gluttonous, greedy, and participate in disorderly eating. Of course, in true Dahl-esque fashion, there are exceptions to the categorisation of good/bad or orderly/disorderly eaters in Dahl’s texts—Dahl’s authorial power enables him to express his often contradictory food ideologies in such a way that makes readers unaware of these contradictions. The blurred boundaries between didactic and subversive messages in Dahl’s texts lead to a series of contradictions around food: greedy actions lead to grisly punishments in Chocolate Factory yet Willy Wonka, owner and proprietor of a confectionery company whose success is dependent on consumers’ excessive consumption of his many food products is one of the heroes in this narrative. As we will explore further in chapter two, critics are divided over whether or not this text is didactic or subversive in its respective anti-greed and pro-‘big business’ messages. In Matilda, Dahl’s disdain for convenience food is evidenced by the negative characterisation of Mrs

8 Disorderly eating in literature is often symbolic of deeper issues linked to power and control as Nicholson identifies how examples of disorderly eating in Margaret Atwood’s Lady Oracle (1976) and The Handmaid’s Tale (1985) are “preoccupied with food as a metaphor of power/control” (M. Nicholson 40).
Wormwood, who serves her family takeaway meals, yet good Miss Honey relies on convenience food, like margarine, but this is presented as acceptable because she is poor (this claim will be demonstrated in Chapter Three). What these examples highlight is how contradictory messages about food and eating in Dahl’s texts bolster his authorial power—readers are left to unravel the contradictions in his message while he remains in control over the meaning, however complex and ambiguous, behind his messages. As Deborah Cogan Thacker notes, “What is […] significant is that Dahl’s own recognition of the power of fairy tales to indoctrinate, control and encourage conformity anticipates the examination of power structures in the author-reader relationship by contemporary critics” (Thacker 16). Here, Thacker acknowledges that Dahl’s texts reveal to some extent, the author’s self-awareness of his own authorial power and its effects on young readers through the ways in which he “at once performs the process [of civilizing readers] and undermines it in a way that offers children, as readers, a dimension of authority, or at least, a sense of collusion in the process of storytelling” (Thacker 16). Dahl often gives the illusion of undermining authority in his literary works for children and one of the most significant ways he does this is through the representation of food. Thacker places Dahl within the context of literary analysis of literature for children by identifying him as an author who is aware of the power of authorial performativity and this performative power will be assessed further throughout this study.

Each chapter of this dissertation argues that in order to gain significant insight into not only Dahl’s children’s works but the author himself, a careful critical analysis of the representation of food and power in Dahl’s texts is necessary. While there has been some examination of food’s prevalence and significance in Dahl’s *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (1961) by Carolyn Daniel and Robert Kachur, and Alston has put forward compelling and persuasive ideas in her critical exploration of family meals in *Matilda*,
there is very little scholarship on food and power in his other works for children, despite the fact that food functions as a crucial signifier of power in many of these works. This dissertation will augment current work being done on Dahl in a number of ways. Firstly, with a focus on food, it will build upon previous analyses that situate Dahl’s works within the fantasy, fairy tale, and folk tale subgenres of children’s literature. This thesis will expand upon ideas presented by scholars who have written on the folk and fairy tale traditions in Dahl’s works including Thacker and Dieter Petzold as well as essays by Alston and Hunt assessing Dahl’s impact on fantasy literature for children. In each chapter, I will address how Dahl employs many of the literary techniques he inherits from these storytelling traditions to teach children about proper food and proper ways of consuming in post-war British society. Secondly, this research will also consider and develop analyses conducted on the ideological aspects of his writing, specifically in the scholarship focused on power and control in children’s literature by Nodelman, Gubar, and Hunt, as well as work exploring representations of mass culture and consumerism by Susan Honeyman, Abbie Ventura and Ron Novy. In this thesis, I will draw connections between these critical essays on Dahl’s works and how they inform discussions about food politics, power, and the anxieties about the transformations in British food culture after the Second World War, as represented in Dahl’s novels.

In addition to analysing food’s importance in Dahl’s children’s texts, what this thesis also considers is how Dahl’s children’s works occupy a significant place in the study of food in children’s literature more generally. Of course, Dahl was not the first children’s writer to explore the intricacies of food culture. Food scarcity in the fairy tale Hansel and Gretel, suspect food hawkers in Rossetti’s “Goblin Market” (1862), the Mad

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9 The first chapter will analyse the conventions of post-war fantasy literature for children and explore the ways in which the anti-hunting messages in two fantasy novels The Magic Finger and Fantastic Mr Fox fit in with fantasy literature published during this time.
Hatter’s tea party in *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* (1865), as well as the futuristic food creations in L. Frank Baum’s novels reflect the concerns of the period in which the authors were writing. However, Dahl’s texts are important to the assessment of food’s function in the children’s literary tradition as they are an extension of a long line of texts for children that have examined the pleasurable aspects and significance of devouring good food in good company as well as the importance of exercising self-control and restraint at the table. As Daniel explains, “[f]ood fantasies are a traditional ingredient in classic British children’s literature”, and “[t]hese stories often include sensuous, mouth-watering descriptions of the foods the characters eat; sweet and rich foods are frequently included in vast quantities as well as foods that contemporary discourses on health condemn as fat-laden” (62). Historically, food has been a significant feature of the canonical texts of children’s literature and continues to be an important signifier in contemporary children’s works. Examining food in children’s fiction has been a particular concern of scholars of children’s literature recently with the 2006 publication of Daniel’s *Voracious Children*, as well as Kara Keeling and Scott Pollard’s collection of essays *Critical Approaches to Food in Children’s Literature*, published in 2009. Both sources enable readers to understand the historical and cultural contexts of children’s texts and address how children are central to understanding how food functions in a culture. Food in children’s literature therefore enables young readers to articulate and understand experiences not only pertaining to food, but also issues related to societal values, cultural mores, and the development of a personal and collective identity. In other words, food is a powerful symbol in children’s literature because, as Daniel argues, “food events in children’s literature are clearly intended to teach children how to be human” (12) (emphasis mine). Food events in children’s literature teach children the contrast between
the civilised and uncivilised, animal and human: food ultimately teaches children about the dynamics between the powerful and the powerless.

In Wendy Katz’s important scholarly article, “Some uses of food in children’s literature” (1980) she argues that when you “understand the relations between the child and food […] you understand the workings of the world of the young. This perspective of children’s literature yields a sort of sociology of childhood; an examination of what’s eaten, by whom, when, and where gives one a portrait of children’s manners, problems, and preoccupations” (192). Food in children’s literature, then, acts as an important signifier that not only instructs children about cultural codes, rules, traditions, and mores but moreover teaches children about the human experience and, essentially, how to face the inevitable process of growing up. As Roderick McGillis explains, “Children’s literature teaches us that growing up does not end at a certain age, and that children will never cease to find themselves under the law of the father” (McGillis, “Postcolonialism: originating difference”, 899) while Colin Mills and Jean Webb assert that authors of children’s literature often grapple with the question, “What can, or could, this story tell the young about the business of being a child, of growing up, of dealing with the themes of change, with feelings, or of coping with adults?” (Mills and Webb 771). Mills and Webb affirm that authors are very much aware that “reading, with the possibilities of entering into other times, locations and value systems, gives us the possibility of growing and changing as thinkers” (Mills and Webb 771).

Food, and by extension, meals, introduce children to the boundaries related to eating, routine, etiquette, and prepares them for the structure of mealtime rituals in adult life. The traditions and rules associated with food experiences are often used in children’s literature to prepare children for experiences in later life where rules, boundaries, and codes are necessary. In Dahl’s children’s novels, the social boundaries and codes
embedded in the representations of food instruct children how to properly consume food. There is a long history in British children’s texts of using traditionally prepared food to teach children about mealtime mores, manners, etiquette, and about ‘proper’ consumption habits. According to Daniel, “[t]here is a clear indication, particularly in classic texts, that a child’s naturally hedonistic appetite must be restrained. If parents prove to be inadequate for this task then an alternative socializing agent or authority must be introduced so that the body of the child is suitably transformed” (187). While food-related lessons vary depending on the concerns and anxieties of the period, food consumption is consistently used as a powerful instructive narrative device, teaching children about social boundaries within a culture.

When Dahl denies moralising in his works and insists that he is above all an “entertainer”, it is unclear as to why he would distance himself from the didactic traditions in children’s literature, particularly when it is very clear that his works owe a great debt to works for children that moralise, particularly in relation to food, table manners, and mores. Food was indeed a prominent feature in some of the earliest texts written for children in English. Earlier forms of literature for children were found mostly in courtesy books of the fifteenth century and these books were designed, according to John Rowe Townsend, to instruct rather than entertain children about appropriate behaviour in a variety of contexts: at home, at play and in church (4). As M.O. Grenby explains, “the books that were published especially for children before the mid-18th century were almost always remorselessly instructional (spelling books, school books, conduct books) or deeply pious” (Grenby, “The origins of children’s literature”). These courtesy books were replaced eventually by instructive books that comment a great deal on mealtime mores, including Hugh Rhodes’s influential Book of Nurture (1554) in which Rhodes emphasises the importance of good table manners. In Book of Nurture,
Rhodes instructs children not to burp at the table and to “Turn from such occasion [as] it is a stinking ventosity” (69). Rhodes goes on to remind readers to “Scratch not thy head with thy fingers, when thou art at meat, / Nor spit you over the table-board, see thou do not forget” (69) and “Pick not thy teeth with thy knife nor finger-end, / But with a stick or some clean thing, then do ye not offend” (69). While the advent of standardized table cutlery in Britain (and indeed the knowledge of how to use such cutlery) renders Rhodes’ advice outdated and outmoded in the present day, the motivation behind Rhodes’s *Book of Nurture*, that is, to instruct children on proper etiquette, has remained a part of the children’s literary tradition in Britain. Although Dahl’s texts do not always explicitly instruct children on what (or what not) to eat, the general idea that children need to be taught about food issues and proper consumption habits in children’s works is framed by positive and negative examples: instances in which readers are instructed to “do this” or “do that” in relation to food are rare in Dahl’s works, however characters who behave improperly at table or while eating are shamed (Augustus Gloop) while characters who eat properly (Charlie) are idealised. Dahl’s food lessons are at times explicit, at other times, implicit—these efforts to teach children about food issues and attempt at influencing children’s behaviour can be traced back to Rhodes’s *Book of Nurture*.

By the end of the sixteenth century, the Protestant Reformation had drastically transformed not only the religious landscape of Europe, but it also completely changed how cultures and nations viewed, produced, and consumed food. According to food historian Colin Spencer, after the Reformation, “the connection between Protestantism and bleak and tasteless food began” (103) and food’s place in the lives of parishioners became one of functionality, and a means of survival, rather than a source of pleasure and enjoyment. Emphasis on the importance of a restricted diet in British society continued throughout the seventeenth century. When John Locke wrote *Some Thoughts Concerning*
Education (1693), he too emphasised the importance of plain food in a child’s diet, stating that “[d]ry bread, though the best nourishment, has the least temptation” (18). Locke insisted that moderate appetites are essential in cultivating ‘good’ children: “Another good you will gain hereby is that you will not teach him to eat more nor oftener than nature requires” (17). In later centuries, plain food would continue to be equated with wholesomeness and purity while ingredients and foods beyond the norm, and indulging in luxurious foods were both seen as essentially “corrupting and unsuitable for children” (Daniel 42). In fact, Daniel argues that many of the literary representations of food in the British classics in later centuries continued to be “much influenced by Puritanical discourses, which recommended an extremely bland and restricted diet for children” (Daniel 11). While Dahl certainly did not promote a restricted diet of plain food for children in his novels, similar sentiments towards greed and gluttony from the seventeenth century can be found in the negative representations of greedy and gluttonous characters such as Augustus Gloop and Mr Twit in Dahl’s children’s works. It is worth noting however, that not all greedy and gluttonous characters are represented negatively throughout Dahl’s texts as Matilda’s Bruce Bogtrotter and The Witches’ Bruno Jenkins are redeemed of their gluttonous actions in both texts, which again, highlights how messages concerning greed, gluttony, and excess are not always straightforward and are indeed contradictory in Dahl’s works.

Although food functions somewhat didactically in Dahl’s texts, it is also an important symbol used to entertain and amuse young readers. While Dahl is, of course, not the first children’s author to simultaneously instruct and entertain children, what is interesting is how this form of writing for children, of instructing and amusing them at the same time, can be traced back to eighteenth-century texts such as John Newbery’s A Pretty Little Pocket Book (1744). Newbery’s text marked the beginning of a shift away
from total explicit didacticism in relation to food consumption in texts for children, paving the way for later texts which combined instruction with entertainment (Townsend 16). Newbery’s text also influenced the way in which future children’s texts imparted more implicit messages about food rules and traditions in British culture. While Newbery’s work signalled a major change in the format of children’s works the importance placed on consuming plain foods in moderation as one of many ways of cultivating good habits on the path to virtue (Klemann 230) was maintained. Newbery’s text, like Locke’s, highlighted how, when left to their own devices, children are prone to improper or immoderate consumption habits. Dahl’s texts inherit and continue this tradition of combining instruction and entertainment in print, and while Dahl adapts his message to twentieth-century concerns, the view that children (and adults) require instruction in relation to food issues remains.

Given Dahl’s anxieties about the rapid industrialisation of food and the extensive expansion of the processed food industry from the 1950s (which will be discussed throughout this dissertation), it is perhaps unsurprising that there are interesting parallels between the representations of food in the nineteenth-century industrial revolution-era children’s texts and Dahl’s children’s works. As Alston and Butler note, “While Dahl is often viewed as a modern author, he also owes a considerable debt to the fairy tale tradition and the nineteenth-century cautionary tale” (193). The advent of new, more efficient technologies during the Industrial Revolution completely transformed the food landscape of Britain and nineteenth-century literary giant Charles Dickens’s works were most notably critical of these new changes and their drastic effects on the working class. In particular, Dickens’s *Oliver Twist* (1837) shares important themes with Dahl’s most famous work, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, particularly in the representations of the excesses of capitalism and of the starving poor. As Ruth Richardson explains, “Most
people know [Oliver Twist] from the original book by Charles Dickens, or from the spectacular opening scene of the twentieth-century musical, where the chorus of neglected boys belt out their lust for food in the echoing workhouse hall” (R. Richardson 1). Rebecca Knuth also notes food’s significance in Dickens’ novel, highlighting how, “When the child Oliver Twist, ‘desperate with hunger, and reckless with misery,’ rose from the table and uttered those fateful words, ‘Please, sir, I want some more’ he confronted not only the inhumanity of his master but the apathy of England’s reading public as well” (32). This scene is representative of an important shift within the British children’s literary tradition: the child, who was once recognised mostly as a gluttonous miscreant in need of reform becomes, in Oliver Twist, a starving victim in need of love and care in the form of healthy food. Along with Oliver Twist the starving child soon became a staple in English literature with the publication of The Little Match Girl (1845), and Jessica’s First Prayer (1867) and over a century later, the starving child would remain a powerful figure in British children’s works with one of the most famous examples being Charlie Bucket in Dahl’s Charlie and the Chocolate Factory, who is essentially, an updated version of the starving boy hero Oliver Twist and adapted for twentieth-century readers. What makes Charlie and by extension, Oliver Twist relevant to a twentieth-century audience is how, by the end of World War II, “the industrial and urban poor had been very badly fed in [Britain] for a very long time” a fact that was “a result of a concatenation of factors including poor wages, little time and the loss of contact with indigenous culinary traditions that was one of the results of the industrial revolution” (Humble 103). The trope of the starving child, through the complex representation of Charlie in Dahl’s text, will be analysed further in chapter two.¹⁰

¹⁰ For more information on Dahl’s reliance on Dickens and the similarities between Dahl’s and Dickens’ works, see Dieter Petzold, “Wish-fulfilment and Subversion: Roald Dahl’s Dickensian Fantasy Matilda” in Children’s Literature in Education 23.4 (1992): 185-193 and also Pat Pinsent, “‘The problem of school’
By the 1860s, Christina Rossetti was writing about the temptations and threats of a precipitously growing food industry in Britain and in her poem “Goblin Market”, she vividly depicts the dangers that two girls, Laura and Lizzie, encounter at the hands of exotic goblin-like food hawkers. In Rossetti’s poem, Laura and Lizzie are in need of moral teaching and moralizing and they both live in a threatening and corrupt society that could potentially harm young women and deter them from behaving morally. Rebecca Stern notes how recent criticism has compared Laura in Rossetti’s poem to “a specifically Victorian echo of the hungry Eve” and how like Eve, “Laura’s appetite stands in for various forms of sexual difference: between genders, between women, between fallenness and purity” (478). Lisa Coar explains how, the idealisation of self-control and a “frugal appetite” and “saintly slender over the voraciously hungry and thickset figure” in the nineteenth century “promoted a fierce ‘anorexic logic’, and under this rubric ‘eating too much—or sometimes wanting to eat at all’ was, in the words of Jacqueline Labbe, emblematic of the ‘child’s inherent viciousness, the residue of Original Sin’” (Coar 50).

Similar themes of gluttony, temptation, and original sin in “Goblin Market” extended into twentieth century literary works for children including Dahl’s Chocolate Factory. In Robert Kachur’s reading of Chocolate Factory, he explains how, at the beginning of Dahl’s novel, when people are searching for Wonka’s golden tickets, “the entire world (and Dahl is careful to emphasize that the search for golden tickets is a global event) recognizes that their deepest desires are bound up in food, but those desires have become

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Roald Dahl and Education” in New Casebooks: Roald Dahl (2012), 70-85. Petzold’s article outlines “Dahl’s indebtedness to Dickens” by comparing Matilda’s reading habits, specifically her love of Dickens to Dahl’s own admiration for the literary giant (187). Petzold also notes “Dahl’s use of slightly ridiculous and curiously apt names like “Julius Rottwinkle” or “Bruce Bogtrotter”’ (187) and argues that perhaps the most important link between Dahl and Dickens is that both wrote novels “about sensitive, highly gifted children who are neglected, suppressed, and finally rehabilitated” as evidenced by the child protagonists in Dickens’ Oliver Twist, David Copperfield, and Great Expectations and Dahl’s Matilda, respectively (187). Pinsent’s analysis of school in Dahl’s texts highlights how the BFG’s transformation from bumbling giant to apt pupil is partly due to his “fondness for Dickens” (973), while Catherine Butler asserts that “Matilda’s literary education, as described in the book’s early chapters, is highly traditional, consisting entirely of canonical or semi-canonical texts for adults (Dickens being especially prominent)” (7) —Pinsent and Butler’s observations here emphasize Dahl’s explicit nod to Dickens in his works.
frustrated and distorted by the fallen human condition” (Kachur 224). Kachur interprets Augustus’s fall later on in the novel as significant because “Not only he but all the children and their parents get ushered out of paradise after Augustus’s literal and metaphorical fall; although all the children except for Charlie are later punished for their own illicit consumption, they are tainted, it would seem, by his “original” sin” (Kachur 225). Like Laura and Lizzie, and Eve before them, Augustus’s literal and metaphorical fall occurs when he is unable to resist temptation for sweets.

Not only did “Goblin Market” examine issues related to greed, gluttony, and temptation, but its publication also coincided with increasing fears and anxieties amongst the British public of tainted and contaminated foods sold in the marketplace: “alongside pamphlets, articles and full-length books on the subject literary publications of the 1850s testify to an established concern about short weights and measures, and a new consciousness emerges about the dangers of adulterated food” (Stern, “Adulterations Detected” 485). The representation of a dangerous marketplace and adulterated food in Rossetti’s poem can be compared to similar themes found in Dahl’s texts a century later, in which Dahl explores the problems and anxieties related to adulterated sweets within a twentieth-century setting. The danger here lies in who feeds whom and indeed, from whom one takes food. The dangers associated with the malevolent feeder in children’s literature is represented in Dahl’s The Witches (1983), his screenplay for Ken Hughes’ 1968 film Chitty Chitty Bang Bang and his memoir Boy where he explores the notion of stranger danger and adulterated sweets, all of which will be examined further in the second chapter.

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11 The children’s greed in Chocolate Factory is akin to the theft of food in both the Edenic narrative and in Milton’s interpretation of the narrative, Paradise Lost (1667) as “an archetypal crime, an emphatic way to express a challenge to vested authority” (M. Nicholson 39).
In addition to *Oliver Twist* and “Goblin Market”, the nineteenth century also saw the publication of another food-filled text, Lewis Carroll’s *Alice*. Carroll’s subversive story about a young girl, Alice, entering a fantastical realm features numerous sequences that parody British customs and traditions, particularly those pertaining to food and consumption. As Mervyn Nicholson asserts, “in *Alice in Wonderland* food subverts the established power relations in a very complex manner” (43) and one of the most important food scenes in *Alice* takes place at the Mad Hatter’s tea party. The Mad Hatter’s tea party has been considered “a parody of the formal British meal” and acts as “a microcosm of Wonderland as a whole, in that the problems Alice encounters at the table are largely to do with differences in opinion over manners, mores, and language” (Daniel 48). It is not entirely clear whether or not the behaviour at the tea party is an explicit moralizing example meant to instruct children how to behave at a tea party, but its placement highlights how, despite the differences in opinion about manners during this period, an ideal sense of conduct at table is sought after. Although there were certainly varying degrees of certainty about what was constituted as acceptable or unacceptable behaviour at a tea party, Victorians were nevertheless preoccupied with identifying and conforming to an ever-evolving set of rules at table which reinforces the important place which normal “good” behaviour at the table has within British society—this does not necessarily mean that the text was endorsing “good” behaviour at the table, as the text mocks the bizarre rules about food prevalent in the nineteenth century. Satire is, after all, most effective when it is poking fun at topical issues that are likely to be, from the

12 During the tea party, Alice and the March Hare argue back and forth about how he should not offer his guests wine when wine is unavailable at the tea party and how she should not sit down at a tea party to which she was not invited (95). The March Hare places his pocket watch in a cup of tea (99), the Mad Hatter pours hot tea on the sleeping dormouse (100), and the table is full of unwashed tea-things (104). Moreover, instead of washing the cups and saucers at the table, the Mad Hatter uses a nonsensical system of simply switching places at the table when he fancies a cleaner cup (108). Alice grows increasingly restless throughout the tea party and in the end, she exclaims that the tea-party was indeed “the stupidest tea-party [she] ever was at in all [her] life” (111).
satirist’s perspective, immediately recognizable to audiences. The clear mockery of strict
dining rules in nineteenth-century British society is effective in the dining scene in Alice
precisely because readers would certainly have been familiar with these pervasive
restrictive codes at table. Though Carroll does not seem to be presenting an explicitly
didactic message to young readers in Alice, by showing children an argument at a tea
party about how to and how not to behave, the prevailing cultural mores and manners that
are typically understood as normative within Victorian society are maintained and upheld.

Like Carroll, Dahl too attempts to teach children how to consume at mealtimes by
negative example in many of his children’s novels including The BFG, The Twits and
Matilda. Yet, it is worth noting that the BFG’s manners are not villainised in the text, and
in fact, the whizzpopping scene at the Queen’s breakfast table is celebrated. Given the
celebration of whizzpopping at table in The BFG, the representation of proper and
improper dining etiquette in Dahl’s texts is not always straightforward and the
whizzpopping scene in particular is interesting because of the BFG’s position as a
foreigner at table. The BFG’s foreign-status allows strict table rules and proper etiquette
to be briefly suspended in this particular scene. Dahl temporarily celebrates improper
etiquette at table, but as we later learn, the BFG “expressed a wish to learn how to speak
properly, and Sophie herself, who loved him as she would a father, volunteered to give
him lessons every day” (198). We discover that the BFG learns to spell, write and “turned
out to be a splendid intelligent pupil” (198). Here, the BFG is represented as an
exceptional foreigner, eager and able to assimilate into British society. While there is no
discussion later on in the text as to whether or not the BFG was able to properly conform
to British table manners, or whether or not he continued to whizzpop at table, it is implied
that he must be well-acquainted with British culture and cultural mores as a well-read
giant who “read all of Charles Dickens (whom he no longer called Dahl’s Chickens), and
all of Shakespeare and literally thousands of other books” (198). Given that the BFG had also moved away from giant country and “also started to write essays about his own past life [(emphasis mine)]” (199), it is clear that the BFG is represented as an accepted member of British society by the end of the text. Though whizzpopping at table, and especially in front of the Queen of England, is celebrated earlier on in the novel, it was a faux pas in the BFG’s past life and it can be assumed that the BFG’s transformation into a literate and, in fact, well-educated giant, is meant to assure readers that he knows better than to whizzpop at table now, thereby affirming the importance placed on proper dining etiquette in the text.\(^13\) Representations of disorderly eating, such as the whizzpopping scene in The BFG, are used to highlight the importance of proper dining etiquette and regimented mealtimes as I will explore in greater detail in the third chapter.

The nursery system in wealthy upper-middle class households of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries had an important impact on the representation of food in twentieth-century children’s texts. As Daniel explains, children brought up in this system often “spent their childhoods almost entirely within the self-contained space of a nursery over which a nanny or nurse presided until such time as boys were sent to boarding school. (Girls were generally tutored at home by a governess)” (64). Similarly, Andrea Broomfield explains how, “In upper- and upper-middle-class Victorian households, children did not eat most meals with their parents; they ate a nursery dinner around noon and a lighter tea or supper around five o’clock” (Broomfield 46). Because of this system, “Food was often used as a means to teach children moderation, discipline, selflessness, and virtuousness in general” (Broomfield 47).\(^14\) By the twentieth century, Daniel notes

\(^{13}\) I would argue that a reading of the BFG as a foreigner could be foundational to interesting scholarship about immigration and assimilation in the text—Dahl’s novel reveals problematic xenophobic attitudes that are worth further assessment.

\(^{14}\) Broomfield highlights how, “Certain foods, in other words, could pose just as many moral dangers to children as they could pose physical ones, and sweets, along with rich foods such as pheasant, curries, and
how many of British children’s writers who grew up in the nursery system “would in all likelihood sympathize with their readers’ thwarted appetites, and understand and share their particular appreciation of fantasy food” (70-71). Vivid food fantasies are central to many classic children’s texts of the twentieth century. Edith Nesbit’s *The Railway Children* (1906) and *The Enchanted Castle* (1907) feature descriptions of quintessentially English buns and tea (*The Railway Children*, 40, 42, 61, 95, 107, 122, 123, 126; *The Enchanted Castle*, 70, 72, 74, 75, 95, 101, 162, 163, 164), while early twentieth-century children’s classics featuring animal characters were also filled with traditional English food. In Kenneth Grahame’s *The Wind in the Willows* (1908) food is used as an important signifier of fellowship and camaraderie. The friendships between Mole, Rat, Toad and Badger in Grahame’s text are cemented by fellowship, warmth, and cosiness over comforting meals. While foreign food, particularly French food is described as somewhat suspect as the Sea Rat consumes “a yard of long French bread, a sausage of which the garlic sang, some cheese which lay down and cried” (181), friendship and British food go together in *The Wind in the Willows*, there are instances in which British food is described in an almost orgasmic way and indeed, Grahame’s text can be read in comparison to Dahl’s works as a celebration of distinctly British food. In Grahame’s novel, British food is idealised, while non-British cuisine is full of foreign aromas and flavours that are seen as greatly offensive when compared to the plain, or some might argue (though not of course Grahame), typically mild flavours of British cuisine.

Celebrations of food consumption similar to those of *The Wind in the Willows* would continue to appear in British children’s texts throughout the century. Other popular children’s texts in the early twentieth century also idealise wholesome food, and in some cases, deriving pleasure from eating (within reason) is represented as acceptable more sweetbreads often posed the biggest dilemma for conscientious parents. “Plain” and “wholesome” came up repeatedly in Victorian-era advice books on raising children” (Broomfield 47).
generally. This is seen in A.A. Milne’s *Winnie-the-Pooh* (1926) and particularly in Winnie’s greed for honey. Moreover, the anthropomorphised animals in both Grahame and Milne’s works as well as Felix Salten’s *Bambi, a Life in the Woods* (1923), and in later decades, Disney’s film version *Bambi* (1942) based on Salten’s novel, also gave way to a more sympathetic and sentimentalised view of animals.\(^{15}\) Dahl’s children’s works were certainly influenced by these texts as evidenced by the complex representation of animals and meat in his novels. While Dahl certainly departs from a sentimentalised view on animals found in the aforementioned early twentieth-century children’s texts, the idealisation of nature and animals found in his works highlight how these texts have influenced his novels considerably. The first chapter will explore the animals and meat and the dynamic of the hunter (eater) and the hunted (eaten) in particular, as well as instances in which anti-hunting and pro-animal welfare messages appear in *The Magic Finger*, *Danny*, and *Fantastic Mr Fox*, all of which I will explore in greater detail in the first chapter. This chapter will also outline how Dahl’s personal experiences with cooking meat and seafood and poaching have informed not only how he wrote about animals, but also how these views are expressed both didactically and subversively in his literary works.

The early twentieth century also saw the publication of L. Frank Baum’s *The Patchwork Girl of Oz* (1913) and *The Magic of Oz* (1919) which both address futurist preoccupations with scientific and technological innovations in food production. In Baum’s *The Patchwork Girl of Oz*, Professor Woggle-Bug’s “square meal tablet” contains the equivalent contents of a square meal in pill form and is described as “equal to a peck of other food” and ultimately aids in chewing: “Think how tired your jaws would be chewing a square meal like this, if it were not condensed to the size of a small tablet—

\(^{15}\) While these texts are not British, they are important in their contribution to Anglo-American children’s culture and will be analysed further in chapter one.
which you can swallow in a jiffy” (Baum, *The Patchwork Girl of Oz* 45). Citing the example of the square-meal tablet in *The Magic of Oz*, Raymond D. Boisvert observes how Baum’s fictional meal-in-a-pill is representative of “the highest ideal for abstract, instrumental reality: provid[ing] nutrition in the form of the most time-saving manner” (Boisvert 3). In later decades, the meal-in-a-pill trope would be represented as a chewing-gum meal in Dahl’s *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* to comment on the potential dangers of scientific and technological experimentation on food and issues of power and social control. The chewing-gum meal as well as other synthetic or lab-grown food in Dahl’s texts will form the focus of chapter four.

As the twentieth century progressed, British food culture changed dramatically. Between 1940 and 1954, Britain entered a period of austerity which resulted in the strict rationing of produce, meat, and dairy products, and a whole host of other foods. In the 1950s, J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis’s books imagined a nearly untouched Britain where food is wholesome and, unlike Austere Britain, abundant. While the basic themes of *The Lord of the Rings* Trilogy (1954-1955) were first introduced in *The Hobbit* (1937), from the Second World War onwards, the representation of an idealised rural Britain eventually “became a dominant motif in children’s fantasy” (153) and “Bilbo […] and his faithful companions were traditional British countryfolk: little men who put their lives on the line to preserve a way of life and their home” (153). This representation idealises traditional British life in the countryside and, as Jonathan Langford argues, “it is the hobbit discourse of food that is the dominant one within the books, in part perhaps because it is the cultural discourse that is closest to our own” (128). In *The Two Towers*, the narrator explains how after yet another long journey and “days spent in the lonely wild, the evening meal seemed a feast to the hobbits: to drink pale yellow wine, cool and fragrant, and eat bread and butter, and salted meats, and dried fruits, and good red cheese,
with clean hands and clean knives and plates” (676). The meal proved so satisfying that “[n]either Frodo nor Sam refused anything that was offered, nor a second, nor indeed a third helping” (676). This association between the rural environment and wholesome food would extend from Tolkien’s children’s classics to other popular fiction, including C.S. Lewis’s *The Chronicles of Narnia* (1950-6), Enid Blyton’s *Famous Five* series (1942-1963) and many of Dahl’s children’s works throughout the remainder of the twentieth century.

In the mid-century, food fantasies continued to be presented alongside didactic messages cautioning readers against unchecked consumer power and out-of-control appetites in children’s texts discussed earlier. While it is acceptable in many of the children’s works of this period to enjoy food and eating, deriving pleasure from both is only acceptable under specific conditions and within distinct boundaries of what constitutes as ‘proper’ consumption. In Eric Linklater’s *The Wind on the Moon* (1944), sisters Dinah and Dorinda indulge in extreme overeating and “transgress a number of food rules about the sequence and timing of meals—they eat between approved mealtimes and eat exclusively. Their behaviour is clearly deviant but also undoubtedly pleasurable” (Daniel 193). The pleasures of and deviance associated with excessive food consumption is represented throughout the twentieth century and an important example of this tension can be found in C. S. Lewis’s *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (1950). In the novel, Lewis envisions a rather bleak fantastical realm under the control of an evil Queen. Early on in the narrative, Edmund, separated from his siblings, is given by the Queen a hot drink described as “very sweet and foamy and creamy” which “warmed him right down to his toes” (37, 38). The Queen also offers Edmund, his deepest desire: several pounds of Turkish Delight of which he “tr[ied] to shovel down as much […] as he could, and the more he ate the more he wanted to eat” (38). As Alston notes, “food leads
to the downfall of Edmund as surely as it did for Eve and for Hansel and Gretel” (*The Family in English Children’s Literature* 115). Jean Webb explains that through Edmund, “[t]he negative stereotyping of the fat child continues throughout the twentieth century” and how,

Although Edmund is not described as being overweight, he does have a fixation about food […] Edmund’s preoccupation with food and his greed are his fatal flaws, for he is so tempted by the Turkish delight offered by the White Witch that he is prepared to betray his family, and by implication his patriotic values. Edmund is overtaken by greed, forgetting his manners and any sense of protecting his family and friends during what was actually an interrogation by the White Witch (“Voracious Appetites” 113).

Still, the didactic function of Turkish Delight as a warning against greed and gluttony in Lewis’s novel is presented alongside a great many idealised representations of food and eating in relation to cosiness, camaraderie and comfort and in fact, the reader is presented with examples of good homemade British food, rather than bad, magic food in the text. When Lucy is invited to tea with Mr Tumnus readers are informed that “[t]here was a nice brown egg, lightly boiled, for each of them, and then sardines on toast, and then buttered toast, and then toast with honey, and then a sugar-topped cake” (16), and essentially, a good ‘British’ meal. This example would have been particularly enticing to readers when this book was first published because of restricted weekly rations. At this time, the average personal weekly ration was approximately one shilling and sixpence worth of meat, eight ounces of sugar, four ounces of butter or fat, one egg, one ounce of cheese and jam and honey were also heavily rationed (K. Barker 9). As bleak as Narnia may have been under the Queen’s rule, it is clear that food is not scarce when Lucy and
Mr Tumnus are able to enjoy almost an entire week’s worth of rations in one sitting. Later, they eat potatoes and fish with the beavers (80) while Edmund vanishes in search of Turkish Delight like a drug addict (89-90). Edmund’s behaviour echoes the behaviour of the poor addicted Laura of Rossetti’s ‘Goblin Market’, whose consumption of foreign fruits, grown in places where summer never ends, results in her wasting away. Evidently, the conviviality of woodland creatures in earlier twentieth-century children’s texts extends to Lewis’s popular children’s series. Moreover, these examples, not unlike those in Tolkien’s works, or later on in Blyton’s novels, offer an escape for readers living under austere circumstances, where they are free to indulge in the food fantasies that Lewis describes here. Dahl too experienced the difficulties of rationing during the Second World War and while he does not explicitly address these issues in his fictional works, he discusses rationing and austerity in relation to his frustration and disdain towards excessive consumption habits which can be found in biographical accounts, interviews and in his non-fictional works. The trope of the greedy child in Lewis’s text is carried on in later characterisations of Bruce Bogtrotter, Bruno Jenkins and perhaps most memorably, Augustus Gloop in Dahl’s novels.  

Like the work of Lewis and Tolkien, Enid Blyton’s children’s novels are also filled with food descriptions that present an alternative and idyllic food-laden Britain very different from the society in which her readers were living when these texts were first published. The idyllic world that Blyton constructs in her books envisions a British society free from scarcity and warnings against over-consumption. Each of the books in Blyton’s *Famous Five* series (1942-1963) is filled with numerous food descriptions and

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16 It is worth noting here that Bruce Bogtrotter’s characterization goes against the ways in which the trope of the overweight and greedy child is represented in Dahl’s texts and in children’s literature more generally as Bruce actually triumphs over Miss Trunchbull in the memorable chocolate cake scene in *Matilda*. In chapter three, I will examine this complexity further in relation to the power reversal between the feeder and the fed in Dahl’s texts and how this dynamic emphasizes Dahl’s contradictory representation of greed and gluttony.
the children in Blyton’s novels are constantly going on picnics in idyllic landscapes where they “munch bread and cheese and enjoy cake and biscuits” and “all [enjoy] themselves thoroughly” (130). Other picnics consist of sandwiches, lemonade (30) as well as “loaves of bread, butter, biscuits, jam, tins of fruit, ripe plums, bottles of ginger-beer, a kettle to make tea and anything else [the children] could think of!” (63). It is difficult not to read Blyton’s abundant and recurring feasts as a fictional escape for readers from their strict and meagre diets and indeed Keith Barker argues that Blyton’s food descriptions function as a form of “wish fulfilment” for her young readers (10).

Although Dahl, like Blyton, inherits many of the anxieties about food and eating present in the British children’s literary tradition, Dahl’s approach differs from Blyton’s in that he directly addresses what he regards as many of the existing problems and challenges associated with food and eating that children encounter in contemporary society, such as overconsumption. While Blyton addresses the problem of austerity by consoling her somewhat food-deprived readers with numerous descriptions of luscious and abundant food, Dahl recognises that there are also, in addition to the austerity measures, potential and emerging problems associated with the mechanisms of food production and consumption in Britain at this time.

Historically, food has functioned as an important instructive tool in children’s literature, teaching children about pleasure, restraint, culinary traditions, social mores and dining etiquette. Dahl’s texts use similar food-related tropes and narrative devices found in earlier children’s novels and adapt them for twentieth-century audiences by including twentieth-century foods and industrial food production processes, thereby simultaneously introducing and renewing discussions about food and eating within a post-war context. By 1950, the lingering effects of austerity measures enacted during the Second World War transformed the ways in which the British viewed food and as Andrew Rosen notes,
“Five years after the end of the war the food revolution begun” (Rosen 18). During this period, convenience foods in the form of ready and frozen meals were being developed at a rapidly increasing rate, the junk food industry expanded considerably, the supermarket emerged and transformed how people purchased food, and the ever-growing amount of food choices in British food culture certainly changed how people ate and lived. It is within this rapidly changing context that Dahl writes his food-laden children’s texts. While Dahl acknowledges that technological innovations in the food industry resulting in an overall increased production of foodstuffs are indeed ground-breaking—particularly the innovations in the chocolate industry (*Cookbook*, 150-5; *Boy*, 147-9)—these innovations are presented as problematic in his texts and threaten to break down what he regards as healthy consumption practices. Augustus Gloop is perhaps the most memorable character that represents the erosion of moderate and healthy consumption habits in Dahl’s novels. Dahl’s anxieties are expressed through his vision of a British food world where traditional foods exist alongside an ever-growing range of synthetic foods, most notably represented in Dahl’s *Chocolate Factory, The Twits, The Witches*, and *Matilda*. For Dahl, many of these processed foods are not only harmful to children’s physical health, but also pose a significant threat to both traditional diets and more importantly, a lifestyle that positions physical health as its ultimate priority. Dahl expressed his frustration with what he perceived to be junk food’s negative affect on children’s physical activity (or lack thereof) and lamented how fewer and fewer children picked from the fruit orchards in his garden as years passed: “Boys should want to climb

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17 Rosen cites the publication of Elizabeth David’s highly influential *A Book of Mediterranean Food* (1950) and subsequent publications of *French Country Cooking* (1951) and *Italian Food* (1954) as instrumental in transforming the way Britons thought about food during this period (18). Rosen also cites the increasingly open attitudes towards dining out and consuming foreign food (19) as important reasons for the transformation in British food culture at this time. Interestingly, according to Rosen, “[t]he enormous increase in the home consumption of foreign food would have been impossible without the development of the frozen food industry. Home consumption of frozen food quadrupled between 1971 and 1993, and by the end of the century Britons were eating twice as many chilled or frozen meals per person per year as Americans or the French” (Rosen 21).
trees. They should want to build tree-houses. They should want to pick apples. Maybe all the crisps and the Coke and the junk food they consume nowadays has made them sluggish” (51-52). This thesis explores what Dahl considers to be healthy and unhealthy eating, proper and improper consumption habits, and it also examines how Dahl uses the boundaries between traditionally grown and prepared foods and industrially processed and synthetic foods to teach children how to eat properly, and by extension, how to eventually become competent adults.

The rapid transformation of the British food industry in the latter half of the twentieth century is central to this study of Dahl and his works. Dahl’s literary works reflect a rather grim outlook on the changes within the food industry during this period and his children’s fiction suggests that British children at this time were in grave danger of being overcome by greed given the expansion of mass production in British food culture. Nicola Humble comments on the effects of an expanded processed food industry noting how,

Probably the furthest reaching, and most devastating, effect of the war on the standards of British cooking was in its encouragement of an increased reliance on manufactured food products. The nutritional scientists whose wartime work kept the population from starvation continued to advise industry after the war on more and more ways of preserving, dehydrating, packaging and generally denaturing food. The canned meat and fish that had been such a novelty to wartime housewives, the pressure cookers they used to save fuel and time, the domestic freezers that they had desperately envied their American counterparts—all these were to become central to the food practices of the 1960s and 1970s. The use of ersatz and substitute ingredients did not end with the war but became a major part of the
industrial production of food. The focus on maximizing crop yields during the war years led to the deleterious practices of industrialized, chemicalized farming, whose results we still struggle to overcome. It was not so much the shortages of the Kitchen Front as its successes that were to haunt the future (104).

Indeed, similar concerns and anxieties about the transformations in British food culture described by Humble are represented in Dahl’s children’s texts and this thesis argues that the prevailing food anxieties gripping the British public consciousness after the War is articulated through Dahl’s use of food in his texts. While food production, food manufacturing, consumption habits and a whole host of other issues pertaining to food culture are constantly changing and in flux, the fear of potential threats to a child’s health remains a pressing concern in children’s literature, primarily because children have historically been, and continue to be seen as, particularly vulnerable to these outside dangers. Overconsumption and child obesity has been of particular interest in children’s literature published over the last ten years, including recent titles such as, Bebe Moore Campbell’s I Get So Hungry (2008), Paul Kramer’s Maggie Goes on a Diet (2011), and Lord Toph’s The Sweet Eaters (2014). These texts reinforce the idea that children need to be instructed about what to eat, how to eat, and how much to eat, and as Daniel notes “The symbolism of food in children’s literature in particular is a significant area for study because children’s fiction is a category of literature written by one powerful group, not for equals, but for another less knowledgeable, less socially enabled and thus subordinated and vulnerable group” (3-4).

This thesis will analyse four specific areas of the British food industry which are heavily represented in Dahl’s fictional works: meat, sweets, convenience food and futuristic food. The four chapters are organised in order, from the least to the most
processed foodstuff within the British agro-industrial food complex. In addition, this study is also organized conceptually: Mervyn Nicholson’s essay on food and power in literature, he highlights how, “As the expression of a power relationship, eating expresses power dually. It marks human weakness in relations to the gods but strength in relation to animals” (M. Nicholson 38). This hierarchy is certainly represented in Dahl’s novels for children and frames the focus of this study. The first chapter focuses on the power dynamics between humans and animals in relation to food, while the second and third chapters explore the power relationships between adults and children within various contexts related to food consumption and consumerism, and the final chapter examines the power dynamics between humans and the natural world in relation to the processes of innovative food production. Each of these chapters will also incorporate Dahl’s impressions about the transformations in the food industry using a wide-range of fictional and non-fictional sources including Dahl’s biographies, interviews, cookbooks, unpublished manuscripts and typescripts, and his personal letters of correspondence. Dahl’s authorial power will be examined through an analysis of his didactic and subversive messages in each chapter.

The first chapter examines issues of animal welfare and industrialised meat production, focusing on The Magic Finger (1966), Danny the Champion of the World (1975), and Fantastic Mr Fox (1970). This chapter considers how the expansion of factory farms, which coincided with an increasing interest in animal welfare in British society after the Second World War, is represented in Dahl’s texts. Dahl’s novels highlight important aspects of debates concerning animal welfare issues and matters pertaining to industrialised meat production during this period. In this chapter, I argue that the representations of hunting, poaching, and factory farming are used to instruct children about proper consumption behaviour in a rapidly changing food culture and I
will analyse the complicated power dynamics between humans and animals in a selection of Dahl’s works for children. The period in which Dahl began writing children’s novels also coincided with increased scholarly interest in food’s relationship to myth, identity, and power with cultural critics including Roland Barthes and Claude Lévi-Strauss commenting on the intersections of food, power, ideology, identity and culture. In Barthes’ influential collection of essays, *Mythologies* (1957), published only four years before Dahl’s first major children’s book publication *James*, he explores quintessentially “French” foods and drink with essays on steak and chips and wine, arguing that food and drink is loaded with multiple meanings that define and shape notions of myth, identity, power, and the politics of a given society. In an essay on steak and chips, Barthes argues that steak and chips are loaded with a multitude of complex meanings and its own mythology: “Steak is a part of the same sanguine mythology as wine. It is the heart of meat, it is meat in its pure state; and whoever partakes of it assimilates a bull-like strength. The prestige of steak evidently derives from its quasi-rawness. In it, blood is visible, natural dense, at once compact and sectile” (Barthes, “Steak and Chips” 69). Barthes was not alone in closely inspecting meat’s symbolism and significance as an important cultural object during this period. Nine years after the publication of Barthes’ *Mythologies* Levi-Strauss’s famed 1966 essay, “The Culinary Triangle” explores similar food mythologies and the connections between food and national identity and how notions of myth, food, and identity transformed across cultures and over time. In “The Culinary Triangle”, Lévi-Strauss explains how boiled meat and roasted meat went in and out of fashion at different points throughout Western culinary history, citing a passage in *The Encyclopedia of Diderot and d’Alembert* (1751-1777) that purports the nourishment

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18 For Barthes, the ‘ordinary’ act of consuming steak in France is worth exploring because it reveals “a part of all the rhythms that of the comfortable bourgeois meal and that of the bachelor’s bohemian snack [and] it effects the best possible ratio between economy and efficacy, between mythology and its multifarious ways of being consumed” (Barthes, “Steak and Chips” 70).
of boiled meats and how only a half century later, Brillat-Savarin took “precisely the opposite view”, emphasising that boiled meat or “flesh without its juice” is inferior to roasted meat (Lévi-Strauss 43). It is unknown as to whether or not Dahl was familiar with or aware of Barthes’ or Levi-Strauss’s observations about food’s relevance to identity, but these texts tell us a great deal about the emergence of methodologies and critical theories that began to recognize food’s significance in not only everyday life but in relation to concepts such as myth, identity, and power. I will examine Barthes and Levi-Strauss’s respective works on meat and cultural criticism in greater detail for my analysis of meat and animal welfare in Chapter One.

The advent of the confectionery industry in the nineteenth century, coupled with the emergence of snack and convenience food industries in the form of packaged and frozen foods in the twentieth century, present challenges to children in terms of making healthy food choices. In addition to the challenges of starvation and gluttony, about which British children have been warned for centuries, for Dahl the child in post-war Britain faces the problem of making healthy food choices in an environment crammed with highly accessible and extremely excessive amounts of food, and particularly, junk food. As the food industry expanded throughout the twentieth century, so too did the definitions of what constituted healthy food, and what was considered junk food.19 The second and third chapters of this thesis focus on junk food or “food that is out of place” (Cook 120) in Dahl’s children’s texts. In the second chapter, I consider the representation of sweets in Dahl’s texts and argue that sweets occupy a unique space in British food culture due to their association with childhood, nostalgia and conspicuous consumption. Concentrating

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19 The OED Online identifies “junk food” as a term with origins in US and its first documented use was in the Washington Post in 1973, and coincidentally coinciding with the middle of Dahl’s career as a children’s author; the OED defines junk food as “food that appeals to popular (esp. juvenile) taste but has little nutritional value” (“Junk food”, OED Online) while Carolyn Daniel defines junk food as “over-processed, unnatural, and literally poisonous” (Daniel 211).
on the representation of sweets within factory and sweetshop settings, this chapter will analyse *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, Dahl’s autobiography *Boy* (1984) and *The Witches* (1983), and explore how sweets in these texts are used to both caution children against overconsumption, and to mythologise Dahl’s persona as somewhat of an authority on confectionery in complex ways. This chapter also highlights how Dahl’s real-life association with sweets greatly complicates the didactic and subversive messages concerning sweets’ consumption and child consumer power in the aforementioned novels. While Dahl does warn children against excessive consumption of sweets and other foods, sweets are still represented as much more acceptable forms of indulgence than other packaged snacks and ready meals, and is yet another way in which Dahl’s complicated and contradictory views about food permeate his texts. In fact, sweets are not seen by Dahl to be as threatening to children’s diets and sensibilities as other junk foods such as frozen entrées, ready meals, and take-away food. Sweets are typically marketed as treats, to be consumed as frivolous fancies, not to be confused with traditional food. What Dahl finds so troubling about convenience foods is that they are foodstuffs that promise to nourish consumers and satisfy their hunger, simultaneously posing as wholesome foods, while being in actuality foods stripped of nutrients and processed with a range of potentially harmful ingredients not typically found in traditional fare. In addition, these foods are represented in Dahl’s texts as major threats to routinized life and to regimented mealtimes, both of which Dahl considered of utmost importance in cultivating ‘proper’ consumption habits.20

20Although Dahl did not explicitly condemn convenience foods as the sole threat to a routinized lifestyle, this negative view of convenience foods was certainly expressed in the representation of activities such as snacking in *The Twits* or Augustus Gloop’s constant eating outside of designated mealtimes in *Chocolate Factory*, both of which are condemned within each respective text and ultimately clash with the routines Dahl lived by throughout his life.
Chapter three will explore examples from Dahl’s personal and professional letters, autobiographical, and literary works that highlight the importance Dahl placed on routine and routinized meals. In addition, the third chapter focuses on the ways in which convenience foods are represented in Dahl’s texts as a threat to traditional food and regimented mealtimes. The first section of this chapter focuses on the association of convenience foods and snacking with disorderly eating and out-of-control appetites in *The Twits* (1980) and *The BFG* (1982) while the second section concentrates on the representations of convenience food and family meals in *Matilda* (1988) and how the dynamics between adult and children in these texts are effective in understanding how power and control functions in these works. As Susan Grieshaber notes, “[t]he object of control is the regulation of young children through domestic organization. This requires continuous supervision by an adult in order to ensure smooth functioning of daily routine and practice” (Grieshaber 652). Grieshaber goes on to note that this process of domestic organization between adults and children are “constituted discourses which together form power-knowledge relationships” (Grieshaber 652). As Rebecca O’Connell and Julia Brannen argue, “families are also political sites […] involving power relations and engaged in the control of resources [where] [p]ower is exercised covertly as well as overtly […] and is not always or usually coercive or explicit” (O’Connell and Brannen 2-3). Indeed, within families, “children and parents are engaged in everyday power negotiations about food” (Grieshaber 650). The power dynamics between adults and children, or who feeds whom, and Dahl’s authorial power will be explored in this chapter.

The final chapter analyses heavily industrially processed and manufactured food in Dahl’s children’s texts. Dahl’s novels anticipate the dangers associated with very controversial developments in food science and in this chapter I will consider how Dahl’s perspectives about technological advancements in food production in his children’s texts
highlight his paranoia about the changing British food industry. This chapter will assess how Dahl expresses his anxieties and warnings to children about the potential problems that may arise with new scientific developments in food. These futuristic foods blur the boundaries between what constitutes healthy and nourishing food and foodstuffs with ingredients that have been manipulated and modified to the point in which they no longer resemble traditional fare. This chapter will also show how Dahl’s texts can be read as complicated didactic and subversive novels, anticipating the development of a food culture in which highly processed and synthetic food are the norm while traditional foods and eating practices become the exception in British society. Examples found in Dahl’s *James and the Giant Peach* (1961), *George’s Marvellous Medicine* (1981), *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* and *Charlie and the Great Glass Elevator* (1972) will form the focus of this chapter.

By exploring food’s important didactic and subversive function in Dahl’s children’s literature, this study endeavours to expand previous work on Dahl and inspire further critical interest in his works. Each of the chapters in this dissertation considers how Dahl’s concerns and anxieties about the post-war food industry shaped the representation of food in his novels and food issues in Dahl’s texts are inexplicably linked to issues of power in children’s literature. Dahl’s biographical and literary works reveal contradictions around food and these contradictions are tied to wide-reaching discourses about contradiction and power in children’s literature. In addition, each chapter also analyses how Dahl adapts contradictory messages about food and power, who eats whom, and who feeds whom, and consequently sheds light on deeper complexities about how authorial power functions through didacticism and subversion in his literary works. A close examination of food in Dahl’s children’s texts reveals crucial ways in which Dahl’s
texts fit into the children’s literary tradition and how his novels provide significant cultural commentary on post-war British society.
Chapter One: Animal Welfare and Meat

This chapter examines issues of who eats whom in relation to Dahl’s ideological positions about animal welfare, hunting, food, and power as represented in his biographical, literary, and non-literary works. In this chapter we will be exploring how the dynamics between the heroes, as anti-hunting activists and poachers, and villains, as hunters and factory farmers, in *The Magic Finger* (1966), *Danny the Champion of the World* (1975) and *Fantastic Mr Fox* (1970), are representative of the complicated power dynamics between humans and animals, hunters and hunted, and adults and children. Dahl’s ideological positions on hunting in these texts suggest a deliberate didactic effort to discourage children from hunting. At the same time, the didactic messages are communicated in a subversive way, giving the impression that it is not children who need to be reminded of this anti-hunting message (after all, the child protagonists in these novels are actually against hunting) but adult antagonists who are hungry for power and driven by greed.\(^{21}\) This chapter examines how one of the key ways of understanding the functioning of Dahl’s authorial power in the aforementioned texts is by analysing the contradictory, didactic, and subversive messages about animal welfare in these novels.

This chapter also explores how the extensive transformations in British food culture after the Second World War deeply affected Dahl’s subsequent views on British food processes. Dahl’s interest in the natural world and natural food is explicitly expressed in his non-fictional works including the posthumous publications *Roald Dahl’s Cookbook* (1991) and *My Year* (1993), while his fictional works reveal concerns about how food production and manufacturing processes affect the natural world. Many of the distinctions between American and British food culture became increasingly blurred in the decades following the War, and numerous changes in food production and

\(^{21}\) This interpretation carries with it other complications, particularly when we consider the Foxes’ reversed role from hunted to hunters in *Fox*, which will be examined further in section three.
manufacturing fuelled Dahl’s weariness, scepticism, and frustration with the British food industry which he eventually articulated in texts for children such as *Fantastic Mr Fox* and adults, in the short story “Pig” (1960). Dahl’s criticisms of hunting and the transformations in post-war British food culture are connected and reveal important contradictions in his ideological positions, which are central to understanding how his authorial power functions within and outside his works.

Dahl’s texts identify and comment on the numerous transformations in British food culture in implicit ways: the technological advancement of food production, the industrialisation of food manufacturing, and the mechanisation of the British farm are all represented in Dahl’s texts in order to teach children about the increasingly complex food environment in which they live. Dahl’s works explore the meat industry, in relation to the ethics of food consumption and focus on the idea that, as Sandra Gilbert notes, “historically[,] [meat] has been the most controversial part of the food chain, for moral, political and medical reasons” (324). Some of Dahl’s non-fictional works also provide insight into his personal anxieties about food production and manufacturing processes in post-war Britain. My analysis will consider the complex notion of the animal as meat, and how meat is central in understanding the connections between food and power in both Dahl’s non-fictional works and his children’s texts. Before we examine the animal welfare, food, and power in Dahl’s literary works for children, it is important to first analyse Dahl’s ideological positions about natural food and meat more generally. One of the most informative sources on the subject is the posthumous publication, *Roald Dahl’s Cookbook* (1991). In this text, Dahl informs readers about his personal food experiences, the importance of freshness and seasonality when picking out fruit, vegetables, meat or fish, as well as the politics of food sourcing, production, and preparation. For Dahl, the processes of growing food and gardening were deeply intertwined with how food is
consumed and how pleasure is derived from eating. In a section at the start of the *Cookbook* called “How to Shop”, there are essays containing tips, instructions and guidelines about how to grow or obtain the “best” foodstuffs. This focus on the ‘best’ is not surprising, since, as Sturrock explains, “Whether it was food, wine, painting, literature or music, ‘the best’ interested [Dahl] profoundly. He liked certainty and clear, strong opinions. I don’t think I ever heard him say anything halfhearted” (Sturrock 8). It is unsurprising then, that Dahl’s opinions and reflections about the “best” ways of growing, preparing and consuming food are articulated with an unwavering sense of certainty.

Throughout *Cookbook*, Dahl expresses a keen interest in natural, seasonal, and local food through several recollections of his gardening experiences. Dahl continued to garden after leaving his mother’s home in Amersham following the Second World War, and he grew a variety of vegetables with his wife and children at his home, ‘Gipsy House’, in Great Missenden. He shared a passion for gardening with his second wife, Felicity Dahl (née Crosland), who co-wrote *Cookbook*. Dahl’s fervid enthusiasm for gardening vegetables is expressed when he exclaims that vegetables are “surely the greatest of all foods” (*Cookbook* 102) believing that gardening allows people to fully appreciate vegetables and “Only then can [one] obey the golden rules that govern the serving of perfect vegetables” (102). Here, Dahl’s claim indicates his rule-bound sense of food perfection and responsibility. Vegetables should only be dug up or picked when one is ready to cook them because, as Dahl explains emphatically and with much hyperbole, “it really is the only way you will taste them in all their glory” (102-3).

Intensely preoccupied with the notion of freshness (*Cookbook* 36), Dahl warns readers against consuming fish that is not fresh as the taste could be grossly inferior (36). As one of

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22 Dahl’s extensive knowledge about growing vegetables is clear throughout *Cookbook*: he describes planting and plucking vegetables in great detail (103), the differences between various vegetable crops (103–4) and recommends a particular type of seed to grow his favourite type of onion and even provides the name and address of the onion seed nursery (29).
Dahl’s biographers, Jeremy Treglown notes, the cookbook is a “panegyric to the subtleties of this variety of onion or that ham, and the right places to buy butter or pick mushrooms” (Treglown 235). In Cookbook, a similar sentiment for “the best” is expressed by some of the other contributors including family members, family cooks, Dahl’s friends, and professional chefs. In a passage on natural food, the Dahl family’s former personal chef Marwood Yeatman declares it as “the only proper choice” and “it carries by far the greatest rewards but must be examined carefully” (17). He goes on to instruct readers to pay attention to the condition of natural foods: to “test hams, try cheeses, and reject or keep them like wines, until they mature” (17). Yeatman stresses the importance of home-grown food, purchasing local food and seasonality and advises readers to resist the temptation of purchasing foods grown out of season and to instead, “look forward to them and be prepared to pounce. The rest of the year, learn to do without and compensate” (Cookbook 18). There is a recurring message throughout the cookbook that emphasises the importance of the fresh, natural, home-grown and ‘farmhouse’ cookery.

The emphasis on local, seasonal foods in Cookbook reflects the boom of the ‘fresh food’ (or ‘peasant food’) movement in Britain inspired by the counterculture movements of the 1960s and 1970s (Humble 167-68). These food movements tapped into the idea that “Of all the qualities we seek in food, freshness best satisfies all these modern appetites. It offers both proof of our progress and an antidote to the ills that progress brings—at least for a little while” (Friedberg 3). The peasant food movement waned slightly during the excess of the 1980s but resurged in the following decade. Humble describes peasant food as “simple and unrefined, but imbued with centuries of tradition and with the hearty, pungent flavours of garlic and anchovies, of olive oil and goosefat and wine” (134). Humble also cites food writers Elizabeth David and M.F.K. Fisher as
early proponents of peasant cooking in food writing (133). Many British cookbooks published in the 1990s, including Simon Hopkinson’s *Roast Chicken and Other Stories* (1994) and Nigel Slater’s *Real Cooking* (1997), championed similar ideas about farm-to-table eating. In this sense, *Roald Dahl’s Cookbook* is not unlike other cookbooks of the 1990s, known for their “Preoccupation with the homely and domestic” (Humble 229). For Dahl, naturally home-grown fruits and vegetables are presented as ideal, while meat and fish are considered best eaten when they are fresh and obtained from local producers. In the 1990s, cookbook writing was seen as “a reaction to the overblown excesses of the 1980s food scene, a longing return to a sense of food as honest and simple, something intrinsically linked to basic human needs and rituals” (Humble 252). During this time, homemade, rustic food was used to remind readers that there were much healthier alternatives to the processed foods that began proliferating in British supermarket aisles from the 1960s onwards.

Many of the images in *Roald Dahl’s Cookbook* reference the rustic and the homemade: the photographs are taken in what appear to be kitchens, gardens and other domestic spaces. There are also numerous photos of Dahl and his family members together at table, both indoors and outdoors, suggesting that conviviality was an important part of the Dahl’s family life. In fact, in a recent article written in celebration of the centenary of the author’s birth, Dahl’s granddaughter Sophie Dahl reflected on her grandfather’s passion for gardening and the natural world: “[m]y grandfather loved the countryside. He loved the green hills of the Chilterns, the woods that spilled behind his house. His garden was beautiful” (Dahl, “My grandfather Roald Dahl, the magician”, *Guardian* 13 September 2016). This quote echoes the sentiment of Dahl’s non-literary texts including *Cookbook* and *My Year*, both of which offer readers insight into the famed

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23 Though this was not a particularly unusual perspective at this time, it was certainly a view that was beginning to gain momentum in British food culture.
his love of the natural world. As we will explore further throughout this chapter, Dahl’s passion for nature often translated into a love of natural, wholesome food prepared simply. The importance Dahl placed on natural food prepared in traditional ways is emphasised in his Cookbook through a sort of fetishisation of freshness. Many of the photographs in Dahl’s cookbook feature images of the freshly caught game and fish positioned alongside the cooked entrées—this positioning is featured in recipes for crab (35), mussels with snail butter (39), pike (47), partridges (58), oxtail (73) and monkfish (95) as a reminder that the raw has been transformed into the cooked.

Fig. 1: Roasted Partridges with Juniper Stuffing, photograph by Jan Baldwin, Roald Dahl’s Cookbook, Felicity Dahl and Roald Dahl (London and New York: Penguin, 1991; Print; 58).

Fig. 3: “Pike Quenelles”, photograph by Jan Baldwin, *Roald Dahl’s Cookbook*, Felicity Dahl and Roald Dahl (London and New York: Penguin, 1991; Print; 47).

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24 The name of the recipe has been incorrectly translated—the recipe is for mussels with snail butter, but the dish is called mussels with snails in French in *Cookbook*. 
Photographer Jan Baldwin’s side-by-side arrangements of the raw and the cooked in Dahl’s cookbook highlights the transformation that takes place during the cooking process, reminding readers of the origins of cooked food. This arrangement of the raw and the cooked is symbolically significant as it alludes to Claud Lévi-Strauss’s demarcation between the raw/nature, cooked/culture, animal/humans, and civilised/uncivilised in “The Culinary Triangle”. In this essay Lévi-Strauss explains how “the cooked is a cultural transformation of the raw, whereas the rotted is a natural transformation” (41). Cooking then, is by contrast, the deliberate transformation of the raw into the cooked. Lévi-Strauss asserts that the culinary triangle allows us “to discover for each specific case how the cooking of a society is a language in which it unconsciously translates its structure” (Lévi-Strauss 35). Expanding upon Lévi-Strauss’s culinary system, Edmund Leach asserts that “when we eat, we do establish, in a literal sense, a direct identity between ourselves (culture) and our food (nature). Cooking is thus universally a means by which nature is transformed into culture, and categories of cooking are always peculiarly appropriate for use as symbols of social differentiation” (Leach 31). In addition, these images also highlight how the in-between space between nature and culture and how the entire cooking process “is not located entirely on the side of culture [but] partakes of both domains, and projects this duality on each of its

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25 See food photography in Delia Smith’s Delia’s Summer Collection (1993) for side-by-side images of raw and cooked fruits and vegetables.

26 What this imagery can also be linked to is Judith Williamson’s analysis of food advertising, where she considers how arranging raw food next to cooked food in a photograph connects the notion of the cooked back to nature (103). These images also highlight how, as Sandra Gilbert notes, in terms of meat consumption “the cook must murder to create, but for those who aren’t vegetarians, the conversion of the raw to the cooked inevitably confronts both chef and diner with unseemly butchery of some sort” (279). Gilbert goes on to explain how “the kitchen is the locus classicus where the dead—whether animal or vegetable—are reshaped and transformed into substances that can sustain the lives of others” (51).
manifestations” (Lévi-Strauss 33-4), bridging the gap between animals and humans, or civilised and uncivilised. 27

Given the importance of natural, fresh, local, and seasonal food stressed in *Cookbook* the layout of these photographs is also important to consider as they draw attention to the significant transformation of the raw into the cooked. These images can be interpreted as an alignment with the discourses that linked idealised food to nature which were in fashion in the early 1990s. The recipes and accompanying photos are used to encourage readers to participate in transforming the raw into the cooked by using natural ingredients and employing traditional cooking methods, rather than relying on pre-cooked or unnaturally processed foods. *Cookbook* gives readers and Dahl scholars alike important insight into food and control, subjects extensively covered in Dahl’s fictional and non-fictional texts. *Cookbook* enables Dahl to act as a proper authority on matters related to food: the text after all, is titled *Roald Dahl’s Cookbook*. In addition, the text can also be viewed as a significant attempt by Dahl and his estate to represent Dahl as a true gourmand; Dahl is able to exercise a similar level of authority on food in *Cookbook* as in his children’s novels. This is particularly interesting in that it highlights the parallels and similarities between both cookbook writing and writing for children—there is an instructional component to both genres and in both cases the author holds a considerably great deal of power that exceeds the authorial power of say, writers of adult fiction for example. I would argue that *Cookbook* was yet another opportunity for Dahl to effectively exercise a similar level of control and authorial power in his writing, not unlike the authorial power represented in his children’s works. *Roald Dahl’s Cookbook* is an important text when analysing Dahl’s work, as it gives readers insight into not only the food habits but also the food ethics of the children’s writer, the latter of

27 Although, at first glance, the anti-hunting messages in the novels explored in this chapter seem at odds with these photographs, the game’s placement as an ingredient in and beside the cooked food suggests that a shift to subsistence hunting as opposed to hunting for the sake of sport has taken place.
which, I argue, finds its way into many of his fictional works. Dahl’s opinions about food, cooking, eating, and more specifically, his perspective on the ethics and politics of growing, producing, and consuming food are represented throughout his texts both directly and indirectly. While much of Dahl’s literature features an assortment of idealised foods, including fruits and vegetables, the production and consumption of meat is often presented in a conflicted and contradictory way. Animal farming, meat production and distribution, as well as other processes pertaining to the meat industry are often explored in Dahl’s non-fictional and fictional works. When Dahl idealises natural food in his fantastical works, he tends to do this by criticising methods of production, manufacturing, and distribution that began to replace traditional farming and food processes after the Second World War as in implicit criticisms of factory farming in Fox and hunting in both The Magic Finger and Danny. Specifically, some of his texts for both adults and children demonstrate an anxiety about the ethics of hunting animals for sport and food, as well as frustrations with the transformations in animal rearing, farming practices, and meat production in the latter half of the twentieth century.

We can trace Dahl’s concerns about animal welfare and food processes to his short story for adults, “Pig” (1960). First published in Dahl’s short story collection, Kiss Kiss, “Pig” is a tale inspired by Voltaire’s Candide (1759)—“Pig” has come to be regarded by critics as a tale that “reflected all of Dahl’s darkest fears about city life” and it is often considered his most misanthropic work (Sturrock 350, 367). Indeed, this short story is divided between what at first seems to be a rural, Edenic paradise and an urban dystopia. “Pig” focuses on a young orphan named Lexington, placed under the care of his great-Aunt Glosspan after his father and mother are accidentally killed by police (who mistook them for burglars) outside their Manhattan apartment when he is less than two weeks old. In a footnote in Candide, readers are informed that “The name Pangloss is
derived from two Greek words signifiying “all” and “language”” (169). Not only is Glosspan an inversion of Pangloss (and a food pun), but it also emphasises the deliberate contrast between Aunt Glosspan and Dr. Pangloss: while Aunt Glosspan sees the world from her rural idyll through a completely negative lens, Dr. Pangloss views the chaotic world in which he lives with a steadfast, and some would argue, naïve optimism. Aunt Glosspan brings Lexington to her farm in Virginia where he remains in her care for the first seventeen years of his life. On her farm Aunt Glosspan teaches Lexington about the natural world, farming, food, and cooking, while sheltering him from not only the dangers of city life but from the outside world more generally. When Lexington is seventeen years old, he returns to the city, shortly after Aunt Glosspan dies, and the story eventually draws to a sinister conclusion when he is slaughtered at a meat-packing plant in New York. Like some of Dahl’s later texts for children, which will be explored further in this chapter, “Pig” comments on animal rights and meat issues. However, unlike those narratives, “Pig” is not a didactic story, nor is it one that resolves with a sort of “comeuppance” for the duplicitous characters in the text. Instead, “Pig” comments on the potential dangers and uncomfortable realities of post-war food production. Although this chapter focuses primarily on how Dahl teaches children about post-war food politics and the anxieties related to animal rights, hunting, and factory farming, it is important to briefly trace the concerns of these texts back to “Pig” in order to better understand the complexity of animal rights issues examined in Dahl’s children’s works. “Pig” is a useful text for discussion in this chapter as it provides insight into Dahl’s complex views about meat production and consumption, which tellingly, reveals a great deal about the food and power through the power dynamics between eater/eaten, human/animal, and adult/child are represented in his texts. Dahl’s authorial power is expressed through didactic and
subversive messages which are perhaps most effectively understood through the representation of who eats whom in his novels.

Interestingly, in one of Dahl’s ideas books, some of the earliest ideas for “Pig” are labelled under the heading “A Story on Pain inflicted” (RDMSC RD11/2). The early ideas for “Pig” are as follows:

The French women scraping the scales off live fish. Small boys burning ants under a magnifying glass and the sun. Small boys stoning a toad. The good chef who cuts the lobster in half when it is alive or boiling. (1) The geese for foie gras. Feet nailed to plank in front of fire. Also the ramming of food. (2) In the French markets—skinning frogs alive. They jump about […] (3) In Shanghai, the little monkey brought in, trussed up, little fire under him to keep his blood running good. Cleaver head and take out brain to be eaten immediately as a delicacy (RDMSC RD 11/2, 25).

Dahl expanded upon these ideas and also consulted many information pamphlets about factory farming in America in the early stages of writing “Pig”. The first typescript draft for “Pig” features more explicit scenes of animal slaughter including a lengthy description of meat packers repeatedly stunning and raining blows upon animals with a hammer:

In the stunning pen, for example, he saw three steers admitted together. The knocker hit the first one a mighty blow on the head with a hammer, and down it went. The two other beasts immediately became alarmed and started barging about and climbing all over the prone body. There was a great deal of stumbling and lunging about, and this naturally made it difficult for the stunner, great artist though he was, to hit either of them in

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28 In a folder from 1956 containing the manuscript and typescript drafts of “Pig”, Dahl’s short story is originally titled “Surprise the Terrapin” and Dahl makes the reference to Voltaire’s *Candide* more explicitly in this version by calling Lexington, Edidnac (“Surprise the Terrapin”, RDMSC RD 4/45/1).
exactly the right place. In the end, however, he managed to get them both down on the floor, but by then the first was recovering consciousness and trying to get back on its feet. Quickly he gave it another tremendous bash. That broke one of its horns. The next blow landed on its nose and completely altered the animal’s appearance. The one after that did the trick (“Surprise the Terrapin”, RDMSC RD/4/45/2).

Importantly, this draft differs from the final published version of “Pig” as the protagonist, Edidnac does not merely visit one meat-packing plant but ends up traveling around the United States and other parts of the world in order to learn about the meat production practices in several different countries and cultures. 29 There are passages on hunting in Pennsylvania, the production of foie gras in France, and prepping geese for the table in England (“Surprise the Terrapin”, RDMSC RD 4/45/2). Perhaps the most controversial example in this typescript is Edidnac’s final stop on his culinary adventure: when Edidnac travels to Tanganyika (present-day Tanzania), he consumes what he initially believes to be monkey but eventually realises is actually a stew made from a man who “was one of those rich foreigners who came here hunting for big game” (“Surprise the Terrapin”, RDMSC RD 4/45/2). In this example Dahl seems to invoke a continuum where barbaric food production practices are connected to primitive cannibalism. This early version of “Pig” concludes with Edidnac being killed for “meat” at the hands of a very crudely represented African tribe, as opposed to the meat packer in the published version of Dahl’s short story, ultimately suggesting that Dahl sees meat packers and animal slaughterers as primitive hangovers. While the representation of the African tribes is

29 Here, Edidnac goes on a journey to different countries not unlike Voltaire’s Candide—again, there are parallels between both characters and each text explores the problems associated with an optimism that proclaims that “All is the best in the best of all possible worlds”, in relation to not only human suffering, but, in the case of “Pig”, animal welfare as well. Despite being raised by Aunt Glosspan, whose ideological positions oppose those of Voltaire’s Dr Glosspan, Lexington/Edidnac, possesses a similarly naïve optimism to Candide’s (at least in the earlier chapters of Voltaire’s monumental work).
certainly offensive, it is telling in relation to Dahl’s view of those involved in modern food production.

In addition to the manuscript and typescript versions of “Pig”, Dahl also consulted several pamphlets in this folder, including one titled “What you don’t know about Hamburger and Pork Chops” produced by The National Humane Society of the United States (RDMSC RD 4/45/3). By consulting these pamphlets, this demonstrates a great deal of effort on Dahl’s part to make the slaughtering scenes in his short story as realistic as possible, highlighting Dahl’s commitment to representing the rather grisly practices of American factory farms in the 1950s and 1960s in an accurate way. Dahl’s consultation of these pamphlets signals to readers that early on in his writing career, Dahl was very concerned about animal welfare issues and his interest in advocating for the humane treatment of animals in his later literary works is perhaps unsurprising when we consider his research into factory farming conducted while he wrote “Pig”. The pamphlet explores the problems associated with slaughtering practices in factory farms:

There is no necessity nor is there any excuse for the present torture of animals in slaughter houses. Other nations outlawed these barbarisms years ago. In Great Britain, The Netherlands, Switzerland, Denmark, Germany, Norway and Sweden, the slaughter of food animals without prior stunning or anaesthetization has in almost every case been made illegal.

In addition to this pamphlet, there is another informational brochure in the manuscript and typescript folder for “Pig” entitled “Facts about Humane Slaughter” (RDMSC RD 4/45/5), issued by the Society for Animal Protective Legislation based in New York. It is clear that Dahl was influenced a great deal by these pamphlets as “Pig” delves deeply into the rhetoric of 1960s and 1970s animal rights campaigns and belies a highly critical view
of not only meat-consumption but also the meat industry more generally. During this period the value placed on and status of meat within Western society had, in many ways, altered to a point where it became what Alan Beardsworth and Alan Bryman describe as “one of the most ambiguous and morally problematic items in the human diet” (313). Beardsworth and Bryman cite the rules and prohibitions associated with the production, preparation and consumption of meat as particularly complex because they differ greatly between various religious, secular and cultural groups (313). Ashley et al. argue that an increasing scepticism about the food industry and the meat industry in particular was due to the rising number of food industry scares which coincided with, and possibly contributed to, the rising popularity of vegetarianism during this time (189). They point to 1960s and 1970s counterculture and contend that it was during these years that the New Left and an expanding environmental movement converged on the topic of food industry practices (189-90). These issues are considered in “Pig” particularly in the representation of Aunt Glosspan’s farm and in her perspectives about meat production, meat consumption, and vegetarianism.

At the beginning of “Pig” Dahl envisions a rural idyll on Aunt Glosspan’s farm, with “five acres of pasture, a plot for growing vegetables, a flower garden, three cows, a dozen hens and a fine cockerel” (618)—an idyll similar to those that inspired many of the grassroots and countercultural movements of the 1960s. In Warren Belasco’s analysis of the 1960s counterculture movements’ effects on the food industry, Appetite for Change (1989), he describes how the communal ideal, rooted in the countryside, “made a virtue of what seemed a necessity in the late 1960s: escape” (76). By the 1970s, the idea that “every pound of beef equals seven pounds of grain and soy [and therefore] an

30 Belasco notes how “[m]any hippies fled to the countryside because tourists, reporters, police, shopkeepers, and unfriendly neighbors were making urban slum bohematics uninhabitable [and] [t]hese refugees just wanted to be left alone in peaceful coexistence with plants and animals” (76). This description certainly parallels the representation of Aunt Glosspan’s idyllic farm, tucked away in the quiet countryside.
incalculable moral gain is induced by a vegetarian dinner” (Gay 86), had taken hold in countercultural rhetoric. I would argue that the counter cultural movements that took place in tandem with the animal welfare movements and growing interest in vegetarianism in the 1960s and 1970s can be interpreted in relation an evaluation of human superiority over animals. In Chloe Taylor’s analysis “Foucault and the Ethics of Eating”, she highlights how “through our very eating of other animals […] we constitute our superiority” and that “[f]or many individuals, then, the vegetarian diet is a forsaking of human privilege, a denial of human superiority over other animals” (75). Aunt Glosspan’s vegetarian diet can be interpreted as a “counter-cuisine that [is] in fact a form of political resistance to disciplinary power” (Taylor 73). Though there is insufficient textual evidence to support a definitive reading of Aunt Glosspan as a hippie and her farm as analogous to a rural hippie haven, her lifestyle reflects ideas that not only became more widespread, but also became completely integrated into the public consciousness, including environmentalism and vegetarianism, because of the counterculture movement.

Aunt Glosspan is certainly an outsider of sorts, described as “an eccentric old woman” who, by the time she was seventy years old, had lived “a strange isolated life all by herself (emphasis mine) in a tiny cottage high up on the slopes of the Blue Ridge Mountains several miles from the nearest village” (“Pig” 618) for thirty years. The characterisation of Aunt Glosspan is probably one of the main reasons why “Pig” has been interpreted “as a gothic vegetarian tale which employs sledgehammer symbolism to demolish an insatiably carnivorous capitalism” (Piatti-Farnell, “A Tour of Cannibal Quarters” 2). Certainly, Aunt Glosspan maintains a strict vegetarian diet of “lovely clean

31 Aunt Glosspan’s views on meat-eating starkly contrast with Voltaire’s Pangloss who observed that, “Pigs were made to be eaten—therefore we eat pork all the year round. Consequently, they who assert that all is well have said a foolish thing, they should have said all is for the best” (2-3), and her pessimistic views of humans and human nature are clearly a foil to Pangloss’s unwavering optimism despite enduring violence, brutality, and suffering.
foods like milk, butter, eggs, cheese, vegetables, nuts, herbs, and fruit” (618). Here, ‘clean’ is used as a synonymous term for not only vegetarianism, but also natural or unprocessed farm-to-table food production methods, anticipating the approved methods of food production Dahl later describes in *Roald Dahl’s Cookbook*. Aunt Glosspan’s diet is similar to what Ashley et al. describes as the “clear connection […] between vegetarianism and the health food movement premised on an assumption that the vegetarian diet is intrinsically healthier than non-vegetarian alternatives” (Ashley et al. 193). Aunt Glosspan “regarded the consumption of animal flesh as not only unhealthy and disgusting, but horribly cruel” (187), and expresses this view with an almost religious fervour. She informs Lexington about what seems to be a major divide between vegetarians and “ordinary people” who consume animals such as cows, pigs, sheep, and chickens (620) and who do not wait for animals to die naturally before eating them, but instead kill them gruesomely by slitting their throats with a knife (620). According to Aunt Glosspan, ordinary people then cut up the animal into “bits” which they cook and enjoy “best when it’s all red and bloody and sticking to the bones. They love to eat lumps of cow’s flesh with the blood oozing out of it” (620).

At the beginning of the narrative, it is clear that Lexington leads a relatively contented, albeit extremely isolated childhood under Aunt Glosspan’s care. After her death, however, when Lexington travels to New York to collect the money Aunt Glosspan has bequeathed to him in her will there is a significant shift in the narrative. The problems associated with animal slaughter and meat consumption discussed on Aunt Glosspan’s farm become concretised in two different urban settings: a restaurant and an abattoir. When Lexington enters a small restaurant in New York, he has no choice but to order pork and cabbage as he is informed that it is the only entrée left at the restaurant. Bewildered, Lexington asks the waiter what pork is made of:
‘And what exactly is pork?

[...]

‘It’s pig,’ the waiter said. ‘You just bung it in the oven.’

‘Pig!’

‘All pork is pig. Didn’t you know that?’ (628)

After consuming his meal of pork and cabbage, Lexington asks the cook whether or not the pork he ate is made completely from pig’s flesh. The cook responds by saying, “all I can tell you is I think it was pig’s meat”, while the waiter interjects that one can never be sure exactly because there is the possibility that the “pork” could have been “a piece of human stuff” (629). Both the cook and waiter’s uncertainty about the origins of the “pork” highlight how far removed the city dwellers are from the natural food processes of the countryside and also alludes to issues of urban legend and fast food fears. Of course, Dahl is not the first writer to address issues of food contamination and the notion of “mystery meat” in fiction. Jacqueline Simpson traces the links between food vendors, contamination, and adulteration to nineteenth-century British texts that expressed a “suspicious attitude toward commercial preparation of food” (466), referencing Mr Brooks’s ‘weal pie’ made of cats in Dickens’s The Pickwick Papers (1837) and Sweeney Todd’s cannibalistic pies in The String of Pearls: A Romance (1847). These texts can be interpreted as “forerunner[s] of the present-day oral legends of ‘The Kentucky Fried Rat’ and ‘The Chinese Restaurant’ cycles” (Simpson 463). For Simpson, these texts also

32 It should be noted that “weal” (which is cockney Sam Weller’s pronunciation of ‘veal’) does not actually signify that particular meat in The Pickwick Papers but rather, satirically, the variety of meats the entrepreneurial Mr Brooks can ‘transform’ into ‘veal’ in his pie-making process. Brooks boasts that he “can make a weal a beefsteak, or a beefsteak a kidney, or any one on ’em a mutton, at a minute’s notice, just as the market changes, and appetites wary!” (Dickens 132).

33 In Gary Alan Fine’s examination of the Kentucky Fried Rat urban legend in North America, he outlines several variations of short narratives in which unsuspecting customers consume what they believe is fried chicken (but is really fried rat), only to become violently ill (Fine 230). This particular urban legend was so widespread that “the accounts were situated in thirty-eight locales in fifteen states, the District of Columbia, and one Canadian province” (230). Jan Harold Brunvand notes how urban legends and “slanderous claims about foreign matter in the food of Chinese restaurants are especially common in Great Britain,
anticipate “an underlying distrust of ready-made, mass-produced convenience foods, as opposed to home cooking” in contemporary society (463). In the twentieth century Upton Sinclair’s *The Jungle* (1906) uncovers the corruption, exploitation and unhygienic working conditions in the meatpacking industry. Virginia Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse* (1927) comments on milk contamination in the British dairy industry, while transformations in the food industry are documented in novels such as Willa Cather’s *One of Ours* (1922). "Pig" is an extremely important story in Dahl’s oeuvre because it is one of his earliest texts to reveal a deep fascination and intense preoccupation with food matters—Dahl returned to this subject matter time and again for the remainder of his long career as a writer.

The waiter’s references to human-contaminated pork are justified as the rest of the story unfolds. Eventually, Lexington inquires about the butchering of the pigs, and is referred to a meat-packing plant in the Bronx. At the plant, pigs are brought into a shackling pen, where men with rubber boots loop one end of a metal chain around the legs of the pigs, one at a time, and attach the other end to a hook on a moving cable (632). This particular scene was likely influenced by a passage in the “What you don’t know about Hamburger and Pork Chops" pamphlet which also features a photo of a shackling pen in the United States with the following caption:

This is one of the primitive and brutal shackling pens in a large American packing plant. Note row of shackle chains on wall at left. A chain noose is slipped over one hind leg of a hog. The hog is dragged to the wall at the

Scandinavia, and Germany, but they also circulate the United States […] The simplest Chinese-restaurant allegations are simply that someone found a rat bone, a finger, or some other foreign matter in the food” (Brunvand 115-6).


right. Along the wall runs a slowly moving cable. The shackle on the hog is hooked onto the cable. The cable draws the hog to the right rear corner and then aloft, struggling and screaming, to the “sticking” room. Note hog being lifted (RD 4/45/3).

While Lexington is glancing up at the pigs moving up along the cable, a rubber-booted man grabs him and loops a metal chain around his leg—he is then hoisted up like the pigs and proceeds through a doorway where he is greeted by a “sticker”, whose role is quickly apparent when, despite Lexington’s cries for help, he uses a knife to slit Lexington’s jugular vein in an abrupt and disturbingly enthusiastic manner (634). Lexington’s final words are “Quick! Save me!” (634) to which the sticker replies “With pleasure” while “taking Lexington gently by one ear with this left hand, he raised his right hand and deftly slit open the boy’s jugular vein with a knife” (634). The final scene is important, as Lexington is not only able to see inside the horrors of the factory but he becomes “meatified” as much as the pigs. Although the industrial food processes of the city are far removed from the safety and seclusion of the idyllic rural farm in “Pig”, it is implied that these processes threaten the countryside, as Lexington, the personification of idyllic rural farm life, is slaughtered in an urban meat factory. Lexington’s naivety, and his unaffected and untroubled mind aligns him with a version of an idyllic, uncontaminated and untouched land. While “Pig” suggests that part of the problem with Lexington’s death is his naivety, caused by his Aunt’s isolationism, in the end, he is the victim of a strictly profit-oriented food industry. The story ends on a grim note, and in this way it differs from the meat industry-related children’s texts such as Fantastic Mr Fox and the poem “The Pig” that Dahl would publish later on.

It is important to note here that in the manuscript and typescript folder for “Pig” there is also a pamphlet by Joseph Sinel titled “The Killing of Crabs and Lobsters for
Table” (RDMSC RD 4/45/4) issued by the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, indicating that Dahl was keeping up with his reading on the cruelties of food production. After outlining a series of experiments in killing lobsters and crabs, Sinel concludes,

The most humane way of killing both crabs and lobsters is to place them in cold water and very gradually raise the temperature. The death which ensues is apparently totally unfraught with pain, and must be somewhat analogous to that of a person succumbing to a “heat wave,” viz., loss of consciousness and a painless end” (RDMSC RD 4/45/4).

Dahl includes a lengthy piece in *Roald Dahl’s Cookbook* that suggests a keen interest in cooking live lobsters humanely and alludes to Sinel’s pamphlet:

Now and again, most of us are faced with the problem of boiling our own live lobsters, and because this caused me so much anguish and guilt, I made a study of all the inhuman things that people do to animals in order to eat them. I then wrote a story about it (*Pig*). We all know about the *foie gras* geese and the treatment of calves for veal production (I won’t eat either), and I found a recipe from Florida that said, ‘Surprise the terrapin by dropping it into boiling water…’ But lobsters are what will concern most of us from time to time. So here is what I discovered years ago from a scientific RSPCA paper on the subject. The lobster has a comparatively highly developed central nervous system, and the usual method of simply dropping it into a pot of boiling water subjects it to at least forty seconds of intense torture. Sometimes you can even hear one screaming. The kindest way of overcoming this problem is this. While you are waiting for the water to boil, you take a basin of cold water and you dissolve into it
half a pound of cheap kitchen salt or agricultural salt, making a strong saline solution. You then immerse the heads of the live lobsters in this for a minute or two, and presto, they become totally anaesthetized. That’s the perfect way. Next best, if you don’t have the salt, is to put the lobsters in cold water and bring it gently to the boil. The scientists have demonstrated that as the water gradually gets warmer and warmer, the lobsters simply drowse off gently without pain. So there you are. Take your pick (90-91).

This detailed example indeed indicates Dahl’s concern and consideration for the animals he cooks and consumes, emphatically demonstrating that animal welfare was at the forefront of his mind when preparing and cooking a live animal.

Following the publication of “Pig” Dahl wrote several children’s novels that dealt with issues pertaining to animal welfare and food production, specifically The Magic Finger, Danny the Champion of the World, and Fantastic Mr Fox, all of which will be examined in this chapter. In 1983, Dahl returned to the subject of pig slaughtering in his poem for children, “The Pig”, published in the poetry collection Dirty Beasts (1983).

“The Pig” signals Dahl’s re-visitation of the question of who eats whom, and clearly indicates that Dahl’s interest in and views of meat-production, particularly pig slaughtering was maintained twenty-three years after the publication of “Pig”. “The Pig” focuses on animal welfare and the anxieties pertaining to meat production and consumption. Dahl’s poem features an anthropomorphised pig that ponders the meaning of life and questions what his purpose is on earth. Mid-way through the poem he realises with great astonishment and horror that his body, made up of bacon, sausages, chops, and chitterlings, is used to feed humans:

“The butcher’s shop! The carving knife!

“That’s the reason for my life!” (Dirty Beasts 4).
The poem concludes with the pig eating Farmer Bland as the pig “feared the worst” and thought “[he]’d better eat [Farmer Bland] first” (5). In Jackie Stallcup’s analysis of humour in Dahl’s children’s texts, she notes how in “The Pig”, Dahl “forces us to confront exactly what we ourselves are eating: under a picture of the horrified (and rather cute) pig, who has just discovered that he’s going to be eaten, [he]catalogues all the parts of a pig that we eat” (Stallcup 38). Stallcup goes on to note how this act “is made both horrifying and yet funny and understandable by Dahl’s depiction of the pig, who is, after all, only acting in defence of his own life” (39). Here, Stallcup taps into what Daniel regards as a central concern when analysing food in children’s literature: the idea of who eats whom.

As Daniel convincingly argues, “One of the most fundamental cultural messages that children have to learn concerns how to eat correctly, that is, to put it simply, what to eat and what not to eat or who eats whom” (4). Dahl’s concerns about who eats whom in his texts are bound up in his concerns about power relations between adults and children, humans and animals, and eaters and the eaten. In Dahl’s “The Pig”, the dilemma of whether or not the clever pig is consumable, is like many other works children’s works featuring animals, is central to the poem. As Daniel highlights, “Because talking animals are subjects, their flesh, like human flesh, is neither morally nor ethically edible. Children’s stories that feature talking animals tend to uphold Peter Singer’s argument for a vegetarian diet” (Daniel 29). Daniel continues, drawing connections between Singer’s

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36 In the preface of the monumental Animal Liberation (1975), Singer explains how his concern for animals is fundamentally connected to his diet. In the years before he began writing Animal Liberation and whilst in England Singer met with a woman who expressed her shared interest in animals and wanted to meet Singer and his wife (i). At this meeting, the hostess began discussing animals and pets while serving Singer and his wife ham sandwiches: when asked whether or not he and his wife owned any pets, they explained that they didn’t and that they were simply not particularly “interested in” animals, but that they were deeply concerned about the respectful treatment of animals “as sentient beings” and “not as a means to human ends—as the pig whose flesh was now in our hostess’s sandwiches had been treated” (Singer ii). Singer’s account of this exchange indicates that he believes an underlying hypocrisy is present if one claims to be
arguments to another children’s text centred on the trials and tribulations of a pig, E.B. White’s *Charlotte’s Web*: “*Charlotte’s Web* for example legitimizes Singer’s argument by endorsing the notion that animals have their own interests and the capacity for feeling pleasure and suffering. For the child reader, the real-life duplicity of adult culture’s attitude toward animals is revealed by such stories” (Daniel 29). I would argue that Dahl’s pig can certainly be compared to Wilbur in *Charlotte’s Web* who also discovers that his very existence is to satisfy the carnivorous appetites of humans: upon Wilbur’s realization, “The reader recognizes Wilbur’s subjectivity and identifies with him, but is also aware that the adult characters’ treatment of the pig as food/object reflects society’s generalized conception of animals. The reader is able therefore to see Wilbur both as object-to-be-eaten and as subject-not-to-be-eaten” (Daniel 30) and in *Charlotte’s Web* and in other texts including Dahl’s “The Pig”, “most children have no choice but to […] psychologically and semantically creat[e] distance between the image of the pig and the pork on our plates” (Daniel 31).

The representation of the pig as both eater and eaten in the poem is meant to sit uncomfortably with readers and is connected to complex uses of the pig in popular culture. In Irving Massey’s *The Gaping Pig: Literature and Metamorphosis* (1976), Massey notes how the gaping pig, or the roasted pig, and its literary representation, “throw[s] us into some realm of anxiety of their own creation” as

They are themselves monsters, centaurs, metamorphs, with two incompatible faces that we are forced to see simultaneously. They are nothing but objects, yet they mock us with a display of significance; and they challenge us to reduce them (but we cannot) to one role or the other.

interested in the welfare of animals and continues to eat meat. Here, Singer’s convictions suggest that the vegetarian cause and the animal rights movement are perhaps the same.
Signs of trauma, they haunt us with the unforgettable yet inexpressible event that they embody or, perhaps, commemorate (11). For Massey, “pigs always have a dead-alive look” which “produces the kind of uninterpretable paradox that is characteristic of metamorphosis” (11). The gaping pig then, is a resounding reminder that what was once alive is now dead—a comparison not unlike the transformation of the raw into the cooked. The Magic Finger, Danny the Champion of the World, and Fantastic Mr Fox conclude in ways similar to “The Pig” with humans receiving comeuppances for their mistreatment of animals.37 While “The Pig” deals with the conflict between the eponymous pig and Farmer Bland, this chapter focuses on the relationship between animals and humans and its effect on the meat industry more generally. As this chapter will uncover, Dahl’s perceptions of power as well as his complicated authorial power is bound up in the representation of humans, animal welfare, and meat consumption in his texts.

In literary critic Mervyn Nicholson’s analysis of food and power in major literary works, he asserts that the power relations between gods and humans represented in a number of different art forms including literature, is similar to the power relationship between humans and animals: “[j]ust as eating divides humans from gods, and the human degree of power from the divine, it also divides humans from subhumans and the superior power of humans over against the inferior power of lower beings. Meat in particular dramatizes this power-relationship” (M. Nicholson 39). As critic Tess Cosslett notes, “Like the fairy story, the animal story has migrated down the hierarchy of literary genres from adults to children, in consequence of an increasing polarization between adults and

37 Similarly, children’s author Martin Waddell’s Farmer Duck (1991) features the eventual comeuppance of a lazy farmer whose duck performs all of the tasks on the farm. Unhappy with the farmer’s treatment of the duck, the cows, sheep and hens band together to kick the Farmer off of his land and the story concludes with the animals assisting the duck in taking over the farm. Orwell’s Animal Farm (1945) is the obvious basis for these twentieth-century reversals.
children. Adults were more and more seen as rational and cultured, while children were imaginative and primitive” (1). Between the late eighteenth and early twentieth centuries, the objects of sensibility’s pity and benevolence were stereotypically women, children, animals and slaves—that is, all those lower down the hierarchy of power, who could be abused or oppressed. That is not to say that only men could be sentimental: women could feel for children, animals and slaves; children could feel for animals and slaves; slaves could feel for animals, and animals […] could feel for slaves (Cosslett 16).

The hierarchy outlined here is particularly interesting as it is represented in The Magic Finger and Danny: the unnamed narrator advocates for the ducks in The Magic Finger while Danny and his father are lower on the socio-economic rungs than Victor Hazell but they do seek to treat pheasants in a much more humane way than Hazell. In these texts and in Fox, Dahl stands up for the underdog, trying to empower those who are typically seen as weak, and tries to reverse power (adult/child relationships), harness power (through acts informed by a conviction for the upholding of animal rights/animal welfare). The narratives are essentially about “the triumph of the underdog over the powerful” (Stallcup 41). Children and animals are often represented as the underdogs in Dahl’s texts and the hierarchy identified by Cosslett is overturned in the resolutions of many of Dahl’s narratives. While Dahl defies convention in these reversals of power, children, and animals in his novels are often paralleled as characters that need the most empowerment. In this sense, Dahl’s texts function similarly to other children’s works, such as The Tale of Peter Rabbit (1902), The Wind in the Willows (1908), Winnie the Pooh (1926), Charlotte’s Web (1952), featuring animals as protagonists: “Talking animal characters in children’s literature problematize […] Western cultural food rules […] They
often evoke a sympathetic identification with the reader, and break down the opposition between animal/human, object/subject, and eaten/eater” (Daniel 29).

In the following section of this chapter, I will look at the issue of hunting and Dahl’s attempt to reconcile hunting practices with growing concerns about animal welfare in British society throughout the 1960s and 1970s. To this end, I will focus on *The Magic Finger* and examine how the anti-hunting message in this text reveals the highly politicized position animals, and by extension, meat, occupied in Britain after the Second World War. This section examines the ideological resonances of *The Magic Finger* as a fantasy novel and explores the way in which, as Peter Hunt notes, fantasy novels for children during the 1960s “meditated nostalgically on the vagaries of the modern world” and, “paid respectful homage to old traditions” (176). Drawing on Dahl’s personal school papers, I will also analyse his essay on hunting, written while he was studying at Repton School. The second section examines animal rights and the distinction between subsistence hunting, hunting for sport, and poaching in relation to class difference in *Danny the Champion of the World*. This section explores how Dahl connects issues pertaining to animal welfare with greed and overconsumption, and also analyses how *Danny*, as a realist text, addresses these issues in a way that corresponds with the storytelling strategies employed in other realist children’s texts during this period. In addition, the second section will consider the representation of a rural bandit ethic in relation to the redistribution of wealth in *Danny*. The final section explores, in detail, Dahl’s criticism of the industrial farming practices emerging in post-war Britain and its effects on animals, focusing primarily on the representation of farming, meat consumption, and animals in *Fantastic Mr Fox*. Like the previous section, this section explores ideas related to the redistribution of wealth but within the context of fantasy narrative. Each of these texts provides insight into the changes under way in children’s
literature and they also simultaneously catalogue Dahl’s perspectives about animal
welfare, food, and power and how his contradictory ideological positions on such matters
highlight the complicated way in which didacticism, subversion, and by extension, his
authorial power, functions in these works.

1.1 Hunting in *The Magic Finger* (1966)

When situated within the wider context of Dahl’s children’s novels, *The Magic Finger*
demonstrates Dahl’s complex views about animals, and by extension, meat. *The Magic
Finger* has been often overlooked by critics as a “more or less pleasing entertainment, not
unduly damaged by the tasteless and questionable morality of [Dahl’s] other books”
(Rees 150), while the role-reversal in the text is merely regarded as “quite amusing”
(151). These statements problematically disregard the politically-charged message in the
novel. Dahl’s stance on animal rights is informed by the highly complicated and
politicised position that hunting and meat came to occupy in British society in the decades
following the end of the Second World War. In *The Magic Finger*, readers are introduced
to a young, unnamed female protagonist who possesses a strange supernatural power that
is unleashed when she becomes angered by what she believes to be unjustifiably cruel
behaviour directed towards her and towards animals. Through the protagonist we are
informed of an ongoing conflict with her neighbours, the Gregg family: Mr and Mrs
Gregg and their two sons Philip and William. Each week, Mr Gregg takes his sons into
the woods to hunt and shoot animals and birds, and it becomes apparent that the fact that
the Greggs hunt is a source of irrepresible rage for the protagonist. Early on in the novel
she exclaims, “I can’t stand hunting. I just can’t stand it. It doesn’t seem right to me that
men and boys should kill animals just for the fun they get out of it” (2). Beverley Pennell
astutely argues that there is a gender issue here: she considers *The Magic Finger* to be a
‘proto-feminist text’ where the unnamed female narrator “is passionately concerned about social issues and assaults the barriers that would deny her a voice on matters in the public sphere, hunting in this case” (106). When the protagonist confronts the Greggs about their hunting, she is mocked and ignored (2). Later on in the novel, she becomes enraged when she witnesses, one Saturday morning, the Greggs walking out of the woods with the carcass of a “lovely young deer” (3) they have shot. In response, she shouts at the family while William and Philip proceed to laugh and make faces at her and Mr Gregg tells her condescendingly, to “go home and mind [her] own P’s and Q’s” (4). In this exchange, Dahl tries to situate the hunting issue in terms of British manners: Mr Gregg redirects the protagonist’s pleas by telling her to ‘mind her manners’ or essentially to not concern herself with their weekly family hobby. Here, Mr Gregg deflects the heroine’s concerns not only by addressing issues of etiquette and politeness, but more importantly, by focusing the question onto privacy and self-authorisation, and away from the ethics of hunting for sport. What Mr Gregg effectively does however, is suggest that his hunting is not a public issue at all, but a private one in which no one can (or should) interfere.

Expanding on Pennell’s argument, I contend that the text captures the spirit of new social movements of the period that emphasised the importance of animal rights. While I will not be examining The Magic Finger through a feminist lens, I will consider how the female narrator stresses the importance of animal rights in the text.

In a school essay written in 1932, Dahl explicitly criticizes hunting: “Many sports are foolish, some pointless and others cruel. Surely the sport which combines all three of these descriptions is one of almost unparalleled stupidity. Who in the world would take part in such a sport? Such a sport does exist and the majority of the bourgeois who can afford it in this country partake in it” (“Hunting”, RDMSC RD 13/3/2/2). For Dahl, hunting thrives in “a thoughtless self-centred community” where hunters take pleasure in
searching for “something that will satisfy their bloodthirsty minds” (“Hunting”, RDMSC RD 13/3/2/2). When the animal is found, Dahl explains how thereafter, “slaughter takes place” and “After this the huntsman, usually a fool, long, thin and pale, presenting the appearance of having been grown in the dark, calls off his dogs or perhaps hounds is the correct word, and treks wearily homewards. Yokels stand at their doors to hail and congratulate him; farmers thank him” (“Hunting”, RDMSC RD 13/3/2/2). Here, Dahl’s disdain for hunting and its effects on the surrounding community is made clear. Although Dahl wrote this essay in school, the anti-hunting messages in his fictional works are similarly scornful.

The Magic Finger considers the debates on the ethics of hunting that re-emerged in post-war British society by giving the young female protagonist fantastical powers to use against hunters. The Magic Finger articulates a clear message that hunting is wrong and those who take part in it are in need of enlightening. In other fantasy novels of the period, animal welfare is an important subject: although E.B. White does not address the issue of hunting in Charlotte’s Web (1952), animal welfare is analysed and Wilbur the pig is spared from slaughter because of the messages spun in Charlotte’s web. Dahl’s use of fantasy in The Magic Finger aligns with the “rules” governing the genre: “[D]espite their seeming fondness for anarchy” fantasy narratives, according to Karen Coats, “ultimately result in conservative outcomes; that is to say, they feature protagonists with anti-social drives that threaten the stability of their worlds, but these protagonists then become empowered through mastering these drives, at least until next time” (83). Peter Hunt echoes Coats, acknowledging how post-war fantasy narratives for children were both “conservative in form and cautiously radical in content” reflective of “a tension between the nostalgic nervousness of the writers and the potential eagerness for the future of their audience” (176). As a fantasy novel, The Magic Finger conforms to the literary devices
and conventions of the genre by introducing radical issues such as hunting and animal welfare to young readers, while simultaneously maintaining a rather conservative textual structure, with the ‘baddies’ receiving their comeuppance at the end of the text. In the text, hunting is represented as an abrupt, unwelcome, violent, and needless series of acts that threaten the lives of helpless creatures. *The Magic Finger* is essentially a social commentary addressed to children about the notion of animal welfare and the concept of animal suffering. Historically, animal rights issues have been an important political and public concern in Britain, particularly from the nineteenth century onwards. The Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals formed in 1824 and hunting practices came under intense scrutiny in the late Victorian period while campaigns opposing cruelty to animals became more frequent and forceful in the twentieth century (Kean 156). In 1911, the Protection of Animals Act, which protected mainly domesticated animals, was passed while The League for the Prohibition of Cruel Sports was formed in 1925. The formation of these organisations coincided with a growing awareness in the British public consciousness about animal welfare which in turn became increasingly explored in popular books, film and television from the nineteenth century through to the twentieth century. Animal “autobiographies”, that is texts in which an animal’s life story is written from the animal’s point of view, became widely popular in the nineteenth century with publications such as Arabella Argus’s *The Adventures of a Donkey* (1815) and Anna Sewell’s *Black Beauty* (1877). Later on, Ernest Thompson Seton’s *Lives of the Hunted* (1901) and Canadian author Charles G.D. Roberts’ *Red Fox* (1905) addressed issues of hunting and animal welfare while Austrian author Felix Salten’s anti-hunting children’s text *Bambi, a Life in the Woods* (1923) was adapted into a 1942 controversial film by Walt Disney Studios which provoked hunting groups to protest after the film’s release (Murray and Heumann 30). The publications of these texts occurred in tandem
with monumental transformations in animal welfare legislation, simultaneously heightening the concern about hunting matters in post-war British society. Animal rights activists reignited and reinvigorated anti-hunting campaigns throughout the 1960s and 1970s, in the years leading up to and immediately following the publication of *The Magic Finger*. By the late twentieth century, as Mike Huggins notes, “there was a growing majority opposed to hunting with dogs, though shooting and fishing had substantial support. In part the debate was about animal cruelty, but it was also increasingly about the nature of British society, while to a more limited extent, it revealed urban—rural tensions” (80). In comparison to some of Dahl’s later works, *The Magic Finger* is probably the most straightforward in its criticism of animal cruelty as the novel draws attention to increasing concerns about animal rights which emerged out of the countercultural movements of Britain in the 1960s and 1970s.

In Emma Griffin’s history of hunting in Britain, *Blood Sport* (2007), she notes how “[t]he most striking feature of the 1960s and 1970s […] was the emergence of a new generation of protesters willing to get involved in direct action” against hunting in Britain, such as the Hunt Saboteurs (196). According to Michael Ticheler, the formation of the Hunt Saboteurs Association in 1963 is indicative of how “the emergence of direct action by groups of young people in disrupting hunt meets drew public attention to the question of animal cruelty in new ways” (105); hunt saboteurs engaged in minor acts of civil disobedience at hunts sometimes while “holding placards, chanting, blowing horns and generally making their presence known” (Griffin 197). While many hunt saboteur activists left the protest group in the late 1960s to form other breakaway factions, the group helped “change the tenor of the conflict over hunting in a discernible and long-lasting way” and “helped to raise the profile of the anti-hunting movement, adding unexpected colour to an old conflict and ensuring that hunting rarely remained out of the
news for long” (198, 199). The Hunt Saboteur Association’s use of sabotage to disrupt and interfere with hunts is not unlike the protagonist’s actions in The Magic Finger. While real-life saboteurs used “Squibs, crackers, smoke bombs and aerosols […] to alarm horses; and anti-mate dog spray was squirted at the hounds to put them off the scent” (Griffin 197), Dahl’s fantastical hunting saboteur uses her ‘magic finger’ (as a sort of fantastical firecracker) to transform the hunters into the hunted. When the heroine becomes cross, she gets “very, very hot all over…Then the tip of the forefinger of [her] right hand begins to tingle most terribly…And suddenly a sort of flash comes out of [her], a quick flash, like something electric. It jumps out and touches the person who has made [her] cross…And after that the Magic Finger is upon him or her, and things begin to happen…” (8-9). In this instance, the Magic Finger functions similarly to the ways in which objects function in children’s fantasy narrative: Coats cites “the sword Excalibur, cornucopias, magic cauldrons, Mrs Who’s glasses, Harry Potter’s wand” as example and explains how, “Fantasized satisfaction of appetites, the ability to act on our aggression, the desire to transgress our body limits—these represent powerful wishes; objects empowered to do our bidding without wills of their own become repositories for wish-fulfilment fantasies” (Coats, “Fantasy”, 79). In The Magic Finger, the empowered child protagonist is able to use the Magic Finger to reverse power from the hands of the Greggs to the Ducks.

The day after this particular hunt, the Gregg family awakens to discover that they have shrunk considerably in size and possess wings instead of arms, while conversely, the ducks they hunted the previous day have grown abnormally large and are the size of full grown humans with “great long arms, like men, instead of wings” (The Magic Finger 16-19, 22). Immediately after their transformation, the Greggs encounter a few problems. First, while testing out their wings for the first time, the family is locked out of their home
by the giant ducks (22). With nowhere to go, Mrs Gregg begins to cry and Philip realises
the family’s vulnerability in their transformed, hybrid bodies. He fears they will all “be
eaten by cats and foxes in the night!” (24) The Greggs encounter other challenges in their
new bodies: they have to work hard and for “a long time” to build a nest for themselves
(25-29), they are unable to go home for food so they attempt to sustain themselves with
apples growing on a nearby tree (32). When the family tried to get some sleep in their
nest, “a great wind began to blow [...] the tree rocked from side to side, and everyone,
even Mr Gregg, was afraid that the nest would fall down. Then came the rain. It rained
and rained, and the water ran into the nest and they all got as wet as could be—and oh, it
was a bad, bad night!” (36-37) Here, the role-reversal results in the Greggs experiencing a
sort of karmic comeuppance: they are confronted with the realisation of what the ducks
experience on a regular basis, or what literary critic Robert Sutherland refers to in
children’s literature as “the politics of attack”, where a negative object lesson in the form
of retribution is “generated by the authors’ sense of amusement, outrage, or contempt
when they encounter something that runs counter to their concepts of right and wrong,
good and evil, justice, fair play, decency, or truth” (147). The comeuppance in The Magic
Finger is certainly evidence of how Dahl “consciously took over the larger patterns of
fantasy: revenge, the triumph of the underdog, the humiliation of the enemy” (Hunt,
“Commodification of Fantasy”, 185).38

While the ducks have evolved in such a way that building a nest and coping with
the wind and rain in a somewhat exposed shelter comes naturally, Dahl’s message is

38 The “underdog” is certainly a staple character in Dahl’s children’s works: Dahl’s autobiographical and
literary works “re-presents [sic] the experiences of his childhood in a form and sequence that nurtures his
adult well-being [through] stories of small triumphing over huge, weak over strong, good over bad, child
over adult” (C. Nicholson 313) and ultimately, these texts show “how victims become victors and
underdogs become heroes, cast him in a traditional storyteller mould” (C. Nicholson 313). Dahl’s defence
of the underdog in his novels is contradictory considering how Dahl “could be a bully, yet prided himself
on defending the underdog” (Sturrock 11). In the third section of this chapter, we will briefly analyse the
characterisation of Mr Fox as an underdog.
clear: the Gregg family’s transformation highlights that ducks, apart from the fact that they are birds, are not all that unlike humans after all as they too must accomplish tasks like building homes for themselves, feeding themselves, and finding a safe place to sleep. The Greggs’ transformation teaches them to empathise with animals and their “time spent as ducks, experiencing flying, nest building and fear of human-sized ducks with guns, leads [them] to new respect for all animals” (Pennell 107). Their transformation into ducks is a kind of fantastic equivalent of the ‘consciousness raising’ advocated for by political radicals of the 1960s. Here, Dahl presents readers with a reversal of the hunted/hunters binary but also raises the issue of what exactly differentiates humans from other animals (if anything), in terms of the Social Darwinian notion of the ‘survival of the fittest’. Dahl empowers the silent and vulnerable, reversing who hunts whom in the text. Dahl’s subversive message advocating for the humane treatment of animals align with the messages of the countercultural movement at this time.

When the family wakes up the morning after their traumatic night, they discover four of the human-sized ducks standing before them, three of them holding Mr Gregg, Philip and William’s guns, threatening to shoot the Greggs (The Magic Finger 38). The role reversal taking place is expressed through humour and intimations of violence intended to entertain young readers while simultaneously instructing them about the effects of hunting on the hunted. This reversal explicitly addresses the dangers of hunting and in this way, the novel emphasises the fact that hunting actually involves killing: hunting is not presented here as mere sport, but as analogous to murder. The Greggs are confronted with the magnitude of their actions on the previous day when they plead to the ducks not to shoot their family:

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'No! No! No!' called out Mr and Mrs Gregg, both together. 'Don’t shoot! Please don’t shoot!' ‘Why not?’ said one of the ducks. It was the one who wasn’t holding a gun. ‘You are always shooting at us.’ ‘Oh, but that’s not the same!’ said Mr Gregg. ‘We are allowed to shoot ducks!’ ‘Who allows you?’ asked the duck. ‘We allow each other,’ said Mr Gregg. ‘Very nice,’ said the duck. ‘And now we are going to allow each other to shoot you.’ […] ‘Oh, please!’ cried Mrs Gregg. ‘My two little children are up here with us! You wouldn’t shoot my children!’ ‘Yesterday you shot my children,’ said the duck. ‘You shot all six of my children’ (39-40).

Here, anthropomorphism is used to teach the Gregg family, and by extension the readers, about empathising with animals. The hypocrisy of the hunters in this example echoes Dahl’s views expressed in his school essay where he notes how, “It is usually the lady who hunts who nearly cries [sic] when her favourite peckinese [sic] gets a thorn in its paw. It seems to me incredible that this same lady should gloat over a fox being torn to pieces” (“Hunting”, RDMSC RD 13/3/2/2). This example emphasizes the connection between the overarching anti-hunting message in the text and the notion of empathy. Both messages are part of a tradition in children’s literature where, as Roger Sale notes, “Animals, talking animals, animals that are children or specially allied with children, creatures that can recreate, flatter and repudiate the human wish that we are not alone—
that is the backbone of children’s books as we know it” (98). *The Magic Finger* reminds readers of the natural world where creatures (with varying degrees of sentience) should be treated respectfully and with a considerable amount of care. By interacting with the ducks in a peaceful way and through constructive conversation at the end of the narrative, the Greggs are capable of expressing vulnerability and come to realise that they are, perhaps, not so different from the ducks after all.

Dahl’s novel reminds readers of what Sale refers to as a view of childhood “as a time of instinctive oneness with the surrounding world” which “used talking animals to signify the potential connection between the human and the surrounding” (99). While there is a clear connection between the ducks and the young female protagonist in *The Magic Finger*, it departs from the ways in which children and animals are traditionally paralleled in children’s literature. As Perry Nodelman explains, The common name for children in contemporary society is “kids”—so common that many people forget that the word originally referred to young goats. Goats have longstanding symbolic connections with irrepressible anarchy; there is, for instance, the goat-footed Greek nature god, Pan. It seems that adults now tend to think of “kids” as basically animal-like beings who must be taught how to act like civilized humans. Not surprisingly, then, many characters in children’s literature are animals—animals who represent the animal-like condition of children (*Pleasures of Children’s Literature*, 194).

In *The Magic Finger*, the ducks and the female protagonist certainly represent the animal-like condition and vulnerability of both groups, but instead of being represented as characters in need of civilising, Dahl reverses their roles and they are the ones who civilise the Greggs. It is this interesting reversal that is again, so characteristic of Dahl’s novels and what makes his messages about children, adults, and power dynamics so difficult to pin down.
The Magic Finger is a didactic text for young readers with a subversive message challenging the hunting traditions in Britain. While Nodelman has argued that “The attitude a picture book implies about whether children should act like the animals they naturally are or the civilised social beings adults want them to be is a key marker in identifying it either as a didactic book intended to teach children or as a pleasurable one intended to please them” (Nodelman, “Illustration and Picture Books”, 76), the characterisation of the unnamed female protagonist and the Ducks as the most civilised characters in The Magic Finger challenges didactic conventions in children’s literature. Dahl is still being didactic but, he masks his didacticism by expressing a subversive message in a subversive way. While Nodelman’s assertion that picture books often engage in “a process of colonisation: adults write books for children to persuade them of conceptions of themselves as children that suit adult needs and purposes” (77) can certainly be applied to Dahl’s didactic texts, these texts do not fit neatly into the didactic patterns of other children’s texts in which the representation of children as “not-yet-civilised […] keeps children other than, less sensible than, and therefore deserving of less power than, adults” (Nodelman, “Illustration and Picture Books”, 77). I would argue that texts like The Magic Finger and a multitude of Dahl’s other children’s works that feature empowered children certainly highlight the difficulty in aligning Dahl neatly with one didactic tradition or another within the genre.

After the climactic scene in The Magic Finger in which the ducks threaten the Greggs, the ducks eventually (and graciously) relent, provided the Greggs promise to never hunt again. The text draws to a conclusion when the Gregg family are transformed back into their human selves, destroy their shotguns, and change their family name from ‘Gregg’ to ‘Egg’ “in honour of [their] feathered friends” (The Magic Finger 42, 54), highlighting their regrets over their previous transgressions. Instead of hunting, Philip and
William spend their time feeding barley to ducks, doves, pigeons, sparrows, and robins (52), while the Gregg family’s atonement is made complete when Mrs Gregg places flowers on top of sixteen graves of ducks that were shot the day before (51). The family makes amends with the ducks and by extension, nature itself. *The Magic Finger* demonstrates what Karen Coats refers to as “the function of Bakhtinian carnival” where “rules, hierarchies, and social propriety get upended for a time, but when control and order are ultimately restored, they function more smoothly as a result of the release of tension and negative emotion that carnival affords” (83). Order is restored, but it is an order that is a ‘new order’, that conforms to the animal welfare rhetoric and anti-hunting messages of the period. *The Magic Finger* encourages children to view hunting as a sport with devastating and deadly consequences, and at the same time, prompts children to view animals empathetically. Of the three texts that will be analysed in this chapter, *The Magic Finger* certainly presents the most straightforward anti-hunting message. As we will discover in the following section’s analysis of *Danny*, Dahl’s anti-hunting and pro-animal welfare messages run into complications when meat-eating is introduced in the text.

1.2 Poaching in *Danny the Champion of the World* (1975)

The anti-hunting message of *The Magic Finger* is extended to Dahl’s other children’s texts, including *Danny the Champion of the World* which considers animal rights issues and hunting in relation to class difference in rural Britain. First published in 1975, *Danny* is based on Dahl’s experiences upon returning to Britain after the Second World War. Whilst living in Amersham with his mother after World War II, Dahl formed a friendship with a butcher called Claud Taylor who worked in Old Amersham. Sturrock notes that what brought Taylor and Dahl together was “a shared love of the natural world” (286).
According to Jeremy Treglown, the two men bonded over their surroundings in Amersham and it was Taylor who introduced Dahl to poaching pheasants and tickling trout (76). In fact, Treglown notes that Dahl kept an old notebook recording many “jokes, poaching yarns, [and] pieces of rural lore” that Taylor shared with him over the course of their friendship (76). In the preface to Dahl’s *Ah, Sweet Mystery of Life* (1989) he recalls his friendship with Taylor:

We both had a passion for gambling in small amounts on horses and greyhounds. As well as that, we shared a love of trying to acquire something by stealth without paying for it. By this I don’t mean common-or-garden thievery. We would never have robbed a house or stolen a bicycle. Ours was the sporting type of stealing. It was poaching pheasants or tickling trout or nicking a few plums from a farmer’s orchard. These are practices that are condoned by the right people in the countryside. There is a delicious element of risk in them, especially in the poaching, and a good deal of skill is required (viii).

Dahl’s outdoor adventures with Taylor inspired him to write “The Champion of the World” (1959), a short story originally published in *The New Yorker* in 1959 and then in Dahl’s short story collection, *Kiss Kiss* (1960) the following year. “The Champion of the World” is about two friends, Claud and Gordon, who plan on poaching pheasants from Victor Hazell, a wealthy and unpleasant businessman who keeps many pheasants to shoot for sport. This story would later be reworked into *Danny the Champion of the World* and the male friendship would be replaced by an idealised father-son relationship, between William and his son Danny. While the main characters in Dahl’s short story differ from

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40 According to Archive Assistant for the Roald Dahl Museum Annie Price, Dahl’s grandson Luke Kelly is currently in possession of this notebook and it was unavailable for viewing when I visited the museum in August 2015.
Danny, there are very few changes to the story in relation to the issue of hunting and poaching.

Dahl was able to adapt his short story for adults into a realist children’s novel with themes of poaching and hunting, partly because he was writing during a period in children’s literary history when, as Lucy Pearson and Kimberley Reynolds note, the boundaries of realism in children’s literature were extended significantly, “introducing many topics previously considered too controversial for younger readers” (72). Pearson and Reynolds also observe how during the 1970s and 1980s, realist children’s literature became “more varied, bold and amorphous than previously” citing fantasy infused realist texts such as Alan Garner’s Red Shift (1973) and Diana Wynne Jones’s The Ogre Downstairs (1974) (71-72) as major texts that “reach[ed] deeper into the psyche, further into the future and employ[ed] a wider stylistic repertoire” (72-73). In Danny, Dahl is able to address political issues such as hunting and animal welfare directly – rather than through the use of fantasy in The Magic Finger—because of this crucial “loosening” of traditional realist conventions in children’s literature during this time.

Given the subject matter of Danny, with its focus on the problems associated with hunting and the thrills of poaching, Dahl is not straying far from the anti-hunting stance seen in The Magic Finger, although Danny expands on the anti-hunting message in two ways. First, in Danny, hunting is not only an animal rights issue but also a class issue. The problems associated with class difference, including the unequal distribution of wealth, are linked to hunting in Danny. While hunting is seen in both novels to be exploitative of animals, the Greggs’ motives for hunting in The Magic Finger seem to differ substantially from Hazell’s motivations. There is very little indication in The Magic Finger that the Greggs hunt for reasons other than sport and it is unclear whether or not the family hunts for subsistence, but it seems unlikely, given the protagonist’s criticism of
the family’s keen interest in hunting for the fun of it (*The Magic Finger* 2). Victor Hazell’s hunting practices in *Danny* by comparison are considered much more problematic and immoral. For Hazell, hunting pheasants is the blending of ostentatious display, and an overriding desire to schmooze with aristocratic and upper-class folk. Dahl’s treatment of hunting, then, is as much a criticism of class privilege as it is a matter of animal rights. As Mark West notes, in *Danny*, “[t]he reader gets the impression that it is not morally wrong to disobey laws that are designed solely to protect the interests of the privileged class” (*Roald Dahl* 79). William bitterly explains to Danny that pheasant shooting is practiced only by dukes, lords, barons, baronets, wealthy businessmen and that “all the fancy folk in the country” travel by the hundreds to shoot pheasants once a year on Hazell’s property (*Danny* 33, 94). Here, Hazell’s annual pheasant shoot epitomizes the unequal distribution of wealth and natural resources. In addition, the annual shoot demonstrates what Emma Griffin refers to as the severing of the hunters’ “relationship[s] with the natural world and refashion[s] wild animals into a form of private property” (162).

William informs Danny that “fancy folk” do not gather to Hazell’s wood because they seek Hazell’s company and in reality, they all “secretly […] despise him [and] think he’s a nasty piece of work” (*Danny* 94). This additional fact, coupled with Hazell’s eagerness to vulgarly flash his wealth, strongly indicates that he is part of the *nouveau riche* and suggests a criticism on Dahl’s part of social climbing: Hazell’s hunting is painted as particularly abhorrent because he willingly pays “almost anything to make [the annual hunting party] a success” (94). 41 William estimates that the cost of rearing one

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41 The unfavourable characterisation of Hazell as a status-hungry representative of the nouveau riche however is not the only example in Dahl’s texts in which social upward mobility is condemned. In fact, Hazell’s attempt to schmooze with upper class folk can be compared to the representation of Mr Wormwood in Matilda, whose depiction as a “derogatory hodgepodge of allusions to his working-class origins and his current petty bourgeois identity indicates a dislike for the type of upward social mobility that
young pheasant up until the shooting day is equivalent to the cost of one hundred loaves of bread (95). By equating one pheasant’s life to one hundred loaves of bread, Dahl emphasises how this particular hunt is an extremely wasteful pursuit as Hazell does not simply rear one, but in fact, hundreds of pheasants (95), the equivalent of tens of thousands of loaves of bread. This comparison suggests that if the pheasants were not reared by the rich in such a way, hundreds of loaves of bread would be available for the poor. What is represented as particularly despicable is that Hazell willingly organises this elaborate hunt primarily for upward social mobility. Hazell’s extensive efforts to fatten up the pheasants for the annual hunt so he can ultimately feel like “a big cheese in a little world” and so that “even the Duke of So-and-so slaps him on the back and tries to remember his first name when he says goodbye” (95), are what make him particularly reprehensible. Hazell’s representation as a member of the nouveau riche links the associations between social climbing, snobbery, and field sport. Hazell, a wealthy beer brewer, owner of a huge brewery and massive plot of land, is illustrated by Blake as a rotund figure (47), while the description of Hazell as a man with a “great glistening beery face […] pink as a ham, all soft and inflamed from drinking too much beer” (45) also highlights his greediness and excessive lifestyle. Dahl’s characterization of Hazell as greedy and overweight is part of a larger pattern in his works in which villainous characters do not conform to “average” body types—Aunts Sponge and Spiker, Farmers Boggis, Bunce, and Bean, Augustus Gloop, Miss Trunchbull, Mr and Mrs Wormwood, George’s grandmother, are some key examples of characters who are extremely short, tall, fat, or thin. As John Martin notes, from the 1900s onwards, hunting “was pursued not only by the upper echelons of rural society, but also by the ‘nouveau riches’, who had

[he] represents” (Beauvais, “Child Giftedness”, 281). Class difference in Matilda and in relation to food and power will be examined further in chapter three.

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made their fortunes in trade and commerce and desired to participate in high status rural sports” (“The Neglected Metamorphosis” 1143).

Another major difference between hunting in *The Magic Finger* and *Danny* is that whereas the animals run wild and are hunted in the wild in the former text, the animals are bred and reared on private estates for the sole purpose of sport hunting in the latter. It is already a matter of contention that the pheasants are being hunted in the first place but what is particularly problematic is that the pheasants are fattened up, most likely disoriented from overfeeding, and then hunted for sport, where beaters are hired to clap their hands as they walk through the woods to drive the pheasants “towards the half-baked men and their guns” before the haphazard shooting commences (*Danny* 34). William resentfully remarks how each year “wealthy idiots” purchase baby pheasants from pheasant farms and rear them in pens at first, and then placed them in the woods where they are fed corn twice a day “until they’re so fat they can hardly fly” (33, 34). This practice can be traced back to the nineteenth century when game “slaughter rapidly spiralled upwards and the shooters inevitably turned to punitive game laws and preservation on an industrial scale in order to produce a large population of huntable game” (Griffin 162). Peter Robinson argues that the increasing number of pheasants hunted between 1960 and 1983 can be linked to captive rearing practices:

Despite its popularity as a lowland gamebird, even by 1900 the pheasant comprised only 15 per cent of the annual take, with the grey partridge forming the bulk. However by the 1980s, pheasants accounted for 55 per cent of shot game birds, with a 500 per cent increase in numbers billed between 1960 and 1983 […] being directly attributed to captive rearing (5).
While the intensive rearing of chickens, cows and other livestock had been well-documented in the early 1960s following influential works such as Ruth Harrison’s *Animal Machines* (1964), the intensive rearing of pheasants has only been investigated by both animal rights and hunting groups in the last ten to fifteen years.\(^{42}\) There is little information relating to the exact period when the captive rearing of pheasants for hunting purposes became widespread.\(^{43}\) Nevertheless, there is evidence to suggest that captive rearing did increase significantly in the decades following the Second World War. For Dahl, as he reveals in *Danny*, the best way to protect pheasants from being hunted is through poaching. Poaching is presented as both a more humane alternative to hunting and as an effective way to redistribute wealth from the *nouveau riche* (Hazell) to the general population. Hunting and poaching are class issues that relate to Dahl’s view of the distribution of natural resources in the text. At first, William justifies his father (Danny’s grandfather’s) poaching by stating that his family and other neighbouring families needed to poach because they had nothing to eat (*Danny* 31). Here, Dahl alludes to the increasing incidents of poaching in the British countryside during the period of austerity immediately after the Second World War. Historian John Martin explains how during this time, “Faced with stringent controls on the availability of meat, poaching became an attractive and lucrative means of securing additional meat for the pot” (“British Game Shooting” 220). Danny’s grandfather participates in what von Essen et al. refer to as “livelihood crimes” which “are seen as motivated by economic factors and are often

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\(^{42}\) Although it remains unclear as to whether or not Dahl was familiar with Harrison’s text, he was aware of the problems associated with animal welfare and factory farming as outlined earlier in this chapter.

\(^{43}\) In early 2005, the British Association for Shooting and Conservation and Animal Aid formed an alliance against the intensive rearing of captive pheasants for hunting. British animal rights organisation Animal Aid collected evidence showing the use of battery cages for rearing pheasants. Paul Brown notes how, in this intensive rearing system, millions of “[b]irds are kept in small wire cages, and some wear hoods to prevent them from pecking each other to death. The eggs and chicks produced are sold on to country estates for about £1 each. The estates fatten up the pheasants and release them in September, around a month before the shooting season starts” (“Unlikely alliance to protect pheasants”). Guy Kennaway points out how in 2011, millions of pheasants “start […] life on game farms in huge 10,000-egg incubators, [are] hatched after 21 days, and spend the next four weeks in large boxes under hot lamps, eating enriched grain to bulk up into poults” (“Fowl Play: In Defense of the Pheasant”).
attributed as the most prevalent acts of illegal hunting” and “Within this category, some livelihood poachers ‘kill for the table’” (640). von Essen et al. also point out that “the general premise” of livelihood crimes “is that they should be able to be approached as predominantly economic in nature” (640).

It is clear, however, that Danny is not set during this period and Danny does not hesitate to remind his father that they, unlike Danny’s grandfather, don’t need to poach because he and his father are not in desperate need of food. Here, Danny’s father participates in poaching as a sort of ‘folk crime’, associated with “characteristics of custom and continuity” and folk crimes are “also less stigmatized and treated differentially to other crimes in the legal process” (von Essen et al. 641). Similarly, as D.J.V. Jones notes, “It was true that some poached for sport and amusement; miners, for example, found it an exciting contrast to their daily work. Indeed, such were the attacks on traditional pastimes and recreations in the mid-century that catching a rabbit or having a drink were two of the few pleasures left to country people” (D.J.V. Jones 835).

As a poacher or a sort of ‘folk criminal’, William’s characterisation corresponds with the “trend towards less positive adult authority figures” in children’s realist novels of the 1960s and 1970s (Pearson and Reynolds 68). Within this framework, it is acceptable for William to make mistakes, commit petty crimes (like poaching) and be an imperfect, yet idealised father at the same time. This change in realist convention coupled with Hazell’s characterisation as a pompous buffoon is used to justify William’s poaching to readers. Dahl’s didacticism is clear in characterisations of baddies such as Hazell or Farmers Boggis, Bunce, and Bean in Fox: it could be argued that the narration in these texts is a form of what Nikolajeva identifies as “dissonant psychonarration” in which there is a “cognitive disparity between narrator and character” enabling authors to didacticise by using “narrators to pass judgment on characters” (Nikolajeva 259).
Similarly, Danny’s disdain for Hazell results in his waning scepticism about his father’s hobby and he eventually begins poaching with William as well. In this way, poaching is endorsed as a kind of guerrilla warfare against the *nouveau riche*—together, both father and son take on the mythologised role of poacher, which Dahl uses to question the status quo and justify the act of poaching itself. Danny and William are presented as the great pheasant liberators of the wood whose poaching balances the distribution of resources that would otherwise be held in the hands of the corrupt few, such as Hazell.

It is worth noting that Dahl’s reference to subsistence poaching is important because it can be linked to poaching narratives such as Fred Rolfe’s *I Walked by Night: Being the Philosophy of the King of the Norfolk Poachers* (1935), a personal account of life as a poacher in Norfolk in the early twentieth century. Edited by Lillias Rider Haggard, daughter of adventure novelist H. Rider Haggard, Rolfe’s poaching text has come to be regarded as a “social documentary about the life of poor Norfolk cottagers in the days before the Welfare State” (Humphreys, “Foreword”). There is no direct evidence in *Danny*, or elsewhere, to suggest that Dahl had read or was familiar with Rolfe’s account. However, the text certainly bears similarities to the romanticised descriptions of nature and poaching evident in Rolfe’s description of the poacher’s skill set. According to Rolfe, the poacher “must study wether [sic], and all kinds of wood craft, the call of birds, and the flight of Wood PIGons [sic] in the wood at night, and distinguish the diffrent [sic] sounds, and there are a lot of diffrent [sic] sounds in the woods at night, and other rough places” (150). Similarly, when Danny enters Hazel’s Wood for the first time, and in the middle of the night, William’s heightened attention to his natural surroundings is not unlike Rolfe’s description above. Danny notes how

> My father was very tense. He was picking his feet up high and putting them down gently on the brown leaves. He kept his head moving all the
time, the eyes sweeping slowly from side to side, searching for danger. I tried doing the same, but soon I began to see a keeper behind every tree, so I gave it up. We went on like this for maybe four or five minutes, going slowly deeper and deeper into the wood. Then a large patch of sky appeared ahead of us in the roof of the forest, and I knew that this must be the clearing [...] The clearing was about a hundred yards ahead of us. We stopped behind a big tree while my father let his eyes travel very slowly all round. He was checking each little shadow and every part of the wood within sight (Danny 137).

For both Rolfe and Dahl, the poacher needs to be ‘in tune’ with nature in order to poach successfully, and here, William becomes almost animal-like, and takes on the role of a ‘true’ hunter.

What we see in Danny is a similar pro-nature ideology to the one that Pennell identifies in The Magic Finger, linked with a rural rebel ethic. In E.J. Hobsbawm’s Bandits (1969), he explores the notion of rebel ethics and banditry and explains how social bandits “are peasant outlaws whom the lord and state regard as criminals, but who remain within peasant society, and are considered by their people as heroes, as champions, avengers, fighters for justice, perhaps even leaders of liberation, and in any case as men to be admired, helped and supported” (13). Indeed, Danny is essentially a novel about rebel ethics and Danny’s father epitomises the social bandit whom Hobsbawm identifies as the “peasant outlaw”. Importantly, social banditry is distinct from other forms of professional rural gangs of “robbers” and “from communities for whom raiding is part of the normal way of life” (13-14). Hobsbawm identifies Robin Hood as perhaps the most famous example of the rural social bandit or “noble robber” (34) and for Hobsbawm, Robin Hood represents “what all peasant bandits should be, but
in the nature of things, few of them have the idealism, the unselfishness, or the social consciousness to live up to their role, and perhaps few can afford to” (35). Given this definition of Robin Hood as the most notable social bandit in English folklore, it is clear that there are indeed parallels between this figure and Danny’s father William. In Danny, “stealing from the rich appear[s] to be a justified act of defiance in an equitable society” (Worthington 133), while Tanya Jeffcoat echoes Worthington’s analysis and notes that in Danny, “[t]he father’s poaching undermines Hazell’s status and calls into question an economic system that allows men such as Hazell to use their wealth inhumanely” (214-15). As the village poacher, William can be seen as an updated Robin Hood figure in Dahl’s representation of rural England in the mid-twentieth century. 44

In Danny, Dahl distinguishes the ethical differences between hunting and poaching: hunting is represented as a particularly violent form of killing while poaching is represented as a much more humane alternative to capturing, and presumably, killing pheasants. Hazell’s annual pheasant hunts are also presented as an inhumane use of money, while poaching is represented as a much more humane alternative. There is evidence in some of his non-fiction works that Dahl attempted to treat animals humanely when he encountered them in everyday household matters. In the posthumously published My Year (1993), Dahl gives rather earnest advice for dealing with pesky animals in one’s gardens in a dignified way and how to cook lobsters humanely, indicating that matters pertaining to humane animal treatment and animal welfare were important concerns in his own life. My Year catalogues Dahl’s perspectives on plants, animals, gardening and nature over the course of the last year of his life, and includes tips for painlessly luring pests such as moles away from the flowers and vegetables in his garden. My Year has

44 Honeyman recognises the link between the figure of Robin Hood and Danny, noting, “A similar transition from communalism to private property (that is inversely disguised by Disney) is admitted into children’s literature through legends of Robin Hood or even Roald Dahl’s Danny the Champion of the World (1975)” (Consuming Agency 124).
come to be regarded as a text that marvels at nature, “reveal[ing] a keen, almost spiritual
sense of connection with the natural world, and of involvement in the seasonal round
which has provided a sense of stability during a lifetime of change and adventure” (Scott
171). In this text, Dahl bemoans those who “wage savage war against the poor moles
because of the molehills they make and kill them in all sorts of cruel ways using traps or
poison or even poisonous gas” (My Year 14). Instead of using traps or poison to scare
away moles, Dahl buries an empty wine bottle in the ground with the neck poking out
(15). He notes how, as wind catches the neck of the bottle, it transmits a soft humming
sound through the ground which “drives the mole half-crazy and he very soon packs up
and goes somewhere else” (15). Whether or not this method is effective, Dahl clearly
prides himself on devising inventive and what he regards as humane ways of dealing with
animals in various situations. This example is important as it draws attention to Dahl’s
concerns about animal welfare in practical situations such as pest control. With these
matters in mind, it is unsurprising that the secret poaching methods outlined in Danny
were not only inspired by Dahl’s own personal poaching experiences but that they are
determined attempts to treat animals humanely in very specific circumstances.

The three secret methods described in Danny involve the use of raisins to lure the
pheasants into various traps. The first of the methods is what William refers to as the
“Horse-hair stopper”. This trap involves soaking raisins in water overnight to plump them
up and then stuffing them with horse-hair cut into half-inch lengths (Danny 37). The
intended effect of the horse-hair stopper is to ensure that the raisin sticks to the inside of
the pheasant’s throat. While William assures Danny that this method apparently does not
cause the fowl any pain, it does paralyse the bird, leaving the pheasant “absolutely rooted
on the spot […] and all you’ve got to do is nip out quickly from the place where you’re
hiding and pick him up” (38). This method is hardly dignified but it is presented as a
much more humane alternative to shooting the pheasants outright. The second method is “the sticky hat” which involves luring an unsuspecting pheasant towards a glue-lined paper hat with raisins until the pheasant “pops his head inside [the hat] to gobble up the raisins and the next thing he knows he’s got a paper hat stuck over his eyes and he can’t see a thing (41).

When Danny’s grandfather first tested this method on roosters he quickly realised that it was effective because “No bird in the world is going to run away once you cover up its eyes” (40). While these schemes are clearly meant to be humorous, and they indeed demonstrate Dahl’s attempt to entertain young readers with bits of poaching folklore, when examined more closely they are, at best, problematic alternatives to hunting. Although the images of pheasants blindly running around with paper hats over their heads, or staying completely fixed and stationary because of the horsehair stuck in their throats are meant to amuse readers, they are rather crude alternatives revealing a dubious understanding of bird welfare. Dahl’s attempts to simultaneously maintain the poaching tradition, because of its association with a kind of bandit counterculture, while protecting animals from unnecessary cruelty, results in the text’s advocation of a series of poaching techniques which are not convincing as serious humane alternatives to the blood sports practised by Hazell. Again, these examples highlight the central dilemma of Dahl: that the ideological positions represented in his works are often bound up in several contradictions that are ultimately complicated by his simultaneously didactic and subversive voice.

The third secret trap in Danny is “The Sleeping Beauty” and this method involves stuffing raisins with sleeping-pill powder (99). In the story, this method is particularly effective: once the sleeping-pill filled raisins kick in, the pheasants, in their trees, begin to fall asleep and fall from their perches (155) and perhaps not so coincidentally, Dahl employed exactly the same trick during his poaching adventures with his friend Claud
Taylor. Sturrock notes how the fictitious Hazell was based on Taylor’s boss in Amersham, George Brazil. Brazil was the local *nouveau riche* landowner known for driving a large Rolls-Royce around town but he eventually became “the victim of a brilliant poaching stratagem that hinged on the idea of feeding pheasants large raisins that had been laced with sleeping pills” (286). Dahl’s texts clearly borrow heavily from these experiences: in one of Dahl’s ideas books, he makes note of “Claud poaching pheasants by filling raisins with seconal. Also other methods—horse hair, fishing-hooks, paper-caps, knitting-teeth. Deliver game next day in pram under baby” (Ideas Book, RDMSC RD 11/2, 18). Similarly, Taylor’s daughters recall how their father and Dahl would “set out at dusk for this adventure, with their bags packed with fruit they had slit open, filled with powdered sedatives, and then stitched back up again” and while neither daughter could remember whether or not this method actually worked, one of them “did remember that the family ate an awful lot of pheasants that winter” (Sturrock 286-87). In a letter to his agent Ann Watkins, Dahl explains how he has

been successfully poaching pheasants by feeding them raisins each one of which contains a Nembutal sleeping pill. They gobble the raisins then feel sleepy, then go up to roost and then the little buggers sleep so hard that they fall off the bough and we catch them on the way down. I look at it this way: if anyone ever poached me, that’s how I’d like it to be done (Dahl, Letter to Ann Watkins, 10/8/49; WLC Series III, Box 22).

Here, Dahl attempts to justify his poaching by expressing empathy with the pheasants. Similarly, poaching is a justifiable activity in *Danny* because the poachers, Danny and his

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45 In a letter to Sheila Saint Lawrence, Dahl explains how, if “there is objection to the knitting-needle method of pheasant-catch, I will substitute a different way of doing it, one that even Saint Francis of Assisi might consider using if he found himself hungry in a wood. The question of how many pheasants can go into sacks and perambulators is being carefully investigated over here by Claud himself who is conducting practical experiments next weekend” (Dahl, Letter to Sheila Saint Lawrence, WLC Series III, Box 24; 9/22/58).
father, act almost as the rogue ‘saviours’ of the wood who protect the pheasants from a highly undignified death. William, as social bandit is similar to the rural figure identified by Hobsbawm as “an agent of justice, indeed a restorer of morality” (37).

In *Danny*, Dahl uses Hazell’s mistreatment of the pheasants, particularly their overfeeding, in order to justify poaching. Poaching essentially saves the pheasant from being shot at by drunken, rich buffoons, which seems to be the real problem with pheasant shooting in the text. Yet, the alternative to Hazell’s hunting, the secret methods that William and Danny devise in order to capture the pheasants, can hardly be regarded as genuinely humane. After Danny and William successfully catch the pheasants through the effective use of their sleeping-pill-laced raisins, William proudly tells Danny that they have “done these birds a great kindness putting them to sleep in this nice painless way. They’d have had a nasty time of it tomorrow if we hadn’t got them first” (*Danny* 167). William’s friend Charlie Kinch agrees and states how “Rotten shots, most of them fellows are […] At least half the birds finish up winged and wounded” (167). The only instance in which poaching and killing are connected is when William recalls how his father had to find his mother to wring a rooster’s neck “and dish it up for dinner as a celebration” for inventing “The Sticky Hat” poaching method (40). Apart from this one example, Dahl coincidentally omits the details of what happens after the other secret methods are employed, giving little room for readers to imagine an alternative outcome, thus “conscripting them to the views of the narrator in a way that can feel coercive” (Butler 3).

When “The Sleeping Beauty” method proves successful, pheasants are no longer discussed as living creatures, but as food. Dahl omits details about what happens in between capturing pheasants through ‘humane’ poaching techniques and roasting them at home. The plot moves swiftly away from poaching pheasants once Danny and William catch them and to descriptions of roasted pheasant as “the finest and most succulent dish
on earth” with “an unbelievable flavour” (168, 170). William explains to Danny how they will prepare and cook the pheasant:

‘[B]efore we put the bird in the oven, we have to lay strips of fat bacon across the breast to keep it nice and juicy. And bread sauce, too. We shall have to make bread sauce. You must never have roasted pheasant without lashings of bread sauce. There are three things you must always have with roasted pheasant—bread sauce, chipped potatoes and boiled parsnips.’ There was half a minute’s silence as we both allowed ourselves the pleasure of dreaming about these beautiful foods (171).

This detailed description of idealised food is used to distract readers away from the pheasants’ death. There is a shift in tone from the preceding passages that centres on the dreamy excess of a traditional pheasant dinner with all the trimmings which can be compared to other idealised descriptions of British food found in *The Wind in the Willows, The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, and is effective in drawing readers’ attention away from the pheasants’ deaths.

In *Danny*, hunting is problematic because it seems an unnatural, inhumane, and cruel way of capturing an animal and given Dahl’s passion for gardening, foraging, fishing, and cooking, it is clear why he would be critical of hunting activities more generally. In both *The Magic Finger* and *Danny*, Dahl identifies hunting in particular as one of the major disruptors and threats to the natural food world. For Dahl, natural food processes and humane killing practices of animals are under threat by those who lurk in the forests, hunting either purely for sport or for more dubious self-serving ends. *Danny*, like *The Magic Finger*, provides social commentary on animal cruelty in relation to field sports—yet, despite the anti-hunting message woven through the text, *Danny* also reveals

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Dahl’s use of terms such as “have to”, “must never”, and “must always” is interesting in this passage and can be connected to Dahl’s fixation on “the best” way of cooking, as explored earlier, which not only defines good food through traditional and simple cooking but also through rule-bound terms.
a rather dubious understanding of animal rights and animal welfare in the various poaching scenes in the novel. The complicated issue of hunting animals is condemned, but Dahl is conspicuously silent about complicated matters related to the necessary death of animals to satisfy carnivorous appetites. Again, these contradictions provide crucial insight into how Dahl’s writing operates didactically on the topic of food within the context of children’s fiction. Similarly, the following section will look at a fantastical poaching text, *Fantastic Mr Fox* which also explores similar contradictions related to Dahl’s perspectives about animal rights and the issue of who eats whom in children’s literature. This section also analyses how Dahl uses fantasy to articulate the problems associated with the expanding agro-industrial complex after the Second World War to young readers.

### 1.3 Industrialised Farming in *Fantastic Mr Fox* (1970)

Dahl’s second book for beginners, *Fantastic Mr Fox*, first published in 1970, is a novel about the title character’s struggle to scavenge for food (in a sort of form of subsistence poaching) for his family of foxes. A conflict ensues between Mr Fox and three farmers, Boggis, Bunce, and Bean, who attempt to kill Mr Fox when they discover that he has been stealing food from them to feed his family. The farmers go to great lengths in their efforts to kill Mr Fox: not only are they willing to destroy their own land, and the habitats of the wild animals, but they are also willing to surround the fox’s hole and wait for an indefinite period of time, with guns in hand, to ensure the death of the eponymous hero of the text. In the end, the farmers are unsuccessful and Mr Fox is able to gain access to Boggis, Bunce, and Bean’s respective storehouses from underground, and steal sufficient foodstuffs to feed his family and other neighbouring animals in the wild. The novel ends with the foxes, badgers, moles, rabbits, and weasels partaking in a communal feast.
celebrating the fact that they do not have to worry about food provisions in their underground community for the foreseeable future.

Since its publication, *Fox* has been dismissed by many critics as a morality tale that skirts around, rather than actually addressing, complex issues about animal welfare. David Rees argues that *Fox* problematically “makes the morality of killing foxes simplistically black and white, not the complex issue that it really is”, and claims that “Dahl does not tell us why his farmers are so revolting; they just are, he says, and he seems to think that this is sufficient. He is short-changing the reader, however, by avoiding explanations and leaving an impression that it doesn’t really matter if foxes slaughter chickens and geese” (146). Rees correctly observes that Dahl avoids addressing the contradictory representation of the foxes as both hunters and hunted in the novel, but I would contend that Dahl *does* touch on the complexity of this issue as it could be argued that the foxes partake in a form of subsistence poaching in order to feed their family whereas the wicked farmers are merely hunting the foxes for sport. There are certainly parallels between Dahl’s “The Champion of the World”, *Fox*, and *Danny* and, given Dahl’s reputation for recycling many of his ideas, when *Fox* is read with these other texts in mind, there are complexities and contradictions related to issues of food, power, and control that reveal Dahl’s distinct (yet still suspect) views about animal rights and animal welfare.

Other critics, including June Pulliam, have interpreted *Fox* as a fantastical narrative that considers important issues pertaining to life and death: Pulliam acknowledges that in the text the “animals are as intelligent as humans”, complex characters that “behave as wild animals who are motivated by the need to survive” (152-53). For Pulliam, there is an equality between animals and humans in *Fox* and like humans, the animals in Dahl’s narrative are willing to steal in order to feed their families.
Like Danny, a rural rebel ethic is not only upheld but celebrated in Fox as well. The fox family is tapping into the Darwinian idea that “Those who are weak are eaten by those who are strong, according to the survivalist outlook [and] Eater and eaten modulate into hunter and quarry, the powerful and the powerless. Metaphorically, if you are weak, you are edible; if you are edible, you are weak” (M. Nicholson 39). Jacob Held goes one step further in his assessment of Fox and observes how, in the narrative, “the thief is the hero, and the businessmen are the villains. This simple inversion of traditional values demands that we rethink things like the morality of theft as well as the right to own property and the justice of distributing, or redistributing, resources” (“The Fantastically Just Mr. Fox” 121). Held’s observation aligns with Hobsbawm’s definition of the noble robber as one that “represents an extremely primitive form of social protest, perhaps the most primitive there is” (48). Indeed, like noble robbers, Robin Hood and William of Danny, Mr Fox is determined to “prove that justice is possible, that poor men need not be humble, helpless and meek” (Hobsbawm 48). Like Danny, Held interprets the novel as one primarily about “Redistributive Justice” (“The Fantastically Just Mr. Fox” 122) and I would argue that in Danny and Fox, Dahl immortalises Robin Hood for a younger generation. These characters are in a way why Robin Hood cannot die, and why he is invented when he does not really exist. Poor men have need of him for he represents justice, without which, as Saint Augustine observed, kingdoms are nothing but great robbery. That is why they need him most, perhaps, when they cannot hope to overthrow oppression, but merely seek its alleviation (Hobsbawm 48).

Between the publication of Fox in 1970 and Danny in 1975, Disney’s animated feature Robin Hood (1973) was released and featured an anthropomorphic fox as the title character. Notably, the connections between countercultural ideas and rebel ethics made
their way into children’s culture through re-imagined representations of Robin Hood during this period. Disney’s *Robin Hood* in particular presents a critical view of those in positions of economic power. The wealthy characters in Disney’s adaptation are represented in a negative light, not unlike the representations of Victor Hazell and the farmers Boggis, Bunce, and Bean in *Danny and Fox*, respectively.

While the power reversal that takes place in *Fox* can certainly be compared to the power reversals examined in the previous sections, one important signifier that highlights that the Fox family, like the ducks in *The Magic Finger*, are *not* in need of civilising (unlike the human antagonists of both texts) is in the fact that the patriarch and matriarch of the Fox family are referred to by their titles of “Mr” and “Mrs”. As Daniel explains, concerning animals in children’s literature,

> An important determinant of subjectivity […] is the capacity for language. When we *name* our pets we give them perhaps an interim status, somewhere between object and subject. But when we give fictional animals language, we accord them full subjectivity. Consider Blinky Bill, Dorothy Wall’s naughty koala “bear” character, Beatrix Potter’s Peter Rabbit and Wilbur the pig in *Charlotte’s Web*, all of whom talk and express thoughts, opinions and feelings and who are likely to evoke sympathetic identification in child readers (Daniel 29).

Naming the heads of the fox family “Mr” and “Mrs” lends both characters a level of authority and respectability, that they are not merely animals, but the civilised heroes of the novel, and that the reversal of their misfortunes, from being hunted to hunters in the narrative, is perhaps not surprising given their names, which set them apart as civilised animals right from the outset of the text. While Held argues that Boggis, Bunce, and Bean “seem to be honest men [that] didn’t steal their farms” and “merely run agriculturally
based businesses” (“The Fantastically Just Mr. Fox” 123), this section argues that although Boggis, Bunce, and Bean may have acquired their farmland legitimately, Dahl’s narrative is critical of them because they are representative of changes in agribusiness after the Second World War. The farmers and their respective farms in Fox are depicted as part of a systemic problem within the agro-industrial sector in post-war Britain that threatens the balance of resources and the ecosystem. At the beginning of the narrative, it is clear that the farmers and the farms in Fox are not part of an idyllic pastoral, rural Britain and Dahl presents a rather bleak outlook on what rural life has become in the decades since the War. In Fox, Dahl’s bleak representation of the post-war farm is in opposition to the idealised farm he describes later in Roald Dahl’s Cookbook. In the latter text he tells of how the farm of his neighbours, May and Alan Bedford, “transports you straight into the sixteenth century the moment you walk into the yard”, that this farm is long-established and the agricultural practices that take place there are also traditional (52). On the Bedford farm,

Calves are born and reared in the old cowsheds, hens and ducks and bantams wander all over the place, ferrets stare at you with pork eyes from their wooden cages, innumerable cats and kittens prowl around the hayricks, and in the lambing season there are usually two or three orphaned lambs wandering about and being fed by hand (52).

Dahl also notes how the Bedfords’s eggs come from “wandering hens”, and that in the Dahl household they “eat no others”, and that the Bedfords give his family the eggs in exchange for grazing rights for their cattle on Dahl’s property (52). In contrast, in Fox, no longer are farms places of natural beauty, pastoral lands flowing with an abundance of the best possible milk and honey, but rather, they have become places of ugliness, filth, greed, over-production, and overconsumption.
In *Fox* the farmers are described in a way that is intended to disgust and repel readers. The descriptions of Boggis, Bunce, and Bean’s strange appearances, ill dispositions and poor diets verge on the grotesque and reveal to children that something is amiss on these British farms. From the outset, Dahl makes it clear that all three of the farmers misuse and abuse food. Their diets are comically unbalanced as they consume the food and drinks they produce in excessive amounts—just as in the characterisation of Aunts Sponge and Spiker in *James and the Giant Peach*, Dahl returns to the trope of the greedy adult in *Fox*. Boggis is an “enormously fat” chicken farmer who consumes three boiled chickens with dumplings three times a day (*Fox* 2). *Fox* contrasts with children’s books about idealistic farm life such as Jan Pfloog’s *The Farm Book* (1964) and Pat Hutchins’s *Rosie’s Walk* (1968), written during this period. Boggis’s farm holds thousands of chickens, while farmer Bunce keeps thousands of ducks and geese on his farm. Bunce is described as a “kind of pot-bellied dwarf” who is “so short his chin would have to be underwater in the shallow end of any swimming-pool in the world” (3). Moreover, Bunce’s diet consists of eating as many as six doughnuts stuffed with goose livers in one sitting, which, we are informed, gives him a “tummy-ache and a beastly temper” (3). Bean keeps thousands of turkeys on his farm as well as an apple orchard for producing cider. Readers are informed that Bean never eats at all but instead drinks copious amounts of strong cider from his farm (4). It is certainly clear that the adage “you are what you eat” is being evoked in these characterisations: according to Daniel, this axiom reminds us that “to be a proper (human) subject one must eat in a controlled manner, according to cultural rules. Eating, and specifically the cultural imperative to eat correctly, is a significant means by which society controls individual identity” (3). In

47 In fact, their appetites are so excessive that Mr Fox can detect the farmers by their smell: “I can smell those goons a mile away. I can even smell one from the other. Boggis gives off a filthy stink of rotten chicken-skins. Bunce reeks of goose-livers, and as for Bean, the fumes of apple cider hang around him like poisonous gases” (10).
addition, not only do all three farmers partake in unhealthy consumption, but their exaggerated physical attributes coupled with their beastly temperaments indicate that these qualities are undoubtedly linked to their grossly unbalanced diets. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the farmers’ individual personalities reflect in large part the excessive state of their respective farms as examined in the following paragraphs. The characterisations of Boggis, Bunce, and Bean are similar to the conventional representations of monsters in fantasy, who Karen Coats argues are used to “encode our current views about what it means to be human and how we should respond to those whom we consider other” (84). Ultimately, the farmers are presented as corrupt and monstrous villains living off the unevenly distributed wealth of the post-war agrindustrial complex.

Boggis, Bunce, and Bean each process thousands of birds for consumption, numbers which indicate that the three farmers are operating industrial farms. Dahl links the increasingly critical view of factory farming emerging in Britain in the 1960s and gaining momentum in the 1970s, to his characterisations of Boggis, Bunce, and Bean and their respective industrial farms. Industrial farming was first introduced in Britain shortly after the Second World War and the changes it brought to the British landscape were enduring and immense. Robert Robinson and William Sutherland note how British agriculture at the turn of the twentieth century was “of a mixed character, with both stock and crop husbandry occurring on the same farm” but the drastic reduction of food supplies and the reduction and unreliability of imports during the wars resulted in what he regards as a “consequent desire for self-sufficiency and demand for an increased standard of living [in Britain] after the austerity of [World War Two]” (161). The drive towards

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48 Given that Dahl frequently uses external characterization to define his characters, he is able to effectively conscript readers into embracing a perspective that is not entirely their own but in fact, one defined by Dahl’s ideological position, as “external characterization is part of the overall didactic adaptation of children’s fiction to the cognitive level of its implied readers” (Nikolajeva 183).
complete self-sufficiency and a more comfortable way of life greatly influenced British agricultural policy and informed the Agricultural Act of 1947, which ushered in monumental transformations in the British farming sector.

John Martin addresses many farmers’ dilemmas in post-war Britain: “The introduction of production subsidies in 1957 led to grants becoming available for the removal of hedgerows and underdrainage” while farmers became increasingly pressured to “achieve efficiency gains in order to cover the deficit between the rising cost of production and the increase in the level of guaranteed prices” (“The Supply Side Revolution” 209). The rapid increase in monoculture farming and use of heavy machinery made these farms far more efficient than traditional farms. Similarly, Robinson and Sutherland cite “a dramatic reduction in landscape diversity” and “a 65% decline in the number of farms, a 77% decline in farm labour and an almost fourfold increase in yield” (157) as a small selection of the changes brought by industrial farming. Indeed, the bottom line for many of these industrial farms, was to maximize crop yields, a focus that, according to Nicola Humble, “led to the deleterious practices of industrialized, chemicalized farming, whose results we still struggle to overcome” (104). By the 1950s, “a number of factors led to the polarization of agriculture in Britain with arable farming predominantly in the east and pastoral farming in the west” resulting in a decrease in habitat diversity within farms; and by the 1970s and the early 1980s, a widespread decline in farmland wildlife (Robinson and Sutherland 165). It is the farming culture of post-war Britain that formed the basis of Dahl’s representation of farms in *Fox*. The main focus of Dahl’s text is not on finding a solution for the problems of monoculture and factory farming. What Dahl undermines is the mentality within a culture that prizes the quantity,
yield, and profitability of a product over a short period of time, above all else. Many of the representations analysed in this chapter focus on the ways in which natural food processes are perceived to be under threat from a number of varying sources in Dahl’s novels for children. In many ways, the threats outlined by Dahl are certainly reflective of the perceived threats to natural food processes in post-war society.

Boggis’s monoculture of chickens, Bunce’s ducks and geese and Bean’s turkeys and apples reveals in large part the main problem of specialised farming within the industry. While Boggis’s farm is the only true monoculture farm in Fox, Bunce and Bean’s farms are by no means polyculture farms in that they are still producing only two different crops to the exclusion of a whole host of other varieties. The limited variation of food produced on these farms is reflective of the monoculture factory farms that began taking over the British countryside following the War. Moreover, not long after the establishment of these farms in the British countryside, and in many other countries around the world, environmentalists, animal rights activists, and social critics alike questioned how this type of farming affected both the food produced on these farms and the surrounding natural environment. One of the most often cited criticisms of monoculture farming was that its specialised nature placed the crops at a greater risk of disease and as a result, a greater number of polluting pesticides had to be used to combat diseases which, in turn accelerated the processes of soil erosion and potentially destroyed other plants and animals within the surrounding habitat (Wolfe (2000); Finckh (2008)).

The transformations of the traditional British farm after the Second World War favoured the intensive rearing practices that boosted profit over the welfare of both the life and land on these farms. Ruth Harrison’s seminal work, Animal Machines, first

49 In this respect, Dahl is quite consistent in his messages against greed and excess—however, as we will discover in subsequent chapters, his messages disparaging greed and excess are problematized and become contradictory when we examine some of his other children’s texts including the highly influential Chocolate Factory.
published in 1964, was among the first critical works that scrutinised the problems associated with the intensive rearing of animals and monoculture farming on industrial farmlands in Britain. As Harrison notes:

To some extent, as the Minister of Agriculture is so fond of telling us, farm animals have always been exploited by man in that he rears them specifically for food. But until recently they were individuals, allowed their birthright of green fields, sunlight and fresh air; they were allowed to forage, to exercise, to watch the world go by, in fact to live. Even at its worst, with insufficient protection against inclement weather or poor supplementation of natural food, the animal had some enjoyment in life before it died. Today the exploitation has been taken to a degree which involves not only the elimination of all enjoyment, the frustration of almost all natural instincts, but its replacement with acute discomfort, boredom and actual denial of health. It has been taken to a degree where the animal is not allowed to live before it dies (37).

Harrison cites an article from 19 December 1961 in Farmer and Stockbreeder that describes how industrial farms are often characterised by “rapid turnover, high-density stocking, a high degree of mechanisation, a low labour requirement, and efficient conversion of food into saleable products” (35). Descriptions of Boggis’s chicken house as “a huge shed […] teeming with chickens”, where the chickens are in close and confined quarters and where there were “white chickens and brown chickens and black chickens by the thousand” (Fox 40-41), parallel Harrison’s descriptions of industrial farms. While there are no illustrations of the duck, geese, or turkey quarters in the book, the fact that there are thousands of the birds on Bunce’s and Bean’s respective farms suggests that facilities similar to Boggis’s cramped chicken houses are likely to be in
place. Bean’s secret cider cellar is stocked with shelves from the floor to the ceiling full of hundreds of jars of cider (63). Again, the scale of drink found in Bean’s storehouse demonstrates that mass production is taking place on his farm, or that his farm is indeed part of a cycle of rapid and mass production which is tied to both agricultural policy and consumer demand. In fact, it was during this period that

[T]he role of official agricultural policy was to increase output while containing costs. The remit of agricultural scientists was to boost yields. The remit of planners was to preserve, as far as possible, every acre of farmland. The remit of agricultural economists was to evaluate the efficiency of these developments in terms of their use of human and capital resources (Lowe 189).

When the foxes and Mr Badger first enter the storehouse, they “stopped and stared” and were left completely speechless as what they saw before them is described as “a kind of fox’s dream, a badger’s dream, a paradise for hungry animals” (Fox 52). Dahl goes on to describe how “against all the four walls of the great room, stacked in cupboards and piled upon shelves reaching from floor to ceiling, were thousands and thousands of the finest and fattest ducks and geese, plucked and ready for roasting! And up above, dangling from the rafters, there must have been at least a hundred smoked hams and fifty sides of bacon!” (52). It is important to note here that because Dahl acknowledges that the ducks and geese were the “finest and fattest”, these descriptions complicate our assessment of how mass production can, and often does, translate into the development of an inferior end product. These qualifiers then, seem to contradict the association between poor quality food products and mass production, again highlighting the recurring dilemma of contradiction in Dahl’s texts. By describing the ducks and geese as the finest and fattest ducks and geese that Mr Fox had ever seen, it would appear that Mr Fox has indeed
succeeded in acquiring not only an abundance of food, but the very *best* foods to feed his family. However, the animals regard the ducks and geese as the *finest* they have ever seen because the birds are the *fattest* the animals have encountered. The interchangeable use of words such as *finest* and *fattest* birds reinforces the problem of factory farming, which prizes the size and quantity of the end product over the overall welfare of the animal.

The connections between Boggis, Bunce, Bean and the mass production taking place on these farms are connected to Dahl’s not-so-veiled criticism of the problem of greed and overconsumption in post-war Britain. As Held argues, “The way property and land is distributed by the farmers is [problematic] because it […] is merely about promoting their own self-interests above and even against the interests of others” and “it outright deprives everyone else of equal rights and equal opportunity” (“The Fantastically Just Mr. Fox” 132). Greed, mass production, and overconsumption are linked to poor quality foods in a passage on “Christmas” in *Roald Dahl’s Cookbook*. In this passage, Dahl complains at great length about the proliferation of turkeys on Christmas day and also grumbles about how turkey has replaced the goose and capon at Christmas time:

   Turkey breeders proliferated and millions of these birds were bred and fed in long sheds that kept their fluorescent lights on day and night to force the turkeys into gorging themselves round the clock. The breeders made a packet, as did the retailers, and soon virtually every family in Britain was stuffing itself at Christmas on one of the most tasteless meats that it is possible to find. I don’t know quite what is drier and more flavourless than a roast turkey (25).

   It is worth highlighting that the mass production on Boggis, Bunce, and Bean’s farms is made possible, in large part, by the use of heavy machinery. What is most alarming in the text is the farmers’ willingness to use powerful industrial equipment to
destructively plough their fields in a consolidated effort to kill Mr Fox and his family. This aim is established early on in the novel when the farmers decide that they can no longer tolerate Mr Fox’s theft and decide to curb the thefts altogether by killing the wily protagonist. Though they are unsuccessful in their attempts the farmers decide to use shovels to dig to the foxes’ burrow, in hopes of killing not only Mr Fox but the entire fox family (Fox 14-17). After digging through the night with their shovels, the farmers decide that using mechanical shovels and tractors to dig might prove to be a much more effective way of getting to the foxes (21). The farmers do not hesitate to use mechanical shovels and tractors which Dahl describes as black, “murderous, brutal-looking monsters” (22). The personified eating machines “bit[e] huge mouthfuls of soil out of the hill” and destroy the natural surroundings with such unnatural ease that “the big tree under which Mr Fox had dug his hole in the first place was toppled like a matchstick” (22). The farmers’ willingness to dig what seems to be a massive hole on their land, while destroying other plant life in the process coincides with what Edith H. Whetham identifies as “the really big push in mechanisation [on farms which] came after 1945” (Whetham 327). As Whetham explains, when farms became increasingly mechanised in the early twentieth century, “The heat and stresses produced by tractors engaged in heavy work, or run at speed, were often excessive for the materials of which the engines were made; metals of adequate strength were at that time expensive. The unguarded air inlets to the carburettors admitted dust which choked the flow of petrol and caused rapid wear on the pistons” (318). This particular sequence is important as it outlines what little regard the farmers have not only for their own land, but towards nature in general. As the farmers continue to dig, readers are informed that “a sort of madness had taken hold of the three men. The tall skinny Bean and dwarfish pot-bellied Bunce were driving their machines like maniacs, racing the motors and making the shovels dig at a terrific speed while the
fat Boggis was hopping about like a dervish and shouting, ‘Faster! Faster!’” (Fox 27). The depletion of soil on the farm links the novel to the post-war farming practices which Body notes “have been conducive both to the failure of the land to replenish the loss of soil which naturally takes place and to the accelerating rate of erosion” (Body 16). What had once been a hill is transformed by a day’s worth of intensive digging into what is described as “the crater of a volcano” (Fox 28). Moreover, one of the main drivers of their desire to kill the foxes rests on their overriding sense of greed: this monstrous greed is what compels the farmers to want to kill the foxes in the first place, and consequently destroy their respective lands. Boggis, Bunce, and Bean are problematically concerned only with processing as many of their livestock as possible for profit.

Admittedly, there are complications with reading Fox as an attack on factory farming. According to Dahl’s biographer, Donald Sturrock, the original plot of Fox was substantially different from the published text, as Dahl’s earlier drafts had the fox family burrowing into and stealing from the local supermarket rather than directly from Boggis, Bunce, and Bean’s farms (444). Editors at Random House at the time were concerned that the text would be interpreted as one that encouraged children to shoplift. By this stage of his career, Dahl had developed a reputation not only as a profitable writer but also a rather sensitive and volatile one who was unafraid of taking his work to other publishers if he felt it was being unfairly criticised or given less attention than he felt it deserved.50 The editors had to tread carefully to ensure that Dahl did not look elsewhere to publish his novel. In the end, an editor at Random House, by the name of Fabio Coen, sent a tactfully written letter to Dahl which suggested that the foxes steal directly from the farmers rather

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50 In a telegram to Bob Bernstein, Dahl wrote, “Trying after a very long time to wrok [sic] for his publisher again this writers [sic] first tiney [sic] effert [sic] has so far gone thirty days unacknowl [sic]edged [sic] which id [sic] dispirit [sic] and discourteous” (Dahl, Telegram to Bob Bernstein, HRCH KNOPF 1334.5; 7/19/68).
than the supermarket (Coen, Letter to Roald Dahl, 11/20/68, HRCH KNOPF 1334.5; Sturrock 446). In Coen’s letter he asks Dahl:

Couldn’t the whole bit on stealing to save the lives of the fox and his family be turned into a joke at the expense of the three farmers who are afterall [sic] their persecutors? That the fox should steal from the supermarket is only a clever solution. If they steal from the farmers, it would also hold something of a moral, namely that you cannot prevent others from securing sustenance without yourself paying a penalty (Coen, Letter to Roald Dahl, 11/20/68; HRCH KNOPF 1334.5).

Surprisingly, Dahl reacted quite positively and enthusiastically to Coen’s suggestion and incorporated it in the final draft. Because this significant alteration to the plot was not Dahl’s own idea, it is difficult to assess whether or not the text is as much a reflection of critical views of industrial farming, or if he was merely looking to make peace with the publishers so that his novel could be published. That being said, Dahl’s wholehearted acceptance of an editor—any editor’s—suggestions was a rare occurrence.

While Coen can be credited for suggesting that the animals steal directly from the farmers in *Fox*, Dahl’s vision of the corrupt and greedy farmers was entirely his own. Yet, there are still questions left unanswered about the characterisation of Mr Fox, and particularly to Mr Fox’s role as a complicated underdog. As Butler explains, “Mr Fox is (literally) an underdog; but he is also a predator, killing chickens without compunction” (8). Indeed, when Mr Fox enters Boggis’s chicken house, he “chose three of the plumpest hens, and with a clever flick of his jaw he killed them instantly” (40). The narrative moves swiftly forward as Mr Fox rushes his children back down the tunnel from which they came and informs them to bring the dead chickens back to their mother and “Tell her to prepare a feast” (42). Like the pheasant dinner description in *Danny*, the promise of a
good meal is used once again as a means to distract readers from the complicated shift of
the hunted transforming into the hunter. The characterisation of the underdog in these
texts, is fraught with complications about power reversal, leaving readers the difficult task
of understanding Dahl’s underlying and problematically contradictory messages about
hunting, meat-eating, and animal welfare. If there is anything to glean from such
messages, it is that Dahl’s narratives present a complicated and contradictory view about
food and power that emphasise his authorial power over the meaning of text, arm-locking
the reader into a very particular set of assumptions about, in this case, hunting and animal
welfare.

Indeed, Dahl’s depiction of Boggis, Bunce, and Bean as grotesque and greedy
versions of industrial farmers in post-war Britain not only entertains young readers but
more importantly warns them about the problematic production and consumption that
takes place in industrial farms. Dahl’s representations of varying threats to natural food
processes in these texts are only one part of a range of food anxieties found in Dahl’s
works, while the tensions between greed and excess and who eats whom are also central
to discussions about food and power in his texts. From the anti-hunting message of The
Magic Finger and Danny the Champion of the World, to the criticisms of industrial food
processing in Fantastic Mr Fox, each of these sections reveal the power dynamics
between hunter and hunted, eater and eaten, and humans and animals in relation to the
meat industry in post-war food culture. Perhaps most importantly, these texts are
subversive insofar that they challenge time-honoured British rural traditions such as
hunting, but they are also vehicles for Dahl to put forth didactic anti-hunting messages,
his (at times, contradictory) ideological positions on food, society, status, greed, and
excess, and the problem of who eats whom, while exercising his authorial power in the
process. As we shall see in subsequent chapters, the line between didacticism and
subversion becomes increasingly blurred when addressing the representation of junk foods in some of Dahl’s most well-known children’s texts. Food fears pertaining to the junk food industry in Dahl’s texts will be explored further in the next two chapters. Each of these following chapters will likewise consider similar and related threats to natural food processes in post-war Britain.
Chapter Two: Cautionary Sweets Consumption

The previous chapter explored Dahl’s ideological positions about animal welfare, meat-eating, food, and power in his literary works as well as the anxieties about threats to the processes of natural food production and distribution, specifically with regard to meat, in post-war British society. Although the industrialisation and mass production of natural food products are of great concern for Dahl, he also expresses many anxieties about the overconsumption of junk foods within British culture – while simultaneously representing them at times as marvellous, almost magical products. As we will explore in this chapter, Dahl’s contradictory messages about junk food, particularly sweets, and his readiness to be sponsored by companies who produce junk food, are problematic and ideologically suspect. Given the enduring complexities of the many food issues in Britain from the 1960s onwards, Dahl attempts to reconcile a number of competing ideas about junk food, and more specifically sweets, inadvertently revealing his somewhat inconsistent views about the confectionery industry in the process. In particular, throughout many of his texts he romanticises sweets and associates sweets-eating with an idealised depiction of childhood. At the same time, however, he often expresses concerns about the effects of eating sweets and seems preoccupied by the increasing child consumer power associated with a growing market in sweets. In addition, Dahl’s personal stake in profiting from a real-life confectionery company inspired by his most popular fictitious work, Charlie and the Chocolate Factory (1964) only complicates matters further and highlights again, the dilemma of Dahl’s many contradictory messages in his works. The connections between the nostalgic power of sweets, child consumer power, the power relationships between adults and children, and Dahl’s authorial power will be analysed in this chapter. This chapter also considers how Dahl’s novels about sweets are presented as unofficial guides for children on how to (and how not to) consume confectionery. In this chapter, I contend
that the romanticised representation of mass-produced sweets in Dahl’s novels is at odds with a consistent message disparaging the excessive consumption of sweets. Even though Dahl is certainly critical of the mass production of ‘natural foods’ there is a problematic acceptance of mass produced sweets that cannot be separated from Dahl’s own financial ambitions for his landmark text *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*.

Dahl’s autobiography, *Boy* (1984), *Roald Dahl’s Cookbook* and fictional texts including *The Giraffe and the Pelly and Me* (1985), *The Witches* (1983), and the immensely popular *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* feature extensive descriptions of sweetshops and confectionery consumption. To say that Dahl clearly thought about sweets and chocolates a great deal throughout his life would be a gross understatement: as we will uncover, Dahl’s sustained interest in confectionery as represented in his life and works is marked by many instances in which the author crossed boundaries between his personal sweets-eating experiences and the fictional counterparts he created in his texts, revealing overlaps and contradictions in Dahl’s personal opinions about confectionery. In addition, the health implications of overconsumption and child consumerism are represented negatively in his children’s texts, yet the messages disparaging greed and excess exist alongside the heroic representation of characters such as confectionery magnate Willy Wonka, whose profession depends on maximising profits in the sweets industry as much as possible. I will argue that children’s increasing consumption of sweets during this period was an issue Dahl was concerned about, yet, his drive to profit from his novel’s success through the development of literary ephemera and Wonka-branded sweets undermined the unofficial and indirect ‘campaign’ against overconsumption in his works.

Before delving into a discussion of the representation of sweets in some of Dahl’s children’s novels, it is important to first define sweets in relation to ‘junk food’ and other
types of foods. While healthy foods are often identified the world over as fruits, vegetables, whole grains, as well as lean meat and fish, junk foods are defined as a broad range of foods including crisps, chips, burgers, pizza, carbonated beverages, chocolate, and sweets with empty calories (Cavagnaro 859; A.F. Smith xxxiii; Kawash 13; Mason, Sugar-Plums 35). Because junk food is often eaten outside mealtimes, it is described by Daniel Thomas Cook as “food out of place” (Cook 120). Similarly, in Children, Food and Identity in Everyday Life (2009), Allison James et al. note how, within a British context, “children’s food” is often classified as “food that is different from that which adults eat and classed as ‘junk’ food”’’ (James, Kjørholt and Tingstad 7).

As they are often regarded as “children’s food”, sweets are a markedly interesting type of junk food. Although the form and function of sweets has certainly changed over time, they were, and continue to be, considered a “special foodstuff” that, according to James, “possess qualities over and above those of ordinary food” (“The good, the bad and the delicious” 674). Sweets are often “regarded as both food and non-food” which “can take on meanings relevant to either identity and sometimes may even be assigned qualities which go beyond the properties of ‘ordinary’ food” (Beardsworth and Keil 249). Confectionery’s “‘in-between’ status as food and non-food” is of particular interest in this chapter, as it is this precarious position within British food culture that makes sweets so contentious, especially in assessing the implications that sweets consumption has on children’s overall consumption habits (Beardsworth and Keil 249). The distinction between pick-n-mix sweets and chocolate elucidated in Roald Dahl’s Cookbook reveals another sort of differentiation made between both types of confectionery, one that distinguishes the consumption habits of children from adults (150). Dahl explains how the sweets “were cheap and to us they tasted good. So on the whole, we made do with eating sweets and toffees and junk (emphasis mine) instead of chocolate” (150). One of the main
reasons sweets are distinguished as children’s food is because, as Juliet Schor observes, “Children take the symbolic order of adults and turn it on their head, going wild for food that adults deem inedible or gross” citing “brightly colored candy that transforms their tongues or other body parts” and “food that tinges, pops, or fizzes” as the main qualities of children’s sweets (58). In fact, the wide-ranging colours of sweets differs from what Schor categorises as the foods of “muted tones, such as brown, or pastels” of adult food (58). This plausible classification indicates that children have an important stake, a certain degree of ownership (distinct from adults) and possess general power in the junk food market. As we will uncover later on in this chapter, the period in which Dahl began writing his children’s works (between 1961 and 1990) also coincided with a significant increase in children’s consumer power in English-speaking countries. 51 Dahl’s personal opinions about sweets consumption were indeed shaped by a lifelong confectionery habit and his conflicted views about sweets are expressed through his differentiation of sweets into subcategories of “good” sweets and “bad” sweets. For Dahl, there was a clear distinction between chocolate and sweets of the ‘pic-n-mix’ variety. In Cookbook, Dahl, at 74 years of age, expresses a disdain for sweets, regarding them as mere playthings and frivolous foodstuffs strictly reserved for children: Dahl explains how he and his peers “were much more inclined to spend […] money either on sweets and toffees or on some of the many very cheap and fairly disgusting (emphasis mine) things” at the local sweetshop (Cookbook 150). This particular description associates sweets with what sociologist Allison James calls a “kind of rotten food” (“Confections” 79). As James

51 Although the extent to which Dahl was familiar with the shift in children’s consumer power during this period is ambiguous, the message against overconsumption in Chocolate Factory was certainly pertinent at the time of the novel’s initial publication as it was at this point in British culture that the role of child consumer began shifting significantly. As Stephen Kline explains, “[f]rom the early 1960s, children’s marketers well knew that new family patterns also granted children [a] greater say in family decision-making. Children responded eagerly to opportunities by making requests for goods and expressing their preferences more forcefully” (183). At the same time, from the 1960s onwards, there were serious attempts by nutritionists, educators and medical professionals to encourage better eating habits amongst children and to encourage “an overall reduction in intake” (Beardsworth and Keil 250).
clarifies, sweets are foodstuffs considered to be “rubbishy, decaying and diseased [...] the peculiar property of children who are, from the adult perspective, a tainted group” (79). Likewise, Tim Richardson notes how the association between sweets and junk food is maintained in the north-east of England where the word for sweets is “kets”, a word that translates into ‘trash’, while the word ‘humbug’ “meant nonsense for at least a century before it was appropriated as the name for a sweet” (296). While Dahl’s texts often feature romanticised representations of sweets and confectionery as positive aspects of childhood, his comment that sweets were “cheap” and “disgusting” suggest that he views these foods as inferior, and by extension, those who consume them as perhaps inferior as well. Dahl’s comments point to problematic perceptions of children as inferior to adults, often found in broader discourses on children in children’s literature. Here, the association between children and “inferior” foods such as sweets sheds light on the problematic view of children as inferior people, as Other, and is part of a broader tendency in discourses on childhood that make “the uncomfortable conclusion that our attempting to speak for and about children in these ways will always confirm their difference from, and presumably, inferiority to, ourselves as thinkers and speakers” (Nodelman, “The Other”, 29).

The contrast between adults as superior and children as inferior is symbolised by the distinction between chocolate and sweets in Dahl’s texts: “bad” sweets such as kets, chocolate or chocolate bars are represented as “good” confections in Dahl’s texts. Dahl’s preference for chocolate or more specifically, ‘countline’ bars highlights his idealisation of more ‘natural’ food products. ‘Countlines’ are characterised by Deborah Cadbury as a mixture of slightly more natural ingredients such as toffee, nougat, caramel, nuts, or marshmallows shaped in a bar form and coated with chocolate. In the early twentieth century, these confections were “becoming known in the trade as [...] ‘countline[s]’ since
the bars were sold by count and not by weight, like blocks of chocolate. During the First
World War, countlines had been developed for the U.S. army when it was discovered that
the chocolate coating kept the high-energy confectionery ingredients fresh” (Cadbury
235).\textsuperscript{52} For Dahl, the fact that countline bars contained ‘real’ ingredients or ingredients
made from familiar household items, meant that they held a different place within the
confectionery hierarchy that James refers to, which places pic-n-mix sweets, or kets, at
the bottom and chocolate and countline bars at the top. While sweets consumption is part
of an important process in developing children’s tastes in childhood, Dahl is alluding to
the idea of educating one’s palate and that ideally, children ought to be moving ‘forward’
in their tastes in food, that tastes should become more and more sophisticated as one
grows older. Sweets are acceptable foods for children to consume but it is implied that
consumption should decline as one gets older. The division between chocolate (good) and
sweets (bad) also highlights the associations between chocolate with adults and sweets
with children—revealing a problematic view of children as inferior.

It is important to clarify here that Dahl’s distinction between junk and chocolate in
\textit{Cookbook} is fraught with complications when we consider other examples from his work.
Though Dahl recognises the differentiation between boiled sweets of the pic-n-mix
variety and chocolate, and maintains that the former are inferior to the latter, both his
autobiography \textit{Boy} and novels such as \textit{Chocolate Factory, The Giraffe and the Pelly and
\textit{Me} and \textit{The Witches} suggest otherwise. And when Augustus Gloop falls into the
chocolate river in \textit{Chocolate Factory}, he is punished, yet the chocolate cake scene in
\textit{Matilda} in which Bruce Bogtrotter consumes an entire chocolate cake in one sitting is
represented in a sort of gluttonous glory. Contradictions of this sort are, of course, not

\textsuperscript{52} On nostalgia and countlines: “The most international segment is the countlines. These products are truly
global, the brands like Mars, Snickers, Kit-Kat, etc. are sold in all the continents and known worldwide like
Coca-Cola or McDonald’s. They are for the young people but also for the people who were young 20 years
ago. Advertising of these products is now part of the food cultural heritage of the world” (Calori et al. 22).
uncommon in Dahl’s fictional and non-fictional works. The contradictions in Dahl’s works are the result of how didacticism functions more generally in children’s literature. In Zohar Shavit’s *Poetics of Children’s Literature* (1986), Shavit explains how attempts at carrying out didactic principles in children’s literature are complicated and can lead to contradictions:

> [A]s long as the concept of didactic children’s literature prevailed, […] the understanding of children’s literature as a tool for education, was dominant. Nowadays, the emphasis differs; although to a certain degree [the idea of children’s literature as a tool for education] still dictates the character of the translations, [the notion of] adjusting the text to the child’s level of comprehension, is more dominant […] In such a situation, the translated text might totally delete one aspect in favour of another, or perhaps even include contradictory features, because the translator hesitated between the two principles (Shavit 113).

In Dahl’s works, there is often a tension between educating and entertaining young readers and this tension is most evident when complex concepts such as consumption and overconsumption are introduced in the text. Dahl fails to address principles related to consumption such as pleasure and self-control in a balanced and nuanced way, favouring instead to highlight only the extreme representations of consumption in, for example, Augustus Gloop’s excess and Charlie’s self-control. Such extreme representations inevitably lead to contradictions: Dahl’s didactic message against overconsumption in *Chocolate Factory* completely contradicts with the subversive glorification of excessive consumption in Bruce Bogtrotter’s cake-eating scene in *Matilda*. Again, Dahl’s didacticism and subversive storytelling is precisely what makes his messages regarding food and power so difficult to understand or comprehend. This contradiction in Dahl’s
texts are in large part made possible by the inherent contradictions within children’s literature and in discourses on childhood. Nodelman’s essay on the Other, colonialism, and Orientalism in children’s literature traces the parallels between the ways in which the Other is represented in Orientalist and colonial discourses with the ways in which children are represented in children’s literature. Nodelman explains how both discourses are “inherently contradictory” as

Orientals cannot be both our unchanging opposite and in the process of changing into us. The same contradiction appears in our discourse about children and children's literature, and there is no way of resolving it there either. Instead, we tend to flip-flop, even within single texts, between two contradictory ideas about children and our reasons for writing to or about them (Nodelman, “The Other”, 32).

To add to an already substantial list of contradictions found in Dahl’s works, the condemnation of gluttony in Chocolate Factory is complicated by Dahl’s own romanticised recollection of his brief stint as a chocolate-taste tester for Cadbury’s while he attended secondary school. Cadbury’s sent chocolate bar evaluations to students at Repton and Dahl and his peers put their skills as aspiring confectionery connoisseurs to work, serving an important role in determining which products were sold to the British public (Boy 147). Dahl notes how these experiences sparked some of the ideas that would eventually form the foundations of the narrative in Charlie and the Chocolate Factory: “For me, the importance of all this was that I began to realize that the large chocolate companies actually did possess inventing rooms and they took their inventing very seriously”, and “I have no doubt at all that, thirty-five years later, when I was looking for a plot for my second book for children, I remembered those little cardboard boxes and the newly-invented chocolates inside them, and I began to write a book called Charlie and
the Chocolate Factory” (182; 183-84). Dahl’s nostalgic recollections of sweets-eating and participating in the sweets manufacturers’ inventing process is essentially a nostalgic marketing exchange between Dahl and the firms: Cadbury’s and other confectionery companies have certainly informed Dahl’s wistful writing on confectionery matters (both fictional and non-fictional) while Dahl’s nostalgic texts have, in turn, become important cultural representations of sweets in their own right, reinforcing a “nostalgic regard for sweetness” (Sugar Plums 214).

Countline bars, not unlike the ones taste-tested by Dahl, revolutionised the way in which snack foods were commodified and commercialised, as cheaper ingredients including toffee, caramel and marshmallows enabled companies to reduce costs. The chocolate coating of these bars preserved the central ingredients, keeping the bar “fresh” (Cadbury 235), and the countline bars themselves are perhaps what made the 1930s (according to Dahl) a ‘golden period’ in chocolate manufacturing (Cookbook 153; McCormack 162). As confectionery historian Nicholas Whittaker reveals,

as soon as the first bars rumbled off the production line, [Mars] began an evangelical mission to convert Britain’s public: ‘It’s more than a sweet, it is a food: the eggs, the large amount of milk and butter, the malted milk all combined to form a nutritious tonic.’ So ran the long-winded boast on the wrapper. Tagging Mars as ‘food chocolate’ was an inspired move. Guilt about sweet-eating lingered, especially during the Depression, and it provided the perfect conscience-salving euphemism (79-80).\footnote{Mars was not alone in marketing their countlines this way—in fact, Rowntree’s and Cadbury’s also grouped their countline bars with other foods: “Following the ‘food value’ trend, Kit-Kat’s slogan later became the slightly bolder, ‘A two-course meal for 2d—and butter free!’” (Whittaker 83) while “‘Cadbury’s Milk Chocolate is a food!’ shouted ads—a far unfamiliar cry during times of war” (Whittaker 102). Samira Kawash elucidates how Mars would continue to use the meal in a bar or ‘food value’ “by playing down the candy nature of their product” (313).}
Similarly, Rowntree’s recognised the potential in marketing countlines as ‘hunger-satisfying bars’ (Fitzgerald 317) situating them closer to the ‘natural food realm’ than, for example, hard-boiled pick-n-mix sweets. Countline bars are a particularly interesting type of confectionery because they function to ‘fill’ a consumer while providing gastronomic pleasure at the same time. Of course, ‘filling’ consumers is a whole other fascinating matter closely connected to the fact that that these products were first envisioned, developed, and produced during the First World War (Cadbury 235; Bradley 114). As a result, the caloric content (as opposed to the nutritional value) was of great concern to consumers and countline bars were marketed with this in mind. Certainly, in Chocolate Factory, eating chocolate is closely associated with ‘filling’ a malnourished and possibly starving boy, so the caloric content of such chocolate bars is crucial.

While it does not seem as though Dahl consumed countline bars to ‘fill’ himself up, he did maintain a consistent confectionery habit when he left Repton School and began his first job with the oil company, Shell, at offices located in London. At Shell, Dahl purchased a countline chocolate bar after his daily lunch and noted how “on my walk back to the office I always, absolutely always, treated myself to a tuppenny bar of Cadbury’s Dairy Milk chocolate” (Dahl, My Year 6). He saved each silver wrapper and added it to a growing chocolate wrapper ball which was roughly larger than a golf ball but smaller than a tennis ball in size (Treglown 33; Sturrock 395-96; Mangan 172-73; Dahl, My Year 6-7; www.roalddahl.com; L. Dahl 8).[^1]

[^1]: The chocolate wrapper ball is on display in the Roald Dahl Museum in Great Missenden, Buckinghamshire. On the Official Roald Dahl website, it is implied that the chocolate wrapper ball was a very important object, which amongst others provided continuous inspiration for Dahl while he wrote Chocolate Factory. In this way, the chocolate wrapper ball is somewhat mythologised: “On the table in Roald Dahl’s Writing Hut, right next to the chair where he sat to write many of his famous stories - including Charlie and the Chocolate Factory - there is a collection of strange and wonderful items, some of which are particularly curious. One of these is what appears to be a cannonball. It’s grey and fits into the palm of one hand. It looks like it would be quite heavy. It’s not a cannonball, though. It’s actually chocolate wrappers” ([http://www.roalddahl.com/roald-dahl/archive/archive-highlights/the-chocolate-wrapper-ball](http://www.roalddahl.com/roald-dahl/archive/archive-highlights/the-chocolate-wrapper-ball)).
Even after quitting Shell, becoming an RAF pilot during the war, and getting married and having a family of his own, Dahl continued to eat chocolate bars almost daily, usually after dinner, from an assortment of chocolate slabs he kept in a red tupperware container. This container has now taken on a life of its own in print. Photographs of the famous red chocolate box are found on the Official Roald Dahl Website, in *Roald Dahl’s Cookbook*, and in Lucy Mangan’s book *Inside Charlie’s Chocolate Factory*. In fact, Mangan’s book
begins with an introduction written by Dahl’s granddaughter Sophie Dahl titled, “The Red Chocolate Box”:

There was nothing more magical, though, than the Red Tupperware Box that appeared at the end of a meal, heralding the most important and longed-for bit. The Red Tupperware was a medium-sized, rectangular box of function. The box itself was almost irrelevant, and it could have been blue, green or see-through. Its postbox redness, though, lent an air of jaunty dissolution to the proceedings and ultimately became part of its own myth. If you had been good at lunch or dinner, not too much of a bore, eaten things proffered without a fuss, you could collect the fabled box from its home in the kitchen and bring it to the table, while the grown-ups were having their coffee. The Red Box contained chocolate. Lots of chocolate, in child-sized appealing bars, nothing fancy, but always compelling (Dahl vii-viii).  

Dahl’s biographer Donald Sturrock also refers to his own personal red box experience, noting how one meal he had with Dahl at Gipsy House “concluded with the offer of KitKats and Mars Bars dispensed from a small red plastic box” (2).

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55 Sophie Dahl wrote a similar description in the article “My grandfather Roald Dahl, the magician” published in the Guardian Online (13 September 2016), on the centenary of Roald Dahl’s birth.
Fig. 6: “Roald Dahl’s chocolate box”; roalddahl.com, n.d.; Web; 21 March 2016

Fig. 7: The Red Chocolate Box, photograph by Jan Baldwin, *Roald Dahl’s Cookbook*, Felicity Dahl and Roald Dahl (London and New York: Penguin, 1991; Print; 151).
Borrowing from Svetlana Boym’s definition of nostalgia I would contend that both the silver chocolate wrapper ball and the red chocolate box are significant representations of nostalgia, symbolising both “a sentiment of loss and displacement” and “a romance with one’s own fantasy” (xiii). The red chocolate box is certainly associated with “a sentiment of loss and displacement” as Dahl’s family and friends view the red box with bittersweet emotions: on the one hand, the red chocolate box is associated with fond memories of consuming and savouring chocolate amongst family while on the other hand, the box reminds Dahl’s family of his passing. Moreover, the silver ball and the red chocolate box are both representative of “a romance of one’s own fantasy” in Dahl’s life and legacy. The silver ball is a physical representation of Dahl’s accumulated daily lunches and commutes to and from the Shell offices in London and indeed his entrance into adulthood through his first, proper job after leaving school and before the outbreak of the Second World War. In contrast, the red chocolate box is emblematic of shared chocolate consumption that was a cherished part of Dahl’s family life after the War: what
was once a solitary activity in Dahl’s early adulthood becomes a part of everyday convivial ritual with family. Dahl’s mythos as a chocolate connoisseur and family man is cemented through these objects.

The memories and experiences of Dahl’s treasured mementos represent an attempt by Dahl and the managers of the Dahl estate to preserve the association between sweets, Dahl’s public persona, and his novels, emphasising his role as both amateur confectionery connoisseur and children’s author. The inclusions of these mementos in narratives about Dahl are what I would consider determined efforts by Donald Sturrock, Lucy Mangan and the Dahl estate to bolster Dahl’s authority on confectionery matters. The commentary on these objects in multiple ‘authorized’ sources strongly suggests that these references are dedicated attempts to maintain and strengthen the association between Dahl, childhood, and sweets in the public imagination. Sweets are symbolic in their association with children and childhood and as a children’s author and it can be argued that his carefully crafted persona as an amateur confectionery connoisseur is used to represent Dahl as an authority on matters pertaining to childhood as well. As Nodelman explains,

Knowledge is, quite literally, power. When we talk about mastering a subject, we don’t often allow ourselves to see the literal truth of the metaphor: our doing so is truly to subject it to our power. To know something is to be separate from it, above it, objective about it, and therefore in a position to perceive (or simply invent?) the truth about it—to be able, in other words, to act as if what one “knows” is in fact true (Nodelman, “The Other”, 31).

In the same way that Nodelman asserts that “We adults similarly use our knowledge of “childhood” to dominate children” (Nodelman, “The Other”, 31), I would argue that
Dahl’s knowledge of sweets, and by extension childhood, is used to coerce children into believing the messages (however contradictory) in his texts. What we will uncover in subsequent sections is how these objects’ association with Dahl’s persona as an amateur confectionery historian complicates his didactic messages against the overconsumption of sweets in his texts and highlights a great deal about how power functions in his texts. In this chapter, I will explore the major transformations in the confectionery industry in two important settings: the sweets factory and the sweetshop. The following two sections analyse in detail how Dahl’s at times romanticised representations of sweets and the British confectionery industry is countered by his scepticism of, and unease with, the overconsumption of sweets and the increased power of the child consumer over time.

The first section of this chapter assesses the confectionery industry with a focus on industrialized sweets production in Dahl’s immensely popular Charlie and the Chocolate Factory (1964). This section analyses how the similarities between the inner workings of Wonka’s factory and those of real-life confectionery firms are used to concretise the nostalgic links between fantasy and reality. In addition, I argue in this section that Chocolate Factory serves as a problematically simplistic guide, teaching children how to navigate the British food world during a period of increasingly industrialised food production in post-war Britain. In this section, I contend that the nostalgic allusions to real-life confectionery companies in Chocolate Factory romanticises the confectionery industry in order to bolster Chocolate Factory and, by extension, the real-life byproduct of Dahl’s popular text, Nestlé’s Wonka Candy Company, as a form of commercialized nostalgia. The second section addresses how Dahl’s autobiography Boy (1984) and novel The Witches (1983) consider the precarious position that the traditional British sweetshop has in both the child consumer’s life and within British food culture. This section also argues that these texts, like Chocolate
Factory, serve as cautionary tales that highlight problematic power dynamics between children and adults found more broadly in Dahl’s oeuvre. With a focus on the sweetshop, as well as folkloric figures and urban legends associated with child harm and stranger danger, the final section assesses how these texts offer insights into the perceived dangers and vulnerabilities children faced in the latter half of the twentieth century.

2.1 Nostalgising the confectionery industry in *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (1964) 56

First published in 1964, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* is Dahl’s best-known and enduringly popular novel for children. 57 At the beginning of *Chocolate Factory*, we discover that the Bucket family, comprising of Charlie Bucket, his parents, Grandpa Joe, Grandma Josephine, Grandpa George and Grandma Georgina, all reside in a small, ramshackle house on the outskirts of a great town in England. The family is extremely impoverished and are a representation of post-war Britons still living in deeply rationed times: their house is cramped and drafty and consists of only two rooms and one bed which both sets of grandparents share (Chocolate Factory 14). Chocolate, we are informed, is the one thing that Charlie longs for most, but unfortunately the Buckets’ poverty prevents him from being able to purchase and consume chocolate or any other sweets at their local sweet shop except once a year on his birthday (16). Eventually, Charlie is given the opportunity to consume a great deal of chocolate: Willy Wonka

56 While the term “nostalgising” is not used in Boym’s seminal work on nostalgia, it is employed in Sedikides et al.’s “To Nostalgize: Mixing Memory with Affect and Desire”. *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology* 51 (2015).

57 On the popularity of *Chocolate Factory*: “During its first year only about 5,000 hardcover copies of the book were sold. The sales figures, though, increased dramatically over the next several years. In 1967 Allen & Unwin brought out the first British edition of the book, which resulted in even higher sales figures. Within five years of the book’s initial publication its annual sales had reached 125,000 copies. […] Throughout the 1970s and 1980s over 100,000 paperback copies were sold every year” (West 66-67).
makes an announcement that he has placed five golden tickets in five different Wonka bars and the five golden ticket winners will be admitted into his factory for a one-day tour and at the end of the tour, each winner will be given a lifetime supply of sweets and chocolates (33). Charlie, along with four naughty children, ends up winning a place at Wonka’s chocolate factory.

Since its publication, Chocolate Factory has been examined by scholars through a wide range of critical lenses and it is, in fact, one of the few of Dahl’s texts to have received a great deal of attention from scholars and critics. Robert Kachur has interpreted Chocolate Factory as an Edenic narrative and compares Wonka to God and Charlie to Jesus, who in the end, inherits a fantastical kingdom of chocolate. While Kachur’s comparison is certainly compelling and his assertion that Dahl “recognizes that [the four naughty children’s] deepest desires are bound up in food, but those desires have become frustrated and distorted by the fallen human condition” (Kachur 224) is interesting, I find that the connection between food and religion to be a bit lacking considering that Dahl was largely uninterested in religion for the majority of his life. I have decided to take a socio-historical approach in analysing food in Dahl’s most popular work primarily because of Dahl’s lifelong interest in food-related matters.

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58 Dahl cited abuse at the hands of one of his headmasters, who he claimed to have eventually been appointed Bishop of Chester, then the Bishop of London and later on, the Archbishop of Canterbury as one of the main reasons why he became uninterested in religion (Boy 144). In Boy, Dahl notes how, “Do you wonder than that this man’s behaviour used to puzzle me tremendously? He was an ordinary clergyman at that time as well as being Headmaster, and I would sit in the dim light of the school chapel and listen to him preaching about the Lamb of God and about Mercy and Forgiveness and all the rest of it and my young mind would become totally confused. I knew very well that only the night before this preacher had shown neither Forgiveness nor Mercy in flogging some small boy who had broken the rules […] It was all this, I think, that made me begin to have doubts about religion and even about God. If this person, I kept telling myself, was one of God’s chosen salesmen on earth, then there must be something very wrong about the whole business” (Boy 146). Yet the headmaster Dahl was referring to in this passage, Geoffrey Fisher, was not in fact the culprit: as Dahl’s biographer Sturrock explains, Dahl “had made a mistake. Not for the first time, he sounded off before he had fully checked his facts. For the culprit was not Fisher at all, but his successor John Christie. The beating [described in Boy] happened in the summer of 1933, a year after Fisher, as Dahl records in his own letters home, had left Repton to become Bishop of Chester. More than fifty years later, Dahl blamed the “shoddy bandy-legged” Fisher for the caning, and painted him as a sanctimonious hypocrite” (Sturrock 89).
The quasi-parental relationship that forms between Charlie and Willy Wonka is explored in William Todd Schultz’s psychoanalytical reading of the novel, and while Schultz’s reading covers a great deal of relevant details about how Dahl’s familial heritage influenced his works, my study will frame biographical and autobiographical writing on Dahl within a historical context. Other critics including Anne Merrick, Eleanor Cameron, David Rees and Jonathan Culley have analysed the suitability of Dahl’s fantasy novel for young audiences. Although Dahl’s suitability for children is worth considering, it is perhaps more suitable in discussions related to the educational purposes of children’s literature—this study focuses on the relationship between food, power, and didacticism within a children’s literary framework. Jacob Held’s collection on philosophy and Dahl includes essays about *Chocolate Factory* including Marc Napolitano’s essay comparing Wonka’s factory to Foucault’s prison in *Discipline and Punish* (1975) (84), while Benjamin Rider looks at the philosophical connections between the writings of Epicurus and *Chocolate Factory*. In Abbie Ventura’s analysis of the economics of childhood and global citizenship in *Chocolate Factory*, she argues that Dahl’s criticism of consumer greed is undermined by “the simple fact that Charlie exists as a cultural text purchasable through video and candy and celebrity and new media, assisting children in their participation on the global market” (Ventura 242). Although Ventura’s argument has certainly influenced the discussion on child consumer power in *Chocolate Factory* in this chapter, my analysis departs slightly from Ventura’s and focuses on the socio-historical context of the confectionery industry and power dynamics in Dahl’s famous work. Jon Billsberry and Louise Gilbert briefly discuss *Chocolate Factory’s* impact on the relationship between creativity and business savvy, noting how, “Since its publication, the name of Willy Wonka has become a byword for innovation, and the chocolate factory is the epitome of a successful but unconventional work environment and organizational
In addition, Billsberry and Gilbert also cite *Chocolate Factory* as a recruitment paradigm for business management (229). Clare Bradford interprets *Chocolate Factory* from a postcolonial perspective asserting that the text “involves the displacement of colonized people and their mass transportation to the imperial center [(Wonka’s factory)], to be commodified as cheap labour” (199) while Katherine Baxter looks closely at the issue of race in the first publication of *Chocolate Factory* which featured black Oompa Loompas instead of the ethnically-ambiguous Oompa Loompas in later versions of the text. Although these essays offer fascinating insight on labour issues and the issue of race in *Chocolate Factory*, respectively, these issues are far too complex to explore further here but could potentially be examined in relation to food and power in Dahl’s work in the future.

This section uncovers how the chocolate industry in *Chocolate Factory*, as a positive face of the sweets industry, revealing contractions in Dahl’s texts that reinforces his authorial power, problematically providing readers with a “description of people and events that insist on the reality of one particular way of looking at the world and themselves—[an adult-centred] way” (Nodelman, “The Other”, 32). Although several critics have argued that *Chocolate Factory* conveys a traditional message about the pitfalls of greed and overconsumption, my research concentrates primarily on how this message is communicated through perspectives critical of complex transformations in the post-war British food industry. This section interprets *Chocolate Factory* as not only an

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59 Billsberry and Gilbert cite Elgin, Hof, and Greene (2005) who describe how the name Willy Wonka has now become synonymous with ingenuity and innovation: “At Google, much of the magnetism is also generated by a zany culture perfectly synced to the geek lifestyle. Engineers are encouraged to spend the equivalent of one day per week on their own pet projects. When they’re not staring into their computer monitors, Google employees will often gather for roller-hockey games in the underground garage or race remote-control blimps through their cavernous offices. Free perks range from gourmet meals at the company cafeteria to bathrooms equipped with digital toilets, where the seat temperature and bidet pressure can be controlled with a remote. ‘They have created a Willy Wonka effect,’ says James E. Pitkow, CEO of Moreover Technologies Inc., whose former company, Outride Inc., was purchased by Google in 2001. ‘Engineers want to work on the coolest problems with the smartest people’” (Elgin et al. 28 and quoted in Billsberry and Gilbert 231).
important text about the dangers of overconsumption in post-war society but, perhaps more significantly, as an unclear guide for children on consumer affairs and how to consume sweets. In this section, I analyse how the representations of British confectionery firms Cadbury’s and Rowntree’s in the popular imagination inspired Dahl’s text and how the allusions to the practices and product development of both companies are used to instruct children about the intricacies of the sweets manufacturing process. Furthermore, I will consider how Dahl attempts to reinforce the importance of supposed ‘proper’ consumption practices through the punishment of disorderly eating in *Chocolate Factory* and how Dahl’s representation of the post-war British confectionery industry reflects his fascination with mass production, the secrecy of the sweets industry, and the increasing power of the child consumer. This section uncovers how *Chocolate Factory* is a manifestation of Dahl’s conflicting perspectives about the confectionery industry, revealing a great deal about the power relationship between adults and children in the text, as well as his authorial power in his novels more generally, which problematically informs children that “their true happiness consists in pleasing us, bending to our will, doing what we want” (Nodelman, “The Other”, 30). Texts such as *Chocolate Factory* fit into problematic discourses on childhood in children’s literature that “imply [adults’] belief in [their] own right to power over children even just by existing” (Nodelman, “The Other”, 29). The issue of didacticism in *Chocolate Factory* is complicated further by its immense commercial success through the commodification and repackaging of the novel into films, stage adaptations, and other merchandise which is fundamentally at odds with the manifestly didactic message against greed and overconsumption in the novel.

Charlie’s idealised consumption outlined in the text is in stark contrast with the idealised representation of Wonka’s fantastical confectionery company that is unacknowledged in the text as an industry that encourages and perpetuates over-consumption. What this
section unpacks is how these competing ideas complicate and diminish the desired effects of the didactic messages against over consumption in Dahl’s landmark text, while at the same time reinforce Dahl’s overall authorial power through his contradictory messages.

In several examples, Dahl describes the mass hysteria the world over after the golden ticket announcement is made: adult women shamelessly purchase as many as ten Wonka bars at once only to unwrap them as soon as they possibly can, while children smash their piggy banks and spend the entirety of their meagre savings on Wonka bars (38). Even though the excitement over the golden tickets and the lifetime supply of chocolate is presented as somewhat understandable, the extreme measures to win these tickets is condemned in the text, given the negative portrayal of the four winners who resort to similarly extreme forms of overconsumption in order to secure their chances of winning a place at Wonka’s factory.

Though an enormous amount of money is spent by what seems to be millions of people on Wonka bars, this extravagance starkly contrasts with Charlie’s golden ticket experience. In fact, Charlie is so impoverished that his family struggle to save money to purchase a single chocolate bar on his birthday each year. When Charlie receives his annual birthday chocolate, Dahl describes, in vivid detail, how Charlie cherished and savoured this rare treat, “treasur[ing] it as though it were a bar of solid gold” (17). In the days immediately after his birthday, Charlie was careful to only look at the chocolate and only after “he could stand it no longer” did he “peel back a tiny bit of the paper wrapping at one corner to expose a tiny bit of chocolate, and then he would take a tiny nibble—just enough to allow the lovely sweet taste to spread out slowly over his tongue. The next day, he would take another tiny nibble, and so on, and so on” (17).60 Here, Charlie consumes

60 Interestingly, this particular scene was influenced greatly by Dahl’s literary agent Sheila Saint Lawrence: “Couldn’t Charlie come into the story more promptly (we feel sympathy for James [in James and the Giant

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the chocolate in a slow, thoughtful way, suggesting that he is paying careful attention to the texture and taste of the chocolate as it melts in his mouth, taking complete pleasure in the present moment. As Benjamin Rider cogently observes, “This story tells us two things about Charlie: First, he has an incredible amount of self-control! But more important, he’s learned how to extract more pleasure from one small piece of chocolate than most children would have from mounds of candy. Because he does not get to enjoy this experience very often, he knows to be grateful for it when it comes” (10).

Charlie’s self-control later on in Wonka’s factory is central to the didactic message that warns children against overconsumption behaviour. In contrast to the four other children, Augustus, Violet, Veruca, and Mike, Charlie is able to exercise restraint prior to and during the Wonka factory tour. Significantly, Charlie’s intense concentration when consuming sweets is contrasted with what is presented as the thoughtless consumption habits of the other children. While it could be argued that Charlie only practices this self-awareness because he is poor—and that there is also, in fact, an instance where he shoves a chocolate bar into his mouth because he is starving (62)—Charlie does manage to practice self-control in the presence of plenty. He is the only child who does not break any rules during his visit at the factory and he is the only child who does not partake of and demand too many sweets, confections or anything at all during the factory tour. Although Charlie’s self-control is represented positively, his characterisation as a passive hero similar to the “male Cinderellas” in fairy tales (Tatar, Peach) right from the start, but have no emotion to peg for Charlie,) so that the readers could hope along with him that he will find the golden ticket (identifying themselves of course with Charlie.) And if this is not possible, then could you not tie in the birthday candy bar with a Wonka product; each year a different one, and then putting off the opening not only to prolong the ecstasy of having it but the possible disappointment of its not having a golden ticket” (Saint Lawrence, Letter to Roald Dahl, 9/12/61; WLC Series III, Box 25).

61 Mike Teavee is the exception in that he does not compulsively consume food; however he consumes television obsessively and has an excessively large toy collection: Mike “had no less than eighteen toy pistols of various sizes hanging from belts around his body, and every now and again he would leap up into the air and fire off half a dozen rounds from one or another of these weapons” (Chocolate Factory 49-50).
The Hard Facts, 86) is troubling. In contrast with children in other fairy tales, including Hansel and Gretel, we see a stark difference in the resolutions of both narratives. Bruno Bettelheim explains how in “Hansel and Gretel” the eponymous characters were “dependent children” that “had been a burden to their parents” but by the time they returned safely after their ordeal at the witch’s home, the children achieved a “new-won independence in thought and action, a new self-reliance which is the opposite of the passive dependence which characterized them when they were deserted in the woods” (Bettelheim 164). In Chocolate Factory, Charlie does not achieve a newfound independence—while Wonka certainly pulls Charlie and his family out of poverty, he has the opportunity to take over Wonka’s factory someday partly by chance, when he won the golden ticket, but also largely by inaction.

Nevertheless, the level of deliberate concentration that Charlie exercises when he consumes chocolate is contrasted with the recklessness of Augustus’ eating habits, given that he is crudely described as “a nine-year-old boy who was so enormously fat he looked as though he had been blown up with a powerful pump” (26). Augustus is portrayed as grotesque, with “[g]reat flabby folds of fat [that bulged] out from every part of his body” and a face “like a monstrous ball of dough with two small greedy curranty eyes peering out upon the world” (36). Augustus wins his golden ticket to Wonka’s factory because, as his mother Mrs Gloop notes, “[h]e eats so many bars of chocolate a day that it was almost impossible for him not to find one. Eating is his hobby, you know. That’s all he’s interested in” (36). The disapproving, condemning, and mocking representation of

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62 Here, Augustus is representative of one of Dahl’s personal phobias of becoming overweight—Dahl’s fat phobia will be examined further in chapter three.

63 With negative portrayals of overweight characters including Augustus Gloop and The Witches’ Bruno Jenkins, Dahl clearly disapproved of gluttony and obesity. In fact, Dahl and his first wife, Patricia Neal, notably bonded over the fact that they both felt that they would “rather be dead than fat” (Sturrock 317).
Augustus and his mother are fully realised when Augustus is sucked up the glass pipe in the factory for his gluttony later on in the novel.

It is not so much a problem that Augustus is eating enthusiastically, but that he is, like the other children, disengaging from food—this disengagement is what Dahl considers most disappointing and frustrating. Food, for Dahl, is something to be experienced carefully and savoured. Dahl comments on how he and his family put a great deal of thought into what they ate and notes how at Gipsy House: “No lunch is ever eaten without a comment or a discussion or a criticism or an accolade. This is not to say that we spend half our waking lives thinking about food, because we don’t. We simply regard meals, and supper in particular, as a wonderful relaxing culmination to a day of hard work. Our suppers are times when work is forgotten and when food and wine are remembered” (Cookbook 13). Dahl’s careful consideration of food and eating is in complete contrast to the fictional Augustus’s total lack of care. As Daniel observes, Augustus is “all body and no mind: his body’s appetite overwhelms him” and he “is connotated as monstrous and denied agency by his inappropriately directed and excessive desire” (190).64 The unfavourable representation of Augustus’s eating habits is not only a clear reaction against overconsumption but also, just as importantly, when contrasted with Charlie’s consumption behaviour, suggests to readers that it is better to consume slowly rather than quickly.65

When Augustus disobeys Willy Wonka during the factory tour and drinks from his chocolate river, he is punished for his gluttony: hurriedly drinking as much chocolate

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64 While Dahl is able to discuss moderate food consumption in real-life situations, there are few representations moderate consumption in his novels for children: often, the most extreme forms of consumption are represented while moderate eating habits often go unmentioned. Even the simple evening meal of cheese sandwiches and cocoa that Danny and his father share after Danny in an early scene in Danny is described as a “midnight feast” (Danny 32).

65 In Augustus’s characterisation, there is a message appealing to slow consumption practices which predate the slow food movement that emerges in the early 2000s, a movement that Boym identifies as “part of the Gastronomic Left, who try to influence the future through gastronomic nostalgia” (Boym 350).
from the chocolate river as he can, Augustus falls into the factory river and gets sucked into a pipe leading to the fudge room (98-102). For Dahl, Augustus’s punishment is justifiable: eating ought to involve a complete consciousness that allows one to not only distinguish good food from bad but also to derive pleasure from food and to develop a deeper understanding of sensory experience through food consumption. As “Charlie’s antithesis” (Alston, “Colonization of food” 81), Augustus has access to an abundance of food, but he does not consume it in a slow, contemplative or appreciative way. What is troubling for Dahl is that the careful eating habits, exercised by Charlie, could potentially be lost by future generations of children in post-war Britain and he articulates his anxieties and concerns through the equally problematic representations of disorderly consumption in each of the four wayward children. Dahl’s anxiety is hardly surprising as it was common enough in the 1960s. For example, Professor of Nutrition, John Yudkin explained in an article from 1963 how sugar consumption in Britain had increased “at the rate of something like 120 lb. a head a year, or a kilogramme a week” (1336) and consumers therefore ate “in two weeks the amount of sugar our ancestors of 200 years ago ate in a whole year” in sugary foods such as confectionery, cakes and biscuits (1336).

Yet Augustus’s characterisation aligns with what Alston astutely observes as the problematic representation of “an unhealthy attitude towards both food and size” in British children’s literature (“Colonization of food” 79). The criticisms in Dahl’s novel are unfairly directed solely at consumers, seemingly leaving mass producers like Wonka relatively blameless. Augustus’s depiction reveals a dismissive and rather superficial understanding of overconsumption that fails to delve deeper into why exactly Augustus overeats. Instead of questioning and critiquing the processes that enable and perpetuate overconsumption and unhealthy eating habits, Dahl is quick to condemn the children and their parents while failing to consider numerous other factors related to mass marketing to
children or mass production more generally. Furthermore, Dahl fails to recognise the confusion amongst parents about whether or not sweets were healthy during this period. As Yudkin complained in 1963, “Most parents insist that sweets and chocolates must be good for their children because the children like them so much. This is no doubt one of the reasons why they give sweets to their children in spite of the fact that a very large majority know that sweets are bad for their teeth” (1336). The message in *Chocolate Factory* fails to acknowledge that the problem of overconsumption amongst children stems not simply from greed and lack of self-control but is deeply embedded in a range of complex issues pertaining to mass production, socio-economic status, and education among many other factors.

The characterisations of disobedient children in *Chocolate Factory* reflect an uneasiness with child consumer power in the text, as Augustus, Veruca, Violet, and Mike use their power to engage in what is considered to be extremely disorderly and problematic forms of consumption. The four naughty children consume as much and as often as possible, emphasising the idea that with the exception of Charlie, “the protectionist rule that kids require vigilant guidance in consumer affairs” applies in the text and is “illustrated multiple times by other golden ticket winners who prove to be less obedient to Wonka’s warnings, falling for tempting influences of television, advertising, novelty, gluttony and greed” (*Consuming Agency* 107). The characterisation of these children conforms to a view that emerged in nineteenth century texts such as Catherine Sinclair’s *Holiday House* (1839), Thomas Hughes’s *Tom Brown’s Schooldays* (1857) that sought “to instil models of self-control in children” (Kline 49). For Dahl, the children’s improper consumption, or rather, their overconsumption is represented as a mindless form of ingestion. Each child possesses a great deal of power as consumers and they are certainly not afraid to exercise this power: their comeuppance in the narrative
reveals Dahl’s frustrations with examples of unfettered and unchecked child consumer power. The children partake in consumption for the mere sake of consumption and, for Dahl, this is deeply problematic and aligns with the “brash commercialism” that Mason persuasively argues took over in the late twentieth century (Sugar Plums 213). Wonka, the producer of sweets, is not held accountable here: instead the children are characterised negatively as individuals incapable of exercising self-control.

As the narrative progresses, it moves rather formulaically between the punishment of one child, followed by the introduction of a fantastical, innovative and interesting aspect of Wonka’s factory. This formula goes through four cycles in which the four naughty children are punished and it is only Charlie that remains. Again, Chocolate Factory shares similarities to the Brother Grimm’s cautionary tales. In Maria Tatar’s analysis of The Hard Facts of the Grimms’ Fairy Tales (1987) she explains how “As cautionary tales, they demonstrate how children with undesirable traits—deceitfulness, curiosity, insolence—come to a bad end. Power is invested solely in adults, who use their superior strength to teach children a lesson” (Tatar, The Hard Facts, 192). 66 Similar to the Grimms’ fairy tales, the extreme punishments that befall the four other golden ticket winners “[inver]t the power structure and the underlying pattern of classic fairy tales” but these punishments are problematic in that “they are likely to instill fear rather than confidence in the children who hear them and read them” (Tatar, The Hard Facts, 192).

The grisly punishments in Dahl’s narrative offer a narrow perspective on morality, 66

Tatar’s observations about some of the Grimms’ more grisly narratives including “Frau Trade” and “The Naughty Child” can certainly be applied to Chocolate Factory: “These stories, with their single-minded focus on the transgression/punishment pattern, their unique power relationships, their explicit morals, and their implicit call for conformity are the most horrifying stories in the Grimms’ collection” (Tatar, The Hard Facts, 192). In “Frau Trade”, the heroine disobeys her parents, leaves home, and meets a witch called “Frau Trade”. The heroine is eventually turned into a block of wood, thrown into a fire, and the “witch and parents win the contest between child and adult” (Tatar, The Hard Facts, 191). “The Naughty Child” is about a disobedient child that is punished by God with an illness: “The child dies, is buried, but asserts a strong will even beyond the grave by thrusting an arm into the air. Only when the mother makes her way to the grave and whips the arm with a switch does the child find peace” (Tatar, The Hard Facts, 192).
problematically highlighting only extreme consequences of possessing self-control (Charlie) or lacking self-control and falling into overconsumption habits (the four other children).

At the same time however the parents are represented as complicit in their children’s overconsumption behaviour, emphasising the traditional and problematic idea in children’s literature, tracing back to the eighteenth century, that “parents were deemed to be responsible for ensuring the moral integrity of their children through applying rigid controls over their appetite and behaviour” (Daniel 42). What is also problematic is that Dahl fails to acknowledge the possibility that children encounter numerous difficulties in exercising self-control in post-war society, especially as they became increasingly bombarded with advertisements for sweets, toys, and other junk food, all while gaining more power as consumers. Moreover, the text fails to consider how the producers are indeed complicit in the increasing problem of overconsumption from the 1960s onwards. While the text appears to be on the side of the child (perhaps more so, in texts such as *Matilda* or *James* or *George*), the morality is adult-centred. Nodelman highlights how adult-centred morality dispensed in children’s literature is problematic to children:

> We may claim to study childhood in order to benefit children, but we actually do it so that we will know how to deal with children […] we write books for children to provide them with values and with images of themselves we approve of or feel comfortable with. By and large, we encourage in children those values and behaviors that make children easier for us to handle: more passive, more docile, more obedient—and thus, more in need of our guidance and more willing to accept the need for it (Nodelman, “The Other”, 30).
The adult-centred morality that Nodelman refers to here is certainly evident in many of Dahl’s works: while all of his narratives conclude with a positive resolution for the child protagonist, the text is nevertheless governed by Dahl’s own subjective outlook on right and wrong. Of course, this is somewhat understandable as an author cannot help but communicate many of their own beliefs and prejudices. Whether this is intentional or not is a whole other matter. The way in which Dahl’s didacticism functions within his works, however, is problematic because it does not encourage young readers to “have a natural, inborn freedom to be and to act for themselves that allows them to defy what social institutions invite them to do and to be” (Nodelman, “The Hidden Child”, 266).

Although *Chocolate Factory* functions as a cautionary tale with Dahl’s didactic message expressed through Augustus, Violet, Veruca, and Mike’s comeuppances, Dahl’s didacticism also functions alongside nostalgic and positive allusions to the British confectionery industry. It is significant to point out that although *Chocolate Factory* is a fantasy novel, the representation of Wonka’s factory is inspired by two major British confectionery firms: Rowntree’s in York and Cadbury’s in Bournville. Dahl builds on his nostalgic impressions of these companies by creating a nostalgia-inducing fantasyland in *Chocolate Factory*, influenced largely by the imaginative spirit of both companies. For Dahl, the factory is a coded endorsement of the confectionery industry: the company’s innovations, the mass production, the fantastical association between the sweets and the factory itself—these are all represented positively and are romanticised and idealised in the text. The description of the exterior design of Willy Wonka’s factory links it with

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67 It is likely that Dahl did not know first-hand what these factories looked like on the inside. In an interview for Norwegian program *NRK Skole* in 20 October 1989, Dahl notes that he had “never been in a chocolate factory” (Interview with Henry Notaker). Dahl also mentions how he had revealed this on television in England two weeks before this interview, and was consequently given invitations from the general managers in every chocolate factory in England to come round and visit (Interview with Henry Notaker). Still, the descriptions in *Chocolate Factory* parallels advertising imagery of Rowntree’s and Cadbury’s strongly suggesting that Dahl’s nostalgic vision of confectionery in *Chocolate Factory* was undoubtedly influenced by some of Britain’s most beloved confectionery brands.
heavy industry, with the “huge iron gates leading into it, and a high wall surrounding it, and smoke belching from its chimneys, and strange whizzing sounds coming from deep outside it” (18), a clear reference to the effects of the Industrial Revolution in the nineteenth century. While the town in Chocolate Factory is unnamed, these images of industry and of smokestacks emitting chocolate fumes in the streets near the Bucket family’s home align Wonka’s factory with Rowntree’s in York, a city recognised in Britain as a major industrial hub whose primary industries throughout the nineteenth and much of the twentieth centuries were in railways and confectionery production. According to the York tourism website, (www.visityork.org), “York’s first railway station was built in 1839, and […] when opened it was the largest in Europe. The city is therefore a natural setting for the National Railway Museum” and the city “has long had a reputation in the chocolate world, in part due to the sizable factories created by Rowntree’s and Terry’s during the 20th Century […] The history and evolution of these chocolates, that we still enjoy today, is intertwined with York’s social history and industrial development” (“Discover York’s rich history”, Visit York website). Rowntree’s ties to York have been used as a marketing and advertising tool throughout the company’s history. For instance, Rowntree’s began developing a plain chocolate bar they called the “Plain York” in January 1925, which was “advertised and personified through ‘Plain Mr York of York, Yorkshire’, a slogan which deliberately emphasised the brand name three times” (Fitzgerald 161) and made the bar seem rather less a luxury and something everyone—average people—should be consuming. While Rowntree’s certainly did not allude to the grit and grime often associated with industrial production of any kind, the company’s image and legacy were indeed indebted to positive images of industrial progress and city life in the north of England.

The fact that Charlie’s father is employed in a toothpaste factory situated near Wonka’s factory strongly suggests that the Buckets live in an industrial hub, not unlike
By drawing from real confectionery companies for inspiration in creating a fictional confectionery factory in an industrial city, Dahl evokes Dickens’s *Oliver Twist* (1837) and *Hard Times* (1854). Charlie’s poverty is clearly a reference to *Oliver Twist*, while connections between Wonka’s factory and heavy industry, allude to the heavy industry represented in Dickens’ *Hard Times*. Dickens’s industrial images are used to bring about social consciousness of capitalist excess, while Dahl’s allusion to Dickens’s works are also an attempt to align himself and his works to the nineteenth century literary giant and as, perhaps, an attempt to associate himself with the literary legacy of a bygone era. In the text, the invocation of Dickens is meant to symbolise a sympathetic representation of the impoverished—this representation is superficial, however, when we consider the idealisation of the factory and the failure to recognise that the factory is in many ways the source of great inequality in the novel.

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68 While the conclusion of Tim Burton’s 2005 adaptation of Dahl’s novel departs significantly from the resolution of the original source material, the film captures themes in Dahl’s other texts (*Danny* and *Matilda*) that disparage social climbing. In the concluding scenes in Burton’s adaptation, Charlie’s father is reinstated at the toothpaste factory with a promotion and instead of choosing to live in Wonka’s factory, Charlie chooses to stay with his family in their dilapidated home. As Elizabeth Parsons explains, “Clearly, Mr. Bucket’s new factory job suggests the Buckets do not need more money to make them happy, but they do not need so much money that they are lifted out of their class station” (Parsons 9). I would argue that this resolution aligns more with texts such as *Danny* and *Matilda*, that condemn social climbing, and that the rags-to-riches resolution in Dahl’s *Chocolate Factory* is somewhat of an anomaly in Dahl’s oeuvre. While his novels for children resolve in positive outcomes for the child protagonists, Charlie’s financial fortune is an exception to the rule in Dahl’s other texts.

69 In *The BFG*, Dahl draws connections between himself and Dickens: by the time the BFG becomes fully literate, he “read all of Charles Dickens (whom he no longer called Dahl’s Chickens)” (198).
Fig. 9: “A 1950s logo for the Rowntree’s cocoa works in York”, photograph from Bournemouth News & Picture Service, “From pastilles to present”, The Daily Mail, Julian Gavaghan; dailymail.com; 25 June 2012; Web; 21 March 2016.

Though the exterior and neighbouring surroundings of Wonka’s factory closely resemble the industrial setting of Rowntree’s in York, the interior of the factory appears to be inspired by Cadbury’s. The notion of the natural and its association with wholesomeness is also evoked in the chocolate room within Wonka’s factory:

They were looking down upon a lovely valley. There were green meadows on either side of the valley, and along the bottom of it there flowed a great brown river. What is more, there was a tremendous waterfall halfway along the river—a steep cliff over which the water curled and rolled and rolled in a solid sheet, and then went crashing down into a boiling churning whirlpool of froth and spray. Below the waterfall (and this was the most astonishing sight of all), a whole mass of enormous glass pipes were dangling down into the river from somewhere high up in the ceiling!
They really were *enormous*, those pipes. There must have been a dozen of them at least, and they were sucking up the brownish muddy water from the river and carrying it away to goodness knows where. And because they were made of glass, you could see the liquid flowing and bubbling inside them, and above the noise of the waterfall, you could hear the never-ending suck-suck-sucking sound of the pipes as they did their work (87-89).

This is an idealised description of both nature and industry: the interior of Wonka’s factory is filled with abundant confections designed to resemble the natural world while being very much in an industrial setting. Although the use of machinery to allow the chocolate to flow through the entire factory suggests that this is very much an industrial space, the steady hum of a “boiling churning whirlpool of froth and spray” and the “never-ending suck-suck-sucking sound of pipes” makes Wonka’s factory seem almost alive, suggesting that this is a living space where all of the edible things created within the factory walls go through a lifecycle not unlike the natural cycle of plants and animals in the natural world. Here, nature and industry coexist in an idyllic space which starkly contrasts to the imagery of industrial tractors eating up the land in *Fantastic Mr Fox*, highlighting yet another contradiction in the representation of the natural and industrial worlds in Dahl’s texts. In *Fox*, nature and industry are directly at odds with one another, while in Dahl’s idealistic confectionery company the natural and industrial coexist in perfect harmony.

While Rowntree’s ties to urban York have been a crucial part of the company’s image and heritage, its major competitor, Cadbury’s, was synonymous with wholesome depictions of the English countryside. Cadbury’s origins go back to 1824, when it was owned and operated by the prominent British Quaker family of the same name and
headquartered at 93 Bull Street, Birmingham. Consumer historian Robert Opie explains how by “1879, the company had accrued sufficient funds to purchase 14 ½ acres of land outside Birmingham. Here they built a large new factory which they christened, Bournville” (109). According to Opie, “The name of Bournville was chosen because it was thought to sound French at a time when many of the best chocolates came from Europe” (109). Historian Emma Robertson explains that for the Cadburys, the actual site of their factory was linked to healthy consumption practices and it was rural Bournville, rather than industrial Birmingham, which was consistently emphasised as the site of manufacture and the ultimate source of goodness of Cadbury products (47).

Fig. 10: “The Factory in a Garden”, *Cadbury’s Purple Reign*, John Bradley (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons Ltd., 2008; Print; 90).
What is particularly interesting about the interior of Wonka’s chocolate factory is that its design parallels some of the supposed ideals of the Cadbury’s company marketing campaigns in the twentieth century. Robertson describes how Cadbury’s capitalised on their rural image by reminding consumers:

To make ‘chocolates as good as Cadbury’s’ it was necessary to ‘leave the smoke and the grime of the city behind and secure a tract of pleasant, English countryside’. It was at this ‘factory in a garden’ (as the slogan ran), that local and global ingredients were transformed by skilled workers in scrupulously clean surroundings into nutritious chocolate (48).

Interestingly, in *Chocolate Factory*, Dahl reverses Cadbury’s idea of a ‘factory in a garden’ by placing a garden within Willy Wonka’s factory. This example connects with what Fred Inglis considers to be a crucial link between nostalgia and consumerism: Inglis observes how, in relation to nostalgia, “[t]here is little doubt that the imagery of consumer living, whose most vivid and popular versions are found in the advertisements, offers an accessible and satisfying picture of an ideal life” (121). Wonka’s factory merges, then, the nostalgic sentiment of romanticised images of consumer living with the depiction of the Cadbury’s factory at Bournville as an idealised chocolate-making haven in advertisements proliferated throughout the last century. Additionally, Dahl’s reimagining of a garden *within* a chocolate factory is significant because it demonstrates that despite the factory’s urban setting, the rural idyll is still sought after, presumably at great lengths, and maintained within the factory walls. Despite the industrial imagery of smokestacks, assembly lines, and the general hum of mass production that is evident throughout the novel, Wonka’s factory is represented as one ‘set apart’ from other factories—the garden within the factory is meant to connote wholesomeness and allude to the natural is in a way analogous to how Cadbury marketed itself as a factory within a garden in the
nineteenth and twentieth centuries. There is, of course, nothing ‘natural’ about having a garden within a factory—but what *Chocolate Factory* is appealing to is a rural nostalgia that has been commercialised by Cadbury. Wonka’s factory is at once an idealised depiction of the factory as well as a form of repackaged nostalgia influenced by Cadbury’s marketing of Bournville. Within the walls of Wonka’s factory in *Chocolate Factory*, the children discover sweets such as everlasting gobstoppers, hair toffee, edible marshmallow pillows, lickable wallpaper, hot ice cream, fizzy lifting drinks and square sweets that “look round” (116, 132-34). In Wonka’s factory, readers are shown the sheer industrial scale of sweets production taking place: these confections are clearly not being produced in an average kitchen, but in a highly technical operation involving equipment and methods used typically in both industrial test kitchens and science laboratories. When Wonka moves from a huge pot, to machines with half a dozen knobs, to a gigantic oven and to a shiny, noisy machine, it is evident that his inventing room is filled with a combination of kitchen gadgets and scientific contraptions used for food-science experimentation. Wonka’s creative forays in the inventing room are described in a telling scene, where “[h]e lifted the lid from a huge pot and took a sniff; then he rushed over and dipped a finger into a barrel of sticky yellow stuff and had a taste; then he skipped across to one of the machines and turned half a dozen knobs this way and that” (114). This account is similar to Deborah Cadbury’s description of the Cadbury’s factory in the 1920s:

The Cadbury cousins oversaw the largest transformation of the chocolate works since it had been built by George Sr. and Richard fifty years earlier. Laurence, as a skilled engineer, supervised the designs of automatic production lines that were tailor-made for virtually every stage of chocolate making: molding machines, blending machines, wrapping
machines—each one electrified. The scale of mechanization was so great that an entirely new building had to be built (239).

The connection to the real factories suggests that Dahl is basing his text in the chocolate-factory reality—albeit a fantastical version of reality—of the mid-century, and that he is deeply interested in the culture of chocolate at the time. Moreover, the exterior and interior of Wonka’s factory combines elements of Rowntree’s and Cadbury’s into one, in some kind of hybrid industrial hub and rural utopia. The confectionery factory’s representation as a place of wonder, excitement, and innovation reveals an idealised and uncritical view of mass production and particularly the mass production of sweets. I contend that Wonka’s factory is indeed a veiled endorsement of real-life confectionery firms. In another example that connects Wonka’s fantastical factory to confectionery companies in real life, readers are informed that Wonka was inventing and producing sweets for several years until spies began leaking information to other confectionery manufacturers and not long after a few spying incidents, other confectionery makers briefly mentioned in Chocolate Factory such as Ficklegruber, Prodnose, and Slugworth began producing confections near-identical to Wonka’s (31). The culture of spying and paranoia in Chocolate Factory is, perhaps unsurprisingly, inspired by real-life espionage that took place in British and American confectionery firms. In the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, ideas, materials, and ingredients were exchanged much more

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70 Contemporary confectionery factories retain some of these features, evidenced in Richardson’s descriptions of various sweets factories in the early 2000s: “I visited half a dozen sweets factories, and every time I entered one I was delirious with joy, ecstatic that the machines were exactly as I hoped they would be—long conveyor belts crammed with little sweets being prodded and poked, coated and dried, and extraordinary cauldrons and pipes and pushers and packers and printers and stampers and choppers and scrapers, all working away to produce super-fresh examples of super sweets, which were left lying around in vast piles, trays and buckets, as if one had stumbled on a candy Eldorado” (T. Richardson 15).

71 In contrast to Dahl’s novel, Slugworth is a crucial figure in the first film adaptation: “The most important alteration [in the Willy Wonka film adaptation] was to emphasize the moral fallibility that exists in all of us […] To tempt the kids into immoral behavior and to add a sense of menace to the film, we strengthened the part of Slugworth, Mr. Wonka’s main candy-making competitor, whom Dahl only alludes to in the novel” (Stuart 22-23).
freely between the British, Continental European, and American confectionery firms. Over time, however, suspicion grew between firms, fostering an anxiety within the industry that would eventually lead to an intense level of secrecy and paranoia. Joël Glenn Brenner notes how in the 1930s, spying “became so rampant that candy makers in Europe began hiring detective agencies to investigate employees. Sensitive manufacturing processes were designated off-limits to all but the most loyal workers. And businesses that dealt with candy makers were forced to sign confidentiality agreements” (61-62). She also explains that “the Cadburys and Rowntrees sent so many moles to work in each other’s factories that their spying became legendary” and cites this spying as inspiration for Dahl’s famous novel (61). Company anxieties regarding the protection of confectionery recipes, technological patents for sweets-making machines and generally innovative ideas related to candy-making in Chocolate Factory are clearly linked to real-world issues within the confectionery industry. As Richardson knowingly highlights, “[s]ecrecy is also essential to the industry, since no two recipes for any one sweet are exactly the same, and even if they were, the heating, cooling, pulling and coating techniques vary widely from one factory to the next” (T. Richardson 253). By drawing from the real-life espionage that took place within confectionery firms such as Cadbury’s and Rowntree’s, the sweets and chocolates in Chocolate Factory are elevated from frivolous everyday foodstuffs (typically consumed by children) to extremely complex objects that have had a great deal of time, money, and research invested into developing them.

Dahl’s allusion to not only confectionery industry espionage in Chocolate Factory, but also to the advanced scientific and technological methods of sweets production and manufacturing, coincided with the many changes occurring within the food industry during this time, as evidenced by the characterisation of Willy Wonka as at
once candy-maker, mad scientist, and culinary alchemist rolled into one. Cam Cobb argues, “While the space between being seen as a genius and being called a madman appears to be a difficult one for Wonka to traverse, it is one he navigates with zest throughout Dahl’s classic novel. And by countering social expectations with such zest, perhaps Willy Wonka is meant to subvert—and prompt readers to question—the constraints of normalization” (80). Wonka’s subversion of ‘the constraints of normalization’ is indeed expressed through the inventive confections he creates in his factory. The fantastical confectionery innovator is described as not merely clever, but a “magician with chocolate” who is capable of creating “absurd” confections that defy the laws of nature such as “chocolate ice cream that stays cold for hours and hours without being in the refrigerator” (*Chocolate Factory* 20; 22), as well as gum that never loses its flavour (22, 23). Despite the way in which Wonka is treated as a kind of hero in the narrative (the saviour of Charlie and his family from a life of perpetual poverty), I think that this characterisation is problematic given the corrupt company practices at Wonka’s chocolate factory, highlighting again, contradictions in Dahl’s text. The romanticised representation of confectionery manufacturing and the culture of chocolate are fraught with problems such as its reliance on cheap, possibly slave labour that Dahl hints at but does not fully discuss in his novel. While *Chocolate Factory* has come to be associated as a sweets fantasy novel for children, it is also a narrative associated with “a secret history of race, slavery, colonialism, and consumerism” (Novy 137). Clare Bradford astutely observes Dahl’s silence on issues related to workers’ rights highlighting how,

Dahl sidesteps the […] displacement by treating workers as mere cogs in Willy Wonka's machine, not as people and even less as individuals. And the Oompa-Loompas’ displacement from their homeland is elided through Dahl's representation of Loompaland, in whose jungles lurk dangerous
creatures such as hornswogglers, snozzwangers, and whangdoodles, and where the Oompa-Loompas can find nothing but green caterpillars to eat (Bradford 199).

The numerous problems, mishaps, and instances of corruption that befall Wonka’s factory are evident, yet Wonka remains a heroic figure in the text. Grandpa Joe explains to Charlie how “not so very long ago there used to be thousands of people working in Mr Willy Wonka’s factory. Then one day, all of a sudden, Mr Wonka had to ask every single one of them to leave, to go home, never come back” (28). Dahl’s inclusion of the “benevolent enslavement” of Oompa-Loompas and the fact that Wonka “let [thousands of workers] go one afternoon with no severance and no pension also speaks to […] ambivalent attitudes toward capitalism” (Novy 137) and highlights that Dahl was certainly aware to some extent of issues related to disenfranchised workers and slave labour within the confectionery industry.

Although Grandpa Joe explains that Willy Wonka laid off all of his employees because of the rampant spying in confectionery factories, it remains quite an extreme yet unchallenged reaction to confectionery industry espionage in the text. As Novy points out,

It’s odd to me that Dahl could so clearly pinpoint what happens when factories close and people struggle for work while making the architect of that closure the hero, instead of the villain. Oh, sure, he tries to villainize the other chocolate manufacturers who spied on Willy Wonka, but ultimately Wonka is the one who made the choice to close his factory. To deny jobs to the community. To import laborers from somewhere else and keep them as slaves (142).
Rashna Singh provides an explanation to Wonka’s complex characterisation and points out that the factory’s corruption and “Dahl’s deliberate—in fact, transparent—reiteration of stock images and stereotypes points to satire. The system of “guest” workers and the exploitation of immigrant labor in an industrial, capitalist context is what is being satirized” (104). In addition, Singh interprets the central message of *Chocolate Factory* as one that “anticipates and disparages [globalisation’s] excess” (104). Even though Singh’s argument is somewhat understandable given the criticisms of overconsumption in the text, it fails to consider the romanticised and idealised representation of Wonka’s company. In the decades following the publication of *Chocolate Factory*, discourses on globalisation drew inextricable but nonetheless irrefutable connections between mass production and mass consumption, yet it is crucial to point out that these connections are not fleshed out in *Chocolate Factory*. It is made clear in Dahl’s novel that the problems associated with mass consumption and mass production are distinct, one having very little effect on the other as far as the issue of overconsumption in the text is concerned. It is seen as a great victory when Charlie inherits Wonka’s factory: when Charlie is the remaining child on the factory tour, Wonka congratulates him, emphatically exclaiming, “I’m absolutely delighted! It couldn’t be better! How wonderful this is! I had a hunch, you know, right from the beginning, that it was going to be you!” (*Chocolate Factory* 175). Again, Wonka’s characterisation as hero is made clear as the narrative progresses but perhaps most prominently at the end of the text when it is revealed that he was rooting for Charlie all along. As Catherine Butler explains, “the text absolves [Wonka]: this is a being beyond blame, a magical dispenser of rewards whose final promise to make Charlie his heir is a blessing to the whole Bucket tribe” (5). Wonka’s enthusiasm for Charlie’s imminent takeover of the factory is evidence of how, as Peter Hunt asserts, “Dahl’s satire co-opts the child reader into a conservative ideology” (181).
Although the main message of Chocolate Factory focuses on the problems associated with mass consumption and the food industry, this same message becomes less compelling when we examine how Dahl’s novel has spawned an entire franchise centred on Chocolate Factory and Willy Wonka’s chocolate factory. The overarching message against overconsumption in Chocolate Factory becomes diluted when we consider the ever-growing expansion of the Chocolate Factory franchise and, perhaps most importantly, the fact that Dahl himself set out to market the text in several different arenas before the popular novel was even published. In a letter to Dahl’s literary agent Mike Watkins dated 28 September 1963, Dahl explains how his publisher at Knopf, Bob Bernstein,

is all excited about the possibilities of selling “Charlie” to a large chocolate manufacturer. Not Hershey, who spend nothing on advertising, but to Nestlé’s (who are international). He says that with my permission, he and Bennett Cerf would go direct to the President of the Company in the U.S.A., and suggest the following: 1) A large T.V. film which would be shown once a year, every year, and which would constitute Nestlé’s entire expenditure on T.V. advertising for the 12 months. 2) That they should do what Mr. Wonka does in the story—hide five or ten vouchers in candy bars across the country (across each country all over the world) and guarantee the finders a life-time supply of free candy (cost, about $250 per annum per person). Now, there is no doubt that these are good ideas. I had had the second one myself long ago. There is no doubt also that Bernstein & Cerf believe there to be an enormous amount of money in it. (They did a somewhat similar deal for Kay Thompson on Eloise). There also seems, curiously, to be a lot of money for Bernstein & Cerf personally in it. At
least that is what Bernstein implied. He added that we should have to discuss terms and percentages before they initiate the deal. I replied that I could do nothing but give my permission to approach the chocolate manufacturers. This permission I gave on condition that suitable terms were agreed by you acting for me. All financial matters, I said, must be handled by you and them (Dahl, Letter to Mike Watkins, 9/28/63; WLC Series III, Box 25).

This particular letter is significant in an analysis of Chocolate Factory for important reasons. First, Dahl’s intense interest in selling the Wonka brand to Nestlé in particular suggests a dogged effort to market his novel and potential by-products of his text to as many people as possible. Though Nestlé’s reputation as a major violator of child labour laws was not uncovered until the early 2000s, the international conglomerate has a long history of placing the financial interests of the company above and beyond the health and safety interests of consumers as evidenced in the boycott of Nestlé products in 1977 after the conglomerate’s aggressive marketing of bottle-feeding (and sales of Nestlé baby formula products) led to malnutrition and disease amongst infants in the developing world.\(^\text{72}\) Although the boycott occurred long after the first publication of Chocolate Factory, an agreement was made between Dahl and Nestlé when the company purchased the Wonka brand in 1988, despite the company’s embroilment in numerous controversies in the years preceding this partnership.

Secondly, in relation to the text, Dahl’s letter to Watkins illuminates a possible explanation as to why exactly Wonka’s factory bore significant resemblances to real-life

confectionery firms. Dahl’s determined efforts to sell Wonka as a confectionery brand to a real-life manufacturer prior to the publication of Chocolate Factory emphasises how the text was in large part first envisioned as a novel with an in-built marketing campaign for a prospective product line of sweets. The Wonka factory’s representation as an innovative confectionery company churning out the tastiest and most inventive confectionery products using state-of-the-art machinery sets it apart from the other fictitious firms in Dahl’s text. As a unique and extraordinary company, Wonka’s factory expresses a message that real-life confectionery companies strive to convey: that their products are not only completely set apart from their competitors but the very best products on the market. In addition, since Wonka’s factory is presented as the only confectionery company that does not steal ideas from the other (corrupt) sweets factories, it is yet again, distinguished from the other firms. In the composition stages of Chocolate Factory, Dahl clearly intended to entice real-life confectionery companies into a partnership to produce a lucrative line of sweets under the Wonka brand. Wonka’s characterisation as hero can therefore be directly traced from Dahl’s determination to secure such a partnership with a major confectionery firm. Furthermore, Dahl’s motivation in this regard explains the absence of any glaring criticisms of mass production in the Wonka factory. The focused criticism of greed, gluttony, and unfettered child consumer power as the main sources of overconsumption behaviour (rather than the notion of mass production itself) in the text, as examined earlier, can therefore be linked to Dahl’s construction of the narrative as a marketing tool for real-life confectionery companies in book form.

Such efforts to negotiate a deal with the large confectionery companies as outlined in Dahl’s letter to Watkins failed however, and in a letter dated 12 May 1964 Watkins explains how Bernstein “said he had been busy with the chocolate companies but they were stuffy, conventional and unimaginative. He had been turned down by Nestlé and
Hershey, and will go after the others as soon as he has book copy” (Watkins, Letter to Roald Dahl, 5/12/64; WLC Series III, Box 26). Nonetheless, Sturrock notes how Dahl was particularly pleased with Knopf publisher Bob Bernstein’s “shrewd business acumen, manifested, for example, by his aggressive pursuit of Hershey’s over merchandising for Charlie and the Chocolate Factory” (487). When considering the primary message disparaging overconsumption in Chocolate Factory, these letters ultimately emphasise both the failure to recognise the inconsistency between the criticism of greed in Dahl’s text and the extensive efforts made to capitalise from the text as much as possible. From before its first publication, Chocolate Factory was envisioned as an opportunity to commercialise a very specific nostalgic and idealised representation of sweets in book form. As evidenced by these letters, the nostalgised fictionalised confectionery factory in Chocolate Factory can be considered as an effort on Dahl and his publishers’ part to commodify the text, primarily in efforts to make significant financial gains.

After unsuccessful attempts to sell the Wonka brand to a major confectionery company prior to the publication of Chocolate Factory, Dahl, his publishers and literary agents were eventually able to negotiate terms with Quaker Oats and filmmakers to adapt Chocolate Factory into a feature length film, Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory (1971), directed by Mel Stuart. Before filming began, the film’s producer David Wolper secured a budgeting deal with the Quaker Oats company “which hoped the film would serve as a lucrative marketing tool for its line of confectionery. (It didn’t: the movie flopped and so did the sweets.)” (Gilbey “Mel Stuart obituary”; Stuart, Pure Imagination

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73 This letter is addressed to Dahl and signed by Dahl which was likely an error on literary agent Mike Watkins’ part. It seems certain that this letter was written to Dahl by Watkins as the letter contains information about correspondences with MGM, contractual documents, and an update on Watkins’ family life.
Stuart explains how Quaker’s development of a Wonka bar was “perhaps the first time and maybe the most revolutionary of the product tie-ins that would become standard with studio movies” (11) and Quaker hoped Stuart’s film would effectively be used as a full campaign ad for their Wonka bar (11). According to Stuart,

Typically, the studio allows a corporation a product placement in the film in exchange for the creation of a huge advertising campaign for the film when it is released, as in the case of Reese’s Pieces with *E.T.: The Extraterrestrial*, and McDonald’s with the *Toy Story* movies […]. In this case, Quaker Oats was using the entire movie as an ad campaign for a new candy bar. Quaker Oats was not only getting a promotional push but also acquiring an ownership stake in a movie. With all the unusual financing deals linked to promotional ideas that Hollywood has seen in the last thirty years, this is still one of the most creative and unique (11).

The combined efforts of Dahl, his publishers, Stuart, and Quaker were ground-breaking in their vision of using one popular children’s text as a lucrative commodity across several marketing arenas. However, Quaker was unable to develop a palatable recipe and in the end decided not to develop and manufacture the bar (Stuart 11). As Mangan explains, Quaker Oats “had problems with the formula for the planned Willy Wonka’s Peanut Butter Oompa-Loompa Cups and gave it up as a bad job before it even reached the shops” (61). Despite this initial failure, one of Quaker’s subsidiary companies, Breaker Confections, began developing and manufacturing sweets under the Willy Wonka Candy

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74 Although *Willy Wonka* proved commercially unsuccessful initially, *Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory* began playing on television from the mid-1970s in many countries (including Canada, the US, the UK and Ireland) during the Christmas season.

75 See James A. Karrh, Kathy Brittain McKee and Carol J. Pardun’s “Practitioners’ Evolving Views and Product Placement Effectiveness” in the *Journal of Advertising Research* 10.1017 (2003): “The practice of placing brands into media content particularly feature films, is not new. MGM Studios even maintained an office for soliciting, placements in the 1930s […] Until the 1990s, the practice had often been used rather haphazardly and decisions had been based almost solely on intuition” (Karrh, McKee and Pardon 138-39).
Company brand in the years after Stuart’s film was released (Hartel 183). In the 1970s and 1980s, the brand was sold and re-sold to several companies and eventually taken over by Nestlé in 1988 (Mangan 163).

Dahl’s didactic messages against overconsumption of sweets in particular contradict his and the Dahl estate’s efforts to financially benefit from his association with the sweets industry through the development of Wonka brand confectionery products. Dahl’s efforts to reap financial rewards from transforming his fictitious sweets into tangible, commercial products in the real world were persistent and, although there is nothing particularly wrong with wanting to benefit financially from his novels, what is particularly unsettling is that the driving motivation of the *Chocolate Factory* franchise is to sell more sweet products to children, and by extension, for the Dahl estate to capitalise on child consumer power. Even within Dahl’s oeuvre, there are references to a Wonka confectionery company. In *The Giraffe and the Pelly and Me*, the protagonist Billy sells “a whole lot of splendid stuff from the great Wonka factory itself, for example the famous Willy Wonka Rainbow Drops—suck them and you can spit in seven different colours. And his Stickjaw for talkative parents. And his Mint Jujubes that will give the boy next door green teeth for a month” (65). Here, Dahl’s direct references to *Chocolate Factory* reveal yet another attempt to keep the Wonka brand in the popular imagination, and in this way, Dahl turns *Giraffe* into a sort of promotional text for his fantastical factory narrative. Consequently, *Giraffe* is used as a propagation of Dahl’s public persona and his works in order to exploit child consumer power, essentially “prelimiting their range of choice and action to consumption-oriented behaviour” (Honeyman, “Halloween Lore” 85). I would argue that what Jack Zipes refers to as “circular structure of cultural affirmation” present in filmic adaptations of fairy tales can certainly be applied to an analysis of the Wonka brand’s inclusion in texts beyond *Chocolate Factory* in Dahl’s
oeuvre. As Zipes notes, “all the possible utopian images contained in the narrative structures of the films [that] certainly contain anti-capitalist tendencies […] cannot have a liberating effect because of the context in which they are embedded […] and […] because of the context in which they are transmitted, received and circulated, i.e., the culture industry” (Zipes, *Breaking the Magic Spell*, 140). In a similar vein, *Chocolate Factory*’s message disparaging overconsumption is far less impactful given Dahl’s drive to capitalise on the Wonka brand—his capitalisation is dependent on a cycle of mass consumerism.

Stuart remarks on the nostalgic power of *Chocolate Factory*, and explains how “The Wonka candy name also bounced back in the nineties, no doubt stirring memories of the Chocolate Room from the film” (110). Incidentally, since the Nestlé takeover, marketing campaigns of the Willy Wonka Candy Company have also coincided with the launch of Tim Burton’s 2005 film adaptation and Sam Mendes’s musical adaption of *Chocolate Factory* in 2013. In 2005, Nestlé launched a line of Wonka bars that closely resembled those found in *Chocolate Factory*, including Wonka’s Whipple-Scrumptious Fudgemallow Delight and the Nutty Crunch Surprise (Mangan 163). According to Andrew F. Smith, Nestlé’s Wonka branded chocolates in Burton’s film, coupled with a “massive advertising campaign relaunched the brand” (752) while Parsons notes how this campaign was “not only a vehicle for, but also a product of capitalist motivations” as “The Nestlé corporation stood to make enormous profits from the increased market share of chocolate sales through their ownership of the Wonka brand name” (Parsons 96). In 2013, three months after Mendes’s musical debuted in the West End, Nestlé launched three Wonka bars: Millionaire’s Shortbread, Crème Brulee and Chocolate Nice cream. Nestlé’s continuing production and relentless promotion of the Wonka brand aligns with Honeyman’s assertion that “Nestlé is a particularly interesting exploiter of the young,
being a company that is famous for milk substitutes and chocolate products. It is also the largest food corporation in the world and spends the most annually on marketing to ensure cradle-to-grave loyalty” (Consuming Agency 194, Note 28). In addition, the fiftieth anniversary of Chocolate Factory’s publication coincided with the ‘authorised’ publication of Lucy Mangan’s Inside Charlie’s Chocolate Factory: The Complete Story of Willy Wonka, the Golden Ticket and Roald Dahl’s Most Famous Creation. The Dahl estate collaborated with Mangan and Dahl’s granddaughter Sophie Dahl wrote the book’s introduction. The collection contains many candid photos of Dahl and his family, and several images of Dahl’s discarded drafts. It is difficult not to interpret this publication as an attempt by Dahl’s estate to both maintain control over the Chocolate Factory brand and to capitalise on it further, as it has with the adaptation and marketing of Chocolate Factory in a range of other artistic and commercial ventures. The expansion of the Chocolate Factory franchise since the novel’s publication in 1964 coincides with the increasing intensity of marketing and advertising aimed towards children through various forms of media and merchandising.76 Dahl’s work is part of a long tradition in storytelling, that stretches back to folk tales in which messages tended to be contradictory, containing utopian and conservative elements. What kept the utopian aspect alive was the context in which the tales were actively received and retold by the common people […] Today the audience for fairy tales, whether they be transmitted as a literary text, film, play, advertisement, TV show, or hypertext on the internet as become

76 Schor also notes how Nestlé sponsors “the SweeTart contest” a contest in which students use SweeTarts, a hard, lozenge-like sweet sold under the Wonka brand by Nestlé, to build an art project (Schor 90). Schor explains how “more than 5,000 schools [in the U.S.] participate, submitting entries such as a Mona Lisa made of SweeTarts and a Sweetmobile car covered in candy” (Schor 90). McLaren and Farahmandpur add in an essay from 2006 that “The conglomerate Nestlé Company, famous for its chocolate awarded $10,000 to the school that came up with the most creative art project using the company’s brand, candy Sweet Tarts. This year, a whopping 5,200 schools participated in the SweeTart contest” (McLaren and Farahmandpur 40).
more passive than active, and the narrative perspective and voice are
generally guided by commercial interests (Zipes, *Breaking the Magic
Spell*, 140).

While *Chocolate Factory* is by no means a fairy tale, Dahl includes fairy tale elements
with the characterisation of Charlie as a passive hero and the comeuppances that befall
the other children. Like other fairy tales in the popular imagination, *Chocolate Factory* is
also guided by commercial interests. The fact that the marketing and development of
*Chocolate Factory* and the Willy Wonka brand is ongoing is testament to the
contradictions between the novel’s function within the popular imagination and Dahl’s
didactic message in the original text. As I have argued, Dahl’s critical stance on over-
consumption, gluttony, greed, and materialism in *Chocolate Factory* has been
significantly diluted over time as the franchise expands. The nostalgic imagery of
confectionery in *Chocolate Factory* has transformed Dahl’s text into a complex
metanarrative about the exploitation of nostalgia, confectionery, and childhood for
commercial purposes. The commodification of *Chocolate Factory* as a brand betrays the
original spirit of the original text, while, at the same time, it keeps *Chocolate Factory* and
the Dahl franchise at the forefront of the public imagination. It is quite ironic that a book
which disparages commercial greed and mass consumption would be promoted through a
similar means.

### 2.2 Unsafe Sweets and Stranger Danger in *Boy* (1984) and *The Witches* (1983)

While the previous section examined the production and manufacturing of sweets in a
factory setting, this section looks closely at the distribution and sales of sweets within the
sweetshops found in Dahl’s autobiography *Boy* and his popular novel, *The Witches*. In
both contexts (factory and storefront), there is an attempt to give children a behind-the-scenes look at two major aspects of the sweets industry—the production and development of sweets and the marketing and distribution of sweets. This section examines various aspects of the childhood sweetshop experience in the above texts and I argue that in Dahl’s texts there are complicated representations of the sweetshop as on the one hand, an idyllic institution in British children’s culture and on the other hand, a place of significant danger. The sweetshop in Dahl’s novels is connected to Dahl’s fond childhood sweets-related memories and to confectionery adulteration and stranger danger. In both *Boy* and *The Witches*, Dahl uses folkloric figures associated with food adulteration and child harm, and updates them for twentieth-century readers; in doing so, his texts perpetuate the mounting anxieties related to stranger danger from the post-war period onwards. I contend that these connections between romanticised sweetshops, confectionery adulteration, folklore, urban legend, and stranger danger are again, used in Dahl’s stores to purposefully make his position as an authority on sweets even more powerful.

Moreover, like *Chocolate Factory*, these texts serve as cautionary tales about the consumption of sweets but, instead of focusing primarily on overconsumption, *Boy* and *The Witches* warn children against the supposed dangers of tainted sweets found in sweetshops and in the hands of strangers. Again, nostalgia functions similarly in these texts as a form of myth-making, cementing the association between Dahl, childhood, and sweets in the popular imagination.

It is clear that the sweetshop is an important cultural institution in Britain: as sociologist Allison James observes, “Sweets—as in ‘Ye Olde Sweete Shoppe’—are an entirely British phenomenon. There is no equivalent abroad and the British sweet industry, in its production of a very extensive range of confectionery, seems to be unique” (“Confections, Concoctions and Conceptions” 75). In a particularly revealing quote, Dahl
upholds the sweetshop as an important establishment in British society, one that was at “the very centre of [their] lives [as boys]” (Boy 33). Dahl explains, “To us, [the sweet shop] was what a bar is to a drunk, or a church is to a Bishop” (33). This comparison is telling: the sweetshop is elevated from a mere village or high street fixture, to an institution. Dahl’s comparison of the sweetshop with the pub and the church strongly suggests that sweetshops and in fact sweets are, as James notes, “replete with ritual significance” (“The good, the bad and the delicious” 673). The average British sweet shop, according to Dahl, allows young consumers to experience, for example, a similar sense of sociality and conviviality often associated with public houses (or transform consumers into the sweets equivalent of an alcoholic). The sweetshop is a place in which people come together to partake in encounters which can be potentially spiritual and revelatory in nature, as in a church. Of course, in reality, regular visits to the average sweet shop rarely result in children stumbling out in an inebriated stupor, or as transformed and perhaps enlightened human beings; however, the sentiments and significance of Dahl’s comparisons are clear: in Boy, entering a sweetshop for the very first time is a crucial rite of passage for the British child. The sweetshop is probably one of the first places where a child exercises their consumer power. As confectionery historian Tim Richardson highlights, it is in the sweetshop that children learn a great deal about not only sweets but economic transactions in general:

The sweets economy of children creates its own rules; it can instil a sense of the meaning and value of property. Children first learn the joys of ownership through sweets, stolidly counting out, measuring and rationalising these gorgeous little items which are indubitably and irreversibly theirs, like nothing else in their lives. Children hunt for
bargains in the sweetshop (big is usually better) and bartering or swapping sweets creates a sense of proportionate worth (54).

Sweets emphasise the capitalist values necessary to thrive in the adult world, and training them in the skills they will need to negotiate their place in that world. Perhaps most significantly, the sweetshop is a site where children are able to gain control over something tangible (sweets) at a point in their lives when they generally possess limited agency. In Boy, Dahl describes how he and his peers would save their pocket money, usually about sixpence per week, to purchase these treats and explains that he would often spend his own money on favourites noting how, “At two for a penny [liquorice bootlaces] were the best value in the shops”, as were Sherbet Suckers which were also two a penny and gobstoppers, at a penny each (29, 31). Dahl describes liquorice bootlaces, Sherbet Suckers and Gobstoppers: “A Bootlace, in case you haven’t had the pleasure of handling one, is not round. It’s like a flat black tape about half an inch wide. You buy it rolled up in a coil, and in those days it used to be so long that when you unrolled it and held one end at arm’s length above your head, the other end touched the ground” (31), while a sherbet sucker “consisted of a yellow cardboard tube filled with sherbet powder, and there was a hollow liquorice straw sticking out of it […] You sucked the sherbet up through the straw and when it was finished you ate the liquorice (31). Additionally, Dahl describes gobstoppers as “enormous hard round balls the size of small tomatoes” that cost a penny each and “would provide about an hour’s worth of non-stop sucking and if you took it out of your mouth and inspected it every five minutes or so, you would find it had changed colour. There was something fascinating about the way it went from pink to blue to green to yellow” (31-32). The sheer variety of chewy, hard, dissolvable, and tart sweets, as well as the huge range of shapes and sizes of confectionery sold at the local sweetshop is important to consider here as these sweets undoubtedly taught Dahl and his peers a great
deal about flavour, texture, and also the idea of “getting one’s money’s worth”. Just as importantly, these extremely formative experiences in their local sweetshop allowed them to engage with food and develop their own personal preferences and distinct sense of taste.

In *Boy*, Dahl describes how he and his friends always stopped in front of the local sweetshop on their way home from school and “lingered outside its rather small window gazing in at the big glass jars full of Bull’s-eyes and Old Fashioned Humbugs and Strawberry Bonbons and Glacier Mints and Acid Drops and Pear Drops and Lemon Drops and all the rest of them” (29). This nostalgic description of Dahl’s local sweetshop is similar to earlier accounts of the British sweetshop. Although it is unknown when the first sweetshop was established in Britain, Laura Mason uncovers how some of the earliest accounts of sweetshops were documented by Daniel Defoe who noted details such as “sash windows, painted tiles, large mirrors and carved and gilded embellishment” as well as good lighting which were important in eighteenth-century confectionery shops (*Sugar Plums* 211). In addition, Mason remarks upon the importance of glass jars in the eighteenth-century sweetshop: “As more glass jars were used, filled with transparent jellies, fruit preserves, little candies and comfits, so they were placed in the window to glint in the light streaming through those expensive glass panes. Inside, candlelight reflected in the mirrors sparkled among glass and gilding” (*Sugar Plums* 211). In reality the aesthetics of the “traditional” sweetshop have not changed a great deal from Mason and Dahl’s descriptions. While many sweetshops continue to implement large glass jars and floor-to-ceiling shelving for, presumably, the sake of practicality, this layout also

77 I have placed quotations around the term “traditional” here to distinguish these shops from the few authentic, traditional sweetshops that have existed for multiple generations and are still operating in Britain today. However, the expansion of “traditional” sweetshop chains such as Mr. Simms Olde Sweet Shoppe (est. 2004) in almost 100 stores across the UK, Ireland, Singapore, and Hong Kong demonstrate how the aesthetics of traditional sweetshops continue to be sought after by proprietors and consumers alike.
capitalises on the memories these aesthetics invoke. The site of large glass jars filled with candies in an array of shapes, sizes, colours, and textures is indeed what Boym identifies as a form of “commercialized nostalgia “which forces a specific understanding of time” (38). For Boym, commercialised nostalgia is a process by which “[t]ransience itself is commodified in passing” (38), and is not unlike the glass jars in the sweetshop described in Boy.

In The Witches, the witches’ intended use of the traditional sweetshop as an effective front for their scheming attests to the fact that the traditional sweetshop is considered to be, for the most part, a ‘safe’ place for children to sample and purchase sweets. It is deemed to be a space for children only: an adult-free sanctum with the exception of a handful of adult staff members. The Grand High Witch orders the other witches to buy sweet shops, but carefully instructs them that they “vill be buying the very best and most rrreespectable sveet-shops in Inkland […] I am vonting no tuppenny-ha’penny crrrummy little tobacco-selling-newspaper-sweet-shops! […] I am vonting you to get only the very best shops filled up high vith piles and piles of luscious sveets and tasty chocs” (73)! The distinction here between confectioner-tobacconists-newsagents (CTNs)—or even supermarkets such as Tesco—and traditional sweetshops is clear: the traditional sweetshop will serve as a more effective front as a ‘wholesome’ place for children to purchase sweets, and is therefore a place that will arouse minimal levels of suspicion; it is an unsuspecting place for children to be swindled or, indeed, poisoned. The witches’ plan to lure children with sweets sold from apparently traditional British sweetshops points to folkloric narratives that associate sweets and strangers with danger and malevolence, the witch in Hansel and Gretel and the Queen disguised as a peddler in Snow White being some of the most famous examples. Here, the Grand High Witch conforms to Barbara Creed’s description of the witch “as a monstrous figure with
supernatural powers and a desire for evil” (76) and Kirsten Uszkalo’s definition of the witch in folklore as “a felon” and one who uses “curses, magic, and familiars […] to damage, hurt, spread disease, and kill” (597-98). The similarities between Dahl’s witches and the folkloric witch are used to nostalgise the dangerous and adventurous aspects of sweets’ consumption further. Although the representation of unsafe sweets’ consumption in the text is certainly not meant to glorify the act of poisoning children with confectionery, the witch’s connection to dangerous sweets’ consumption is ultimately intended to make the ritual seem all the more thrilling and exciting.

In addition, the aesthetics of the traditional sweetshop, with the high shelving and stacks of big glass jars filled with confectionery, are so closely associated with positive aspects of childhood and a certain degree of respectability that the Grand High Witch’s plan to use the traditional sweetshop as a front for her plan to transform unwitting children into mice seems like quite a good one. The Grand High Witch instructs the witches to have a “Great Gala Opening” at their sweetshops, offering free sweets and chocolates to all children (75), and envisions chaos and pandemonium erupting in the classrooms all over Britain as the transformation takes place the following day (78). The transformation of children into mice is probably an allusion to the Pied Piper and by extension to the ratcatcher in Boy, which will be explored further in this section.

In Boy, the sense of fun and camaraderie associated with sweets is expressed through a shared confusion and bafflement about what the sweets they consumed were actually made of. In one example, Dahl cites the gobstopper as one sweet that was the subject of intense fascination for him and his classmates because they were baffled by how, exactly, these sweets were made. Part of the appeal of sweets in Boy rests on the fact that the actual components of confectionery remained largely a mystery: the gobstoppers, pear drops, tonsil ticklers, acid drops and strawberry bonbons that Dahl describes were
made of a combination of edible but inexplicable ingredients. Dahl’s childhood friend Thwaites offered one explanation about the changing colours in gobstoppers, speculating that it was saliva that changed the colour in gobstoppers (32). Even though Dahl does not provide a definitive answer to questions about how gobstoppers are made, his inclusion of Thwaites’s unsubstantiated explanation suggests that in some ways, it did not matter whether or not he and his friends knew the precise reasons why a gobstopper kept changing colour—what was more important was how a foodstuff could prompt such wonder and awe as well as conversations about taste, texture, and general sensory experience amongst child consumers. These sweets are representations of gastronomic nostalgia, which Boym identifies as one type of nostalgia that is important because of its connection to remembered “sensations, tastes, sounds, smells, the minutiae and trivia” of a real or imagined paradise (4). Descriptions of the boyhood sweets mentioned throughout Dahl’s nonfictional works and biographical accounts draw attention to the significant connections to food and memory and reinforces the idea that, according to Jon Holtzman, “[t]he experience of food evokes recollection, which is not simply cognitive but also emotional and physical” (365). However, in romanticising sweets, Dahl can be accused of romanticising commercial transactions themselves, in the same way mass production in the confectionery industry is idealised in Chocolate Factory.

The mysterious colours, ingredients, tastes, and textures of sweets were not the only aspects of sweets which Dahl and his peers were interested in as the dangers of sweets tampering and adulteration were also subjects of intense fascination for Dahl and his friends. In Boy, Dahl includes one anecdote about adulteration involving the local sweetshop owner Mrs Pratchett and another involving Dahl’s childhood friend Thwaites. Both works allude to the supposedly great risks involved in consuming confectionery that Dahl and his friends would have faced. In the first anecdote, Dahl recalls his encounters
with Mrs Pratchett, the local sweetshop owner who is described as a grumpy, repugnant and “small skinny old hag with a moustache on her upper lip and a mouth as sour as a green gooseberry” (33). From this description, Mrs Pratchett sounds like a precursor of Dahl’s horrific female villains including Mrs Twit, Miss Trunchbull and, perhaps most notably, the witches. As he does with other disorderly eaters including Augustus Gloop, Dahl alludes to the grotesque again in his characterisation of Mrs Pratchett, who wore a grey and greasy apron, a blouse with “toast-crumbs and tea stains and splotches of dried egg-yolk” all over it and used her disgusting hands and fingernails covered with dirt and grime to scoop out sweets from sweet jars for her customers (33): here, Mrs Pratchett is akin to Creed’s definition of the witch as a figure “associated with a range of abject things” including “filth [and] decay” (76).

Mrs Pratchett’s unpleasant demeanour did not deter Dahl and his friends as “[s]weets were [their] life-blood” and they “would have put up with far worse than that to get them” (Boy 33-34). This particular example is important in three ways: first, by risking possible illness from potential traces of bacteria and dirt from Mrs Pratchett’s hands transferred to the sweets, like most children, Dahl and his friends demonstrate the extent to which they were willing to go to feed their confectionery consuming habit. Secondly, this example is also significant because Dahl’s emphasis on the lack of health laws and his detailed description of the dirt and grime on Mrs Pratchett’s fingers are representative of a somewhat romanticised view of his own childhood. Though Dahl and his peers clearly despised Mrs Pratchett and do not have fond memories of her at all, Dahl’s recollection of these experiences express a sort of gastronomic nostalgia for the thrill of “dangerous” consumption. Mrs Pratchett’s characterisation as a witch-like figure is akin to Creed’s definition of the witch as one “thought to be dangerous and wily, capable of drawing on her evil powers to wreak destruction on the community” and a
figure who “sets out to unsettle boundaries between the rational and irrational, symbolic and imaginary” (76). By consuming Mrs Pratchett’s potentially tainted sweets, Dahl and his friends, like the fictional Hansel and Gretel or Edmund in Lewis’s *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (1950), participated in an early form of risk-taking and lived to tell their tale. The thrill of dangerous consumption is nostalgised, while the folkloric witch is updated through the characterisation of Mrs Pratchett. Thirdly, this example highlights yet another contradiction between Dahl’s texts: Dahl and his friends are daring and rebellious in their efforts to consume sweets yet, similar efforts to consume sweets in a daring and rebellious way (Augustus’ fall into the chocolate river, Violet chewing a piece of gum that she is repeatedly told not to chew) in *Chocolate Factory* are represented as greed. The positive representation of Dahl and his friends’ efforts to consume sweets by any means necessary again highlights how Dahl’s authorial performativity and self-representation as an amateur confectionery connoisseur eclipses, obscures, and contradicts messages cautioning readers against overconsumption in *Chocolate Factory*.

In another anecdote, Dahl informs readers how one of his schoolmates, Thwaites, warned Dahl and his friends against eating liquorice bootlaces as “they were made from rats’ blood” (*Boy* 29), alluding to a sort of ‘urban legend’ about tainted sweets. Thwaites explained how ratcatchers across the country took thousands of rats to the liquorice bootlace factories where they were boiled in cauldrons for several hours in a “thick steaming rat-stew” (29-30). The “stew” was pulped, poured onto a flat surface, steam-rolled and cut into strips that resemble long, thin bootlaces (30). The reference here to ratcatchers is important as it introduces one of the most famous associations between child vulnerability and ratcatchers in European folklore, the Pied Piper. Peter Arnds dates the legend of the Piper of Hamelin back to the fifteenth century noting how “from the beginning, its textual adaptations display an acute tension between mythological material
fed by subconscious fear and desire on the one hand, and by historical fact on the other” (62). Since then the legend of the Pied Piper of Hamelin has been both “demonized and mythologized” and “[d]uring the Romantic period, especially in the fairy-tale adaptation by the Brothers Grimm, the legend is then once again clad in an aura of demonic mystery and is understood as folk myth due to the Piper’s relationship with such figures as the Nordic spirit of the Erlking, who also abducts children” (Arnds 62). Thwaites’s father warned him not to eat liquorice bootlaces as he would get ‘ratitis’, an incurable disease that causes the consumer to develop pointy teeth and “a short stumpy tail [that] grows out of your back just above your bottom (Boy 31). Incidentally, contracting ‘ratitis’ from consuming sweets is a variation of the witches’ plan in Dahl’s novel: if children are eating contaminated sweets, they too will turn into mice. In Boy, the effects of ‘ratitis’ align those responsible for producing and manufacturing the liquorice bootlaces, the ratcatchers and confectionery producers, with child-threatening figures from folklore such as witches—an idea that Dahl returns to again in The Witches. Of course, Dahl recalls with some nostalgia how they “all enjoyed Thwaites’s story and we made him tell it to us many times on our walks to and from school. But it didn’t stop any of us except Thwaites from buying Liquorice Bootlaces” (Boy 31). Dahl goes even further in a passage in Roald Dahl’s Cookbook where he recalls his childhood experiences at sweetshops and alludes to Thwaites’s liquorice bootlace anecdote without referencing Boy. Here, he states Thwaites’s claims as mere fact: “There were sherbet-suckers and gobstoppers and liquorice bootlaces and aniseed balls and all the rest of them, and we did not mind that the liquorice was made from rat’s blood and the sherbet from sawdust (emphasis mine)” (Cookbook 150). Although this tongue-in-cheek statement is not meant to be taken

78 Dahl references the Pied Piper again in the development of the Child Catcher in the 1968 film, Chitty Chitty Bang Bang, which will be discussed later in this section.
seriously, it seems like an attempt on Dahl’s part to mythologise an element of his life and published work, transforming Thwaites’s claims from mere anecdote to urban legend.

Mrs Pratchett’s contamination of sweets and the urban legend of liquorice bootlaces made of rats’ blood in Boy are two important examples that highlight a long association between adulteration, sweets and the vulnerability of children. The association between unwholesomeness and sweets alluded to in Boy has its roots in confectionery scandals dating back to the early nineteenth century. During this period, it was not uncommon to find lead, brick dust, mercury and arsenic amongst other deadly filler ingredients in sweets (T. Richardson 302) in markets not unlike the fantastical one in Christina Rossetti’s “Goblin Market” (1862). Between 1900 and 1920, adulteration and accidental poisoning remained a regular occurrence in British society while some confectionery, including the aptly named chocolate Chump, released in the early twentieth century, was rumoured to be made from a mix of “‘grocers’ sweepings’—including soda, bits of soap, sawdust and candle wax” (Whittaker 30). Moreover, Whittaker also explains how many flavours advertised in sweets during this period were made of various chemicals and that “Pear flavour sounded especially dodgy [and was] synthesized apparently from rotten cheese mixed with sulphuric acid and bichromate of potash” (32). Thwaites’s father’s explained how “Every ratcatcher in the country […] takes his rats to the Liquorice Factory, and the manager pays tuppence for each rat” and that in fact, “Many a ratcatcher has become a millionaire by selling his dead rats to the Factory” (Boy 29). Although these statements are clearly meant to be humorous, and perhaps an effort by Thwaites’ father to inhibit consumption, it certainly links to what Whittaker refers to as the “glee [which] also attended persistent rumours of evil practices” (Whittaker 31). The liquorice bootlaces in Boy allude to food-related urban legends in which “Wicked witches had been usurped by crooked factory owners” (Whittaker 31).
Moreover, Thwaites’ father’s far-fetched explanation of the origins of liquorice bootlaces is similar to what Robin Croft refers to as a “theme of consumption outside the home [which] manifests itself in tales which parents commonly exchange, warning of the dangers of products and brands which children would typically consume away from supervision” (Croft 1057).

Dahl’s characterisations of the mysterious ratcatcher, Mrs Pratchett and the witches of his novel allude to anxieties about sweets’ consumption and also amount to something of a comment on anxieties about ‘stranger danger’ that were palpable in British society from the 1950s. Clapton et al. comments how:

‘Stranger danger’ has always been a public anxiety, despite the low incidence of child abduction and sexual abuse by strangers. In the 1950s, children were warned never to take sweets from a stranger and this took on a quasi-official status and even found its way into films of the time. That taking such sweets could lead to abduction was not generally well understood by children who would refuse a toffee offered by an old lady on the bus (206).

The connections between stranger danger and confectionery were articulated in dramatic terms in British films such as *Eight O’Clock Walk* (1954) and *Never Take Sweets from Strangers* (1960), both of which deal with the subject of child homicide whereby the villains use sweets to lure their child victims and both build on the classic German film *M* (1931) in which a paedophilic killer uses a balloon rather than sweets to lure his victims. In the 1960s, child serial killers Ian Brady and Myra Hindley’s grisly murders of five children sparked outrage, terror, and a heightened anxiety about child safety in Britain that would continue in subsequent decades. By the 1970s and 1980s, animated Public
Information Films (PIFs) produced in the UK, including *Charley Says* and scripted PIFs such as *Never Go with Strangers* (1971) and *Say No to Strangers* (1981) warned children against accepting sweets or other objects from unfamiliar persons.

Despite the narrator’s insistence that the witches in the novel are unlike witches in fairy tales who “always wear silly black hats and black cloaks, and they ride on broomsticks” and that the novel is about “REAL WITCHES” (*The Witches* 1), the narrative conforms to the witches’ association with stranger danger and the malevolent and harmful treatment of children in the popular imagination. There are plenty of examples of ‘stranger danger’ warnings in *The Witches* itself—for example, the grandmother tells the boy to examine carefully every woman he meets, and teaches him how to spot a witch. While most stranger danger panics relate to male attacks on children, *The Witches* warns children against the threat of women. The unnamed narrator is informed by his grandmother that the best way to identify a witch is to beware of women wearing gloves that may conceal “curvy claws” (18). The Grandmother also explains how witches are also always bald and wear “first-class wig[s]” (19) and they have “slightly larger nose-holes than ordinary people. The rim of each nose-hole is pink and curvy, like the rim of a certain kind of sea-shell” (20). Moreover, readers are informed how witches’ pupils constantly change colours and have fire and ice dancing in the middle of the pupil (22), they do not have toes (24) and their saliva is blue (25). In these examples, Dahl merges ‘stranger danger’ fears with folkloric imagery of the witches dating back to Early Modern England: as Uszkalo explains, “Physically, [the witch] was monstrous: her skin numbed, flesh extended into witch’s marks, bodies floated, eyes stopped shedding tears—all metamorphoses that might be undone through counter-magics (cutting, scratching, piercing, or killing the witch or the object she bewitched to break the magic’s hold)” (597-98). Uszkalo’s description conforms to Creed’s assessment of the witch as “a
familiar female monster” who “is invariably represented as an old, ugly crone who is capable of monstrous acts” (2). By indicating that the threats to children in *The Witches* are indeed actual witches (who, after they are unmasked, look like folkloric witches), Dahl is not dismissing the stranger danger panic at this time but is in fact, perpetuating such fears. Like the White Witch in *The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe* (1950), Mrs Coulter in Philip Pullman’s *His Dark Materials* (1995-2000) trilogy, and the witch in *Hansel and Gretel*, Dahl’s witches tempt children with food. Witches are often “cast as the embodiment of the bad breast—the devouring mother figure” (Daniel 117). In Dahl’s text, the unnamed protagonist’s position as an orphan in the care of his grandmother also places him in a vulnerable position and the “the phallocentric image of mother as witch/monstrous feminine” in the novel effectively emphasises his “psychological fear of abandonment (the bad breast) and desire for oneness” (Daniel 136).

Before *The Witches* Dahl also contributed to the representations of stranger danger in popular media. In 1968, Dahl collaborated with Ken Hughes in the film adaptation loosely based on Ian Fleming’s novel *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang* (1968). Ken Hughes claimed to have written most of the script, but Donald Sturrock insists that Hughes “was surely exaggerating” as “[Dahl’s] fingerprint is most apparent in the film’s most memorable character: the sinister ‘Child Catcher’” (436). The child catcher is important because his representation as one of the most frightening child abductors in cinematic history (“Childcatcher is scariest villain” BBC Online) reflects the fears about strangers and tainted sweets in post-war Britain. Sturrock goes further in his comparison of the Child Catcher to some of the most well-known villains in Dahl’s children’s texts:

79 Other representations of child abductions by imposter figures are found in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, in which the White Witch lures Edmund away from his family and in the kidnappings conducted by Mrs Coulter and the General Oblation Board in Philip Pullman’s *His Dark Materials* trilogy.
This spindly, long-nosed monster captures children in a cage baited with candy, sniffing them out in their hiding places with his extremely sensitive nose. He is Willy Wonka’s evil doppelganger, treading that line between the creepy and the comic that Dahl had already made distinctively his own. Aunts Sponge and Spiker had walked it already. Miss Trunchbull and the Grand High Witch would step along it two decades later. But the Child Catcher is perhaps the most terrifying of them all. With good reason, he is often described as one of the scariest characters ever to appear on screen (436).

The probability that it was Dahl who envisioned this villain indicates that he was well aware of the societal anxieties and paranoia associated with stranger danger at this time. Apart from his promises of free lollipops, chocolate, ice cream, cherry pies, cream puffs, treacle tarts, the child catcher rings a bell through the village streets to lure children away from their homes (Chitty Chitty Bang Bang). The child catcher’s bell-ringing is clearly reminiscent of the Pied Piper of Hamelin’s use of a magical pipe to lure rats and children away from Hamelin and at one point in the film the child catcher refers to the captured children as his “little mice” before they enter his coach (Chitty Chitty Bang Bang). Furthermore, the child catcher’s dancing and skipping movements through the village streets wearing a bright red and yellow coat aligns with Robert Browning’s Pied Piper—as Arnds notes, Browning’s Pied Piper’s “appearance, his kith and kin, his wandering lifestyle, his reluctance to partake in proper quotidian work, and his association with vermin are all reasons not “to pay this sum to a wandering fellow / with a gipsy coat of red and yellow!”” (66).
These villains, the witches and the Child Catcher, were created at a time in British history when paranoia about child safety and stranger danger was at the forefront of the popular imagination. By the 1970s and 1980s however, sweets adulteration was no longer closely associated with the confectioner or candy factory owners—instead, sweets adulteration became linked to acts of so-called Halloween Sadism. As Joel Best and Gerald Horiuchi explain, the Halloween Sadism phenomenon was characterised by “the widespread belief that anonymous sadists give children dangerous treats on Halloween” (488). Although the Halloween Sadism phenomenon originated in the United States, Philip Jenkins observes in his analysis of moral panics how, in Britain, “Even customs

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80 According to Best and Horiuchi, Halloween Sadism “can be viewed as an urban legend, which emerged during the early 1970s to give expression to growing fears about the safety of children, the danger of crime, and other sources of social strain” (488). Echoing Best and Horiuchi, Robin Croft remarks on how the Halloween Sadism phenomenon marred Halloween by associating trick-or-treating with “incidents of psychotic neighbours hiding razor blades and discarded hypodermic needles in candy” (1057).
like Halloween were adopted during the 1980s [and] with it familiar American legends of Halloween sadism” (220). Dahl perpetuates this kind of moral panic in his texts and in The Witches in particular. The fear of razor blades and needles in sweets in popular culture in the 1980s are exacerbated by what Honeyman identifies as “[a]n exaggerated reflection of this danger” in Dahl’s novel (“Halloween Lore” 96). While Dahl does not use specific examples associated with Halloween, his references to witches as those who contaminate and adulterate sweets propagate the alleged connections between sweets, stranger danger and the witch as a figure in folklore and urban legend.

Perhaps just as importantly, the publication of The Witches in 1983 coincided with intense anxiety surrounding witchcraft, the occult and the treatment of children that emerged in the 1980s. ‘Witch-hunts’ for those allegedly taking part in Satanic Ritual Abuse (SRA) against children took place around the world and caused so much concern that professional workshops providing diagnosis and treatment of SRA were held in the United States, Canada, England and Holland (Putnam 363). The alleged abuse of SRA victims included involvement in human sacrifice, torture, cannibalism, incest, and sex and death orgies (Putnam 363) and the search for the perpetrators of this abuse are now regarded as evidence of a modern-day witch hunt (Nathan 253). Books including Michelle Remembers (1980) which chronicled Michelle Smith’s ‘recollections’ of the purported SRA she experienced as a child, were widely popular and helped fuel the moral panic concerning SRA in countries around the world (Frankfurter 353). It is in this cultural context that The Witches’ connection to issues of stranger danger, Halloween sadism and SRA is strengthened: as James Curtis explains, during this period, the text “presents to readers the possibility that child-hatred is not some now-defunct phenomenon, but rather an extant danger in the historical present of childhood, a danger made ever more threatening by its ability to hide under a mask of benevolence” (166).
Here, *The Witches*, and I would argue *Boy* too, warns against the perceived dangers of sweetshops and sweets in the public sphere more generally while simultaneously implicitly encouraging children to consume sweets for the supposed thrill of dangerous confectionery consumption.

Representations of industrialised confectionery companies and the traditional British sweetshop examined in this chapter emphasise how the connections between Dahl’s fictionalised food-producing institutions and the practices of real-life confectionery firms and shops are used to nostalgise himself, his works, and confectionery marketed under the Willy Wonka moniker. The contradictory messages regarding overconsumption and sweets across Dahl’s fictional and non-fictional works reveal problematic views about the power dynamics between adults in children in both children’s literature and Dahl’s novels. This chapter also uncovered how Dahl’s didactic and subversive messages reinforce his authorial power while shedding light on the in-built contradictions in children’s literature. From the industrialised sweets production and manufacturing in *Chocolate Factory* to the distribution of confectionery in the traditional British sweet shop in *Boy* and *The Witches*, both sections in this chapter exemplified Dahl’s contradictory perspectives about the confectionery industry revealing his resolute attempts to maintain and strengthen the association between his public persona and sweets in order to further capitalise on his texts. The following chapter builds on the discussion in this chapter and examines food and the power dynamics between adults and children and Dahl’s authorial power in *The Twits*, *The BFG*, and *Matilda*. 
Chapter Three: Convenience Food

This chapter extends the discussion about junk food in the previous chapter and considers the representation of another junk food subcategory: convenience foods. The post-war years in Britain were characterised by rapid growth in the convenience food industry. As J.G. Davis noted in a 1963 article, “[s]ince 1945 there has been a major revolution in the food demands of the consumer in Britain” (77). Davis anticipated that by the mid-1960s, “Pre-packed foods, convenient for distribution and for the housewife … will soon constitute more than half the food sold in shops” (77). That Davis’s predictions came true is confirmed by Nicola Humble who explains that “[b]y the 1960s [convenience foods] were an accepted part of life for most people, embraced with an enthusiasm that may seem strange to us now” (197). In a 1963 study of the increase in convenience food consumption, John C. Abbott explained how, by 1960, “Convenience foods absorbed 18 to 19% of household expenditure on food by average income families in Britain” and “Complete frozen dinners and dehydrated meals are now on sale; and sliced bread and cheese, prepared sweets, jellies, custards, and instant puddings are becoming standard retail items” (20). In the post-war period, the British family’s increasing reliance on convenience food is indicative of many important and dramatic changes that occurred in British society and food culture. In Dahl’s children’s works, convenience foods are usually represented as ‘bad’ foods that disrupt traditional forms of food consumption in Britain.

This chapter examines how some of Dahl’s children’s works allude to critical perspectives on processed food and the convenience food industry more broadly. Convenience foods in Dahl’s texts are loaded with multiple meanings which reveal ideologically suspect messages about children’s food consumption and social control. The representation of mealtime mores, routine, and table manners are problematically used in
Dahl’s texts to judge and categorise people, distinguishing “good” characters as “orderly” eaters and “bad” characters as individuals who fail to conform to Dahl’s very specific standard about proper food consumption. Morality ‘lessons’ or come-uppance narratives about gluttony in Dahl’s texts emphasize the connections between convenience food and convenience-oriented eating habits (like snacking or ‘grazing’) with excess, greed, and impolite behaviour more generally. As Carolyn Daniel notes, “[f]ictional food is often used to discipline fictional children and literary meals (especially, in the British classics, teatime) are frequently used to carry both implicit and explicit socializing messages to readers” (39).

This chapter focuses on how food, and convenience food in particular, functions as a powerful tool for expressing socializing messages to children in Dahl’s texts, and examines criticisms of the convenience food industry’s impact on socialization, health, and the culinary landscape in British society as represented in Dahl’s children’s works. The complicated relationship between food, power, and ideology in Dahl’s children’s fiction is perhaps best understood with the idea that “ideology is an inevitable, untameable and largely uncontrollable factor in the transaction between books and children, and that it is so because of the multiplicity and diversity of both ‘book’ and ‘child’ and of the social world in which each of these seductive abstractions takes a plenitude of individual forms” (Hollindale, “Ideology”, 27) in mind. Here, Peter Hollindale’s assertion of the inevitability of ideology in children’s fiction can be applied to Dahl’s texts, in which the author’s ideological positions about food, routine, and who feeds whom certainly inform the text. What is problematic, but worth examining, about Dahl’s texts is that his priority does not seem to be to orient children towards understanding ideologies, but merely to promote his own moralistic agenda. As Hollindale explains, “Our priority in the world of children’s books should not to be to
promote ideology but to understand it, and find ways of helping others to understand it, including the children themselves” (Hollindale, “Ideology”, 27). In Dahl’s texts, the author’s ideology is often promoted but rarely explored in a way that invites and encourages understanding. What complicates Dahl’s ideological positions even further is that many of these positions are contradictory across Dahl’s oeuvre. Dahl’s perspectives on food, power, and control, however, are perhaps some of the most important and useful concepts that highlight Dahl’s contradictory views, and are effective in understanding how ideology functions in his works. This chapter analyses how the often negative representation of convenience foods, as contrary to the symbolic sense of ‘order’ represented through table manners, routine, and etiquette in Dahl’s texts are part of a long tradition in children’s literature of dispensing messages of social control. The texts analysed in this chapter, *The Twits* (1980), *The BFG* (1982), and *Matilda* (1988), feature numerous representations of food consumption and food rituals framed by Dahl’s sense of “orderly” and “disorderly” eating. Dahl uses ritual as an antidote to disorder, revealing an ideological perspective of ritual that “recognises the potency of disorder” (Douglas 94). This chapter also examines how the negative representation of convenience foods in his texts and Dahl’s own strict personal routines and mealtime regimens reveal both the importance of control in his own life and informed the didacticism in his fictional and non-literary works.

For the purposes of this chapter, it is important to first outline a clear definition of ‘convenience foods’. Food writer Tom Jaine defines convenience foods as “foods [that are] ready or almost ready to use such as the whole range of store sauces and ketchups as well as those starch-based powders that begin with custard and end with instant whips and cake mixes” (215). Jaine also explains how convenience foods are primarily produced and manufactured using a number of food-preserving technologies including canning and
freezing (215). In the 1920s, “Processed foods became staples for busy households, and even those who liked to cook kept an ‘emergency’ corner filled with bottled olives and gherkins, bouillon cubes, bottled fish, meat and grated Parmesan in case of unexpected visitors” (Colquhoun 324). James Johnston explains how, in 1926, the food manufacturing firm Smedleys “introduced the first fully automatic, high-speed pea-canning plant into Britain […] Within a short time British canners were turning out the first tinned British fruits and vegetables to compete with imported varieties” (Johnston 56). 81

These foods became associated with the notion of a “constant state of preparedness” during the Second World War and in the decades subsequent to the War this attitude was retained in Britain. Although convenience foods or foods manufactured with various preserving technologies such as dehydrating, canning, jarring or freezing, had been used increasingly during the First World War, it was not until the Second World War that convenience foods were introduced into the wider British market. 82 By the 1950s, convenience foods were being gradually embraced by families and seen as useful products that made household management more efficient. As Warren Belasco explains, “[a]nxious to get kids off to school efficiently […] parents bribed children with something sweet [such as sweetened breakfast cereal]” (Appetite for Change 223). In post-war Britain sales of tinned meat and canned vegetables more than doubled and by

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81 Johnston notes how, “It has been estimated that between 1920 and 1938 the consumption of canned vegetables in Britain rose from just over 1 lb per head to 9½ lb per head, that of canned fruits from 2½ lb to 9¾ lb per head, while the consumption of fish in tinned form doubled over the same period to stand at just under 4 lb per head in 1938” (57).

82 In the United States, many of the technologies used to produce and manufacture instant and convenience foods can be traced to the military: as Laura Shapiro explains “[s]ome of the new foods eagerly sent to market right after the war were, in fact, field rations” (Shapiro 8) while Lorna Piatti-Farnell asserts that military science in World War II inspired many changes in the technological aspects of food production (“At My Cooking I Feel it Looking”, 200). Although both Shapiro and Piatti-Farnell describe the emergence of the convenience food industry within an American context, the growing British convenience food industry that emerged after the Second World War was greatly influenced by the changes in United States food culture during this period.
the end of the decade, canned fruit and soups also doubled in sales (Hollingsworth 27).

Convenience foods are ‘convenient’ because they are sold as foods that are pre-prepared to varying degrees, depending on whether they are intended to be consumed as a full meal or as an addition to a meal, in order to help ‘save time’ for the consumer. For Carrigan et al., convenience food “includes any fully or partially prepared food in which a significant element of the skill or energy involved is taken out of the kitchen and into the marketplace” (“Managing routine food choices” 373). It is important to note that not all home cooks or food writers in the post-war period embraced convenience foods wholeheartedly in everyday cooking. Humble cites cook Peter Pirbright’s 1946 publication, Off the Beeton Track, a play on the title of Isabella Beeton’s highly influential domestic handbook, Mrs Beeton’s Book of Household Management (1861), as “setting out to reform” the post-war culinary landscape of Britain, particularly the home cook’s increasing dependence on convenience food (119). She notes how Pirbright “is firm in his opposition to convenience foods” (119-20) and explains that “[h]is is one of the earliest voices raised in outcry against the post-war boom in industrially produced food” (120). At the same time, not long after this period, convenience foods were being advertised more boldly and brashly and, as Bee Wilson highlights, these foods soon “lost their inferiority complex in relation to unprocessed food” (228). Although convenience food is not accepted as “legitimate” food, as evidenced in texts such as Matilda, Roald Dahl’s Cookbook, and My Year, it is clear that Dahl was certainly aware that these foods were becoming increasingly incorporated into the British diet and in British households. I would argue that analysing the representation of convenience foods in Dahl’s novels allows readers and critics to gain a deeper understanding and greater insight into how power and control functions in his texts. Convenience foods are often represented as the chosen food of disorderly people such as Mr Twit and Mr and Mrs Wormwood—what is
problematic is that Dahl essentialises these characters, drawing connections between convenience food and out-of-control appetites largely informed by his own prejudices.

There are many competing perspectives in studies of convenience foods and their impact on health and socialisation in British society during the time Dahl was writing and his work alludes to these debates about convenience food’s function in British food culture in the latter half of the twentieth century. It was during this period that convenience foods were seen as on the one hand, useful foods that help maintain everyday meal structures within the family. In an article from 1961 Dorothy Hollingsworth acknowledges how “On present evidence it seems safe to conclude that the choice of food may also be influenced by such additional factors as lack of time and inclination to cook and ready availability of a wide choice of foods in supermarkets, which are likely to favour the trend towards increased consumption of precooked and other processed foods” (29-30). In 1970, British scientist Magnus Pyke claimed that convenience foods were “the prime achievement of food technologists, [though they] have up till the present still been designed as components of meals”, and noted approvingly how “Frozen and dehydrated peas, mashed potato powder and ‘instant’ porridge save the housewife from the trouble and waste involved in shelling fresh peas, peeling potatoes and cooking them, and from the laborious business of putting porridge to cook in a double saucepan overnight” (32). On the other hand, there were persistent fears articulated about both the short-term and long-term effects of convenience foods on the socialization of families and, more specifically, children. In the decades after convenience food’s entrance in the British market, it became viewed increasingly as food that could potentially break down or threaten everyday meal routines within the home, and as an “illegitimate” food that was “seen to lack the care that produces ‘proper’ foods” (Ashley et al. 134).
By the early 1980s, the association between convenience food and ‘illegitimate’ food was reinforced. At the time, Maurice Hanssen was critical of the convenience food industry, referring to convenience foods such as dehydrated mash potatoes, cheesecake mix, coffee flavour, canned peas and jams as “unnecessarily synthetic” (34). Dahl too considered convenience foods ‘illegitimate’ and worried that these foods would ruin children’s palates and sense of taste: in a deeply revealing quotation from Cookbook, Dahl laments,

Young children have untrained and rather vulgar palates and, as the makers of baked beans and vegetable-oil ice cream have long since discovered, they prefer bland-tasting food to any other. When they grow up, these unfortunates shy away from subtle flavours and are perfectly happy in a world where all foods taste alike. That is why they smother their meat or fish either with tomato ketchup or with one of those bottles of brown sauce that grace the tables of so many of our cafes (86).

While this passage certainly reflects the sentiment of critics such as Hanssen during this period, it also highlights Dahl’s fixation on issues of control in relation to food consumption. For Dahl, convenience foods could potentially influence a child’s palate in such a way that they end up preferring processed food over natural food prepared in traditional ways. Here, Dahl is clearly concerned that a preference for convenience and processed food would prevent children from appreciating not only subtle flavours but also the wide range of tastes and textures that food in the natural world brings. At the same time however, this passage, not unlike many in Dahl’s fictional works such as Chocolate Factory that disparage greed and overconsumption, highlights “the qualities Dahl apparently appreciates in a child: civilised manners, frugality, and, most importantly, restraint and control” (Daniel 188). Dahl’s extreme and often polarised representation of
characters who lack self-control are problematic because they conform to prejudiced and ideologically sinister assumptions separating “orderly” eaters as definitively “good” and “disorderly” eaters as definitively “bad”.

Dahl expressed his concerns about child obesity and his notions of disorderly consumption with characterisations of gluttonous children including *Chocolate Factory*’s Augustus Gloop, *The Witches*’ Bruno Jenkins and *Matilda*’s Bruce Bogtrotter and overweight adult antagonists Mrs Wormwood and Victor Hazell. It is difficult not to read the unflattering and usually rather crude representations of people who are overweight in Dahl’s children’s texts as symptomatic of a society struggling with changing food consumption in this period, though also revealing of deeply held prejudices by the author himself. While the connection between obesity and convenience food is not made in these earlier accounts, Dahl’s prejudices against overweight people are worth examining because they were maintained throughout his entire life and became directly related to his perspectives on convenience foods in later life and works. Dahl’s representation of overweight people as individuals with out-of-control appetites reveal not only his own deeply held prejudices but also his fixation on issues related to social control, particularly at mealtimes. Dahl’s prejudices can be traced back to letters he wrote to his family while he was attending Repton School. In a letter written to his mother in 1929, Dahl recalled a football match between the staff and teachers at Repton. In this letter, Dahl described a man called Pople as having “the largest belly in the West of England” and complained how, when Pople got the ball, his “paunch being so great in front, and his bottom not sticking out enough to balance him”, he fell forward and what followed was a “squelching sound, for the wretched Pople had fallen with all his weight on his profuse pot-belly! He got up, or rather bounced up to the great amusement of the whole school
just the same, except for a slight flattening of the abdomen!” (Letter to Sofie Magdalene, 12/15/29; RDMSC RD 13/1/5/17/1-2).

In another letter, Dahl describes an overweight master called Crummers as a “fat master” who was teaching his daughter how to skate when the ice beneath them cracked and they both fell through (Letter to Sofie Magdalene, 1/29/33; RDMSC RD 13/1/8/22;). Dahl’s fascination with other people’s weight continued when he moved to Africa and he was able to recall the precise weight of four other men in a letter written to his mother: “There was Stanley Mule, Editor of Tanganyika Standard, weight 19 ¼ stone. Fatty Pearson, aviator at Brighton with Louis weight 18 ½ stone, Gordon Duff of Tanganyika Landing and Shipping weight 17 stone and Sandy Morrison, the local solicitor weight a mere 15 ½ stone” (Letter to Sofie Magdalene, 6/5/39; RDMSC RD 14/3/40/16/5/39). It is difficult to read this letter without wondering to what extent this information was shared willingly with Dahl or whether Dahl had to do a great deal of probing and inquiring to collect these rather personal details. That Dahl felt it was worth mentioning such detail in a letter to his mother reveals a rather obsessive fixation on weight—as we will uncover later on in this chapter, there are certainly parallels with the problematic ways in which Dahl scrutinized other people’s bodies and the vivid and grotesque descriptions of “disorderly” characters in his texts.

By comparison, Dahl informs his mother how his housemate at the time, George Rybot, weighed “9 stone dead!” (Letter to his Mother, 6/5/39; RDMSC RD 14/3/40/1). Dahl prided himself on his ‘thinness’, telling his mother that he was coping well with the heat in Africa, “I don’t feel the heat much—probably because I’m thin” (Letter to Sofie Magdalene, 10/6/38; RDMSC RD 14/3/5/1). In another letter, Dahl enquires about his sister Else’s diet because he thinks “it would be a good thing to follow it in a modified way out here because you get awfully lax in the heat and mustn’t eat too much”, but

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qualifies his inquiry by assuring his family, “not that I’m getting fat—far from it, I’m thin as an old garden rake” (Letter to his family, 12/21/38; RDMSC RD 14/3/17/4). After he receives Else’s diet sheet, he complains that it’s “too bloody strict”: “bugger it anyway … [I’m]not fat” (Letter to Sofie Magdalene, Between 9 January and 22 January 1939; RDMSC RD 14/3/19/12). Six months later, Dahl responds approvingly of his sister Else who “certainly seems to have lost a packet of weight” as noticed from pictures his family sent him in the post (Letter to Asta, 6/16/39; RDMSC RD 14/3/42/1). It is clear from these letters that matters of ‘fatness’ and ‘thinness’ weighed heavily on Dahl’s mind.

In later years, Dahl would continue to be fixated on matters related to body weight and food consumption. Over time, he identified the connection between inactivity, obesity and the overconsumption of convenience foods and food more generally in many of his later works. In his posthumous autobiographical publication, My Year, Dahl documented seasonal events and a lifetime of memories for each month in the last year of his life. Dahl lived in Gipsy House in Great Missenden from 1954 onwards and My Year provides important insights into both the everyday rhythms and seasonal routines in Great Missenden during this period of Dahl’s life. In this text, Dahl described the apple, pear, cherry and plum trees on his estate and how for several decades the Dahls invited children to come and pick fruit at their home (My Year 51). Dahl lamented how despite the fact that many of the fruit trees growing at Great Missenden still bore plenty of fruit, “no children come any more asking to pick” and “They haven’t come for the past ten or fifteen years” (51). Writing shortly before his death in 1990, Dahl explained in My Year how

Recently, I met a bunch of boys in the lane coming back from school and asked them if they would like to go up the trees and get a basketful of apples. They shook their heads and said, ‘Naaw.’ What has happened to
these children? I believe they have too much pocket money and prefer to buy crisps and Coke in the shops rather than climb trees for apples. I find this infinitely sad. Boys should want to climb trees. They should want to build tree-houses. They should want to pick apples. Maybe all the crisps and the Coke and the junk food they consume nowadays has made them sluggish (51-52).

Dahl’s frustration with the children’s apathetic responses to fruit-picking as well as his view that this apathy stems from the consumption of junk food is revealing of his frustrations about the eating habits of future generations. This passage also strongly expresses Dahl’s disappointment at the youths’ increasing uninterest in apple-picking, harvesting and the natural world and all the food it has to offer. Here, Dahl is lamenting a significant loss and we are given a glimpse of his earnest concerns over the state of British food culture. Clearly, Dahl is concerned that as children develop tastes for novel convenience food, other food traditions will be lost and forgotten, and the impact on their health will be great. At the same time, however, this particular passage reveals a great deal about Dahl’s prejudices towards people that consume convenience foods. The fact that the children do not respond to his apple-picking offer in a complete sentence, let alone an actual word (“Naaw”), suggests that Dahl is certainly making a problematic correlation between sluggishness, convenience foods, and ignorance as well. As we will uncover later on in this chapter, Dahl’s prejudices about food and identity largely inform the way in which characters are represented in his novels and that his didacticism and at times, thinly veiled subversive messages, encourage a narrow and judgemental perspective about convenience food consumption and identity.

It is worth noting that Dahl’s didactic messages, critical of greed and excessive consumption of sweets in particular, as explored in the previous chapter, are complicated
by Dahl’s push for real-life confectionery firms to manufacture and market sweets under the Wonka brand. Similarly, the disdain for the takeaway and ready meals consumed by the Wormwood family in *Matilda* (which will be explored further in the second section of this chapter) contrast with the Dahl estate’s recent partnership with McDonald’s. Although Dahl certainly cannot be held accountable for this particular development, I would argue that the partnership is part of a persistent effort by the managers of Dahl’s estate to commercialise Dahl’s works as much as possible. Alison Flood explains how, in a 2015 collaboration between the Dahl estate and McDonald’s, the fast-food giant gave away millions of Dahl’s children’s books in McDonald’s Happy Meals across the UK. Flood quotes Abigail Moss, deputy director of the National Literacy Trust, who believes the partnership is effectively “reaching out on to the high street, where the families are” and who believes that “The scale of the campaign will reach millions of children, including many who haven’t owned a book before, inspiring them to enjoy reading and improving their life chances” (Flood, “Roald Dahl book to be given away”). Similar partnerships between McDonald’s and other authors and publishers are not without controversy: health advocacy groups in Australia have criticised such partnerships as a means of “encouraging children to consume fast food in order to collect the books included in the campaign” (Flood, “Roald Dahl book to be given away”. 83 While the partnership between the Dahl estate and McDonald’s appears to be one that promotes child literacy, it is difficult not to interpret this partnership as one that places both parties’ commercial interests above and beyond any concerns about literacy, especially given the Dahl estate’s determined commercial pursuits in the confectionery industry through a partnership with international conglomerate Nestlé and through the general expansion of

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83 The McDonald’s partnership with the Dahl estate is not the first of its kind. Since the 1980s, fast food chains have been partnering with schools and literacy agencies to encourage children to read. Pizza Hut’s “Book It” program began in the United States in 1984 and continues today, while Jane Levine notes how, by the 1990s, Pizza Hut, Domino’s Pizza, Taco Bell and McDonald’s partnered with elementary schools across the United States in reading incentive programs (290-91).
the Dahl franchise through filmic and theatrical adaptations as examined in the previous chapter.

This chapter explores how fears and apprehensions about the state of the post-war British food world are woven throughout Dahl’s fictional and non-fictional works for children in ideologically suspect ways. During this period, convenience food became increasingly marketed towards children, and I would argue that there are recurring messages throughout Dahl’s works for children intended to show his readers how to navigate this changing food world. Dahl’s texts address the attitudes pertaining to disorderly eating within a late-twentieth century context. The first section in this chapter considers how Dahl’s texts comment on the effect of convenience food on the transformations and changes in attitudes towards time management, routine and the ‘proper’ meal, specifically, the ‘proper’ English breakfast. This section will specifically examine Dahl’s autobiographical accounts *Boy* and *Going Solo*, as well as the didactic messages in novels such as *The Twits* and *The BFG*. The representation of mealtimes, table manners, and routine in these texts often translate into anxieties about eroding mealtime routines which also reveal Dahl’s problematic and contradictory attitudes about power and control.

The second section focuses on *Matilda* and also briefly examines the representation of a traditional English breakfast eaten in what is represented in the text as the *wrong* way. Perhaps most importantly, this section examines the contradictions related to the power dynamics between men and women in relation to convenience foods and cooking in the home more generally, and the power dynamics between adults and children in relation to overconsumption. This section also examines the effects of convenience food on the notion of the proper meal, specifically, proper dinners, and everyday consumption within the home. It is, perhaps, important to explain here why this
chapter does not include a section that focuses on the ‘proper’ lunch. Not only is the
midday meal under-represented in Dahl’s children’s texts but it is not typically viewed as
an important ‘family meal’ during the work week of most families—parental control is
limited during the midday meal as it is typically consumed away from home and not
under parental supervision. As Charles and Kerr note, “we are all familiar with a ‘cooked
breakfast’ consisting of bacon, eggs and so on, which is this meal in its most proper form”
while the re-heating of food that typically constitutes lunch (and not breakfast or dinner)
“is not classed as cooking” (19). Charles and Kerr also point out that “lunch and tea,
when they are non-main meals may be ‘prepared’ but they are unlikely to be cooked” and
therefore not typically defined as proper meals (Charles and Kerr 19). Mealtime mores
are traditionally outlined in British children’s texts and Dahl’s texts are no exception.
Dahl’s novels differ however in that they challenge and question whether or not the new
food technologies and developments of post-war food culture are truly beneficial in terms
of time, efficiency, and health to families, and more specifically, children, in the long
term. More importantly, Dahl’s comments on these changes function as attempts to
didactize, and can be interpreted as a somewhat sinister attempt to control children,
particularly when it comes to matters at table. In this way, Dahl’s texts do not differ a
great deal from other didactic children’s works, however, Dahl’s novels are unique in that
they are among the earliest in the twentieth century that didactize about convenience
foods in relation to gluttony and overconsumption. The following sections explore how
Dahl’s anxieties about the state of mealtime routines, table manners, and the increasing
consumption of convenience foods reveal problematic attitudes about power and control
in his texts.
3.1 Routinized Meals, Snacking, Class, and the ‘Proper’ English Breakfast

This section explores convenience food consumption in relation to notions of routine in Dahl’s autobiographical Boy and Going Solo, snacking in The Twits and the ‘proper’ English breakfast in The BFG. This section examines the relationship between everyday routinized meal structures and how convenience foods, originally intended to function as a time-saving food or a food that helped maintain routine for busy people, can deviate into a food that actually undermines these routines and meal structures. The examples in these texts will highlight the importance and significance of routine throughout Dahl’s life, even during periods in the late twentieth century when the routinization and clearly defined mealtime rituals were in decline within British society.

Before I examine exactly how convenience foods help individuals and families supposedly ‘save’ time within the context of Dahl’s children’s works, it is important to first consider the significance of routine and the three-meal structure within British society and in relation to Dahl’s narratives. The three-meal structure has been adopted as an acceptable eating pattern in Britain since the eighteenth century (Oddy, From Plain Fare 4). Since then, as Gilly Lehmann notes, breakfast and lunch were consumed at 9 or 10 in the morning and 1 in the afternoon, respectively, and the dinner hour shifted considerably from late in the evening until 6 or 7 in the evening from the nineteenth century onwards (503). The three-meal structure is part of what Lehmann considers to be a “daily rhythm […] patterned by the week, with its seasonal and ritual variations”, commenting that these meals have their own patterns as well, with food being “consumed in an ‘appropriate’ order” (503). Of course, the notion of an “appropriate” order to consume food is quite subjective and is defined differently depending on socio-historical and cultural contexts—for the purposes of this study, it is important to clarify that in Britain, appropriate, everyday food consumption takes place in the form of a “three-meal”
structure. Daily routines and the notion of structured meals were certainly of vital importance to Dahl: while convenience food becomes gradually accepted as helpful aids to maintaining daily mealtime rituals, Dahl’s works undermine this acceptance, stressing that these foods are harmful promoters of overeating and dismantlers of proper, scheduled and regimented mealtimes.

Meals are perhaps one of the earliest daily ‘events’ that teach children about scheduling, time and routine and how to balance meals with everyday tasks, activities, work and play. In this way, routinised meals are indeed the building blocks of quotidian life. Meals are used to socialize or in more extreme cases, control children—to teach them about manners, etiquette, social interaction and engagement with others. As Wendy Katz notes, “The practice of using meals as a measure of the child’s adjustment to the social order, the child’s observance of social requirements, is especially pronounced in English children’s literature” (193). Historically, meals represented in children’s literature helped to teach young readers about the principles that govern meal structures (among other things) in both explicit and implicit ways (Daniel 39). While it can be argued that the representation of meals in children’s literature is often used as an important guideline to teach children about social order, boundaries, and the rhythms of daily life and to prepare them for the prospective roles and responsibilities they will take on as adults, these examples also reveal a great deal about the complicated power dynamics that exist between adults and children. It is, after all, adults who write most children’s novels and it is usually adults who prepare meals for children. Social anthropologist Carole Counihan explains how adults’ “control of what and how much [food] is available, their efforts to make children eat what they do not want, their ability to reward with or withhold food, and their use of food as emotional power” (Counihan Anthropology 122) are all factors that enable adults to exercise power and control over children through food.
While it is not unusual for people and writers in particular to structure everyday life through a series of regimented routines, Dahl’s own routines were particularly well-documented and Dahl himself often expressed the pleasure he derived from the very structured quotidian rhythms in his life. From a young age, Dahl was accustomed to strict everyday routines while attending boarding schools. Even when he began working for Shell before the Second World War he kept an exacting daily routine which he recalled with much fondness in *My Year* and *Boy*. In *My Year*, Dahl describes how he commuted from Kent to London by train and how “absolute punctuality was demanded” of him and his co-workers, any lateness resulting in staff members being reported to office directors. Dahl describes how he would have breakfast at precisely 7.45 a.m. for six days a week and board the 8.15 a.m. train to London (*Boy* 170), and would go to a pub for pork pie and beer at lunchtime (*My Year* 6), and comments that he always “found it easy to fall into [a] pattern” (*Boy* 170). From these examples it is clear that Dahl was concerned about the rhythms of everyday life, a fascination and satisfaction with routine, but also something of an obsession with control and a very specific and subjective sense of “order”, that continued when he was later transferred to a post for Shell in Africa.

In *Going Solo* (1986), Dahl recalls the breakfast he was served daily in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, and uses terms such as “never” and “always” to describe these breakfasts in, perhaps, an exaggerated attempt to emphasise the consistency and even rigidity of his daily routine:

Breakfast in Dar es Salaam never varied. It was always a delicious ripe pawpaw picked that morning in the garden by the cook, on to which was squeezed the juice of a whole fresh lime. Just about every white man and woman in Tanganyika had pawpaw and lime juice for breakfast, and I
believe those old colonials knew what was good for them. It is the healthiest and most refreshing breakfast I know (51).

In a letter from 4 December 1939, and reproduced in *Going Solo*, Dahl explains his daily routine with the RAF, noting how “[W]e wake at 5.30 a.m., drill before breakfast till 7 a.m., fly and attend lectures till 12.30. 12.30/1.30 lunch-1.30 to 6.00 p.m. flying and lectures” (84). While other fighters would have certainly experienced similar or identical routines, Dahl notably maintained and endorsed similar routines later on in life and throughout his career as a full-time writer. When Dahl eventually married actress Patricia Neal and moved into Gipsy House at Great Missenden in 1954, Dahl’s biographer, Sturrock notes how Dahl “loved Gipsy House and his routine” adding that he “liked the regularity of life at Gipsy House” (474). Dahl’s daughter Lucy Dahl attests that her father “always went to his hut from 10 A.M. to 12:30 P.M. and then again from 3 P.M. to 5:30 P.M. every day, including weekends” (L. Dahl 7). Although Dahl’s routines have been well-documented, there is a discrepancy between his working hours across different sources. Lucy’s Dahl’s claim contrasts slightly with information listed in several of the Puffin editions of his novels titled “A Day in the Life of Roald Dahl”:

Roald Dahl had a very strict daily routine. He would eat breakfast in bed and open his post. At 10.30 a.m. he would walk through his garden to his writing hut and work until 12 p.m. when he went back to the house for lunch—typically, a gin and tonic followed by Norwegian prawns with mayonnaise and lettuce. At the end of every meal, Roald and his family had a chocolate bar chosen from a red plastic box. After a snooze, he would take a flask of tea back to the writing hut and work from 4 p.m. till 6 p.m. He would be back at the house at exactly six o’clock, ready for his dinner (*The Twits* 92; *The BFG* 206).
While these examples detail the meal structures and routine in Dahl’s daily life, they also, more importantly highlight Dahl’s interest in maintaining these routines right down to the minutest of details. It is worth mentioning that although Dahl prided himself on carrying out his daily tasks in a highly regimented routine, he was in fact, able to do so largely with the help of nannies early on in his career. Between 1958 and 1962, Dahl’s family relied on the help of a nanny called Susan Denson for over four years, followed by a Scottish woman called Sheena Burt (Sturrock 428; 405). While the exact dates are unclear, what is certain is that during Dahl’s marriage to Felicity Dahl from 1983 until the author’s death in 1990, the family relied on personal chef Marwood Yeatman, as well as a team of cooks, gardeners, and housekeepers to keep Gipsy House running (Cookbook 14). Dahl’s pride in his routine reveals a great deal about his lack of self-perception—his ability to maintain such strict routine has less, of course, to do with any innate ability he possesses but the many resources (to which most people do not have access) at his disposal.

It is worth noting here that Dahl’s interest in routine and more specifically, control, can be traced back to his fascination with routine mastication and digestive processes from a young age. Not only was Dahl interested in maintaining a daily work routine and routinized consumption, but he was also fascinated by natural rhythms related to the means and course of bodily absorption. In fact, he was so intrigued by the entire process of digestion that Sturrock notes how, when Dahl, in his twenties, was working in Africa, he “was profoundly concerned about the frequency and quality of his bowel movements, and his letters home [were] full of scatological details and jokes about urination, enemas, and the regularity or irregularity of his motions” (106). From Dahl’s interviews, biographical, non-fictional texts, and perhaps most revealingly, in his personal letters, it is clear that he adhered to very strict routines related to the entire process of
cooking, eating, and digestion. When Dahl was attending Repton School, he would often send letters to his family which featured numerous jokes and anecdotes about digestion. In a letter addressed to Dahl’s mother, Alf, Else and Asta (but particularly Alf—Dahl makes a little squiggle to Alf’s name indicating that the letter is a response to Alf’s letter), Dahl asks his siblings to,

tell [Mama] the joke about the person who had had all teeth out and couldn’t be fed through the mouth. So the Doctor said, I’ll have to feed you with a tube through your anus—what would you like for your first meal? A cup of tea please doctor—Right, here goes. Hi, stop doctor, stop—what’s the matter, what’s the matter, is it too hot? No, there’s too much sugar in it (Letter to his family, 11/25/38; RDMSC RD 14/3/13).

Here, Dahl finds the topsy-turvy reversal of digestion particularly amusing and one can see the similarities between this joke and the sections on frobscottle and whizzpoppers in The BFG.

Although this anecdote can be interpreted simply as a humorous joke shared between Dahl and his family, it also sheds light on Dahl’s lifelong fascination with digestive control—a fascination which found its way into some of Dahl’s novels, including The BFG. When readers first learn that Frobscottle, a fizzy drink in Giant Country is known to induce “whizzpopping” or farting (56), Sophie and the BFG proceed to discuss whether whizzpopping is a particularly deviant act. The BFG explains that whizzpopping in fact, is not deviant at all as “giants is making whizzpoppers all the time! Whizzpopping is a sign of happiness. It is music in our ears!” (59). While there appears to be a contradiction between anarchy and control in this sequence, and although this sequence can be interpreted as rather subversive, where Dahl undermines conventional
British notions of manners and etiquette, I would argue that it in fact contains a rather implicit didactic message about digestive control. Up until this point in the novel, the BFG has not yet whizzpopped, but the first instance in which he does is preceded by plenty of warning in a detailed description of the BFG taking a “tremendous gurgling swig” of frobscottle (60). In this instance, whizzpopping is represented as perfectly acceptable because it occurs in a controlled way. Moreover, because burping, as opposed to farting, is regarded as “filthsome” in Giant country and given that “giants is never doing it” (59), the ‘subversion’ of conventional British manners is quite contained: although the rules pertaining to bodily functions in Giant country are contrary to conventional British rules, the BFG is able to conform to a specific set of rules related to etiquette, emphasising his representation as an idealised foreigner.

While the whizzpopping sequence at Buckingham palace seems, at least initially, contradictory to Dahl’s positive emphasis on orderly behaviour (the Butler Tibbs’ commitment to maintaining decorum, as will be explored later on in this section): the BFG explains during breakfast how, if there isn’t any frobscottle at the Palace, he is still perfectly capable of whizzpopping if he tries “hard enough” (163). When the Queen misinterprets “whizzpopping” as another word for “making music”, she insists that the BFG “play something” which the BFG interprets as an invitation to whizzpop which he proceeds to do (164). Although the BFG is aware that whizzpopping is strictly forbidden in public outside of Giant Country, this particular sequence demonstrates that the BFG’s behaviour is somewhat acceptable given that it is carried out by invitation, on cue, and with deliberate control.

The BFG’s control over his bodily functions is represented as commendable, which is perhaps unsurprising given Dahl’s own obsession with controlling his bodily
functions through a variety of exercises designed to maintain digestive routines. Dahl sought out order and control in matters often associated with involuntary bodily reactions, including digestive processes. In Dahl’s letters, routine and square meals are seen as preventative of digestive problems, while snacking on processed or semi-natural food is perceived to exacerbate digestive issues. For Dahl, routine meals and snacking are presented as binary concepts with the former allowing consumers to gain more control over food’s regulatory effects on their bodies while the latter is associated with convenience foods that are not only deterrents to proper routines but also lead to problematically unpredictable effects on the human body. Dahl sought out what anthropologist Mary Douglas refers to as “[I]deas about separating, purifying, demarcating and punishing transgressions” which “function to impose system on an inherently untidy experience” (Douglas 4). In another letter to his mother, Dahl thanks her for sending Frederick Arthur Hornibook’s book *Culture of the Abdomen: The Cure of Obesity and Constipation* (1924): Dahl appreciatively responds, “Thanks awfully for Hornibrook, George Rybot and I are both going to start it; as a matter of fact I started it 2 or 3 days ago and it made me so constipated that I gave it up. But that must have been coincidence, because you can feel it churning up your tummy” (Letter to Sofie Magdalene, 1/27/1939; RDMSC RD 14/3/20/1). By this time, Hornibrook and “Horniblow”, a play on Hornibrook’s last name, had become buzzwords for matters pertaining to digestion in...
Dahl’s house: “Old Hornibrook is a byword [sic] in the House now: if Anyone farts its always “and Hornibrook to you”” (Letter to Sofie Magdalene, 1/27/1939; RDMSC RD 14/3/20/1).

Hornibrook appealed not only to Dahl and his peers during this time but was very popular amongst the British public. Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska describes how Hornibrook’s text caused quite a sensation in the first half of the twentieth century in Britain: *Culture of the Abdomen* “went through eighteen editions and remained in print until the early 1960s [and] was the most successful popular reducing manual published in Britain in the first half of the twentieth century” (239). In a letter dated two months after Dahl began reading Hornibrook’s text, he explains how he and his housemates “all do Horniblow now every morning” and it leaves Dahl, his housemates George and Panny “sprawling over the floor of my bedroom, groaning, panting and sweating and cursing the old Proffesor [sic]. But I think its [sic] doing me lots of good” (Letter to Sofie Magdalene, 3/5/1939; RDMSC RD 14/3/27/7). If there was a disruption in his “Hornibrook” or digestive routine, this indicated to Dahl that something was amiss in his body. Dahl’s impressions of his overall health were largely dependent on the effects his diet had on his bowel movements. If something was amiss with his stool or if he was constipated, then he tended to trace the cause back to a meal consumed earlier: Dahl was deeply fascinated with what he ate and often pondered about the overall effects chewing had on his digestion. In another letter to his mother, he explained how:

But I’m wondering, I haven’t finished with my constipation yet. I really know, in fact I’m going today to get some nice extra teeth made because that’s all it is and I refuse to chew rabbit-like in public as Bill Blakely does, so the result is that I don’t chew very much. I pride myself that I can take and pass it through my system and out the other side, whence it will
emerge whole and untouched, still a perfectly good pea in every sense of the word—except that it may have got a little scratched on the rock-like decomposed organic matter in my lower intestine. Now men have become famous for performing feats far less extraordinary than that—Have you ever known anyone else who could pass a pea through themselves whole? No—I hope the fact will be recorded in the next edition of “Deeds that won the Empire” (Letter to Sofie Magdalene, 1/27/1939; RDMSC RD 14/3/20/3-4).

Dahl remained fascinated with the links between these various movements and his overall health for the rest of his life and he continued to be just as concerned with what was coming into his body as well as what was going out of it on a daily basis. His careful attention to food’s effects on his digestive motions coupled with his adherence to strict daily routines of all sorts, highlight the significance of structure and order in the daily rhythms of his life. As a proponent of regimented meals, Dahl’s daily decisions about chewing, eating, and digestion in general were at odds with the increasing shifts in meal organisation and the rising consumption of convenience foods as the twentieth century wore on.

Although convenience foods were relied upon as a means of saving consumers time, Dahl laments the growing dependence on convenience food in British society which he views as particularly threatening to routinized meals, and by extension, physical health and social cohesion. Again, Dahl’s focus on the importance of routinised consumption and his judgement of those who do not conform to traditional mealtime rituals reveal his inability to see how he might be perceived: it is likely that he was able to maintain such regular routines because of the many individuals employed to manage domestic tasks at Gipsy House. Dahl’s chef Marwood Yeatman prepared meals and personally sourced
cooking ingredients as well as fish and ham (Cookbook 44-45; 85). While it is well-documented that Dahl enjoyed maintaining the family garden, the family also had a gardener called Keith who grew “vegetables like nobody else” (Cookbook 14). With these resources it is no wonder that Dahl did not have to rely on convenience foods to maintain his own and his family’s everyday routines—this however, is what makes his didactic messages about routine problematic as he fails to recognise that issues regarding meal structure, routine, and a family or an individual’s dependence on convenience foods are not as clear cut as he seemed to believe. In fact, the ‘time-saving’ effects of convenience foods were initially intended to actually maintain the daily meal structures within the family as the increasing work hours, and especially an increasing number of women entering the workforce, placed greater pressures and time constraints on the family. Avner Offer notes how “[i]n the 1960s, British women spent about two hours a day cooking; by the 1980s, this had fallen by almost 45 minutes” (“Epidemics of Abundance” 20) while Burnett argues that this shift in both the workplace and domestic sphere brought on “the increased use of convenience foods and ready-made meals” which became “especially important as more and more women entered employment and ‘housewife’ became almost a pejorative term” (267).

Domestic appliances such as refrigerators and freezers revolutionised not only how Britons consumed their food but also how they organised the sequence of their meals and managed their time. Culinary historian Bee Wilson explains how, “In 1948 just two per cent of households in Britain owned a fridge”, and by 1959, the percentage had risen to thirteen and then to 58 percent in 1970 (Wilson, “The rise of the Fridge”) while fridge-freezers did not enter British kitchens in greater numbers until the late 1990s (Wilson, “The rise of the Fridge”). Shove and Southerton describe the freezer as sort of ‘time machine’ and as “a device with which to manage the otherwise intolerable demands of
scheduling, ordering and co-ordination” (315). As these technologies improved and became more affordable for the average consumer, they not only enabled but also propelled the growth of the convenience food industry and ultimately, “symbolise[d] a new stage in the development of space-time ordering” (Warde 525). In the 1950s, a variety of frozen foods such as fish fingers and frozen peas were introduced into the British frozen food market and by the 1970s, specialist frozen food stores like Iceland opened in Britain (Offer, “Body Weight and Self-Control” 86; Shove and Southerton 307). Warde argues that “in the face of more pressing social obligations, to eat convenience foods [is] a provisional response to intransigent problems of scheduling in a de-routinised society” (Warde 525).

Avner Offer explains how, in the decades after the Second World War, the three-meal system was in decline and that breakfast was being “hurried or skipped altogether, lunch a matter of grab as you can. By 1982, less than a quarter of British households conformed to the three-meal pattern, while almost half ate only one main meal a day” (“Epidemics of Abundance” 19). The decline of the three-meal structure eventually led to further de-routinised mealtimes and increased snacking and grazing, an eating pattern criticised in Dahl’s children’s texts and most notably in The Twits. In this novel, there is perhaps one of the most explicit anti-snacking messages in Dahl’s children’s narratives. In the text, readers are introduced to an older couple, Mr and Mrs Twit, a couple who derive pleasure from pranking one another, catching birds with superglue, mistreating their pet monkeys and generally being nasty to those around them. The publication of The Twits in 1980 coincided with the rise of snacking, grazing, and unstructured mealtimes in Britain and it could certainly be argued that Mr and Mrs Twit are exemplars of how not to behave at table. In fact, I would argue that the negative representation of the Twits as individuals who snack, graze, and “play” with their food, is ultimately part of Dahl’s
overarching didactic messages that condemn non-traditional and unstructured consumption habits. According to the narrator, Mr Twit “was born a twit” and “at the age of sixty, he was a bigger twit than ever” (2). Like many of Dahl’s villainous characters, Mr Twit is a disorderly eater: he does not open his mouth wide in order to place food in it cleanly (4). It is important to note that Mr Twit is an older person, a ‘bad’ adult who does not conform to traditional, ‘proper’ and routine eating habits. The narrator warns readers to “hold your noses, ladies and gentlemen” (5) and explains how a combination of convenience and non-convenience foods including scrambled eggs, spinach, ketchup, fish fingers, and minced livers could be found in Mr Twit’s beard and how foods such as “maggoty green cheese or a mouldy old cornflake or even the slimy tail of a tinned sardine” had also been lodged in his beard for months and months (4, 5).

Fig. 12: Mr Twit’s Beard, illustration by Quentin Blake, *The Twits*, Roald Dahl (1980; New York: Puffin Books, 2007; Print; 5).

The adage “you are what you eat” is particularly apt when we are told that Mr Twit never washed and he is indeed a “foul and smelly” and “horrid old man” (5) who consumes old

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and rotten food. The rather grotesque description of Mr Twit again emphasises the importance of order and control—as Douglas notes, “It is only by exaggerating the difference between within and without, above and below, male and female, with and against, that a semblance of order is created” (Douglas 4). Mr Twit’s characterisation as a filthy man reinforces the idea that “Dirt offends against order” (Douglas 2). By negative example, Dahl uses Mr Twit to reinforce rather extreme ideas about disorderly consumption, and control, suggesting not only that individuals who engage in this sort of consumption are inherently bad, but the problematic idea that it is acceptable to judge others based on what type of food they consume and how they consume it.

By consuming ‘stored’ and rotting food in his beard whenever he wishes, Mr Twit challenges traditional eating structures and rules, not only by consuming expired food, but also through grazing. Mr Twit engages in a sort of “dietary individualization” (Sobal and Nelson 182) that further alienates himself from others. Mr Twit’s negative characterisation as a disorderly eater is threatening as it represents what David Marshall refers to as “[t]he alleged demise of the family meal, or the growth in snacking and grazing,” which he argues reflects a “sense of ‘anomie’ and [a] trend towards individualisation that raises questions over the relevance of ritual in contemporary society” (69). This form of dietary individualization is contrary to the three-meal structure prevalent in British society and Mr. Twit’s eating habits amount to what Burnett identifies as “a fragmentation of the traditional pattern of main meals towards lighter, more frequent snacking and ‘grazing’” (295). The novel’s publication in 1980 coincided with the “move away from formal meals towards snacks [and an] increased reliance on convenience foods” (Burnett 294) between the 1950s and the 1980s. Mr Twit’s beard proves to be an important but problematic site for food storage as it is a sort of receptacle for food, (too) conveniently situated on his face: “Because of [his beard], Mr Twit never went really
hungry. By sticking out his tongue and curling it sideways to explore the hairy jungle around his mouth, he was always able to find a tasty morsel here and there to nibble on” (5). This particular action here is described as a sign of degeneration: Mr Twit is animalistic, more specifically reptilian, when he uses his tongue to retrieve and gather food from his beard to his mouth. The narrator describes Mr Twit’s rubbish bin-like beard disapprovingly and, by extension, identifies snacking or grazing as disorderly, unstructured types of eating. Mr Twit has many traits that reveal a flawed character: he plays pranks on his wife, he inflicts harm on animals, and he threatens children. While his disorderly eating habit is merely one of several bad qualities he possesses it is a defining aspect of his character. In a copy of the first draft of the manuscript for *The Twits*, Dahl describes how Mr Twit treated his monkeys poorly by feeding them “horrid porridge because it was the cheapest” and “rotten apples” instead of fresh fruits, nuts and buns (Untitled Manuscript for *The Twits*, RDMSC RD 2/16/1/1). In the novel, the monkeys “had to eat and drink upside down and that is not an easy thing to do because the food and water has to go up your throat instead of down it. In fact, it is almost impossible, but the monkeys simply had to do it otherwise they got nothing” (*The Twits* 45).

As discussed in the first chapter, Mr Twit uses a paint-brush to apply hugtight sticky glue onto tree branches to catch birds for bird pie (39-40). When four boys climbed up the same tree in Mr Twit’s garden one evening (and we are assured by the narrator that “there’s nothing wrong with that” (41)), Mr Twit found them “sitting in the tree, stuck as tight as could be by the seats of their pants to the branches” the following morning (41). Mr Twit shouts menacingly that he would have to have “Boy Pie” rather than “Bird Pie” that evening and that Boy Pie would have “More meat and not so many tiny little bones!” (41). In this instance it is Mr Twit’s voracious and cannibalistic appetite that drives him to

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86 The link is clear between the positive remarks about boys and tree-climbing and Dahl’s complaints about boys not climbing trees enough in the posthumous publication *My Year* as examined earlier in this chapter.
catch the birds in such an inhumane way in the first place, and to threaten to eat the children in his neighbourhood. Here, Mr Twit’s disorderly consumption escalates—he is represented as out-of-control and, perhaps, unhinged, in his attempt to partake in taboo consumption. Mr Twit’s potential cannibalism addresses themes linked to control found in other narratives including, for examples, Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* (1899): Jennifer Brown has analysed cannibalism in literature and film and argues how cannibalism in Conrad’s novel “functions […] as the locus for question of control: control of appetite, desire, enemies, resources, and representation” (J. Brown 35). Similarly, in Daniel’s comparison of cannibalism in Richard Rowe’s *The Boy in the Bush* (1869) and R.M. Ballantyne’s *The Coral Island* (1858), she notes how “cannibalism symbolizes the brutish, immoral, uncivilised state in which the natives exist. This, of course, serves to highlight the civilized, moral superiority of the white Westerners and to justify racist discourses” (Daniel 144). In *The Twits*, the narrator is represented as the civilized, morally superior figure opposite Mr Twit’s “savagery”. Although Mr Twit is not contemplating the consumption of convenience food in this instance, his snacking and grazing habits have driven him to a kind of crazed, taboo consumption. He is representative of disorderly eating that has gone unchecked, emphasising a rather extreme and problematic view that equates disorderly consumption with cannibalism, encouraging readers to do the same. The narrator encourages readers to judge Mr Twit through his food habits and to analyse him in a way that is similar to how Dahl observed overweight and obese people when he lived in Tanzania, and how he describes the appearances of other disorderly eaters and overweight characters including Augustus Gloop, Victor Hazell, and as we will discuss in following section, Mrs Wormwood. Because the villainous Mr and Mrs Twit fail to consume and treat each other in a mannerly way in the text, manners and mores are upheld as the twin pillars upholding civilised society as we
know it and the presence and absence of both are what crucially separate humans from animals. As Margaret Visser notes, “Table manners are as old as human society itself, the reason being that no human society can exist without them” (1). Visser explains how

The active sharing of food […] is believed, even nowadays, to lie at the root of what makes us different from animals. Birds, dogs, and hyenas carry home food for their young until they are ready to find food for themselves, and chimpanzees may even demand and receive morsels of meat from other adults in their pack […] Only people actively, regularly, and continuously work on the portioning out of their food (1).

Mr Twit’s association with the grotesque is used to reinforce the importance of upholding notions of proper etiquette and manners during consumption rituals. The representation of Mr Twit can be interpreted as what Visser refers to as “the constant likening of rude people to animals” which is used to remind readers “that a universal purpose of good behaviour is to demonstrate how unlike beasts we mannerly people are” (63).

In The BFG, like The Twits, disorderly eating is used to reinforce messages about proper etiquette and mealtime manners. Marina Warner cites Iona and Peter Opie’s term ‘swallow tale’ and applies it to The BFG “because of the amount of devouring that takes place in it” (311). While Sophie and the BFG themselves do not engage in disorderly eating, and granting the exception of the Manhugger, the Maidmasher, and the Butcher Boy, the names of the other giants, the Fleshlumpeater, the Bonecruncher, the Childchewer, the Meatdripper, the Gizzardgulper, and the Bloodbottler and strongly suggest that they are disorderly eaters par excellence. These names all connote violence while Fleshlumpeater, Meatdripper, and Gizzardgulper in particular further suggest gorging, gluttony, and generally careless and disorderly consumption. Not only do the
giants consume human beings from all parts of the world, but they also engage in a far less horrifying and far less disturbing but nonetheless deviant act in Dahl’s fictitious world: they snack outside of their mealtimes. The giants betray British food rules that emphasise the importance of “not appearing to be greedy” (Fox 318) which they fail to recognise within the context of polite society. Within a British context, “over-eagerness about food is disgusting and even somehow faintly obscene” and ideally, a “more restrained, unemotional” approach to eating is preferred (Fox 319). There is a significant history of publications about etiquette, table manners, and “civilized behaviour” in Britain stretching back to the late Victorian period, which informs the connection between self-control at table. Winnie Chan argues that it is partly because of this tradition that “the British remain the exemplar of civilized behavior” (Chan 132). When the Bloodbottler giant visits the BFG and accuses him of hiding a human being in his cave he explains how he has come to “winkle it” and “guzzle[e] it as extra snacks before [his] supper!” (The BFG 47). By this point in the novel it has been established that the giants are barbaric, greedy, and gluttonous. However, when the Bloodbottler declares that he plans on eating a human (Sophie) as a snack before his supper, the message is made clearer: the giant’s snacking or grazing outside of meals further associates him with greed, gluttony, barbarity and general incivility, the sort of “hunger that takes possession of ogres and witches” (Warner 137). It seems as though the giants are “civil” enough to have structured mealtimes such as “supper” in their society, yet the Bloodbottler consumes outside of this designated teatime through what Charles and Kerr refer to as the consumption of “‘snack-type’ meal[s] which usually constituted the non-main meal of the day” (19). Similar to his characterisation of Mr Twit, Dahl uses disorderly consumption to categorise the giants as deviant.
Perhaps what is most significant about the giants in *The BFG* is that they, like other monsters in fantasy and fairy tales are used to “variously represent abominations against society, civilization and family” and at the same time, they are also used as “vehicles for expressing ideas of proper behavior and due order” (Warner 11). Warner notes how “The songs and tales that feature ogres and cannibal devils and other monstrous eaters raise questions about the very nature of desire and our ways of expressing it: do our appetites make us monstrous?” (Warner 135). When applied to *The BFG*, the answer to the question Warner poses here is a resounding yes: our appetites have the potential to make us monstrous and that is precisely why manners and etiquette are represented as crucial behaviours necessary for individuals to become civilized citizens in a given society. Warner comments how the abundance of food and the “ever-present hunger in ogre stories […] communicate a literally frustrated physical appetite” (136). The giants in Dahl’s novel do indeed have an unsatisfied physical craving but the problem lies in the fact that their appetite is frustrated because it is indulged far too often. It seems unlikely that the giants are in the novel for the sole purpose of instructing children how not to consume as there is, after all, a long tradition of giants consuming humans, crushing their bones and generally using their size and strength to intimidate, harm, and in some cases kill and consume humans. As Jeffrey Cohen explains “Giants typically elicit terror” and that “Looming over our diminished selves, the giant makes evident our frailty, our mortality” (“Giant” 280). Nevertheless, giants have also, historically, been signifiers of “those dangerous excesses of the flesh that the process of masculine embodiment produces in order to forbid” and as folkloric figures with out-of-control appetites (*Cohen, Of Giants*, xiii). Although the giants’ names clearly reveal that they are defined by their disorderly eating, their habit of eating wherever and whenever they are hungry rather than at designated mealtimes is meant to highlight their barbarity.
even further. It is bad enough that the giants crush and eat humans but the fact that this could occur at any time, without warning, rather than in an orderly manner is what makes their taboo consumption habits even more appalling.

In the passage where Sophie almost gets eaten by the Bloodbottler, he is described as savage, as other, and in a similarly critical and judgemental way:

The Bloodbottler was a gruesome sight. His skin was reddish-brown. There was black hair sprouting on his chest and arms and on his stomach. The hair on his head was long and dark and tangled. His foul face was round and squaishy-looking. The eyes were tiny black holes. The nose was small and flat. But the mouth was huge. It spread right across the face almost ear to ear, and it had lips that were like two gigantic purple frankfurters lying one on top of the other. Craggy yellow teeth stuck out between the two purple frankfurter lips, and rivers of spit ran down over the chin (49).

What is particularly notable about this description is that at first, the Bloodbottler’s skin, hair, and face is “his” own: it is the Bloodbottler’s skin that is “reddish-brown” and it is his hair that is long, dark, and tangled, and his face that is “round and squaishy-looking” (49). In the subsequent lines however, there is a dramatic shift in which the narrator describes the rest of the Bloodbottler’s features in more distant and disconnected way. The description of “the” eyes, “the” nose, “the” mouth, and “the” chin certainly “others” the Bloodbottler further, but perhaps what is most troubling about this description is that it bears similarity to the rather clinical, detached way Dahl observed overweight people or individuals who failed to conform to his specific body image standards in his own life. What is deeply problematic about this description of the Bloodbottler and descriptions of
the Twits, and, as we will analyse later on, Mrs Wormwood, is that they suggest that there is very little difference between Dahl’s view of the grotesque, and the monstrous, with those who fail to conform to an “average” or “thin” body type.  

If human-eating giants are associated with snacking, general disorderly eating and un-British consumption habits, then the BFG serves as an appropriate model for children of proper consumption particularly because he willingly conforms to the rules and etiquette associated with ‘proper meals’ within a British context. Like the other giants, the BFG also has a sort of frustrated physical appetite, yet this comes from refraining from eating humans, unlike the other giants, and eating unsatisfying and unappetizing snozzcumbers instead. The BFG insists that even though giants consume human beings, he is not a “man-gobbling cannybull” (17). The use of the term “cannybull” suggests that although giants and human beings are different, they share enough similarities that if a giant were to eat a human being, they would be engaging in cannibalism. In this specific description, I would argue that the allusion to cannibalism functions as way to simultaneously “reveal society’s concerns about the need to discipline the appetites and behaviour of children” and “reflect social anxieties about enemy others” (Daniel 141, 142). This example communicates to children that disorderly eaters like the giants and Mr Twit are cannibals, while idealised foreigners like the BFG, who is able to exert self-control and would rather consume unappetizing snozzcumbers than eat a human being (which, would seem to be in his “nature” as a giant), is an appropriate model for “good” food consumption.

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87 It should be noted that despite Dahl’s idealisation of his mother, she too was “not exempt from his fat-detecting eye” (Sturrock 58). While she was on holiday in 1929, Dahl warned his mother that despite the fact that she reserved a room with a double bed, he was sure her hips would protrude from either side of the bed (59).
The BFG undermines the traditional representation of the giant and proves to be not only capable of, but willing to partake in ‘civilized’ eating. In the novel the BFG receives an education on mealtime manners from Sophie, the Queen of England, and Tibbs the Butler. In contrast with the other giants, the BFG is given opportunities to eat and conduct himself in a mannerly way during the breakfast sequence with the Queen. In the most formal eating sequence in *The BFG*, Sophie and the BFG are invited to breakfast by the Queen of England when they visit Buckingham Palace to try to convince the Queen to stop the giants from snatching up and eating English children. At the palace, the BFG learns about British customs, traditions and manners at a breakfast organised by the Queen’s personal butler Mr. Tibbs. When readers are first introduced to Mr Tibbs, he is described as “an imposing personage” who oversees all of the domestic operations in Buckingham Palace and is “gifted with extraordinary ingenuity, adaptability, versatility, dexterity, cunning, sophistication, sagacity, discretion and a host of other talents” (*The BFG* 154). We see the sheer scope of Tibbs’s expertise throughout the breakfast sequence. At this particular meal, Sophie asks the Queen for sausage, bacon, and fried eggs. Apart from a few ingredients, such as black pudding, baked beans and in some variations, mushrooms, tomatoes, fried bread and chips, Sophie is essentially asking the Queen for the main elements of a traditional English breakfast. As Ellen Castelow explains, the traditional English breakfast can be traced back to the Middle Ages, eventually becoming an important part of Georgian and Victorian society (“Traditional English Breakfast”). In fact, the traditional English breakfast has had nationalistic overtones since the Victorian era which “saw a wealthy middle class begin to emerge in British society who wished to copy the customs of the gentry, including the tradition of

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88 Although it may seem surprising that the BFG consumes meat in this sequence, especially considering how he insists that unlike the other cannibalistic giants, he does not eat human beings, it is not mentioned in the text whether or not the BFG refrains from eating animals. What we do know however is that because the BFG refuses to eat human beings, he has no choice but to eat snozzcumbers, the only food source that grows in Giant Country (40).
the full English breakfast […] Even as late as the 1950s, almost half the adult population began their day with a good old English fry-up” (“Traditional English Breakfast”). Although earlier versions of the traditional English breakfast prior to the mid-twentieth century would have included a large range of meats, fish and bread, Kaori O’Connor explains how “the English Breakfast is now usually seen only in its simplest incarnation—the bacon, eggs, baked beans and grilled tomato combination beloved of the English working man” (54). Social anthropologist Fox goes further and examines the complexities of the breakfast habits within the British class system, explaining that the traditional English breakfast

is maintained more at the top and bottom of the social scale than among the middle ranks. Some members of the upper class and aristocracy still have proper English breakfasts in their country houses, and some working-class people (mostly males) still believe in starting the day with a ‘cooked breakfast’ of bacon, eggs, sausages, baked beans, fried bread, toast and so on (311).

While the breakfast sequence in The BFG is meant to be out of the ordinary, it is also represented as a unifying and nationalistic meal in which members from opposite ends of the class system, like Sophie and the Queen, and indeed, outsiders like the BFG, can truly partake together.

Naturally, the Queen grants Sophie’s request and Tibbs immediately begins planning the food, seating arrangements, and eating utensils required to accommodate the BFG. Given the fact that at twenty-four feet high, the BFG is four times the size of the average six-foot man, “Everything, Mr Tibbs told himself, must be multiplied by four. Two breakfast eggs must become eight. Four rashers of bacon must become sixteen.
Three pieces of toast must become twelve, and so on” (154). Tibbs even calculates various measurements required in assembling a make-shift table out of grandfather clocks and a ping-pong table complete with a tablecloth and a chair made out of a chest of drawers and a piano fit for the twenty-four-foot giant (155-56). When the BFG’s twelve-foot-high table and chair are set and the food is prepared, Tibbs serves the giant by climbing step ladders and “What’s more, he [does] it [by] balancing a huge warm plate on the palm of one hand and holding a gigantic silver coffee-pot in the other” (160). Readers are reminded that “A normal man would have flinched at the thought of it. But good butlers never flinch” (160): here, Tibbs keeps a British ‘stiff upper lip’ and when he reaches the top of the ladder, the narrator notes how, “Mr Tibbs, balancing like an acrobat, poured the BFG’s coffee and placed the enormous plate before him. On the plate there were eight eggs, twelve sausages, sixteen rashers of bacon and a heap of fried potatoes” (160-62). Here, Tibbs is performing a great number of tasks to ensure that the breakfast is prepared and served in a very proper and regimented way. Tibbs’ ability to take control of this very unusual situation is what is being idealised here. Not only does this sequence highlight Dahl’s fixation on control, it emphasises that “good” meals require structure, even in the most unusual of circumstances. The breakfast scene in The BFG is importantly tied to British notions of manners and etiquette and British hospitality. The fact that this scene occurs in the Queen’s palace only further emphasises how the sequence is meant to strongly convey “Britishness”. In this scene, the traditional breakfast, unlike convenience foods, stresses the importance for communal ‘pause’ for individuals, families, and whole communities during mealtimes. Of course, the breakfast sequence is not an explicit message condemning the use of convenience foods (especially because there are no convenience foods in this scene) but rather, an important sequence in our discussion of convenience foods because it reinforces the idealisation of the proper
meal so often invoked in Dahl’s novels. The breakfast consumed in the Queen’s palace symbolizes the significance of a square meal that conforms to the rules and etiquette associated with proper meals: that is, the use of proper eating utensils, dining furniture, etc. Tibbs’ extremely determined efforts suggest an underlying anxiety which highlights how, without extreme efforts to normalise and formalise breakfast time, proper meals could lead to the erosion of meals and by extension, on a much greater scale, the breakdown of social decorum and civility as we know it. It should be noted here that while the association between a ‘proper’ English breakfast and civilised values is nostalgised in The BFG the idealisation of the traditional English breakfast is particularly important because the novel’s publication in 1982 coincided with the declining consumption of the traditional cooked breakfast within the British home. In fact, breakfast consumption had by then reduced significantly and in many homes it was not eaten at all. At this time, the traditional cooked English breakfast had been replaced with convenience foods in the form of breakfast cereals and fruit juices (Buss 4).

Offer considers how, even by the 1950s, “a fifth of British breakfasts included American type cereals” (“Body Weight and Self-Control” 86) while Mitchell and Boustani trace the decline of breakfast consumption from the 1950s to the 1980s to the changing dynamics within the family:

With the increase in the number of working mothers, 2.7 million in 1951 to an estimated 7.4 million in 1986, many children are forced to go without food from a high tea or evening meal one day through to a school lunch

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89 See Anne Murcott’s essay “Family meals—a thing of the past?” in Patricia Caplan’s Food, Health and Identity (1997). In this paper, Murcott explores and traces how perceived anxieties about the supposed decline of the family meal emerged in post-war British society.  
90 The breakfast scene in Matilda is an indirect reference to the changes in breakfast consumption among families in the 1980s: while Mrs Wormwood prepares Mr Wormwood a traditional fry-up, the Wormwood children consume different breakfast foods altogether with Matilda eating breakfast cereal while her brother consumes bread with an excessive amount of peanut butter and jam (53). The following section will examine the breakfast scene in Matilda more closely and argue that a similar anxiety about the state of the traditional English breakfast is also represented in the text but expressed rather differently from the concerns represented in The BFG.
the following day. Breakfast has tended to become either a rushed affair or simply non-existent, and with the cuts in the mid-morning school milk programme in the UK, children are virtually fasting for 18 hours (18).

However, it is important to note that the breakfast sequence in *The BFG* is not meant to necessarily represent an idealised ‘family’, since this is a very odd group indeed. Sophie, the Queen and the BFG are obviously not family, but the idea of family or at least, the notion of people gathering together for a traditional meal, consuming the same sort of food, is being idealised here. The breakfast sequence reinforces the importance of the traditional Breakfast in British society as a cohesive “unifying cultural practice” (O’Connor 54), and as an essential part of a lifestyle that upholds tradition, order, routine, and ‘proper’ consumption. In contrast to the savage giants, the BFG is the idealised foreigner who can be part of breakfast at the palace, and therefore, assimilate properly. The breakfast sequence glorifies control at table, and the BFG is the idealised foreigner who can be controlled.

Although *The BFG* does not include sequences in which traditional cooked breakfast foods are compared to convenience breakfast foods such as breakfast cereal, in one example in *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, breakfast cereals are described with anxiety and suspicion. When Mike Teavee asks if Wonka can send breakfast cereal by television, Wonka exclaims “Don’t mention that disgusting stuff in front of me! Do you know what breakfast cereal is made of? It’s made of all those little curly wooden shavings you find in pencil sharpeners!” (*Chocolate Factory* 162). Wonka’s suspicion here is not unlike the views of critics of breakfast cereals during this period as evidenced by an article from 1971 in which George Mann complained about how “In the past summer, Robert Choate tackled the breakfast cereal industry with the charge that their advertising is misleading and their products are second-rate foods […]” It is quite clear that these
companies are selling convenience under the guise of nutrition” (1494). Considered one of the first mass-marketed convenience foods, breakfast cereal is often seen as “the epitome of cheap commodity converted to higher value goods” (Lawrence, “The truth about breakfast cereals”) and the earliest American cereal companies, Kellogg’s and Post, are now regarded as pioneers of the “wholesale industrialization” of food through their “Fordist-style” food system (Blay-Palmer 44). Much of the disgust conveyed in Wonka’s exclamation can be linked to breakfast cereal’s association with highly processed ingredients and industrialised production methods. Lawrence explains how, in breakfast cereal production, “The nutritious germ with its essential fats is first removed because, as the Kellogg brothers discovered all that time ago, it goes rancid over time and gets in the way of long shelf life. Flavourings, vitamins to replace those lost in processing and sugar may be added at this stage” (“The truth about breakfast cereals”). Moreover, Lawrence also explains how these cereals “depended on fortification rather than micronutrients from the raw ingredients” primarily because the raw ingredients of the cereal were destroyed during processing (“The truth about breakfast cereals”).

The proliferation of pre-sweetened cereal in the breakfast market from the 1960s on forward indicated how this food shifted closer in association to sweets rather than the cereals first marketed in the early twentieth century (Kawash 285-86). As Kawash notes, “[t]he production of sweetened cereals owed much to candy flavors and candy-making techniques, a fact that was flaunted rather than disguised” (289), leading sceptics to consider these foods as “little more than sugary junk with milk and vitamin pills added” (Lawrence, “The truth about breakfast cereals”) in the decades following the Second World War. In this sense, breakfast cereal is a sort of ‘mock’ breakfast food, almost like sweets posing as a nutritious morning meal for children. Although Wonka does not mention sweet cereals, it is certainly implied that the cereals Mike Teavee refers to are
sweet, given both Mike Teavee’s addiction to television and sweet breakfast cereal’s association with television advertising during this period. Mike Teavee’s question posed to Wonka about transmitting breakfast cereal through television, and Wonka’s response, can be read in the context of concerns about the enticing television advertisements for breakfast cereals aimed at children. Breakfast cereal’s unique use of toys and cartoon characters to coerce and manipulate children into consuming cereal has been well-documented and criticised. In the 1930s, cereal companies Kellogg’s and Post hired artists to illustrate now-iconic cartoon characters for their products, including Rice Krispies’ Snap, Crackle and Pop and Sugar Crisp’s three bears (Lawrence, “The truth about breakfast cereals”). By the late 1950s, these cartoon characters, along with Frosted Flakes’ Tony the Tiger and General Mills’s Trix rabbit featured heavily in advertisements in Saturday morning television programmes for children (Lawrence; Schor 39). During this time, “toys and breakfast cereals were already the two major categories of products being advertised” (Schor 39-40) and in the 1970s, the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) in the United States investigated the advertising and marketing practices of the breakfast cereal companies and uncovered “a tight net linking imaginative packaging, television advertising, sugar and additives, and oligopoly” within the industry (Appetite for Change 145). Dahl was certainly aware of the link between breakfast cereal and advertising and marketing directed towards children and in Boy he noted how, “Even today, fine footballers and baseball players and runners and all other great sportsmen are much admired by the general public and advertisers use them to sell breakfast cereals” (162), a reference which echoes the implied criticism found in Chocolate Factory.

The loaded description of cereal in Chocolate Factory seems at odds with a partnership made fairly recently between the Dahl estate, Puffin Books, and UK Supermarket retailer Asda. In 2011, excerpts from The Witches, The Twits, The BFG,
Danny the Champion of the World, and Charlie and the Chocolate Factory were placed on at least ten million boxes of Asda’s “own-brand children’s cereals, such as rice pops, frosted flakes and honey hoops” (Wallop, “Roald Dahl stories to be on millions of cereal boxes”). As Wallop notes, this partnership was established primarily because “The publisher has realised that children, from even before the age they can read, pick up cereal boxes from the breakfast table and scan the back for games and information. By replacing the games and adverts with an excerpt from a book, it hopes to spark an interest in literature” (“Roald Dahl stories to be on millions of cereal boxes”). Although this venture was supposedly intended to encourage children to read, it is contrary to the critical message against the mass-production of breakfast cereal and convenience food products in Dahl’s texts and, in fact, undermines many of the messages found in Dahl’s texts about convenience foods more generally. Just as Dahl’s didactic messages against overconsumption in Chocolate Factory contradicted his stake in a real-life confectionery company inspired by his famous novel, so too does this example highlight a glaring contradiction between the messages disparaging convenience foods in Dahl’s texts and his estate’s partnership with cereal and fast food companies, respectively. In Matilda we see convenience foods replacing traditionally home-cooked breakfasts and dinners and how this replacement is deeply symbolic of familial dynamics within the text. The following section expands on the relationship between convenience foods, proper meals, routine, and control, focusing on how notions of proper meals and the proper family in Matilda highlight Dahl’s problematic views about gender and power dynamics within the domestic sphere that encourages readers to subscribe to extreme, polarised, and judgemental views of those around them.
3.2 (Im)Proper Meals and (Im)Proper Families in *Matilda* (1988)

Dahl’s *Matilda* (1988) is a novel about a young girl whose extraordinary brilliance enables her to eventually escape an unloving and neglectful family to form a new, alternative family with her beloved teacher Miss Honey. In a subplot of the narrative Matilda is able to free herself, her classmates, and Miss Honey from the tyranny of the headmistress Miss Trunchbull through her telekinetic powers. In her study *The Family in English Children’s Literature* (2008) and in an essay on the family in Dahl’s children’s fiction, Ann Alston explores the connections between child empowerment and family dynamics which includes close readings of the family dynamics in *Matilda*. Here I expand on Alston’s examination of the family and the family meal in *Matilda* and analyse the relationship between ‘proper’ meals and ‘proper’ families. In this section I will consider how the treatment of convenience food, specifically in *Matilda*, illuminates the concerns and anxieties about such foods pervading post-war British food culture. This section highlights how Dahl’s fixation on issues of control and power in relation to meal rituals, routines, and gluttony sheds light onto the contradictory didactic and subversive messages in the text. This section will also consider what Davidson regards as the symbolic and hierarchical significance of meals: “Meals establish hierarchies or indicate congruence among foods, and they send out far richer messages about both the eaten and the eater than might any other instance of consumption” (503). Echoing Davidson, this section outlines a sort of convenience food hierarchy that places convenience foods’ associated with austerity, such as the margarine consumed by Miss Honey, at the top and TV dinners served at the Wormwood household, as inferior versions of the meat and two vegetable dinner model, at the bottom.

In the Wormwood household, fast food and convenience food take the place of the care and consideration of a mother manager as Mrs Wormwood falls short of the
expectations placed on women in the household in the mid-twentieth century. Before considering Mrs Wormwood’s role as mother manager in *Matilda* it is important first to analyse Dahl’s own perspectives about meal preparation and motherhood. Significantly, Dahl’s own personal expectations of an idealised mother manager can indeed be traced back to his relationship with his mother, Sofie Magdalene Dahl for it was she who first sparked his interest in cooking, fine wine, art, and horticulture (Sturrock 42) and Dahl’s idealisation of his mother seems to relate directly to her expertise as a housewife and household manager. In his biography, Donald Sturrock notes that Dahl considered Sofie Magdalene as “undoubtedly the primary influence on [his] own life” (42). In her essay, “Dahl, The Marvellous Boy”, Catriona Nicholson examines Dahl’s childhood and correlates his personal experiences with the fictional experiences of the children in his novels and highlights how his admiration for his mother was notably marked by the absence of his father so that in his father’s death, “his mother took on the role of both parents” (318). When Dahl was three years old, his father died of pneumonía, leaving him, along with his siblings, Alfhid, Else, Ellen and Louis in the sole care of their mother. In his autobiography, *Boy* (1984) Dahl recalls her strength in coping with back-to-back family tragedies:

My mother had now lost a daughter and a husband all in the space of a few weeks. Heaven knows what it must have felt like to be hit with a double catastrophe like this. Here she was, a young Norwegian in a foreign land, suddenly having to face all alone the very gravest problems and responsibilities. She had five children to look after, three of her own and two by her husband’s first wife, and to make matters worse, she herself was expecting another baby in two months’ time. A less courageous
woman would almost certainly have sold the house and packed her bags and headed back to Norway with the children (20-21).

Sofie Magdalene did not return to Norway, however, and decided to raise her children in Wales and eventually sent them to English boarding schools (22). In the summers, Dahl proudly acknowledges how his “dauntless mother[’s]” (55) excellent organizational skills (54) were invaluable in making their family’s long journeys to Norway every summer possible. It should be noted however, that after Harald Dahl’s death, Sofie Magdalene had the help of a Norwegian nanny called Birgit and maids to rear the children (Sturrock 46), and while she may have been “dauntless”, she depended on the assistance of several other adults, a luxury that many mothers simply do not have. Nevertheless, Dahl viewed his mother as the ideal housewife and model household manager, and seems to have internalised this model, applying it to every woman he met subsequently.

Dahl’s appreciation of his mother’s household management skills directly led to the kinds of expectations he had for his first wife, American actress Patricia Neal. The fact that she was not prepared to exhibit these same skills significantly complicated their marriage. Jeremy Treglown highlights how, “All his life, Dahl said, he had watched Sofie […] organizing the household, making sure it was kept clean and tidy, and up to a point acting as what he called her husband’s servant” (107). Despite Dahl’s belief that men ought to be self-reliant and able to keep house, he acknowledged that he felt that “it was natural for a man to be waited upon” (Treglown 107). Problematically, for him, Patricia Neal was “not able to bring herself to this” (107). Dahl’s dissatisfaction with Neal and her lack of domestic compliance persisted throughout their marriage; while there were many reasons why they eventually divorced, it is clear that she did not meet Dahl’s expectations of an ideal housewife. According to varying sources, it is not entirely certain whether or
not Dahl’s mother immediately warmed to his first wife. According to Sturrock, Sofie Magdalene had written to Dahl’s friends after first meeting Neal, saying that everyone loved Neal and hoped that she and Dahl would be happy together (327). Despite this, Dahl’s twin nieces Anna and Lou recalled that their Grandmother Sofie “was initially far from impressed when her new daughter-in-law drifted down from her bedroom into the kitchen of Wistaria Cottage each day, almost at lunchtime, wearing a pink chiffon negligée and matching feathered dressing gown” (Sturrock 327). What Sofie really expected of Neal was that she “be able to cook and make a home for her husband [and] was scornful when she discovered that Pat could scarcely boil an egg” (Sturrock 327). Upon hearing about their early marital troubles, Dahl’s close friend and mentor, Charles Marsh dispensed some advice to the couple. Though Marsh was thought to have encouraged some understanding between Dahl and Neal, according to Treglown, it was clear that “his advice to [Neal] couldn’t have been more favourable to her husband” (109). Marsh suggested that it would be best if Dahl handled the family’s finances, even though Neal was earning the majority of the income (109); moreover, despite working full-time as an actress, Marsh also suggested that she ought to perform the majority of the household duties as well (109). While Neal agreed to this arrangement and though this ‘formula’ worked for some time (Treglown 109), both Neal and Dahl grew to resent one another and the marriage eventually disintegrated. One major contributing factor to the breakdown of their marriage was that Dahl wanted someone who could take care of him and did not find this quality in Neal: he wanted “someone to make him a cup of tea” (Sturrock 477), and to prepare proper meals, perform household tasks well, and take good care of their children. Essentially, Dahl wanted a replica of his mother in terms of provision of household management skills.
Later in life, Dahl maintained that measure and defined housewives by their aptitude in the kitchen. In *Cookbook* Dahl explains the importance of the “mother cook” in family life, noting how some mothers are genuinely marvellous cooks and they are the salt of the earth. They not only provide endless delight for their families and friends but, most important of all, they invariably pass on their talents to their female offspring. It is a curious and recondite fact that nearly every daughter of a marvellous mother-cook turns out to be a marvellous cook herself. Great mother-cooks produce great daughter-cooks and so on *ad infinitum*. The kitchens of great mother-cooks are suffused with a glow of enthusiasm and competence, and the children are encouraged to come in to watch and learn (86).

Dahl’s claims here are grounded in his prejudices about women and while they are of course, deeply problematic, they are perhaps symptomatic of ideas that proliferated in the culture and generation Dahl was brought up in. Dahl claimed that this theory applied completely to his family: “my own family and Licey’s (my mother with her three daughters and Licey with her three daughters) support the theory 100 per cent” (*Cookbook* 87), but notably remains silent about whether or not this theory applies to his and Patricia Neal’s daughters. Whether this omission was intentional or not, it is difficult not to interpret it as a silent condemnation of Neal’s refusal to comply with Dahl’s unreasonable expectations of women regarding cooking. In stark contrast to the marvellous mother-cook is the “lousy mother-cook” who Dahl identifies as “usually chaotic and messy, and any child who ventures in is likely to be greeted with an ‘Oh, do get out of my way! Can’t you see I’m busy!’” (*Cookbook* 86). Dahl goes on to point out how the daughters of lousy-mother cooks “stand little chance of becoming even half-way
decent cooks. The kitchen is to them, as it was to their mothers, a place of frustration and hard labour” (Cookbook 86).

What is curious is that while Dahl did not insist that men ought to aspire to great culinary feats in the same way he expected the women in his life to command a kitchen, he did express frustration with men who were incompetent cooks:

I have no time at all for those husbands who declare, usually with a kind of chauvinistic pride, that they can’t even boil an egg. The implication here is that the wife’s place is in the kitchen and it is her job to serve the master. I am not saying that husbands should necessarily be excellent cooks, but I do believe strongly that they should all be moderately competent. They should certainly be able to provide a decent meal for the family when the wife is tired or unwell, or when she might be in hospital having another baby. Even when none of these circumstances applies, it is nice to give her a break now and again (Cookbook 147).

The beginning of this quote gives the impression that Dahl is somewhat concerned about equality within the home, at least in regards to dividing up household tasks: he seems frustrated with the idea of men being incapable of cooking or being less than “moderately competent” in the kitchen. As we will explore later on in this section, this idea is clearly reinforced in Mr Wormwood’s negative characterisation as a husband who depends on his wife to prepare his meals. At the same time however, Dahl’s assertion that men should be able to assist their wives if they are tired or unwell and to simply “give [them] a break now and again” reveals that this assistance in the kitchen is not truly rooted in a view that promotes equality within the home, but is instead, an exception to the rule. For Dahl, men’s roles in the kitchen are limited to assisting their wives as some sort of heroic task,
meant to occasionally relieve her from what he perceives to be her everyday
responsibilities.

The passages in *Cookbook* are particularly illuminating when we consider the
polarised characterisations of women in Dahl’s novels, particularly in *Matilda*. Dahl’s
tendency to describe and view people, including his mother and ex-wife Patricia Neal, in
extreme and exaggerated ways has certainly influenced the polarised characterisations in
his novels. Nicholson notes that “Dahl’s dependence, as an only boy, upon the sole love
of his mother, raises interesting issues that relate to his ambivalent and polarised
depictions of women in his books” (318). From the beginning of Dahl’s career as a
children’s author, gender representations in his novels have been controversial. He has
been accused numerous times of supporting misogynistic views in his works. For
children’s book critic Amanda Craig, Dahl’s characterisation of polarised representations
of women in his works is in line with what she refers to as a “streak of rather unpleasant
misogyny” (de Castella). Craig comments how “in a Freudian sense, female characters
are either warm and loving like ‘the supportive, luscious peach’ or evil like the wicked
aunts. It’s a simple duality that children are used to […] Dahl is picking up the baton of
the evil stepmother and the fairy godmother” (de Castella). Dahl polarises the women in
his texts to emphasise his own problematic views about ‘appropriate’ gendered
behaviours.

One of the most memorable representations of a lousy-mother cook in Dahl’s
oeuvre is the characterisation of Mrs Wormwood in *Matilda*. When readers are first
introduced to Mrs Wormwood, she is described as “a large woman whose hair was dyed
platinum blonde except where you could see the mousy-brown bits growing out from the
roots” (21). Mrs Wormwood defines herself by her appearance: she condescendingly tells
Miss Honey that instead of choosing a life of “books” like Matilda’s teacher, she chose
“looks” (*Matilda* 91-92). The narrator speaks unfavourably of her “heavy make-up” (21) and the fact that she “had one of those unfortunate bulging figures where the flesh appears to be strapped in all around the body to prevent it from falling out” (21). Here, Mrs Wormwood’s appearance is akin to the monstrous feminine mother figure whose body marks her as what Barbara Creed has described as “the incorporating, devouring mother”, the oral mother (144) and ultimate threat to her children. Like *Chocolate Factory’s* Mrs Gloop and *James’s* Aunt Sponge, Mrs Wormwood’s out-of-control flesh is used to emphasise a monstrous maternity and monstrous femininity.

This description of Mrs Wormwood implies that she lacks “control of consumption” which is often regarded in Western society as “women’s principal channel for expression of identity, influence, and will” (Counihan *Anthropology* 107). Clémentine Beauvais astutely notes that this description has “essentialist undertones” and the narrative voice “essentializes her ‘bulging figure’ by suggesting that it is in her *nature* to be fat” (Beauvais, “Child Giftedness”, 285). Beauvais also highlights how Mrs Wormwood’s condemnation “has sexist undertones, but here sexism is also unmistakably tinged with class judgment: Mrs. Wormwood is shamed for being, by nature, an unappealing woman, and, by culture, unable to make the right choices to remedy this issue with good taste” (Beauvais, “Child Giftedness”, 285). This classist view of Mrs Wormwood can be compared to Victor Hazell’s characterisation as an overweight member of the *nouveau riche* in *Danny*, as analysed in the first chapter. In both cases Dahl assumes classist and sizeist prejudices against Mrs Wormwood and Victor Hazell, and he problematically presents these ideologically suspect ideas in a didactic way, teaching children that it is perfectly acceptable to view others, and other people’s bodies, with an unreasonably critical eye.
While it is established early on in the novel that Matilda lacks a role model who will encourage her scholastic pursuits, what is presented as particularly problematic as the narrative progresses is that Matilda also lacks an adequate mother-cook in the Wormwood household, and as a result, is in danger of becoming an inadequate mother-cook herself someday. The Wormwood family’s association with improper meals and Mrs Wormwood’s representation as a “lousy mother-cook” is evidenced in the breakfast scene in *Matilda*. The narrator describes how,

At breakfast time Matilda sat quietly at the dining-room table eating her cornflakes. Her brother sat opposite her with his back to the door devouring hunks of bread smothered with a mixture of peanut-butter and strawberry jam. The mother was just out of sight around the corner in the kitchen making Mr Wormwood’s breakfast which always had to be two fried eggs on fried bread with three pork sausages and three strips of bacon and some fried tomatoes (53).

This breakfast scene at the Wormwood household is particularly revealing for several reasons. Although it is unclear whether or not Mrs Wormwood prepared Matilda and her brother’s breakfasts, the fact that both breakfasts consist of different foods and that they are convenience foods which are not so much cooked as they are assembled emphasises Mrs Wormwood’s representation as a lousy-mother cook. The ‘assemblage’ of Matilda and her brother’s breakfast go against the idea put forth by Ashley et al. that within a British context, most consider that “the proper meal is […] home-cooked” (125). While it could be argued that by cooking her husband a traditional fry-up, Mrs Wormwood is, in this instance at least, fulfilling the role of a marvellous mother cook, the fact that her children are not partaking in the same breakfast as their father is meant to strongly suggest otherwise. Here Mrs Wormwood fulfils the role of a “good wife”, rather than a
“good mother”, and commits the rather transgressive act, at least in Western society, of placing the needs of her husband before that of her children. As Ladd-Taylor and Umansky note, “The ‘bad’ mother we recognize today has historical roots in the late eighteenth and nineteenth century […] Vestiges of the Victorian ideal of motherhood persist: the ‘good’ mother remains self-abnegating, domestic, preternaturally attuned to her children’s needs; the ‘bad’ mother has failed in one or more of these scores” (Ladd-Taylor and Umansky 6). Ladd-Taylor and Umansky’s description of “good” and “bad” mothers respectively complicate our discussion about Mrs Wormwood. It is not stated in the text whether or not Mrs Wormwood has prepared breakfast for herself and in this way, she somewhat conforms to the idealised “self-abnegating, domestic” “good” mother, while at the same time, her failure to be “preternaturally attuned to her children’s needs” (6) emphasise, at least by the standards that govern the text, that she is indeed a “bad” mother, highlighting yet again, the dilemma of Dahl.

In addition this scene highlights how, by consuming different food at the breakfast table, the Wormwoods consume their (individualised) meals in an improper way. As Ashley et al. note that the proper meal does not simply constitute “what one eats but how we eat: the proper meal is at a table, shared and promotes sociality and talk” (125). As discussed in the previous section, Dahl promotes a similar attitude towards meals and conviviality in texts such as *The BFG* in which proper sociality during a meal is maintained even in extremely unusual circumstances. In *The BFG* breakfast is a calm, convivial event, with Sophie, the Queen, and the BFG all eating the same food, at the same time, and in the same place. The fact that Tibbs goes to great lengths to ensure that the BFG’s dining experience is as similar as possible to Sophie and the Queen’s is testament to the importance placed on a general sense of pleasure and conviviality at breakfast in the text. In contrast, readers are informed in *Matilda* how at breakfast time,
“Mr Wormwood came noisily into the room” and how “[h]e was incapable of entering any room quietly, especially at breakfast time” (53). The general unpleasantness of not only Mr Wormwood but mealtimes at the Wormwood household in general is emphasised again when Mr Wormwood asks his wife demandingly, “Where’s my breakfast?” (54). Mr Wormwood’s representation here is similar to Dahl’s complaints about demanding husbands in *Cookbook*: Mr Wormwood’s disruptive entrance is part of a pattern of behaviour in which “[h]e always had to make his appearance felt immediately by creating a lot of noise and clatter. One could almost hear him saying, ‘It’s me! Here I come, the great man himself, the master of the house, the wage-earner, the one who makes it possible for all the rest of you to live so well! Notice me and pay your respects!’” (53-54). This description highlights how “The narrative voice in *Matilda* firmly expresses […] disgust” towards Mr Wormwood and how he “is presented as essentially parasitic […] Further dehumanized by being repeatedly described as “beastly,” the Wormwoods, it is understood, are social leeches, dirty and undesirable” (Beauvais, “Child Giftedness”, 281). Beauvais’ emphasis on the narrative voice’s preoccupation with Mr Wormwood’s “beastliness” and “dirtiness” parallels the characterisation of Mr Twit and his association with dirt and by extension, disorder. Here, Mr Wormwood consumes a traditional English breakfast, a meal which is meant to connote a sense of civility and conviviality but he consumes it the wrong way.

Absent from the Wormwood breakfast is the sense of ‘pause’ represented in the breakfast sequence in *The BFG*. By demanding his breakfast and consuming food completely different from that of his family, Mr Wormwood and his family are participating in a sort of proper-meal paradox: they are physically seated together for a meal, yet at the same time, their consumption of breakfast cereal, bread with peanut butter and jam, and an English fry-up respectively, indicates that they are all engaging in a form
of dietary individualization at the table. Despite cooking her husband’s breakfast, there are no other instances in *Matilda* in which Mrs Wormwood actually cooks. In the text, Mrs Wormwood is clearly a lousy mother-cook similar to the one Dahl describes in *Cookbook* as she does not work, neglects her children, and plays bingo, which left her “so exhausted both physically and emotionally that she never had enough energy left to cook an evening meal” (49). In fact, Mrs Wormwood’s characterisation is consistent with Dahl’s tendency to “vilif[y] characters who refuse to embrace the domestic” (Alston, *The Family in English Children’s Literature*, 141) and her representation as a lousy mother-cook is perhaps most emphasised by the food she serves during the Wormwoods’ family dinner. Readers are informed that the Wormwoods are typically found in the living room eating “TV dinners in floppy aluminium containers with separate compartments for the stewed meat, the boiled potatoes and the peas” (*Matilda* 20) in front of the television.  

It should be noted that in examining Dahl’s frustration and anxieties about convenience food culture in post-war Britain, the representation of the TV dinners in *Matilda* is significant to this discussion in three distinct ways. First, by consuming TV dinners, the Wormwoods are eating ‘mock’ versions of proper meals. Ashley et al. notes that while “more recent studies of British perceptions of the proper meal [are] showing some shift towards ‘menu pluralism’”, “the meat/potatoes/vegetables model” remains “central to British people’s understanding of the proper meal” (126). Although these

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91 Later on in the novel, the family’s reliance on convenience food is emphasised further when the narrator points out that “if it wasn’t TV dinners” served at the Wormwood household, “it had to be fish and chips” (49).
dinners conform to the standard of a meat and two-vegetable dinner, they are certainly not represented as ‘authentic’ versions of healthy foods but industrialised and processed versions of a traditionally (British) home-cooked meal. These TV dinners and other convenience foods served at the Wormwood household attempt and ultimately fail to recapture the nostalgic sense of the ‘homemade’ and do not connote what Carrigan et al. refer to as homemade food that is “emotionally laden with highly nostalgic, idealistic undertones” and prepared through cooking with raw ingredients (“Managing routine food choices” 376). While the Wormwoods are eating a type of meat and two-vegetable dinner, and essentially, a variation of the right ‘kind’ of food, it has certainly been prepared in the ‘wrong’ way. Dahl judges the Wormwoods and this imagery “allows the reader, even the professional reader, to slide out of individual caricature and into problematic social realistic judgments” (Beauvais, “Child Giftedness”, 282). In *Matilda*, food functions as a crucial signifier that Dahl uses to indeed judge categorise individuals into binary oppositions of good/bad and fat/thin. Dahl’s representation of overweight individuals reinforces the problematic idea that “The thin body proclaims […] its wearer eats “right,” is good, and fits society’s ideals” and that fatness “is a clear symbol of loss of control” (Counihan, *The Anthropology of Food and Body*, 123).

Secondly, in Mrs Wormwood’s characterisation as a lousy mother-cook completely reliant on frozen TV dinners and takeaway meals, Dahl is also suggesting that the marketing of convenience food as aids to the busy family is actually a ploy to distract attention away from the possibility that, in fact, convenience food is most attractive to the lazy adult, like Matilda’s mother, rather than the hardworking adult. The Wormwoods problematically consume the types of ready meals supposedly designed to aid *hardworking* families—particularly dual-income families—that are pressed for time due to the constraints and demands of balancing work- and home-lives, in maintaining
quotidian commensality within the home. In the novel, Mrs Wormwood’s engrossing interest in Bingo and Soap Operas are represented as poor reasons to rely on TV dinners to feed her family, as the text makes it clear that she should be feeding her family ‘proper’ homemade meals rather than engaging in these activities. Mrs Wormwood’s dependence on convenience foods is problematic because she does not lead the fast-paced lifestyle that might require the assistance of ready meals to help her maintain her (and her family’s) daily routines and meal structures. Jaine contrasts traditional homemade food with convenience foods and highlights how the convenience of the latter “may lie in closing off the dilemmas of choice from a worried mind” (Jaine 216). Mrs Wormwood is represented as having very little to worry about and so her reliance on convenience foods is represented as particularly inexcusable. What *Matilda* reveals about convenience foods is that they are highly symbolic of a lifestyle contrary to order. Even though these foods are produced and consumed in order to release women from cooking duties, it seems that Dahl fears that ‘improper’ mothers, like Mrs Wormwood, who have few responsibilities outside the home (and who have not taken on enough responsibilities or duties within the home) might consume too much or rely too heavily on these foods as a substitute for, or ‘mock’ versions of, proper dinners.

Thirdly, the Wormwood’s pre-prepared ready meals are represented as a threat to proper family life. Alston argues that “the Wormwoods’ inability to conform to traditional culinary convention identifies them as a bad family and promotes, by negative example, the right way for good families to behave” (*The Family in English Children’s Literature* 131). Family life is cheapened in the Wormwood household by virtue of their ready-made meals and by the fact that the TV trays replace proper tables at dinner time and sociality is substituted with American soap-operas highlighting how the family “fail[s] to share their domestic space in a conventional manner” (*The Family in English
*Children’s Literature* 65). The message about proper dinners in *Matilda* coincides with popular views in post-war Britain that regarded the proper dinner “as a symbol for what a proper family does and is something that families continue to aspire to” (James et al. 39). James et al. explain that from the 1980s to the early 1990s, a number of critics of convenience food insisted that the notion of “the ‘proper dinner’ constitutes the cement of family life” (39) and was primarily, “cooked by women for their families” (39). Moreover, preparation of proper meals were seen as central to the maintenance of a healthy family, and the proper dinner in particular “not only evidenced women’s care and love for their families but also distilled the gendered division of labour that existed within households and evidenced the generational hierarchy between parents and children” (39). The Wormwood family’s failure to meet the ideal standards in terms of their poor food consumption is bound up in their treatment of one another and vice versa. Mr and Mrs Wormwood are, in this sense, exactly what they eat while Matilda and her brother are exempted from Dahl’s criticism as they are both in the care of their parents. Dahl’s didactic messages about food, power, and control are grounded in the author’s own prejudices about body image and expressed in a sinister way. What is problematic is the way in which Dahl coerces readers into co-opting his moral objections about the parents in the novel suggests that for young readers, “no actual agency is possible” (Nodelman, “The Hidden Child”, 266).

In addition to the TV dinners, what is also presented as problematic in the food preparation and consumption at the Wormwood household is that “[t]he only book in the whole of this enlightened household was something called *Easy Cooking* belonging to her mother, and when [Matilda] had read this from cover to cover and had learnt all the recipes by heart, she decided she wanted something more interesting” (*Matilda* 5). The Wormwoods’ ‘book collection’ or lack thereof, not only highlights how reading is
certainly not a priority in their household but it also indicates that cooking is of little importance as well. The title of the Wormwood’s cookbook is significant: “Easy Cooking” suggests that the contents and recipes in the book require few to basic cooking skills and likely relies on shortcuts or convenience foods to speed up the overall cooking process. The title “Easy Cooking” implies that this cookbook places productivity before taste and technique and is representative of what Visser has identified as a way of looking at food as “a matter of efficiency and an expression of technological know-how” (123). Moreover, I would argue that the title “Easy Cooking” is bound up in what Visser regards as a problematic perspective in which “People see food as fuel, to be ingested with dispatch so as to make time for something else” (123). Here, Visser’s quotes are applicable to the characterisation of Mrs Wormwood: although Mrs Wormwood prepares the food, “with dispatch so as to make time for something else” (123), the “something else” in Mrs Wormwood’s life constitutes Bingo and Soap Operas, two activities described in critical and disapproving ways.

Mrs Wormwood’s unused copy of “Easy Cooking” is also revealing in that it is representative of one of the major cookbook trends that emerged after the Second World War. One can presume that “Easy Cooking” is a recipe book written in the same vein as cookbooks of the 1940s and 1950s that “increasingly endorsed the value of canned soups, cake mixes, and frozen juices, stressing their modernity and time-saving qualities” (Gargano 209). Humble notes during this period two distinctive types of cookbooks dominated the food writing market in Britain, one focused on impressive, elaborate, and authentic food using more traditional and complex techniques, the other written “for absolute beginners (bachelors, young people living in bedsits) and the very busy (working women)” (167). Humble explains how in Britain, by the 1960s,
Many food writers catering for the ‘quick, cheap and easy’ market leapt on these ingredients with alacrity, relying on cans for their main ingredients, turning soup mixes into sauces, substituting dehydrated onion flakes for the real thing and never serving a fresh vegetable if a frozen one would do. Their chief constituency was single people catering for themselves and busy women despairing at producing yet another meal for their families. There is an easy acceptance in these decades that convenience foods are the perfect diet for children (197).

The Wormwoods’s copy of “Easy Cooking” is symbolic of a popular mode of culinary instruction that relied heavily on convenience foods and speedy cooking and one that was seen as at odds with more traditional methods of food preparation. “Easy Cooking” suggests a “shortcut” approach to eating that aligns with the Wormwoods’s other shortcut approaches to life: Mr Wormwood establishes his career around shortcuts as a crooked salesman and essentially makes a living from swindling trusting customers. Similarly, there is a fairly explicit assumption in the text that it is Mrs Wormwood’s job to make sure that the family eats the right kind of food, a role she fails to fulfil because she too relies on shortcuts as evidenced by her reliance on convenience foods.

Curiously, the ‘cooking’ shortcuts made by Mrs Wormwood are represented rather negatively, yet, the author himself endorsed using chocolate bars and confectionery for ‘homemade’ desserts. Dahl describes using commercial sweets such as Jelly Babies, Maltesers, Mars Bars, Kit Kats, Crunchie Bars, and other ingredients including Hundreds and Thousands, whipped cream, and ice cream to create desserts that he claims “will make any child in the world love you” (Cookbook 148). This is strikingly similar to the way in which Dahl uses sweets in his children’s texts to make children love him. Moreover, this is yet another example of Dahl using his persona to promote confectionery
consumption but also, more importantly, it again highlights the unequal standards Dahl places on men and women in the domestic sphere. When Mrs Wormwood takes “shortcuts” in the kitchen, she is represented as a “bad mother” and it is assumed that the “marvellous mother-cooks” in Dahl’s life would rarely, if ever, cut corners in the kitchen. Yet, Dahl’s incorporation of commercially produced confectionery in some of his dessert recipes is not only represented as completely permissible, but commendable, highlighting the problematic ways Dahl holds men and women to different standards, and how this complicates assessments of notions of food and power in his literary and non-literary works.

Dahl’s didactic message condemning Mrs Wormwood’s reliance on convenience food is already problematic in the way in which the narrative voice judges her appearance and “bad” mothering. At the same time, this message is weakened and complicated by the fact that Dahl himself relied on convenience foods when preparing desserts for children. Dahl’s condemnation of Mrs Wormwood’s reliance on convenience foods is even further complicated in the scene in which Matilda is invited to Miss Honey’s cottage in the novel. In contrast to Mrs Wormwood, Matilda’s teacher Miss Honey takes on the role of proper maternal manager in the narrative and proves to be an idealised mother manager in spite of her own reliance on convenience food. Despite the negative representation of TV dinners as a sort of ‘mock’ food in Matilda, the anti-convenience food message in the text is not applied to all foods or circumstances, particularly in the scene in which Matilda visits Miss Honey’s cottage. When Miss Honey invites Matilda to her cottage, she offers her student two slices of bread with margarine, which leads Matilda to think to herself: “Margarine […] She really must be poor” (Matilda 183). Here, Miss Honey consumption of margarine seems to be acceptable because she is poor: unlike the Wormwoods Miss Honey consumes convenience food purely out of necessity, which is represented as
completely acceptable in the text. As Beauvais notes, “Extreme poverty is sentimentalized: Miss Honey, temporarily fallen from economic comfort, lives like Snow White in a little cottage in the woods” (Beauvais, “Child Giftedness”, 279). In this important example, margarine is also a particularly symbolically powerful food. Developed in nineteenth-century France, margarine was made from oil-bearing plants and used as an affordable substitute for butter for those with financial constraints (Visser 120). Oddy points out that margarine was once considered the “new ‘artificial’ food” of the nineteenth century (From Plain Fare 35), and as a sort of ‘mock’ food predating the austerity and convenience food eras in Britain, typically “eaten in hard times and less in good” (204). Although convenience foods and their association with disorderly eating are criticised in many of Dahl’s children’s works, in Matilda, Miss Honey’s consumption of margarine, as a butter substitute, is deemed acceptable and is in some ways, respectable. Miss Honey consumes margarine because she is poor and this is, in Dahl’s text, an acceptable reason for consuming ‘mock food’.

The polarised representations of Miss Honey and Mrs Wormwood’s food consumption allude to several major changes in the post-war British culinary landscape. Miss Honey’s austere diet and Mrs Wormwood’s dependence on convenience foods are representative of major shifts from the 1950s’ “initial shortages […] to a return to the free-market and comparative plenty, then growing demands of convenience foods in the 1960s” (Buss 4). As Oddy notes, British food culture following the Second World War experienced a “gradual transition from under-consumption to over-consumption” (From Plain Fare 225). Dahl was certainly not unfamiliar with these changes: in 1942, he began working as an Assistant Air Attaché at the British Embassy in Washington D.C. On his journey to Washington D.C., Dahl first travelled by boat from England to Halifax then by train to Montreal and then to Washington D.C. Sturrock explains how, during his journey,
Dahl experienced first initial shock and then frustration with “the culture of plenty he found in North America”, which represented the opposite problem to the one he found in Britain (165). While Dahl was staying at the Ritz Carlton in Montreal before journeying to Washington D.C., he “was by turns fascinated and appalled by the conspicuous consumption he found there” while millions of people were living on meagre rations across Britain (165). Shortly after arriving in D.C. Dahl sent his mother what would become the first of many monthly food rations of lemons, cheese, chocolate, and marmalade and an accompanying birthday telegram in which he complained about some of the food he had eaten on his journey thus far. The sheer size of the portions offered bewildered and angered him as he informed her of being served “lettuce hearts like giant cabbages” and “steaks like doormats, only thicker” (165). After the war, Dahl returned to his mother’s house in Amersham and lived there from 1946 until 1951, gradually readjusting to a rural lifestyle in which he tended to various animals including cows, goats, dogs, ducks, birds, and even ferrets (Treglown 75). However, the idyllic rural surroundings at Amersham did not compensate for having to return to an austere Britain where even staple foods like bread and butter were extremely scarce while luxuries were virtually unobtainable. During this time Dahl began gardening and growing various types of fruit and vegetables “to supplement the family’s meagre official rations” (Sturrock 251). Given Dahl and his family’s experiences with ‘making do’ during and immediately after the war, it is understandable why Miss Honey’s austere diet and her supplementation of margarine for butter in particular is represented very sympathetically.

In the bread and margarine scene at Miss Honey’s cottage, the narrator explains how, it was “more out of politeness than anything else [that Matilda] took a slice of bread and margarine and started to eat it. At home she would have been having buttered toast and strawberry jam and probably a piece of sponge-cake to round it off. And yet this was
somehow far more fun” (*Matilda* 185). Miss Honey informs Matilda that both slices of bread are for Matilda because she never eats anything when she gets home from work (184). She further explains that she gets a “good old tuck-in at the school lunch […] that keeps [her] going until the next morning” (184). Alston highlights how Miss Honey takes on a “proper maternal role” (in her sacrifice for Matilda) and this is emphasised by the fact that “the two converse during the meal conforming to the culturally constructed ideal of the mealtime in children’s fiction” (*The Family in English Children’s Literature* 131). Miss Honey’s bread and margarine offering, though meagre and partially comprised of a convenience food, “is a distinct sacrifice” (“The Unlikely Family Romance” 93) and is also the most proper meal represented in the text, as Miss Honey offers the best food she can afford to Matilda. Miss Honey’s austere offering of margarine demonstrates, as far as the text is concerned, that it is understandable for people to rely on convenience foods if they are unable to afford more expensive alternatives. In contrast to Mrs Wormwood, Miss Honey is using and consuming convenience food in the correct way. While the ready and take-away meals the Wormwoods consume lack what Ashley et al. refers to as the “warmth, intimacy and personal touch” characteristic of non-industrialized food products (124), Miss Honey’s generosity certainly shapes and changes Matilda’s initial impressions of margarine and Matilda eventually decides that this butter substitute “wasn’t at all bad” and “doubt[s] whether she could have told the difference if she hadn’t known” (*Matilda* 187). Despite its definition as a convenience and ‘mock’ food,

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92 Here, it is assumed that Mrs Wormwood provided Matilda with buttered toast, strawberry jam and sponge cake—and while this does indeed seem out of character, it is consistent with the positive portrayal of the Wormwood family in earlier drafts of the novel. In fact, in the earliest drafts of *Matilda* (then referred to as “The Miracle Child”), Matilda is the antagonist who reforms by the end of the story. Interestingly, as a bad child in the earlier drafts, Matilda often uses and wastes food for a series of elaborate pranks which she plays on her family and classmates. For example, Matilda smears tomato ketchup all over her face and hands and claims to have been attacked by an Alsatian dog (“The Miracle Child”, RDMSC RD 2/27/2/10), and she devises a recipe for itching powder that she uses on her classmates which features finely chopped fibre-glass along with a substantial amount of ground black pepper, Indian curry powder, and hot mustard powder stolen from the kitchen (“The Miracle Child”, RDMSC RD 2/27/1/18). This early characterisation of Matilda aligns her with the naughty children in Dahl’s other texts as she steals, plays with, and wastes her food.
margarine in *Matilda* becomes a memorably important food characteristic of the warmth and personal touch Ashley et al. refer to.

It is important to explore here the fact that while Matilda experiences both ‘good’ and ‘bad’ meals at Miss Honey’s cottage and the Wormwood household, respectively, the fare offered at school is not only presented as unappetizing but also referred to as “filth” by Matilda’s villainous headmistress Miss Trunchbull (114). When Miss Trunchbull accuses Bruce Bogtrotter of stealing and eating her private chocolate cake, she exclaims to Bruce: “That was not boy’s cake! You don’t think for one minute I’m going to eat the filth I give to you? That cake was made from real butter and real cream!” (*Matilda* 114-15), clearly distinguishing between adult and children’s food, distinguishing the powerful adult from the powerless child. Dahl undermines the differentiation between the supposed superior adult’s food and inferior children’s food perspective by placing it in the mouth of one of his most hated characters.

In assessing food, power, and didacticism in this study, the Bruce Bogtrotter cake-eating scene in *Matilda* is particularly interesting and complex. Bruce, an overweight child, who can certainly be compared to Augustus Gloop in *Chocolate Factory*, steals and consumes Miss Trunchbull’s chocolate cake and gets punished. What is perplexing is that while Augustus is punished in *Chocolate Factory* for his gluttony, and readers are not, by any means, encouraged to empathise with him, Bruce faces no such condemnation in *Matilda*. While Bruce is punished, his punishment, which involves eating an entire chocolate cake in one sitting, is not the humiliating event that Miss Trunchbull hopes it will be and instead, the scene highlights the transfer of power from the Trunchbull to Bruce, in front of the entire school. While at first, the children fear that Miss Trunchbull has filled the chocolate cake with pepper, castor-oil, or arsenic, or has booby-trapped the
cake with a bomb (120-121), when Bruce is able to consume most of the cake, it is clear that, in contrast to Augustus’s fall into the chocolate river, his gluttony is represented as a great strength that will lead him to a victory in the “battle between him and the mighty Trunchbull” (124). This scene complicates Dahl’s didactic messages in not only Chocolate Factory but in other texts in which overweight characters are villainised, including Matilda (Miss Trunchbull, Mrs Wormwood), Danny (Victor Hazell), James and the Giant Peach (Aunt Sponge), and Fantastic Mr Fox (Farmer Boggis). Bruce Bogtrotter’s cake-eating scene can certainly be interpreted as subversive within Dahl’s oeuvre, yet this particular scene, provides an explanation for the division amongst critics as to whether or not Dahl’s texts are subversive or didactic.

This chapter’s exploration of the convenience food industry’s effects on meal routinisation, snacking, and proper meals as represented in Dahl’s children’s novels highlights not only the author’s fixation on control and order, but also how the contradictions about food and power in his texts are symptomatic of the didactic and subversive messages in his texts. This chapter also revealed contradictory messages about the way in which power divisions are mediated through the consumption of food in Matilda. The following chapter expands on ideas pertaining to the industrialised food complex as presented in this chapter and looks closely at how Dahl’s concerns about agricultural biotechnology’s effect on the British food industry translates into discussions about power, control, and didacticism in his texts.
Chapter Four: The Future of Food

In the previous chapter I explored the relationship between food, meal routinisation, convenience foods, and control in Dahl’s children’s texts and how Dahl’s fixation on control in his own life informed the didactic messages in his texts, which provides important insight into how ideology functions in Dahl’s novels. Although many of these convenience foods were created with the future in mind—that is, to make everyday tasks like cooking, eating, and washing up more efficient and convenient—the components of ready meals, canned food and other preserved convenience foods were manipulated and transformed to appear and taste similar to familiar ‘homemade’ food. Yet, by the 1960s, as Bee Wilson explains, convenience foods had been transformed from food designed to resemble and taste like traditional foods to edible concoctions that actually bore very little resemblance to actual food. For example, Wilson points out that while convenience drinks like instant lemonade were made with a combination of water and tartaric acid, everybody knew it should have been made with fresh lemons. It was much harder to say what “Tab,” the new diet drink introduced in 1963, was an imitation of. It might as well have appeared from space, so little resemblance did it have to any traditional beverage. Like so many of the new foods and drinks, it was a novel creation, sui generis (233).

“Tab” and other processed drinks such as Gatorade, first envisioned and created in the 1960s, contained unique flavours not typically found in traditional food and drinks. As Ruth Gay noted in an article from 1979, “the industry is bored with merely reproducing nature” considering “[t]he new frontier” to be “‘fantasy flavor,’ which has no counterpart in the vegetable kingdom and is altogether the product of the chemist’s imagination” (86). This chapter expands on the connections between food and control in the third chapter
and considers how the fantastical representations of futuristic food and food technologies in Dahl’s novels reveal a great deal about the author’s ideological positions on food, power, and control more generally. This chapter also analyses the relationship between food and power in relation to the major changes in the British food industry during this period.

It is important to clarify that this chapter is not so much an analysis of the exact components of fictional futuristic food but how these fictional foods are used in Dahl’s texts to highlight anxieties about the future of the British food industry. With this in mind, it is worth mentioning that there are limitations in analysing futuristic food: as food historian Warren Belasco explains in his book *Meals to Come: A History of the Future of Food* (2006), “Stories about the future tend toward large abstractions. In part this is simply because the future *is* an abstraction; it has not happened yet” (3). This chapter examines how the representation of futuristic foods and food technologies in Dahl’s novels raises important questions that challenge the definition of food and where it will come from in the near future. I will also explore the ways in which Dahl’s fixation over food production processes reveal both the author’s preoccupation with control, but also contradictions across Dahl’s novels that undermine the didactic messages in his texts.

While what we understand as ‘natural’ food or ‘traditional’ food production and cooking methods were developed over many generations and across many civilizations, agricultural innovations since the nineteenth century have completely transformed the way humans produce and consume food at a much more accelerated pace than ever before. Although Dahl’s children’s texts do not explicitly catalogue the major transformations in British food culture, they comment on the significant and potentially negative impact of scientific and technological developments in the food industry. With the complicated exception of the confectionery industry (given the Dahl estate’s stake in
Nestlé’s Wonka brand sweets as well as its partnerships with McDonald’s and Asda’s breakfast cereals), Dahl’s texts are highly critical of the processed food industry’s practices and these criticisms are expressed through a fictionalised representation of the intricate post-war industrial food complex in Britain. While Wonka is represented favourably, for the most part, in *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (1964) his characterisation in the sequel, *Charlie and the Great Glass Elevator* (1972) is complicated by the representation of Wonka’s factory as not simply a confectionery production company but as an industrial food enterprise with immense resources invested in not only confectionery but also ‘scientific’ research for cosmetic and pharmaceutical products.

This chapter explores how the modification, enrichment, and fortification of natural and artificial ingredients in the creation of novel lab-grown food is presented as threatening in Dahl’s fiction. These foods are presented as particularly threatening because unlike convenience foods and confectionery, they are even further removed from an original, natural food source. Although the futuristic concoctions in Dahl’s texts are presented as impressive creations, as Charlie is excited about Wonka’s creations in *Chocolate Factory* and George is enthusiastic about his own ‘medicinal’ mixture, many of the characters in Dahl’s novels, including Charlie in *Great Glass Elevator* and Mrs Kranky in *George’s Marvellous Medicine* (1981) have what is represented as both an excitement and healthy scepticism towards new, synthetic food products. This scepticism is indeed reflective of Dahl’s “instinctive dislike of modernity and automated mass culture” (Butler 6). These foods are not necessarily analogous to post-war convenience foods but rather, they are symbolic of the possible outcomes of the food industry of the future. The gum that replaces a three-course dinner in *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*
transforms a misbehaving Violet Beauregarde into a giant blueberry.93 James’ giant peach is so large that it kills his villainous aunts and destroys whole English villages. George’s concoction made of random household ingredients transforms his grandmother into various shapes and sizes until she eventually disappears. Dahl seems to have these foods injure the very people readers find so obnoxious in the texts and we are surely meant to cheer when Violet, James’s aunts, and George’s grandmother are hurt (and in some cases killed) by these foodstuffs. Yet, Dahl’s use of these foods in particular does not necessarily indicate that he is pleased with the transformations of the food industry. What is at issue is how the greedy characters are so overcome by not only their curiosity about the latest food invention but also their relentless desire to consume that they are blinded by their insatiability and unable to recognise the potentially disastrous effects of new-fangled food products. At the same time, the heroes of the narrative make the production of these products possible—this contradiction complicates discussions about Dahl’s didacticism, which will be unpacked further in this chapter.

The contradictory representation of technological advancements in food production as innovations to be both celebrated and feared in Dahl’s texts will be analysed in this chapter. This chapter will closely examine *James and the Giant Peach* (1961), *George’s Marvellous Medicine, Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (1964) and *Charlie and the Great Glass Elevator* (1972) and unravel how the didactic messages in the novels reveal a series of contradictions about food, power, and control. These texts can be read as didactic novels anticipating the increasing production and consumption of highly processed foods that are entirely novel creations which push the boundaries of what we consider food altogether. Dahl’s children’s narratives represent a crucial shift in how children are taught about the food world. The first section explores Dahl’s blending

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93 That Wonka produces this gum is certainly problematic—the characterization of Wonka as something of an ambivalent hero will be explored further in the third section of this chapter.
of genres in *James* and draws connections between the giant peach and other examples of gigantic and at times, monstrous plants in fairy tales, adventure stories, and science-fiction. In addition, this section examines how the peach’s rapid growth is symbolic of developments in experimental radiation on food and plant growth in the post-war period, the relationship between futuristic foods and issues such as environmentalism, and the use of food as a weapon of war and nuclear attack following World War II. The second section explores the moral and ethical dilemma of product testing on humans and animals and analyses the relationship between post-war animal husbandry and industrialised farming in *George’s Marvellous Medicine*. Specifically, this section focuses on how the problematic use of growth hormones and chemicals on livestock in this novel contradicts with the anti-factory farming messages in *Fantastic Mr Fox*. In the final section, I will look at the experimentation process in Willy Wonka’s factory in both *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* and *Charlie and the Great Glass Elevator*. This section examines the ethical implications of product-testing of ‘futuristic foods’ in the *Charlie* texts more generally and outlines the similarities between Willy Wonka’s candy factory and real-life multinational food conglomerates.

**4.1 (Radioactive) Giant Fruit and Ecocatastrophe in *James and the Giant Peach* (1961)**

In *James and the Giant Peach*, readers are introduced to James Henry Trotter, an orphaned boy whose parents are eaten by a rhinoceros that escaped from London Zoo. After his parents’ death James is tragically placed under the care of his physically and emotionally abusive Aunts Sponge and Spiker who are described as “selfish and lazy and cruel, and right from the beginning they started beating poor James for almost no reason
Eventually, however, through a series of extraordinary events James is able to find refuge from his aunts inside the giant peach, and embarks on a perilous oceanic crossing from the English countryside to New York City. The few critics who have assessed *James* have interpreted the text through a variety of critical lenses. Mark I. West reads *James* as “a story about psychological regression” noting how “James’s decision to enter the giant peach suggests that he wishes to escape from the harsh world to the security of the womb. The scene in which he climbs into the peach closely resembles a reversal of the birthing process” (*Roald Dahl* 62). Matthew Bokma and Adam Barkman look at *James* through an existentialist perspective using the philosophical writings of Søren Kierkegaard. Bokma and Barkman assert that *James* wrestles with existentialist questions about the chaotic reality of existence and the search for joy (47) and how “These questions are linked to a characteristically Dahlian and Kierkegaardian theme: self-actualization (or becoming a fully developed human), the fundamental task of every individual” (47). While these interpretations are fascinating, this section expands on the critical interpretations of *James* as an updated fairy tale. Ann Alston convincingly argues that the family dynamic between James and his Aunts Sponge and Spiker shares similarities with families in traditional fairy tales. For Alston, *James* is “a neat reversal of the Cinderella story in terms of gender” explaining how “James, rather than finding a prince … [instead] discovers a bizarre family set-up of oversized and charismatic yet caring insects. The peach the insects live in is a model of growth and fertility while, in contrast, the aunts’ house and its setting are representative of the aunts’ lack of nurture and love” (“The Unlikely Family Romance” 88). Similarly, Deborah Cogan Thacker also

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94 In a promotional book for the 1996 film adaption of *James and the Giant Peach*, Dahl’s daughter Lucy Dahl comments on Dahl’s inspirations for the characters in *James*: “Almost everything that he wrote about had influenced his life in some way. Aunt Spiker and Aunt Sponge, for example, were a foul mixture of his cruellest teachers throughout his school days” (12) while “The Cloud-Men were derived from a tree in blossom. “Close your eyes,” Dad said, as we walked through the orchard in spring. Then he led me to the blooming tree. “Now open them,” and all I could see were little faces in what appeared to be clouds in the sky” (12).
interprets James as a Cinderella figure who is able to flee his abusive home and make a new home in New York City (21). For Thacker, “Dahl appropriates expected fairy tale trajectories and power relationships, whether reflecting the child’s struggle for selfhood in the face of devouring parents or through a moral testing grounds” (22). David Rudd also explores the fairy tale elements of Dahl’s novels in his analysis of the insects’ role in *James*:

Dahl, certainly, was always on the hunt for new, surprise endings to his short stories; and more specifically in his writing for children, continually sought out novel approaches; for instance, using insects as main characters in *James and the Giant Peach*, updating fairy stories and nursery rhymes to cater for a more savvy, twentieth-century young audience, and fashioning a language more appropriate for those reared on cartoons, TV, advertising slogans and the like (52-53).

In this section I argue that *James* is an important text to examine in relation to the study of food in Dahl’s children’s texts because it considers food politics with fantastical and sci-fi themes. Although Dahl’s novel addresses important concepts such as bravery, friendship, and family, I will focus on the giant peach in the text and contend that the peach, as a monstrous plant, is at the centre of various anxieties about the state of the environment and the impact of futuristic food technologies. I will also examine how the peach’s representation as a monstrous plant reinforces Alston, Thacker, and Rudd’s interpretations of *James* as an updated fairy tale by drawing comparisons between the peach in Dahl’s text and the giant beanstalk in the English fairy tale ‘Jack and the Beanstalk’. The peach’s representation as a monstrous plant points to examples of ecocatastrophe and Cold War anxieties from sci-fi narratives during this period, and comments on the complicated and divided discourses about atomic power and nuclear
war in the 1950s and early 1960s, more of which will be discussed as this section progresses. It is important to clarify here that I will be analysing James in relation to the United States’ promotion of nuclear energy after the Second World War. Dahl was dividing his life between the United States and England during this period and the fact that James was first accepted for publication in the U.S. in 1961, and not published in England until 1967 suggests Dahl’s text was shaped greatly by the cultural climate of the United States at this time.  

For my analysis of James it is important to consider the parallels between Dahl’s text and “Jack and the Beanstalk”. According to Ruth Bottigheimer, the earliest versions of “Jack and the Beanstalk” can be traced back to the eighteenth century and the first documented title of the Jack tales was Jack and the Gyants (1708) (266). Bottigheimer categorises the eighteenth-century Jack tales into three groups: in the first cycle, “Jack defeats his foes physically” using tools that would be the modern-day equivalent of horns, spades, shovels, and picks (266); in the second cycle, Jack fights and tricks Welsh giants which eventually garners him favour from the mythic King Arthur; in the third “honest Jack” cycle, Jack is in King Arthur’s service and “continues to fight Welsh giants” (266). In later eighteenth- and nineteenth-century rewritings of “Jack and Beanstalk” Bottigheimer explains how “the crudity of […] gory killings disappeared, King Arthur faded away, Jack became an earthly Everybody, and the Giant a geographically unlocalizable married oaf, reachable only by the magic of a bean that grew endlessly heavenward” (267-68). Ultimately, the “Jack tales incorporated modern fairy-tale elements of social rise through magical enrichment” (268). The notion of “social rise through magical enrichment” in the Jack tales of the later eighteenth and nineteenth centuries share greater similarities with Dahl’s James than the earlier versions of “Jack”

95 As Catherine Butler explains, “[Dahl] broke into the American market even before the UK one, and his first books for children were originally published in the USA” (1).
and because of this link I will be looking specifically at Joseph Jacobs’s 1890 version of the famous English fairy tale. While there are many versions of ‘Jack’ I have decided to use Jacobs’s version because the capitalistic message in Jacobs’s version aligns with Dahl’s capitalistic reinterpretation of the traditional fairy tale in his 1982 collection of fairy tales *Revolting Rhymes*. As Brian E. Szumsky explains of Jacobs’s version of ‘Jack’, Jacobs’s “moral” is a purely capitalistic one in which the entrepreneurial (mercantile-capitalist) spirit - that is, the taking of risks for the sake of personal gain - results in Jack’s materialistic success […] The “moral” of the story boils down to a dialectic on risk as investment and reward. The notion of risk is suggested not only in the initial trade, but also when Jack enters the Giant’s house (19).

Similarly, Dahl’s Jack is an entrepreneurial risk-taker. In Dahl’s version, however, the beanstalk itself garners Jack capital as the leaves of the entire giant plant are made of gold (*Revolting Rhymes* 15). In both *James* and ‘Jack and the Beanstalk’, the protagonists are offered mysterious objects from peculiar men, who promise that these crystals and beans, respectively, will transform the boys’ lives. In ‘Jack and the Beanstalk’, Jack and his widowed mother are very poor and live off the milk from their cow and when the cow stops giving milk, they decide to sell the cow for money. On his way to market to sell the cow, Jack meets a man who offers to swap his magic beans for Jack’s cow and who explains how the beans, when planted overnight, will grow up to the sky by the following morning (Jacobs 32). When Jack wakes up:

The room looked so funny. The sun was shining into part of it and yet all the rest was quite dark and shady. So Jack jumped up and dressed himself and went to the window. And what do you think he saw? Why, the beans
his mother had thrown out of the window into the garden had sprung up into a big beanstalk which went up and up and up till it reached the sky. So the man spoke truth after all (32).

The early scenes in ‘Jack and the Beanstalk’ are clearly an important inspiration for James: when an old man slowly approaches James at the beginning of Dahl’s text, he is holding a small white paper bag full of “a mass of tiny green things that looked like little stones or crystals, each one about the size of a grain of rice” (James 17). The green crystals are described as beautiful, bright, and luminous and as objects, according to the old man, containing “more power and magic […] than in all the rest of the world put together” (18). The green crystals are made of crocodile tongues, lizard eyeballs, the fingers of a young monkey, a pig’s gizzard, a green parrot’s beak, porcupine juice and three spoonfuls of sugar stewed for a week (18). Here, the old man is represented as an alchemist figure in the text: he seems to appear out of nowhere and offers James a bag of moving, shimmering green crystals which he urges James to ingest, promising that these crystals will change his life forever (19). Although it is not clear whether or not the mysterious old man in Dahl’s novel made the green crystals himself, his extensive knowledge of the process and his ready supply of green crystals identify him as a sort of alchemist figure, and as a precursor to the modern scientist.97

96 This particular description of the green crystals would influence the lengthy descriptions of various formulas and potions in Dahl’s later novels, including Charlie and the Chocolate Factory, The Witches, George’s Marvellous Medicine amongst others.

97 Historically, in literary interpretations, the alchemist is a figure that straddles fantastic and protoscientific worlds. I would argue that the alchemist’s unique position in both the fantastic and scientific worlds makes them important to texts like Dahl’s which bring together themes from both science fiction and fantasy novels. In Dahl’s texts, the marriage of fantasy and science is made possible through the alchemist figure and as we will examine in subsequent sections, the alchemist figure takes on many forms in Dahl’s novels, particularly in relation to the creation of futuristic foods, and is perhaps most memorably embodied by characters such as Willy Wonka and to a slightly lesser extent, George Kranky in George’s Marvellous Medicine.
In contrast to Jack, James is advised to mix the green crystals with water and a number of other ingredients and to consume them quickly rather than plant them. However, in his haste, James trips, falls, and drops the entire contents of the bag onto the ground near the old peach tree in his aunts’ garden (21-22). Unlike the beanstalk in Jack’s tale, which grows gradually overnight, the peach enlarges immediately after contact with the green crystals and begins growing larger and larger, until, in a matter of minutes, it is the size of a small house (30). Given James’ publication in 1961, it is difficult not to interpret the glowing green crystals as not only fantastical, magical objects but also as objects with radioactive properties. The crystals’ luminous green colour is significant as it alludes to the green associated with radioactivity: “[m]any people associate the word “radioactive” with an eerie, green glow” (Burchfield 37) and as virologist Chris Smith explains, the association between radioactive chemicals and a green glow has its origins in the early twentieth-century development of a paint containing zinc sulphide, doped with a small amount of copper. This mixture glowed bright green when it was exposed to radioactivity, and adding a small amount of radium to the paint was a cheap way to provide a long-lasting supply of radiation capable of keeping the paint illuminated (“It Don’t Necessarily Glow, Bro! The origins of the myth that radiation glows green...”).

While the green crystals in James are not confirmed as radioactive material in the text, the ensuing effects the crystals have on the insects and the peach are clear references to the monstrous and gigantic insects and plants represented in nuclear war narratives of the 1950s and 1960s. The representation of the peach is quite complicated, then, and it brings about both positive and negative changes to whatever and whomever encounters it. It is worth noting that the complex effects of the possibly radioactive peach are reflective of
the debates for and against radiation and atomic science made during this period, and
indeed Dahl’s representation of the transformed peach as both positive and negative
captures the spirit of the American public’s hopes and fears about atomic power after the
Second World War. As historian Spencer Weart explains, after the atomic bombings of
Nagasaki and Hiroshima in 1945, American teachers “believed, naturally enough, that the
primary response to bombs must be “education”’” and “everyone wanted students to face
the future not only with knowledge but with good cheer” (Weart 87). As a result, atomic
energy clubs formed in high schools across the country producing learning materials and
comic books promoting atomic energy in the 1950s (Weart 87; Sovacool and Valentine
77). The backlash against the first hydrogen bomb test in the world, conducted by the US
in 1952, “prompted planners to start building an extensive public relations campaign
surrounding atomic energy” (Sovacool and Valentine 76). President Dwight D.
Eisenhower’s famous “Atoms for Peace” speech (which eventually launched a campaign
of the same name) in December 1953 “had an unexpectedly strong impact on the world
public” and eventually resulted in a rapid promotion and expansion of the nuclear power
industry worldwide (Weart 80). Part of the Atoms for Peace campaign was the production
of short films that “were based on thrusting positive images” of atomic energy into the
public consciousness in the 1950s (88).

The giant peach is, in some respects, an important symbol in the text of
radioactivity gone right. The green crystals’ effects on the peach’s tremendous
transformation is not unlike the representation of “oversized peanuts “created by

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98 In the United States, atomic energy promotion was not limited to government-run productions as companies including General Electric and Walt Disney studios also took part in creating cartoons designed to educate American children about the supposed positive aspects of atomic energy: “Perhaps most effective of all was Walt Disney’s Our Friend the Atom, shown on television and in schools beginning in 1957. The great storyteller naturally introduced the subject as something “like a fairy tale,” indeed the tale of a genie released from a bottle. The cartoon genie began as a menacing giant much like the bomb-monster of editorial cartoons. But scientists turned the golem into an obedient servant who wielded the “magic power” of radioactivity, symbolized as glittering pixie-dust” (Weart 87).
radioactivity” found in Atoms for Peace productions in the 1950s (Weart 89). In fact, during this period, Atoms for Peace productions attempted to present atomic rays positively by demonstrating in more than a quarter of its films how radiation could “promote life through increasing the supply of food” and that the growth of fantastical-looking gigantic food was done through “a variety of mutation in seeds” from radiation (89). At this time, some researchers and policy makers speculated that in order “[t]o boost yields indefinitely […] radiation might displace or supplement the newly introduced petrochemical fertilizers” (Meals to Come 200). In the United States, the “optimism over the possibilities of nuclear technology” gave way to advancements in atomic energy and radioisotopes research which were promoted as “elements to help grow food quicker and cure diseases” (Sovacool and Valentine 138).99 The optimism described by Sovacool and Valentine about enlarged, radiated food is similarly expressed through the positive representation of the giant peach’s taste and texture in Dahl’s novel. When James approaches and touches the peach for the first time, readers are informed how the peach “felt soft and warm and slightly furry, like the skin of a baby mouse” (37). The peach was so soft that James felt so inclined to take “a step closer and [rub] his cheek lightly against the soft skin” (37). Even after the dramatic transformation took place, it seems as though the peach’s flavour has not been compromised.

Despite its transformation into an absurdly large peach, eating the giant fruit is not presented as particularly dangerous. As the novel progresses, however, the tantalising fruit proves to be dangerous to its surrounding environment in several ways. When we

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99 In the post-war period Weart explains the importance of “nuclear healing” and how “No production about Atoms for Peace seemed complete without a patient lying calmly on a table and gazing up at a gleaming white radiation mechanism. Medical radiation was so popular that U.S. officials had to issue a warning against “atomic” potions peddled by quacks. During the 1950s X-rays were often used to kill unwanted body hair; thousands of fluoroscopes in shoe stores across the United States and Europe showed people the bones in their children’s feet; some hospitals routinely X-rayed infants simply to please parents with an inside view of their offspring. The accumulated radiation sometimes reached hazardous levels, yet the public continued to trust in rays” (Weart 89).

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first encounter the peach, it is represented positively as a foodstuff that effectively feeds James and the insects, and later on in the novel many children in New York City, yet the peach also disrupts ecosystems on land, sea, and air at various moments throughout the text. As a gigantic food source, the peach is non-threatening. However, its accelerated growth and sheer size is presented as rather disconcerting. The peach’s dramatic transformation prompts readers to wonder what exactly would have happened to James if he had consumed the entire bag of green crystals as instructed. Would he have been transformed into some sort of giant (like the one that exists in “Jack and the Beanstalk”)? Would a gigantic James have been dangerous to those around him? Would he have transformed into a figure not unlike comic-book heroes during this period including Marvel Comics’ Fantastic Four (1961), Spider-Man (1962), The Hulk (1962), and Daredevil (1964) whose origin stories stem from mishaps related to radiation?

Apart from the peach’s dramatic transformation, one of the most significant changes in the surrounding environment sparked by the green crystals is the insects’ rapid change into oversized versions of their previous selves. As Ralph Beliveau argues, monstrous giant animals and insects presented in literature and film “are [often] the direct result of human tampering with the environment” (18). The Old-Green Grasshopper becomes the same size as a “large dog” and he, along with Miss Spider and the Ladybird are seen “squatting” side-by-side on a chair (James 39, 40) when James first enters the peach pit. The Centipede and the Earthworm recline on a sofa while the Silkworm is curled up in a corner and the Glow-worm is suspended from the ceiling like a large electric lightbulb (40, 41, and 49). The representation of the insects as larger than humans and potentially threatening is similar to the anxieties in Jack Arnold’s 1957 science-fiction film The Incredible Shrinking Man. In addition, in the 1950s, there were a number of films in which insects and small animals are transformed into gigantic monsters –
usually because of being close to nuclear material of some kind—and Dahl is almost certainly thinking of such narratives here. As Beliveau explains, “Human technological hubris took center stage in a series of films in the 1950s that feature gigantic animals created by science that outstrips human control” and lists Them! (1954), Beginning of the End (1957), Tarantula (1957), The Black Scorpion (1957), The Deadly Mantis (1957), Earth vs. The Spider (1958), The Killer Shrews (1959), and Giant Gila Monster (1959) as examples (19). It is often nuclear power accidents or experiments gone awry that cause the gigantic transformations in these narratives and the insects as well as the giant peach are symbolic of heightened fears of nuclear attack that arose after the nuclear attacks on Nagasaki and Hiroshima at the end of World War II. The insects’ ingestion of the green crystals and their subsequent changes emphasizes the sensitivity of the ecosystem and highlights how unfamiliar and perhaps unnatural substances placed into the earth can potentially have complicated, positive and negative consequences on the living organisms in a particular habitat.

James is initially terrified when he encounters the giant insects; yet, they eventually explain how they grew significantly in size after swallowing the green crystals and James feels assured that the strange creatures intend no harm (42, 45-46). The abnormal growth of the single peach is unsettling because it suggests something strangely unnatural and disorderly is happening within this mysterious fruit. Although the peach is described in a few instances as a thing of great beauty (28, 30), as the narrative progresses it becomes clear that the giant fruit is capable of massive destruction in its surrounding environment. The giant peach is at once a magnificently beautiful fruit and a monstrous plant and in this way, the peach functions in such a way that it “point[s] to a deep unease about the boundary between taxonomic kingdoms” (Miller, “Lives of the Monster Plants” 461). The unease about monstrous plants was not uncommon during this period given the
publication of Arthur C. Clarke’s “The Reluctant Orchid” (1956) and Roger Corman’s 1960 film *The Little Shop of Horrors* based on Clarke’s short story about a carnivorous orchid. In *James* the giant peach changes the tone in the text from fantastical, updated fairy tale at the start of the narrative, to a quasi-sci-fi story with the representation of giant insects later on in the novel. Miller surveys monstrous plants in a literary and cinematic context and explains how

[although there is incredible diversity among the hundreds of carnivorous plant species on the planet, the monstrous plants of fiction almost invariably exceed the size of even the largest of these, possess a much higher degree of mobility, and, rather than settling for a diet of insects and the occasional frog, often prove capable of consuming prey as large as *Homo Sapiens*—sometimes the only acceptable food (“Plants, Monstrous” 470).]

While the giant peach in Dahl’s novel is not carnivorous, it has a transformative effect on its surroundings. Shortly after James encounters the insects, the centipede breaks the peach stem free from the peach tree and at that point, the adventure of James and the insects truly begins (*James* 53). In contrast, ‘Jack and the Beanstalk’ concludes with Jack chopping the beanstalk in two, which falls over and “[t]hen the ogre fell down and broke his crown, and the beanstalk came toppling after” (Jacobs 35): the fairy tale simply ends here and Jack, his mother, the stolen golden hen, and the talking harp presumably live happily ever after whereas *James*’s plot takes off after the peach breaks free from the tree. It is worth noting that the giants and Aunts Sponge and Spiker’s deaths, in both respective instances, by powerful monstrous plants are important examples in which power is transferred from adult/monstrous figure to a child. While *James* seems to fit neatly into the paradigm of a traditional fairy tale up until this point in the novel, this scene proves to
be an important turning point in which the narrative gradually evolves from part folk tale, part underdeveloped comeuppance narrative to a sci-fi inspired adventure novel. I refer to *James* as an “underdeveloped” comeuppance narrative primarily because the narrative arc differs from other traditional comeuppance narratives, including fairy tales such as *Hansel and Gretel* and *Little Red Riding Hood*, and most of Dahl’s novels including *The Witches* and *The BFG*, in which the baddies receive their comeuppance at the end of the narratives.

After the peach breaks free, to say that its effects on the surrounding environment are harmful would be an understatement. The peach leaves a huge amount of destruction in its path which is described in a dramatic, action-packed sequence certainly used to entertain and amuse young readers. While the destruction wrought by the peach is presented in an exciting but also light-hearted way, it is crucial to acknowledge that the peach *kills*: it moves quickly away from the peach tree and rolls towards Aunts Sponge and Spiker until they “lay ironed out upon the grass as flat and thin and lifeless as a couple of paper dolls cut out of a picture book” (56-57). Here, Dahl’s use of language and his comparison of the Aunts to lifeless paper dolls minimises the seriousness of their deaths in this scene. At the same time, the Aunts’ death are, as West explains, “a pivotal role in the story, for it represents the surfacing of James’s murderous feelings toward his caretakers” (“Regression and Fragmentation” 222) and although I agree that this violent description is meant to provide some sort of retribution for James—a final act of unintended vengeance against his abusers—it also emphasises the magnitude of the peach’s destruction. The overall effects of the peach on the surrounding environment are both positive and negative: when the peach rolls over Aunts Sponge and Spiker readers are urged to cheer over this crushing victory. Yet, the narrator does not explore how the subsequent destruction of the English village is devastating: people and animals run away
from the rolling peach in a panic and the giant fruit destroys a significant amount of private and public property in its path (*James* 57-59).

James does not deliberately steer the peach towards his aunts. Aunts Sponge and Spiker’s death occurs more as a karmic comeuppance for not only their abuse of James but also for their attempts to capitalise on the giant peach. The peach is on display in their makeshift circus show and while visitors marvel at its beauty, they also gawk at the absurdity of a giant peach growing in an English garden: “By lunchtime, the whole place was a seething mass of men, women, and children all pushing and shoving to get a glimpse of this miraculous fruit. Helicopters were landing like wasps all over the hill, and out of them poured swarms of newspaper reporters, cameramen, and men from the television companies” (*James* 33). West notes that “While this miraculous phenomenon amazes the aunts, they are oblivious to the peach’s beauty. They are primarily interested in exploiting the peach in order to make “a pile of money” (p. 20)” (“Regression and Fragmentation” 220). James’s aunts concern themselves with wealth and fame rather than investigating why, exactly, their once-bare peach tree is now carrying a single, giant fruit. As Ann Alston asserts, “after a day of selling tickets to people wishing to see the marvellous giant peach, Aunt Sponge and Aunt Spiker cannot feed the starving James as they are too busy counting their money and instead send him out into the garden for the night in order to pick up rubbish” (“The Unlikely Family Romance” 88). In this scene there is clearly a play on the ironic contrast between an enormous source of food and a starving boy. From the outset of the novel, the giant peach itself reads as a metaphorical sermon, disparaging greed, when it rolls over Aunts Sponge and Spiker. The remainder of the novel is rather fast-faced with action-packed sequences and without didactic or subversive messages, making the text an anomaly in Dahl’s oeuvre. After it crushes James’s aunts, the peach is described as a “terrible monster” (*James* 57) that rolls through
the countryside and through factories, like a strangely unnatural force of nature. The peach’s enormous size makes it a force of nature capable of destroying everything in its path: what takes place in the scenes where the peach is rolling through the English countryside is similar to the monster plant’s typical function in fiction. As Miller explains,

Forcing us to contemplate and confront the vegetal in the human, the monster plant inspires fear as well as offering ways forward for the posthumanist project: the overturning of hierarchies that the monster plant can effect strikes at the root of humanity’s instrumentalist domination of plants, because being forced to recognize kinship with plants will inevitably alter how we think about our use of them (“Lives of the Monster Plants” 462).

The old man’s earlier foreshadowing that marvellous things would happen to whatever came into contact with the magical green crystals is confirmed through the peach’s transformation. Furthermore, when the peach rolls over Aunts Sponge and Spiker, the abusive power they once held over James is extinguished, while the peach’s power as a monstrous fruit prevails indicating that the “overturning of hierarchies” that Miller refers to has certainly taken place at this point in the narrative. Power is transferred from the green crystals, to the peach, and by extension, James, who is able to use the peach to free himself from a life with his abusive Aunts.

In addition, the fantastical elements of the text are ‘updated’ through the use of political themes about environmentalism often found in sci-fi texts contemporaneous with James, which are used here to merge fantasy with ecological concerns. Moreover, the references to war are clear in the representation of the peach as a fantastical thing of
beauty but also as a monstrous fruit with the power to destroy. The giant peach knocks over a telegraph pole, flattens cars, breaks down fences, bowls through herds of cows, horses, and pigs, and flocks of sheep, and transforms the countryside into “a seething mass of panic-stricken animals stampeding in all directions” (57-58). The peach continues to roll quickly towards a village and through a large factory “where they made chocolate, and almost at once a great river of warm melted chocolate came pouring out of the holes in the factory wall” which covers all the streets in the entire village. The narrator asks, “[w]ould it ever stop? Why should it? A round object will always keep on rolling as long as it is on a downhill slope, and in this case the land sloped downhill all the way until it reached the ocean” (59). The giant peach has suddenly transformed into a colossal agent of death and destruction, flattening the countryside all around and threatening traditional English life as represented by the stereotypical English village.

What is perhaps most interesting about James is that the narrative begins as one rooted very much in the fairy tale tradition, but then gradually transforms into an ecocatastrophe narrative (bordering on science fiction) for children. The green crystals’ immediate effects on the peach are reflective of an emerging view of the natural environment as a deeply interconnected and highly sensitive space. Rachel Carson’s immensely influential Silent Spring (1962), published a year after James, did not merely celebrate the beauty of the environment but also informed readers of the damage already done to the natural world from the mass incorporation of pesticides and fertilizers into industrialised farming. In Silent Spring, Carson also warned readers against the continued contamination of what she saw as a powerful, highly volatile, but also extremely fragile environment. As M. Jimmie Killingsworth and Jacqueline S. Palmer note, Carson’s

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100 Because James was published in 1961, three years prior to Charlie and the Chocolate Factory, the chocolate factory in this scene is not confirmed as Willy Wonka’s; however it is likely that this scene is one of the first glimpses of Dahl’s fictitious chocolate factory in print.
seemal work is not only a significant contribution to scientific research but also “taps into a vein of mythology that has haunted literature since the Enlightenment, the story of the end of the world brought about by human hubris, the counternarrative to the master story of human progress and perfectibility” (176). In fact, Killingsworth and Palmer highlight how Carson “was perfectly aware of the connection of her rhetoric to the fabulous and the fantastic” by comparing the insect world to the fictitious world of the brothers Grimm (183). Although Carson’s seminal work was published after James, both texts reflect the anxieties about environmental catastrophe fomenting the popular imagination during this period, an anxiety also found in crucial texts including Alfred Hitchcock’s film The Birds (1963). In fact, Bernice Murphy explains how Alfred Hitchcock’s The Birds (1963) “was well into production when Carson’s first articles appeared in The New Yorker in 1962”, so that Hitchcock’s film can be interpreted as “the foundational narrative of post-Carson eco-horror” (184). I argue that James can be interpreted as an early text that was very much part of the wave of what Murphy refers to as the “‘nature strikes back’ horror films … [which] are obviously linked to the sense of ecological crisis” examined in Carson’s Silent Spring (Murphy 181).

The narrator hints that the peach falls over the Cliffs of Dover, a site crucial to the world wars, and described in James as “the most famous in the whole of England and they are hundreds of feet high” (59). The whole rolling experience very nearly kills the inhabitants of the peach itself and they remain in danger all through the novel: on the journey, James and the insects encounter sharks, and attach string (produced by the Silk Worm and Miss Spider) to seagulls who transport the peach overseas. The description of the peach rising as five hundred “seagulls strain[ed] at the strings above” and of “the giant peach rose up dripping out of the water and […] climbing towards the heavens” (88), and Nancy Ekholm Burkert’s 1961 illustration in the original text bears a striking
resemblance to the Japanese fire balloon bombs or “Fu-go”, launched by Japan on the United States and Canada during World War II. The fire balloon bomb’s unique construction as a huge balloon “[w]ith ropes dangling from the underinflated concave envelopes [which] observers compared […] to huge jellyfish swimming through the pale blue sky” (Coen 46) meant that they could travel from Japan by “a range as great as two thousand miles […] under optimum wind conditions” and with “a time-control device on each balloon that would release a five-kilogram incendiary bomb once the vehicle had completed its flight” (Coen 19). While the peach is not feared to be a bomb at this point in the narrative, the giant fruit eventually frightens panicked New Yorkers, who worry that “the biggest bomb in the history of the world was hovering over New York City, and that at any moment it might go off” (135). The similarities between the giant peach in flight and Fu-go emphasise again, the peach’s representation as both a majestic fruit that transports James and his insect friends safely across the Atlantic Ocean and just as importantly, its association with bombings (nuclear or otherwise) in the aftermath of the Second World War.
Fig. 13: “Diagram of a Japanese Fire Bomb”, *Japanese Paper Balloon Bombs: The First ICBM*, Henry Morris (Newtown, PA.: Bird and Bull Press, 1982; Print; n. pag.).

Fig. 14: Giant Peach with Seagulls, illustration by Nancy Ekholm Burkert, *James and the Giant Peach*, Roald Dahl (1961; New York: Penguin, 2011; Print; 80).

At the end of their journey, James and the insects are confronted by mysterious cloud-men prior to arriving in New York City (80-85). As the peach hovers over New
York City, New Yorkers begin to panic, thinking that the monstrous fruit is a bomb “sent over by another country to blow the whole city to smithereens” or a flying saucer (133, 140), while others believe James and the insects are men from Mars or the Moon (140). In this scene, the peach is the source of a whole host of anxieties associated with the Cold War and the Space Race: the threat of nuclear attack, giant insects, flying saucers, and extra-terrestrial invasion, and nuclear destruction all coalesce in the monstrous fruit hanging over an American city. Here, the giant peach is a futuristic-looking fruit that is perceived to be an imminent threat and in this example, the peach as grotesque plant is perceived as a possible weapon of war. A plane flying “not more than twenty feet” past the peach slices through the silken strings attaching the seagulls to the peach, causing the peach to quickly hurtle down towards the city below (136-37): “[r]ound and round and upside down went the peach as it plummeted towards the earth, and [James and his friends] were all clinging desperately to the stem to save themselves from being flung into space” (137).

In the end, the peach evades disaster and lands safely on the tip of the Empire State Building, in a reference to King Kong (1933), sparing the lives of hundreds below. The allusion to King Kong here is important as it effectively emphasises the peach’s power as a looming threat over New York City even further. As Kingwell explains, in King Kong “The Empire State is its fitting site of climax, not simply in being, at the time, the tallest building in the city, and the world” but also because of its position as “both the physical and the spiritual center of the island, and of the universe; the mythic tower around which the urban jungle arrays itself” (Kingwell 166). Like Kong on the Empire State Building, the peach is a focal point once again, and the fruit is perceived to be a threatening, monstrous plant. Given the references to overhead bombing in war as well as gigantic insects and plants, I would contend that this scene is not only referencing King
Kong but it is also referencing Ishirō Honda’s *Godzilla* (1954), where a giant monster threatens Japanese metropolis Tokyo, “spewing radioactive rays” (Suzuki 291). As C.J. Suzuki notes, the “historical and political elements in the film make Godzilla both a Japanese and atomic age monster” (Suzuki 292) and I would argue that within the context of British children’s literature, the giant peach can be interpreted as a symbolic “atomic age monster” as well.

Ultimately, *James* is a conflation of tropes, themes, and literary devices used in fairy tales, sci-fi, and adventure stories with a giant, monstrous peach at the centre of the narrative. Dahl’s novel captures the anxieties about monstrous plant life in popular culture during this period. Christian Nyby’s film *The Thing from Another World* (1951) and John Wyndham’s post-apocalyptic novel *The Day of the Triffids* (1951) feature monstrosely intelligent plant-life and a fictional carnivorous plant species called triffids respectively. The threat of enormous food recurs in other fictional works in later decades as well. John De Bello’s film, *Attack of the Killer Tomatoes* (1978), Judi Barrett’s children’s book *Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs* (1978), the 2009 film adaptation of the same name and the sequel to the 1978 publication, *Pickles to Pittsburgh* (2000), and Steven Spielberg’s film *Minority Report* (2002) are works that anticipate a dystopian world where food destroys and in some extreme cases, kills. Although the peach benefits many upon its arrival in New York in the end, James, the insects and the peach itself, endure a precarious journey in order to get there. Though the monstrous plant destroyed environments and killed people on its transatlantic journey, its power is used for “good” rather than evil in text as the Aunts are destroyed, and James is liberated in the end. In the next section, I will expand on the discussion about the effects of unnatural substances entering into the natural food system and analyse the effects of chemical growth enhancers on livestock in *George’s Marvellous Medicine.*
4.2 Futuristic Meat in *George’s Marvellous Medicine* (1981)

In the first section of this chapter I looked at the effects of unnatural substances entering the ecosystem and the food system in *James*. This section explores the use of chemicals on humans and animals in Dahl’s *George’s Marvellous Medicine* and examines the way Dahl represents the ethical implications of using growth hormone-like substances on livestock to increase profits. Dahl’s biographer Treglown comments on the similarities between *George’s Marvellous Medicine* and *Chocolate Factory*, asserting that Dahl clearly expanded upon the ideas from the chocolate factory fantasy novel in his characterisation of George as a “magician” figure not unlike Willy Wonka (125-26). I would argue that there are further similarities between *James and the Giant Peach* and *George’s Marvellous Medicine* in that both texts show the effects of the extreme manipulation of food in fantastical ways. In addition, in *George*, Dahl returns to the theme of the greedy farmer, as explored earlier in the analysis of *Fantastic Mr Fox* (1970) in chapter one—in this instance however, something much more insidious is occurring on the Kranky family farm: Mr Kranky is willing to experiment with a wide range of chemicals and drugs, and risk the health of his animals in order to increase yields and, by extension, the profits of his farm. While the cramped living conditions of Boggis, Bunce, and Bean’s chickens, geese, and turkeys are hardly ideal, Mr Kranky’s crazed enthusiasm for George’s growth-enhancing medicine is a deeply unsettling reflection of the direction factory farming took in the decades following the Second World War, yet Mr Kranky is not represented as an outright villain. Instead, his complex characterisation is like Willy Wonka before him, that of an ambivalent hero. Given the rather grisly subject matter of *George’s Marvellous Medicine*, it is difficult to disagree with David Rees’s assertion that this text is “the most repellent of all Roald Dahl’s books for the young” (148). At the beginning of the narrative, the plot centres on George’s extremely strained relationship
with his grandmother. George’s father is a farmer and the family consists of George, his parents, Mr and Mrs Kranky, and George’s grandmother. Readers are informed that George “couldn’t help disliking” his grandmother who “was always complaining, grousing, grouching, grumbling, griping about something or other” (2). Unlike the marvellous mother cooks described in the previous chapter, George’s grandmother orders George to make her tea (2), and demands that he bring and feed her medicine. Given the association between with monstrous women as “lousy mother cooks” such as Mrs Wormwood, or women suspected of contaminating food including Mrs Pratchett in Boy and the Grand High Witch in The Witches, this particular exchange between George and his grandmother is not only unsurprising, but is also a rare instance in which Dahl is consistent in his representation of women who do not conform to a traditional “mothering” role, as monstrous or out-of-control. Though it is not explicitly stated at the beginning of George’s Marvellous Medicine, it is implied that George’s grandmother is in fact a witch. Like the Grand High Witch in The Witches (The Witches 59), George’s grandmother is a tiny person; Dahl notes that “her legs were so short she had to have a footstool to put her feet on, and her head only came halfway up the back of the armchair” (5). Frustrated with his grandmother, and fearful that she will hurt or harm him in some way, George decides to concoct and feed her a mixture resembling her medicine that “is so strong and so fierce and so fantastic it will either cure her completely or blow off the top of her head” (14).

The extensive list of ingredients that make up the first concoction of George’s marvellous medicine includes golden gloss hair shampoo (19), toothpaste (20), hair remover (21), Dishworth’s famous dandruff cure (21), lipsticks (22) flea powder (23), brown shoe polish (24) curry powder, mustard powder and black peppercorns (25), engine oil (31), anti-freeze and dark brown gloss paint (35) amongst a lengthy list of other
household items. It is important to note here that there is an entire chapter in George’s *Marvellous Medicine* devoted to the inclusion of animal pills in the recipe. The first bottle George comes across is “for chickens with foul pest, hen gripe, sore beaks, gammy legs, cockerelitis, egg trouble, broodiness or loss of feathers. Mix one spoonful only with each bucket of feed” (27-28). There is also another bottle labelled “for horses with hoarse throats”, one bottle for cows and bulls that promises to cure “cow pox, cow mange, crumpled horns, bad breath in bulls, earache, toothache, headache, hoofache, tailache and sore udders”, one bottle “for sheep with sheeprot and for getting rid of ticks and fleas” and another bottle for pigs with “pork prickles, tender trotters, bristle blight and swine sickness” (28, 29, 30). Although some of these ailments, including “bad breath in bulls”, “cockerelitis”, and hoarse-throat in horses, are most certainly meant to be humorous, many of the other ailments that afflict the animals on the Kranky farm, including fowl pest, cow mange, and “sheeprot” (or foot rot in sheep) are infections that affect farm animals. The Kranky family’s farm can therefore be interpreted as a fictionalised industrial farm, as animals in real-life factory farms face similar afflictions.

The Kranky family’s farm is similar to the industrialised farms in Britain during this period: on these farms, “antibiotics [were] incorporated in [animals’] feed, heavier doses of drugs given at the least sign of flagging, and growth stimulants, hormones and tranquilisers [were used to force the] rapid conversion of animal feeding-stuffs into flesh” (Harrison 38-39). The fact that Mr Kranky uses so many of these pills and his largely profit-oriented attitude towards the livestock strongly suggests that he owns an industrialised factory farm, not unlike Farmers Boggis, Bunce and Bean’s farms in *Fantastic Mr Fox* (1970). Mr Kranky’s farm is also strikingly similar to many British

101 Fowl pest is a viral disease of poultry and is connected to poor standards of hygiene on factory farms (Harrison 63). Cattle mange is a skin infection caused by mites that affect cattle (“Mange”) while foot rot in sheep is “an infectious and contagious disease caused by bacteria” which “digest[s] the connective tissue between the horn and flesh of the hoof” (“Footrot in Sheep”).
factory farms where “[t]he hormones in growth-promoting implants include estrogens, androgens, and progestins and have been in use since the 1950s” (Rogers 748).

The effects of the medicine on George’s grandmother are immediate: when she first ingests the medicine, “her whole body shot up whoosh into the air” as if “someone had pushed an electric wire through the underneath of her chair and switched on the current” and for a moment, she was suspended in mid-air (George’s Marvellous Medicine 39). More than satisfied with the changes happening to her body, George’s grandmother demands another dose of his medicine (47). In addition to his grandmother, George also feeds a brown hen a spoonful of medicine and after jumping, sputtering and sizzling, the hen begins to grow and becomes four or five times its normal size and lays football-sized eggs (56, 62). Following this, George’s parents, Mr and Mrs Kranky appear at the house and are shocked by the sight of George’s transformed grandmother and the giant chicken.

The connection between the growth medicine and industrial farming techniques is what is important here, as is the interest of the family in cashing in on George’s discovery. Instead of being concerned about the welfare of the hen, Mr Kranky is impressed by the transformed chicken’s football-sized eggs and exclaims, “Bring the medicine! For years and years I’ve been trying to breed bigger and bigger animals. Bigger bulls for beef. Bigger pigs for pork. Bigger sheep for mutton…” (62). Unlike the negative and rather straightforward representation of Farmers Boggis, Bunce, and Bean as greedy factory farmers in Fantastic, Mr Kranky’s characterisation is far more dubious. Mr Killy Kranky’s name is important and gives readers a clue concerning the sort of heinous, murderous acts George’s father may be capable of committing, yet, at the conclusion of the novel, Mr Kranky is not punished for his experimentation on the animals. Mr Kranky’s characterisation as a greedy farmer highlights yet another reason why Dahl’s didactic messages are difficult to pin down—often, these messages are inconsistent across
various texts, like *Fantastic* and *George*, and problematize discussions about Dahl’s didacticism. Here, Dahl also revisits the notion of a monstrous living thing similar to the giant peach in *James*, and this time the animals on the Kranky family farm are what Ralph Beliveau refers to as “The most common monstrous giant animals in Western fiction and film [which] are ones that are the byproducts of the irresponsible use of science” (Beliveau 18).

In Allen Jones’s book *World Protein Resources* (1974), he notes how

Farmers can do relatively little to control unintended additives but they need to be aware of the fact that any product used for feed is likely to contain some component which can interfere with growth of the animal. Farmers can control deliberate contamination but there is strong temptation to overload confined animals with hormones and antibiotics, on the basis that prevention of trouble is less expensive than rectification of damage (87).

Mr Killy Kranky gives in to a similar temptation when, at his insistence, George feeds the marvellous medicine to one pig, a herd of black bulls, sheep, their pony, and nanny-goat (62-68). Mr Kranky deems the farm animals’ transformations highly successful and the next day, insists that he and George must make more medicine at once (73). Mr Kranky explains to George how, “[W]e need barrels and barrels of it! Tons and tons! Then we will sell it to every farmer in the world so that all of them can have giant animals! We will build a Marvellous Medicine Factory and sell the stuff in bottles at five pounds a time. We will become rich and you will become famous!” (73). This example again, highlights Mr Kranky’s greed. It is difficult to understand however, whether or not the narrative voice approves of Mr Kranky’s excitement here, however, when Mr Kranky
gets carried away with his dream of mass producing the marvellous medicine, the narrator notes how “Mr Kranky was too excited to listen to anyone but himself” (75). While the narrative voice here seems to disapprove of Mr Kranky’s excitement here, it is Mr Kranky’s enthusiasm, rather than an interjecting didactic narrative voice, that dominates the sequence. This rather muted didactic voice is what makes *George* more difficult to assess in terms of the narrative’s overarching didactic message. While it was somewhat clearer in *Fox* that Dahl was criticising factory farming, the slightly more positive representation of Mr Kranky as a greedy farmer, points once again, to the dilemma of Dahl. Given that the text concludes without Mr Kranky facing any comeuppance of any sort, suggests that while he may be a flawed and greedy character, Mr Kranky, unlike Farmers Boggis, Bunce, and Bean in *Fox*, is not an antagonist in the text. Mr Kranky exclaims that George’s medicine will change the world and that “Nobody will ever go hungry again!” (74).

George’s father also informs George that his medicine will make one giant chicken equivalent to “a hundred fried chicken dinners, and one giant pig will give you a thousand pork chops!” (74). Mr Kranky’s insistence that George’s medicine will solve world hunger comes after a rather lengthy rant about George becoming rich and famous from his concoction. The structure of Mr. Kranky’s thoughts about the medicine – fame and fortune first, ending starvation next – indicates that Mr Kranky’s end goal is not really to eradicate world hunger, but to increase profits on his farm while also being praised for the beneficent impact of his discovery. For Mr Kranky, eradicating world hunger is merely a by-product of rearing larger animals with potentially dangerous growth-enhancing drugs to increase profits for the Kranky family’s farm. Mr Kranky’s dream of eradicating world hunger with his son’s medicine, while exaggerated and far-fetched, shares many similarities with the futurist vision set out by some manufacturers of
both meat and pharmaceutical products for animals in a post-war context. Warren Belasco explains:

In 1952, *Fortune* celebrated drug company research on antibiotics that, when added to animal feed, promised “to supply U.S. dinner tables with more chicken, turkey, and pork at a lower absolute cost than ever.” Also promising, *Science Digest* reported that same year, was Swedish work on “chromosome multiplication” that could potentially exceed the capabilities of mere hybridization, yielding “hogs as hefty as horses, and cattle as big as elephants”—a hopeful prospect considering the “skyrocketing” meat prices. And if science could devise ways to convert surplus sugar wastes into beefsteaks, the president of the Sugar Research Foundation suggested in 1954, “it will be possible to feed the people of the world adequately for the first time in human history” (*Meals to Come* 47).

Given Dahl’s scepticism of post-war meat industry practices as explored in chapter one and his preferences for natural and traditional food production and preparation (with the exception of confectionery production), it would hardly be surprising to find that Dahl was suspicious of the scientific interference in food production that Belasco describes. After the initial excitement of George’s medicine earlier on in the narrative, it is clear that as the novel progresses, the medicine’s effects on the animals are represented as more and more unsettling and problematic in numerous ways. Mr Kranky and George’s medicine-making process runs into a number of issues: Mrs Killy Kranky warns her husband and son against trying to make more batches of medicine and explains to them, “You’ll never get it right […] Don’t forget you don’t just have to have the exact same things but you’ve got to have exactly the same amounts of those things. And how can you possibly do that?” (*George’s Marvellous Medicine* 89).
Mrs Kranky is correct as there is plenty of trial-and-error in George’s efforts to recreate an identical second batch of his first batch of medicine: Marvellous Medicine Number Two extends the chicken’s legs, while Marvellous Medicine Number Three stretches the chicken’s neck (79-88). In the end, the experimentation goes awry and Marvellous Medicine Number Four completely shrinks the chicken until “it was no bigger than a new-hatched chick [and] it looked ridiculous” (91). In an effort to convince her husband and son to cease experimentation on the chickens, Mrs Kranky tells them that they are “going to have some mighty queer chickens around here if [they] go on like this” (89-90).

Each of the animals’ transformations are important because it emphasises not only how complex the process of producing large quantities of growth-enhancing medicine for farm animals is, but also how volatile and dangerous this process could be. George’s medicine is not created from immense knowledge about combining various household products in precise quantities and in a specific order, but it is arrived at purely by chance. While professional rather than amateur scientists were actually working with growth hormones and animals during this period, the message here is still clearly critical of the use and incorporation of steroids and unnatural substances in feed for livestock by anyone. The disapproving representation of the Krankys’ concoction reflects the censorious tone in *Cookbook* when Dahl, critical of commercial turkey breeders, remarks that they problematically “proliferated […] millions of these birds [which] were bred and fed in long sheds that kept their fluorescent lights on day and night [and forced] into gorging themselves around the clock” (*Cookbook* 25).

Mrs Kranky’s comments point to the possible risks not only involved in experimenting with chemicals and livestock but also the potentially disastrous effects such products could have on consumers. Mr Kranky’s desire to enter into the growth-enhancing medicine production business is on the one hand, presented as a wasteful use
of time and resources, not to mention the inevitable problems that arise from the irreversible changes brought on by the medicine. On the other hand, Mr Kranky does not face any negative consequences for his experimentation—when animals are harmed by humans in Dahl’s other texts, including *Fox, The Magic Finger*, and the poem, “The Pig”, the humans are either shown the error of their ways, punished, or both. While the ideological positions in *George* and *Fox* contrast a great deal when considering Mr Kranky’s characterisation as a greedy farmer with the characterisations of greedy Farmers Boggis, Bunce, and Bean in *Fox*, Mr Kranky *does* share similarities with another ambivalent hero in Dahl’s texts: Willy Wonka. Treglown compares *George* to the *Charlie* texts and comments on the similarities between Willy Wonka and George, noting how both “are cavalier in their dealings with inconvenient people, but they are still heroes and heroines” (125-26). The similarities between *George* and the *Charlie* narratives are important because they show the continuity of certain themes (dosing medicines) in Dahl’s works. In the next section, I will explore *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* and *Charlie and the Great Glass Elevator* and look at the manipulation and combination of natural with artificial ingredients into new-fangled food products through many processes of trial and error represented in both narratives. I will move away from looking at the manipulation of seeds in soil, to the isolation and manipulation of vitamins, minerals and nutrients in food products. The following section will also analyse the development of the alchemist figure in Dahl’s novels for children, looking specifically at Willy Wonka.

### 4.3 The Futuristic Food Factory

While I have explored at length the connections between Wonka’s sweets company and real-life confectionery manufacturers in chapter two, this section will look specifically at
the research and development sector of Wonka’s factory as an industrial food laboratory.

This section closely examines how Wonka’s factory represents the anxieties about major innovations in the processed food industry during the time Dahl was writing. Although the factory is romanticised and idealised in *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, the sequel presents a somewhat more critical view of the practices at Wonka’s factory. Wonka’s forays into manufacturing non-confectionery products such as revitalising medicines designed to reverse the signs of aging (not unlike cosmetics) in *Charlie and the Great Glass Elevator* prove to be particularly problematic. Yet, at the same time, Wonka, like Mr Kranky in *George* does not face any punishments at the end of the narrative, suggesting that despite his cavalier actions towards other human beings, he is not an antagonist in the text. While I briefly discussed the development of British chocolate factories in chapter two, here I look at the similarities between Wonka’s factory and the factories of international food and consumer product conglomerates whose divisions expanded significantly in the decades following the Second World War. In addition, this section also explores how the increasing obsession with ‘nutritionism’ in the processed food industry gave way to a new, more scientific approach to consuming food as well as transformed attitudes about meals and sustenance in the decades following the Second World War.

In contrast with *James and the Giant Peach* and *George’s Marvellous Medicine*, the narratives of *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* and *Charlie and the Great Glass Elevator* do not take place in the natural world but instead, mainly take place within Wonka’s factory. It is important to examine the factory in order to contextualise the food politics in Dahl’s texts within a post-war context, because the food factory was a site of some of the most rapid advancements in food research and technology. The expansion of the agro-industrial complex in the latter half of the twentieth century onwards completely
transformed the way people shop, cook, and eat and at the very centre of the processed food industry is the factory. When *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* was first published in 1964, the processed food industry and technological sectors were rapidly expanding and it was also during this time that significantly, “the factory and the laboratory replaced the kitchens as the centre of food production” (Gargano 209). The chocolate factory in Dahl’s children’s novel is, perhaps, one of the most iconic food wonderlands in children’s literature and Willy Wonka is not only one of Dahl’s best known characters but among the most recognisable mad scientist or culinary alchemist figures in twentieth century literature. In many ways, Wonka represents the “mad, bad, dangerous scientist” and an alchemist figure who Rosylnn Haynes argues “soared to the heights of megalomania” in popular culture of the twentieth century (251). Dahl’s characterisation of Wonka as mad scientist and culinary alchemist extraordinaire can be linked back to one of Dahl’s undated files titled “Small ideas” jotted down between c. 1953-1983, where he describes at great length a character called Mr Billy Bubbler, an inventor who “can invent just about anything you want” (RDMSC RD 11/3/23/3). In this file, Mr Billy Bubbler is described as “[t]he cleverest man in the world” who, like Wonka, “has a marvellous workshop full of wheels and wires and buckets of glue and balls of string and huge pots full of thick hot foaming stuff that gives off smoke in many colours” (RDMSC RD 11/3/23/3). Bubbler’s food inventions also typically involve chocolate or confectionery of some form and the machinery used in Bubbler’s factory is not unlike Wonka’s

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102 Victoria Moore has explored the connections between Heston Blumenthal and the fictitious Willy Wonka in her article “Blumenthal is the Willy Wonka of modern British cooking” (Moore, *The Guardian*) while Joanne Hollows and Steve Jones have expanded on this comparison in their analysis of Heston Blumenthal’s influence in British culinary culture. In their article, Hollows and Jones cite Moore’s comparison and go further, identifying Blumenthal as “a ‘culinary alchemist’ rather than just a food scientist” noting how “[t]he culinary alchemist, or ‘Willy Wonka’ (Moore 2001) figure […] blends science with magic, art and childlike wonder to produce one-off meal events that cannot be reproduced through the application of formulae” (Hollows and Jones 535).
confectionery manufacturing contraptions. For example, the process of Mr Bubbler’s “Instant Chocolate Making Machine” is outlined here:

If you want a bar of chocolate, all you have to do is to go outside and get a bucket of mud. You pour the mud into the funnel at the top of the machine and you start turning the handle. The machine groans. It shakes and bounces up and down and sparks fly out, but you mustn’t get frightened and stop turning the handle. In less than a minute, a beautiful big bar of creamy chocolate will drop out of the spout underneath. Many people have said, ‘We simply don’t believe you can make chocolate out of mud.’ To this Mr. Bubbler always answers, ‘Try it for yourself. Go and get some mud and put it in and turn the handle.’ It always works. BUBBLER’S INSTANT CHOCOLATE-MAKING MACHINE is not yet for sale in this country. But it soon will be. Then you will be able to wish for one for Christmas (RDMSC RD 11/3/23/10).

In addition to Mr. Bubbler’s Instant Chocolate-Making Machine, he also invents a device that “will turn old newspapers into toffee” (RDMSC RD 11/3/23/7):

The huge machine stood in the middle of the workshop. It was an amazing thing, full of tubes and springs and bicycle wheels and chains and it had a wide funnel sticking out of the top. Cathy could see a Wellington-boot in the engine of the machine, and some empty sardine tins and a sponge and a pair of knickers. There was a giant handle on one side. […] Mr. Bubbler scrunched up a newspaper and pushed in into the top of the funnel at the top of the machine. Then he began turning the handle. The machine shook and groaned. It bubbled and gurgled. It made funny whistling noises.
The machine gave a mighty cough and a slab of toffee dropped out of a spout onto a tray underneath. ‘That’s it!’ cried Mr. Bubbler, hopping up and down. ‘Take it! Try it! It’s delicious! It’s Bubbler’s Best Creamy Brown Toffee, all made out of one rotten old newspaper!’ (RDMSC RD 11/3/23/7-8).

The description here shares similarities with the Great Gum Machine in Chocolate Factory which quickly stirred a “blue frothy mixture” and let out “queer rumblings” and a “monstrous mighty groan” before it produced a small piece of chewing gum (19). Here, the descriptions of Mr Bubbler’s Instant Chocolate-Making Machine and Wonka’s Great Gum Machine, respectively, are particularly attractive to readers because they provide a fictionalised “backstory” of how chocolate and gum, two types of confectionery that most readers are familiar with and perhaps enjoy consuming, are produced and manufactured. In addition, Bubbler’s ambition parallels Wonka’s as he explains how, “[i]n a few months’ time […] [e]very house in the country will have one of these machines” (RDMSC RD 11/3/23/8). In an effort to solve the problem of children getting holes in their teeth (cavities) from Mr Bubbler’s toffee, he unveils another contraption that “makes Bubblers Magic Concrete Sweets” (RDMSC RD 11/3/23/9) and explains how “Concrete is what people use to build houses and skyscrapers and bridges […] But I use it to fill teeth. It’s hard as rocks” (RDMSC RD 11/3/23/9). Mr Bubbler’s invention of toffees that make holes in children’s teeth and concrete sweets designed to fill those same tooth holes back up is particularly interesting as Bubbler is clearly attempting to corner a particular market for sweets that promote tooth decay and sweets that promise to reverse tooth decay. In addition to these ideas, another file titled “Stories: Some work begun” contains an idea (not attributed to any of Dahl’s fictional inventors in particular) of a “motor car that goes on fizzy drinks” which will bring “Chaos in the motor industry and the big oil
companies” (RDMSC RD 11/4/12/4). These examples are not only foundational to the character development of Willy Wonka but they also provide insight into Dahl’s keen interest in the step-by-step processes of industrial manufacturing, production, and inventions more generally.

In *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* readers are informed that Wonka’s factory employs green-haired workers from a faraway, distant land, and has numerous rooms full of mysterious machines that are pumping out all sorts of concoctions at a rapid rate. One of the most memorable futurist foods in Wonka’s factory is the chewing-gum meal. In the following example, Wonka explains how this gum will “change everything” and

> It will be the end of all kitchens and all cooking! There will be no more shopping to do! No more buying of meat and groceries! There’ll be no knives and forks at mealtimes! No plates! No washing up! No rubbish! No mess! Just a little strip of Wonka’s magic chewing-gum—and that’s all you’ll ever need at breakfast, lunch, and supper! (*Chocolate Factory* 121).

Wonka goes on to explain how chewing the gum provides the consumer with the “feeling” of food going down their throat and that the chewing gum “fills” one up and “satisfies” the consumer (122). Here, Wonka fulfils the role of part-alchemist, inventor, and flavourist, not unlike the commercial flavourists in the processed food industry who, in the 1970s, after the publication of *Charlie*, began viewing themselves “as artists, *In an article from October 2010 for The Telegraph*, Richard Gray explained how, at the Institute of Food Research in Norwich, “Researchers have developed a technology that allows different flavours to be captured inside microscopic capsules, which can be designed to release the flavours at different times. They claim it could be used to produce a real life version of Willy Wonka’s three course meal gum, which features in Roald Dahl’s famous children’s novel *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*” (“Willy Wonka chewing gum could become reality”). As of October 2010, “Professor Dave Hart, a food scientist at the Institute has already developed a boiled sweet that uses different layers to provide changes in flavour, but he hopes the new technology could help produce more dramatic results” (“Willy Wonka chewing gum could become reality”). What this research highlights is how Wonka’s invention has permeated the popular consciousness so much that Wonka’s chewing-gum-meal is cited as an inspiration for the researchers, and not the meal-in-a-pill products that predate Dahl’s fictional concoction.
operating with the blessing of the government” (Wilson 249). Wilson refers to these flavourists as “Willy Wonkas who could fashion entire meals out of nothing” (249). Wonka’s chewing-gum meal is part of what Matt Novak argues is a common theme in early science fiction, where “the man or woman of the future pops a pill on to their tongue, knocks it back and is almost immediately satisfied. For inside the little white capsule was a full three course meal, designed to mimic the meals of the past in a single convenient, portable dose” (“Meal-in-a-pill: A staple of science fiction”).

Speculation and rising interest in the notion of a meal-in-a-pill can be traced back to the Victorian era and Richard Faulk draws connections to some of the earliest representations of the synthetic meal-pill to Anna Dodd’s *The Republic of the Future* (1887) where “Dodd envisions with horror the food pellets prescribed by state scientists and distributed from centralized larders directly to kitchen-free homes via hundreds of miles of pneumatic tube” (Faulk 131). Throughout the twentieth century, inventors were attempting to develop products that would not only make cooking more efficient but actually eliminate cooking altogether. L. Frank Baum’s *The Patchwork Girl of Oz* (1913) features one of the earliest examples of the meal-in-a-pill in children’s literature: Baum’s “Square Meal Tablet” is described as “a square meal, in condensed form” containing “soup, fish, roast meat, salad, apple-dumplings, ice cream and chocolate drops, all boiled down to this small size, so it can be conveniently carried and swallowed when you are hungry and need a square meal” (*The Patchwork Girl of Oz* 45). As the twentieth century progressed, “once-unbelievable wonders like electricity, telephones, cars, X-rays, airplanes, and radio had become commonplace. Encouraged by the early successes of

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104 As Faulk explains, “One of the first to speculate in earnest about food pills was the feminist, lawyer, and populist firebrand Mary Elizabeth Lease, who, as part of the hype building up to the Chicago World’s Fair of 1893, was asked by the Associated Press to forecast the world of 1993. Lease predicted a future where the minimization of household chores would raise the status of women” (Faulk 130) and “One year later, the eminent French chemist Marcellin Berthelot made a similar prediction, in equally purple prose and at much greater length, in an interview called “Foods in the Year 2000,” which could be considered a synthetic-food manifesto” (Faulk 131).
rayon, plastics, margarine, coal-tar dyes, saccharine, and artificial nitrates, science journalist Edwin Slosson pitched synthetic food as mankind’s best hope” (*Meals to Come* 32). Belasco explains how the technological advancements in the 1920s eventually gave way to assumptions that “modern technologies— ranging from conventional seed selection to that science fiction favorite, the meal-in-a-pill—could easily feed the 150 million Americans expected in 1993 (actual: 256 million)” (*Meals to Come* 27). In addition, historian A. Bowdoin Van Riper notes, the meal-in-a-pill “along with flying cars, automated houses, and robot servants—became part of a standardized image of the future outlined in magazine articles during the late 1940s and 1950s” (105).

By the 1960s, Novak asserts, “techno-utopianism, driven by the glamour and excitement of the space race” became part of the public consciousness (“Meal-in-a-pill: A staple of science fiction”). Samira Kawash explains how during the space race, inventors and scientists attempted to develop and produce food for “extended travel in a confined, weightless environment called for a new kind of food: it would have to be nutritionally adequate, calorically dense, and tasty, while also being easy to transport, unwrap, and eat” (308). Kawash documents how the space race eventually led to the invention of a product called space food sticks, which were a “high-calorie, soft, chewy nougat containing about 15 percent of its calories from protein, 30 percent from fat, and 55 percent from carbohydrates” and though space food sticks were initially popular after the landing on the moon, due to a declining interest in space food, they were eventually pulled off grocery store shelves (309, 310). Despite this food’s disappearance following the moon landing, it paved the way for the development of the meal-size food bar (310). NASA and the U.S. Army continued to invest resources in food-technology resource and as David Rowan explains,
The space programme is directly responsible for spin-offs such as water filters and softeners, enriched baby food, portable cooler-warmers, and freeze-dried ingredients; Nasa money has also accelerated the development of microwave ovens and irradiated food. So if today’s research successfully enhances food provision in a future space mission, there is a very good chance that it will become available in supermarkets tomorrow (“Are scientists putting you off your dinner?”).

The advances in food technology were also alluded to in Ray Bradbury’s collection of short stories, _The Martian Chronicles_ (1950), Harry Harrison’s dystopian futurist novel _Make Room! Make Room!_ (1966) and the sci-fi film based on Harrison’s novel _Soylent Green_ (1973) as well as in television shows including _The Jetsons_ (1962-63; 1985-1987) (Widdicombe “The End of Food”).

Readers of Dahl’s novel are informed how Wonka makes the chewing-gum meal by using a highly complex machine complete with “hundreds and hundreds of thin glass tubes”, buttons, nozzles and whizzers (_Chocolate Factory_ 118-19). Several ingredients pass through this machine undergoing a lengthy and complicated process in which different coloured “runny stuff” flowed through each of the tubes and was then dumped into a tub where it was combined until it turned into a blue frothy mixture, and then “sucked back into the stomach of the machine” until “the machine let out a monstrous mighty groan” and dropped a small, thin stick of gum that resembled a “little strip of grey cardboard” (_Chocolate Factory_ 118-19). This description points to the extremely mechanical and unnatural processes of factory-made food. Despite this elaborate production process, the gum is not yet ready for human consumption and Wonka informs the five golden ticket winners that he has not got the recipe “quite right yet”, and therefore they cannot try it out (122). Of course, Violet disobeys, chews the gum and “her
face, and hands and legs and neck, in fact the skin all over her body, as well as her great big mop of curly hair, had turned a brilliant, purplish-blue, the colour of blueberry juice!” (124). Violet’s comeuppance has been interpreted as a didactic message that warns children against compulsivity and greed, and I would agree that her punishment does indeed reinforce a message that “advocates both an appetite for chocolate and restraint” (Consuming Agency 210). Honeyman also compares Violet’s temptation to Christina Rossetti’s “Goblin Market” (1862), noting how this scene “didactically represents a struggle similar to Laura’s in “Goblin Market”: she is addicted to an un-substance, signified by her lack of resistance to gum that is a meal, or simulated substance (96)” (Consuming Agency 210). What Violet’s unfortunate transformation also highlights, though, is that the chewing-gum meal exposes the limitations in futuristic food production. The gum is very much a work-in-progress and the immediate effects on the “unfinished” gum are evident in Violet’s adverse bodily reaction to the futuristic confection, a reaction not unlike George’s grandmother’s multiple transformations in George. Here, the chewing-gum meal is an important food to examine in particular because it prompts readers to question at what point exactly do processed foods and other ‘edible’ food products manufactured in food factories cease to be ‘works-in-progress’? When do these products become ‘food’? These questions become increasingly difficult to answer when one considers the long-term effects of artificial or unnatural foods.

The food technologies that emerged in the post-war period coincided with (and perhaps directly resulted in) a preoccupation with nutritionism, that is, the process of “promoting food as nutrients rather than food as whole foodstuffs” (Kawash 316) in both post-war Britain and the United States. Laura Thomas explains how “[i]n the context of the nutritionism paradigm, foods and diets are understood in terms of their most basic units—that is to say, their nutrient and biochemical composition” (1046). This reductive...
way of understanding or consuming food occurred in tandem with the increasing use of fortification and enrichment in the processed food industry. Although humans have been fortifying food with added nutrients for centuries, it was not until the nineteenth century that food fortification took place on a much larger scale (Merskin 1451). Bee Wilson notes how enrichment and fortification can be traced to the early 1830s when a French chemist suggested that adding iodine to table salt would help prevent the spread of goitre and cretinism (235). By the early 1900s, iodine-enriched table salt became standard in Western Europe and “little by little, goitre became a forgotten disease in the affluent West” (235). Wilson explains how

Each decade of the twentieth century brought a new vitamin or mineral to worship. In the 1900s, it was fish oil to cure rickets. In the 1920s, it was calcium and Vitamin A, which led experts to recommend drinking enormous quantities of milk and stuffing oneself with green vegetables. It also led to vitamin D being added to milk, to aid calcium absorption and prevent rickets. Next came vitamin C and vitamin G (later rechristened riboflavin) (236).  

Although these changes were immensely positive in preventing disease and vitamin deficiency in many parts of the world, they were accompanied by an increasing preoccupation with vitamin and nutrient supplements in the developed world as the twentieth century progressed. By the 1960s and 1970s, “the dietary-supplement industry really started taking hold” and began “using the word “vitamin” with the public to

105 Debra Merskin explains how in the twentieth century, “[w]ith the rise of agriculture, the human diet came to be based more on vitamin-sparse grains such as wheat and corn and less on green plants and fruits. High levels of processing, exposure to light, temperature changes, and oxygen variation all impact the stability and longevity of vitamins, resulting in less nutritious foods and, consequently, higher risks of vitamin deficiencies. Sometimes, they are lost due to storage, transport, or processing and must be added back (restoration) as compensation for seasonal variations in nutrition values (standardization), or must be added because they are a substitute food, for example, margarine for butter (substitution). Adding nutrients to food is a process called fortification” (1451).
describe their products” (“Vitamin B.S.”). As Gyorgy Scrinis notes, “Nutritionism—or nutritional reductionism—is characterized by a reductive focus on the nutrient composition of foods as a means for understanding their healthfulness, as well as by a reductive interpretation of the role of these nutrients in bodily health” (2). For Scrinis, nutritionism is particularly problematic because it “includes the decontextualization, simplification, and exaggeration of the role of nutrients in determining bodily health” (5) and thereby significantly limits food’s importance in social and cultural contexts. Charlie and the Chocolate Factory certainly addresses (and lightly satirises) the cultural obsession with the supposed benefits of vitamins: Wonka’s Supervitamin Chocolate contains vitamins A-Z, except for vitamin S “because it makes you sick and vitamin H, because it makes you grow horns on the tops of your head, like a bull”, and perhaps most importantly, it “does have in it a very small amount of the rarest and most magical vitamin of them all—vitamin Wonka” (Chocolate Factory 169). This example comments on the increasingly prevalent perceptions within British society during this period that vitamins operate as a sort of cure-all substance. While the advances in vitamin research were certainly remarkable, as the century progressed, foods, particularly processed foods, became increasingly identified as amalgamations of vitamins, nutrients, proteins, and lipids, and depending on the ratio of these properties, they promised to provide an array of health benefits for consumers. In an article from 1979, Ruth Gay notes how, “Vitamins can now be produced so cheaply in the laboratory that utterly worthless breakfast cereals made up entirely of sugar and starch can, in the course of their manufacture, be sprayed with enough vitamins to carry labels indicating that they meet impressive levels of required daily vitamin intake” (Gay 86). While it seems that Gay viewed the addition of vitamins to breakfast cereals as positive, in Chocolate Factory and

106 It should be noted that only vitamins A, C, D, E, K and several different types of B vitamin exist in the real world—Wonka’s claim that chocolate contains vitamins A-Z is perhaps a comment on the prevalent use of vitamins to market foods in the 1960s and 1970s.
*Great Glass Elevator*, in Dahl’s texts, the idea that vitamins are “cure-all” substances is satirised: Wonka’s Supervitamin Chocolate is meant to provide high levels and nutrients to “fatten up” Mike Teavee after he is shrunk from traveling by television in *Chocolate Factory* (169). Wonka explains how, “all we’ll have to do is give him a triple overdose of my wonderful Supervitamin Chocolate” (169) which will supposedly restore Mike back to full health. It is difficult not to interpret the over-the-top promises of Wonka’s Supervitamin as a reference to the vitamin craze of the 1960s and 1970s in which the dietary supplement industry “started using the word “vitamin” with the public to describe their products. And that word, the way they used it, represented far more than just vitamins. It eventually came to represent any substance that you use as a pill to supplement your diet” or as substances that gave an “aura of health” (“Vitamin B.S.”). In *Charlie and the Great Glass Elevator*, Wonka develops a similar nutraceutical product called Wonka-Vite that is meant to reverse the signs of aging (*Great Glass Elevator* 117-18). Wonka-Vite pills are described as a “brilliant yellow” and “shimmering and quivering inside the bottle” (124). In fact, the pills “were vibrating so rapidly that each pill became a blur and you couldn’t see its shape. You could only see its colour. You got the impression that there was something very small but incredibly powerful, something not quite of this world, locked up inside them and fighting to get out” (*Great Glass Elevator* 125). The main ingredients of Wonka-Vite include fine chocolate, a manticore’s hoof, an elephant trunk, three egg yolks from a whiffle-bird amongst several other nonsensical-sounding items, all of which are meant to be placed in a large cauldron over a hot furnace (126-28). All of the ingredients should be dissolved and boiled for twenty-seven days until all that is “left in the bottom of the cauldron only a hard brown lump about the size of a football. Break this open with a hammer and in the very centre of it you will find a small round pill. This pill is WONKA-VITE” (128). Wonka’s
experimental recipe for Wonka-Vite coupled with his business savvy places him in the role of expert alchemist-industrialist. Moreover, Wonka-Vite acts as a sort of ultra-vitamin that promises the most extreme type of revitalisation (like the Philosopher’s Stone). Ultimately, Wonka-Vite is a fountain of youth product concocted in an industrial food factory.

Wonka-Vite is not without its problems: as we examined in the previous section, George’s medicine underwent a number of transformations and several processes of trial and error. Wonka-Vite undergoes a similar process, however the primary difference here is that Wonka has seemingly unlimited resources at his disposal: an abundance of ingredients, state-of-the-art machinery and in-house testing subjects in the form of Oompa-Loompas. When Wonka first creates the mixture that would later become Wonka-Vite, the mixture “kept changing colour as [he] looked at it, and now and again it gave a little jump, it actually jumped up in the air, as though it were alive” (115). Wonka then “rushed it quickly to the Testing Room and gave some to the Oompa-Loompa who was on duty there at the time. The result was immediate! It was flabbergasting! It was unbelievable! It was also rather unfortunate” (Great Glass Elevator 115). Wonka explains how he “had stumbled upon a new and tremendously powerful vitamin” and adds, “if only I could make it safe, if only I could stop it doing to others what it did to that Oompa Loompa…” (116). When Grandma Georgina asks what exactly happened to that Oompa Loompa, Wonka replies, “The older I get, the deafer I become” (116). Wonka’s avoidance of Charlie’s grandparents’ questions continues throughout the remainder of the narrative fuelling distrust and suspicion of Wonka’s intents and purposes in the text. The development of Wonka-Vite took one hundred and thirty-two days to perfect (117-18) and Wonka tested the 132nd sample of “Wonka-Vite” on an old, bald, wrinkled, toothless Oompa-Loompa who “had been in a wheel-chair for at least fifteen years” and who
“looked at [the pill] nervously” (117, 118). In a deeply revealing quotation, Wonka explains, “I couldn’t blame him for being a bit jittery after what had happened to the other one hundred and thirty-one volunteers” (118). When Grandma Georgina asks “What had happened to them?” Wonka responds, “Who knows the way out of a rose?” (118). While the transformation of the blind Oompa-Loompa is deemed as something of a success in the text, Wonka’s 131 previous failed attempts and his refusal to divulge any information about the effects of the previous mixtures on the other 131 Oompa-Loompas alludes to the veiled and secretive practices of real-life industrial corporations. In both Charlie texts, the workers are treated as “mere cogs in Willy Wonka’s machine, not as people and even less as individuals” (Bradford 199). This particular example is testament to Wonka’s complex and contradictory characterisation as both hero and rather sinister industrial-alchemist who is willing to go to extreme lengths to create innovative but potentially dangerous products for profit. This again, points to the dilemma of categorising Dahl, of the difficulty of unravelling his didactic and subversive messages within his texts.

Wonka’s foray into pill manufacturing signals to readers that his company is not merely a globally popular and financially successful candy business, but it is also in fact a burgeoning consumer goods company complete with a large research and development sector not unlike consumer product conglomerates such as Mars, Nestlé, Unilever, and Proctor & Gamble (P&G). More importantly, the development of Wonka-Vite in Charlie and the Great Glass Elevator also suggests that similar real world nutraceutical products are, for Dahl, nothing more than updated alchemy. Wonka’s expanding research interests in his factory are reflective of real-life food companies’ expansion into more general product development during this period. As cosmetics historian Geoffrey Jones explains,

107 While 132 days may initially seem like a lengthy period of time, in the context of product manufacturing, and particularly in the context of manufacturing a product that completely reverses the signs of aging, this is indeed a very short time frame. The development of Wonka-Vite over the course of merely 132 days strongly suggests that the profit-oriented Willy Wonka is rushing his product to market.
“The beauty industry also found itself intimately involved in the enthusiasm for wholly unrelated diversification which swept American and European business between the 1960s and 1980s” (252) and during this period, “Cosmetics companies became for a time a target of highly diversified firms, sometimes known as conglomerates, which assumed that their management skills and financial discipline could be applied to almost any industry with equal effect. Meanwhile, some beauty companies themselves also diversified into wholly unrelated industries” (252). Jones observes how after the Second World War the beauty industry was becoming increasingly part of “conglomerate-style investment” citing Reckitt & Colman’s (“a diversified British business spanning food and drink, household products, OTC drugs, and toiletries”) acquisition of Gala cosmetics in 1969 (G. Jones 252).

The similarities between Wonka’s factory, as represented in *Charlie and the Great Glass Elevator*, and general consumer product manufacturing firms, complicates discussion regarding Wonka’s characterisation in the text. As David Rees notes, the text comments on the “problems of dubious morality” characteristic of many of Dahl’s texts and Rees also argues how these texts make “no comment on the ethical questions

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108 Similarly, in the years following the Second World War, P&G, which produced a number of household items including soap for washing machines, synthetic detergents and Crisco “the first all-vegetable shortening that changed the way consumers cooked” (“P&G: A Company History” 5) expanded into the toothpaste market, manufacturing Crest Toothpaste in 1955. In 1957 P&G partnered with Charmin Paper Company, Downy fabric softener in 1960, acquired Folger’s Coffee in 1963, introduced potato crisp snack Pringles in a test market in 1968 and entered the “cosmetics and fragrances category” in 1989 (“P&G: A Company History” 10-12). Unilever’s company timeline also shows a similarly diversified foray into household, food and cosmetic food products from its inception in the nineteenth century. By the latter half of the twentieth century the Dutch conglomerate gained control of companies in the frozen foods market, acquiring Vita NV in 1958, Lipton in 1971 and in 1978, National Starch, a company specialising in the production of adhesives and chemicals (“Our History”). Ice cream product Viennetta was sold under Unilever’s ice cream brand Wall’s in 1982 while Lynx body were sold in stores in 1983. Wonka’s foray into pill manufacturing in *Charlie and the Great Glass Elevator* anticipates the expansion of multinational conglomerates typically specialising in household items and food products into the nutraceutical industry.

109 *Charlie and the Great Glass Elevator* are still relevant today: in a 2004 article in *The Observer*, David Rowan refers to a nutraceutical supplement revolution that is well under way with multinational companies who are creating foods and consumer products that supposedly promote health and nutrition: “it’s the multinationals who will dominate this revolution. Kellogg’s has cereals and pasta containing psyllium, a grain said to help lower cholesterol; Nestlé has joined L’Oréal, to produce dietary supplements that claim to ‘improve the quality of skin, hair and nails by supplying nutrients essential to their physiology’” (“Are scientists putting you off your dinner?”).
raised by Mr. Wonka’s experiments with pills that can bring eternal youth. Again, the Oompa-Loompas are the unfortunate laboratory mice; one particular test goes wrong and causes an Oompa-Loomba to be prematurely aged—which is seen as comic” (145-46). It seems that readers are therefore encouraged to work the implications of these products out themselves. At the same time however, Wonka’s experiments are represented as somewhat problematic as the characters display a healthy scepticism that possibly encourages child readers to beware of seemingly impressive consumer products manufactured using new technologies in a complex way. Charlie expresses his concern about the potential side-effects of the pill, explaining how he is worried because of what happened when Violet ate Wonka’s gum during the factory tour (130). This seems to be a fairly direct connection being made by Dahl, suggesting that both events are to be seen as part of the same issue. Wonka responds by saying,

But don’t you understand, my dear boy, that I never did give that gum to Violet? She snatched it without permission. And I shouted, “Stop! Don’t! Spit it out!” But the silly girl took no notice of me. Now Wonka-Vite is altogether different. I am offering these pills to your grandparents. I am recommending them. And when taken according to my instructions, they are as safe as sugar-candy! (Great Glass Elevator 130)

Here, Wonka’s reassurance that Wonka-Vite is “as safe as sugar-candy” is an important example of Wonka’s complicated and contradictory characterisation: how is Charlie expected to trust Wonka when the confectionery produced in his factory has proven to be unsafe? While Wonka does indeed shout in the original text, his response to Violet’s rapid transformation into a kind of blueberry is not exactly reassuring because shortly afterwards it is clear that Wonka is much more concerned about his product rather than Violet. After she transforms Wonka responds disappointingly, “I told you I hadn’t got it
quite right” and “It always goes wrong when we come to the dessert […] It’s the blueberry pie that does it. But I’ll get it right one day, you wait and see” (Chocolate Factory 124). Later on, Wonka comments on it in a sort of detached way: “It always happens like that […] I’ve tried it twenty times in the Testing Room on twenty Oompa-Loompas, and every one of them finished up as a blueberry. It’s most annoying. I just can’t understand it” (126). Here, he is not concerned about Violet, but the gum—in Great Glass Elevator, the focus too, is on the product, Wonka-Vite and not on the well-being of Charlie’s grandparents. Wonka’s lack of regard for the Oompa-Loompas and people in general in both texts is problematic, but what is concerning is that this is not represented as particularly problematic within the text—there is an acceptance in the narrative that Wonka’s enslavement is simply the reality of the working conditions and power dynamics within the factory itself.

In Charlie and the Great Glass Elevator, Wonka dodges another one of Grandma Georgina’s questions: when she asks, “Why don’t you use [Wonka-Vite] yourself then? […] You told Charlie you were getting too old to run the factory, so why don’t you just take a couple of pills and get forty years younger? Tell me that?” (120). Wonka responds by saying: “Anyone can ask questions […] It’s the answers that count. Now then, if the three of you in the bed would care to try a dose…” (120-21). Wonka’s blatant evasion of Grandma Georgina’s question arouses suspicion in readers, or it ought to at least. While Wonka dodged some of the visitors’ questions in Charlie and the Chocolate Factory as well, his repeated avoidance of Grandma Georgina’s questions in Chocolate Factory’s sequel is represented as highly suspicious. Charlie’s grandmother is hardly villainous and while she is presented as an eccentric older woman, she is by no means a naughty child in need of reform, nor is she a bad parent like the characters in Dahl’s first tale about Charlie. Although the older people are sometimes presented as irritating characters who
deserve what happens to them (as far as the text is concerned), this particular sequence paints Wonka as particularly untrustworthy as he is treated with suspicion by both Charlie and the grandparents.

In contrast with *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* Wonka’s characterisation in *Great Glass Elevator* is less heroic and even more pronounced as a ‘trickster’ figure. I contend that this shift in Wonka’s characterisation is reflective of the distinct ways the factory is represented in both texts. In *Chocolate Factory*, Wonka is the sole innovator of a massive confectionery enterprise—given Dahl’s attempts to sell the Wonka brand of sweets to real-life confectionery firms prior to its first publication, Dahl clearly had a personal interest in representing Wonka as a heroic figure. Wonka’s experimentation of non-confectionery products in *Great Glass Elevator* however makes his characterisation as hero rather murky, and by extension, reveals a rather critical representation of industrial manufacturing companies. Moreover, Hershey and Nestlé’s refusal to partner with Dahl in purchasing and building the real-life Wonka brand of sweets likely soured his view of sweets companies during this period. In addition, Quaker Oats’ failure to effectively develop and market the Wonka brand prior to the 1971 cinematic release of Stuart’s *Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory* may have been another factor contributing to Dahl’s rather negative representation of Wonka’s food factory in *Great Glass Elevator*. At the time of *Great Glass Elevator’s* publishing in 1972, Dahl had very little to lose in terms of building Wonka as a real-life confectionery brand.

Consumers, like Charlie’s grandparents are ignored and manipulated by Wonka and his brainwashed slaves, to test his products. The Oompa Loompa break into a song that reads like an advertising jingle when Wonka tries to convince Charlie’s grandparents to try Wonka-Vite.
Come on, old friends, and do what’s right!
Come make your lives as bright as bright!
Just a dose of this delight!
This heavenly magic dynamite!
You can’t go wrong, you must go right!
IT’S WILLY WONKA’S WONKA-VITE! (131)

Convinced of the supposed overwhelmingly positive effects of Wonka-Vite, Grandpa George, Grandma Georgina and Grandma Josephine start to fight over possession of the bottle of pills (131). The narrator explains how, upon witnessing this squabble, Wonka walked away, thinking,

it was an unhappy truth, he told himself, that nearly all people in the world behave badly when there is something really big at stake. Money is the thing they fight over most. But these pills were bigger than money. They could do things for you no amount of money could ever do. They were worth at least a million dollars a pill. He knew plenty of very rich men who would gladly pay that much in order to become twenty years younger (131-33).

Wonka’s perspectives about the value of the pills is deeply revealing as it uncovers his confusion between what is truly valuable and the value of money. Wonka claims that the pills are bigger than money, but then a few sentences later gives them a monetary value of “at least a million dollars” each (132). This example emphasises how Wonka acknowledges that there is some sort of objective value that exists outside the economic realm, but also that he himself, like Mr Kranky in George, is much more concerned with the monetary value of his products than the positive effects these products may have on
the consumer’s life. This ambivalence about food production processes, factory owners, and exploitation in the novel is deeply problematic and also highlights again, the difficulty in assessing how ideology functions in Dahl’s texts, particularly in regard to issues such as greed, overconsumption, and financial gain. This ambivalence also points to somewhat of a problematic underestimation of the power of ideology within the text—as Peter Hollindale explains, how in writing for children, adult authors should not “underestimate the powers of reinforcement vested in quiescent and unconscious ideology” (Hollindale, “Ideology”, 30).

Wonka’s mistreatment of consumers like Charlie’s grandparents coincides with what Bee Wilson identifies as “contradictory views of the consumer” that emerged in public consciousness in the 1970s (241). Wilson argues that these views on the one hand, “saw consumers as children who need to be protected against nutritional harm without their knowledge” who are transformed into “passive creatures, who swallow vitamins whether they choose to or not” and on the other, “treated consumers as adults who can assume total responsibility for the food they buy” (241). Grandma Josephine, Grandma Georgina and Grandpa George are changed not so much into passive creatures but brainwashed individuals who are desperate to feel and look young again. Unfortunately, Charlie’s grandparents consume too many pills: Grandma Josephine and Grandpa George become infants who are three months- and one year-old respectively, while seventy-eight year-old Grandma Georgina is “minus two” after she consumes her pills (Great Glass Elevator 137, 140). Wonka resolves this problem, however, with Vita-Wonk, a pill designed to reverse the effects of Wonka-Vite and make people older. Vita-Wonk is made from a collection of the oldest living things on earth (152), emphasising Wonka’s unconcerned attitude towards older things, and how these things are not treasured by Wonka but instead exploited for commercial gain. Wonka’s total control of two products,
Wonka-Vite and Vita-Wonk, in which one product is able to reverse the effects of the other, is essentially the same as Dahl’s earlier ideas about cornering the market for both Bubbler’s toffee and concrete sweets. Like Bubbler, Wonka is attempting to control the whole market for revitalising and aging nutraceutical products.

This chapter’s exploration of futuristic food in Dahl’s children’s works suggest that these texts anticipate many of the new challenges in British food culture that emerged in the latter half of the twentieth century and have continued right up until the present day. Commentary on irradiated food during the post-war period is explored in James while anxieties associated with the development of chemicals and synthetic substances designed to increase the size of livestock is analysed in George. This chapter also examined how the representation of Mr Kranky in George problematically contradicted with the representation of Farmers Boggis, Bunce, and Bean in Fox, complicating assessments of the didactic messages related to human power over nature in both texts. The third section of this chapter highlighted the similarities between Mr Kranky and Willy Wonka, and argued that both characters’ desire for total control over their respective industries revealed a series of contradictions about greed and excess in Dahl’s works. Each of the texts considered in this chapter warns young readers to be cautious of the supposed benefits of foods envisioned, constructed and created in an environment somewhat or entirely detached from nature. In Dahl’s texts, the future of food and indeed the food of the future, is both promising and frightening.
Conclusion

On 16 March 2016 it was announced that an extract from Dahl’s memoir *Boy* (1984), reprinted for World Book Day 2016 as a short book titled *The Great Mouse Plot*, sold 32,096 copies in its first week, reaching No. 1 in the UK book charts (Flood, “First ever UK No 1”). Indeed, since his death in 1990, Dahl has continued to sell millions of copies of his books worldwide, and has sold more than 10 million copies of his books in the UK alone since 1998 (ibid.). Dahl’s presence continues to pervade the popular imagination as evidenced by several film adaptations of Dahl’s novels from the 1990s onwards, including Nicholas Roeg’s *The Witches* (1990), Danny DeVito’s *Matilda* (1996), Henry Slick’s *James and the Giant Peach* (1996), Tim Burton’s *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (2005) and Wes Anderson’s stop-motion animated *Fantastic Mr Fox* (2009). Tim Minchin’s musical adaptation of *Matilda* debuted at Stratford-upon-Avon in 2010, while Marc Shaiman and Scott Wittman’s musical based on *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* debuted in the West End in 2013. Both of these adaptations, along with the television film adaptation of *Esio Trot* (2015) on the BBC and Stephen Spielberg’s July 2016 release of *The BFG*, highlight how Dahl’s works are continually reimagined for stage, television, and film productions more than twenty years after his death. The major release of Spielberg’s adaptation coincided with the year-long celebration of the centenary of Dahl’s birth with many other Dahl-related events being held all over the UK, organised by the Welsh government, National Theatre Wales, Wales Millennium Centre and Literature Wales. The UK-wide Dahl centenary celebration, “Roald Dahl 100” in 2016, emphasised how the children’s author and his works are certainly not in danger of fading into obscurity anytime in the near future.

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Flood points out how “*The Great Mouse Plot* beat another World Book Day title, Star Wars story *The Escape*, to the top spot, also coming ahead of bestselling titles by Mary Berry, Jeffrey Archer and Philippa Gregory” (Flood, “First ever UK No 1”).
Since 1990, the links between food, Dahl’s persona and his works, have certainly been maintained as well. The publication of literary cookbooks for children inspired by Dahl’s novels including *Roald Dahl’s Revolting Recipes* (1994), *Roald Dahl’s Even More Revolting Recipes* (2001) and *Roald Dahl’s Completely Revolting Recipes and other tasty treats!* (2009) (the latter a compilation of recipes previously published in the first two *Revolting Recipes* editions) are testament to food’s importance in Dahl’s literary legacy.

In 1997, British Chef and TV personality Gary Rhodes hosted a thirteen-part children’s cookery series for the BBC inspired by *Revolting Recipes*, while British restaurateur and celebrity chef Heston Blumenthal, known for his forays in molecular gastronomy, has used the food and sweets described in *Chocolate Factory* for two episodes in both his *Heston’s Feasts* (2010) and *Heston’s Fantastical Food* (2012) programs, respectively. These examples are indicative of a continually renewing interest in food representations within Dahl’s children’s fiction in popular culture. The Disney film adaptation of *James* in 1996 was tied to a partnership between Disney and McDonald’s and considered to be, at the time, “one of the largest pairings of the entertainment and fast-food industries” (Fitzpatrick 4). In this partnership, Disney was advertising films including *James* for “the Disney Masterpiece Collection Trivia Challenge” which gave consumers a chance to win cash prizes, “trips to Disney World, storybooks and videos in the Masterpiece Collection” (Fitzpatrick 4). Disney’s partnership with McDonald’s for the promotion of the film adaptation of *James*, coupled with Nestlé’s consistent production and development of new sweets including the

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111 Because Dahl did not write these cookbooks (and it was in fact Felicity Dahl and Lori-Ann Newman who wrote *Revolting Recipes* and Josie Fison and Felicity Dahl who compiled the second volume of the Dahl-inspired cookbooks) I decided not to include analysis of these texts as I was much more interested in the didactic function of food in Dahl’s works. Nevertheless, these cookbooks are particularly interesting because they highlight recognition by both Dahl’s estate and Dahl’s publishers of the inextricable ties between his children’s fiction and food.

112 The Trivia Challenge featured “300 million soda cups, supersized French-fry boxes, and hash-brown bags” containing “scratch-off game cards” that asked trivia questions based on Disney films and while “Masterpiece titles on moratorium, such as “The Little Mermaid,” [were] not included in the promotion, […] “James and the Giant Peach” w[ould] be tied in” (Fitzpatrick 4).
“Wonka Xploder bar (milk chocolate mixed with popping candy)”, Wonka biscuits, Wonkalate “a purple chocolate bar studded with […] snozzberry nerds” (Mangan 163), emphasise how both of these massive food corporations have strengthened the association between Dahl’s life, works, and food. The complex association between Dahl’s persona, his novels, and food products inspired by his works are reflective of complicated issues related to child consumerism, mass production, and the food industry from the mid-twentieth century onwards. The complexities explored in this study could serve as the basis for future studies not only of food’s function in Dahl’s children’s works but also of food in children’s literature more generally.

The publication of literary cookbooks inspired by Dahl’s children’s texts could also be the subject of important analyses of literary cookbooks for children. As Nicola Humble explains, the publication of cookbooks for children has increased significantly in recent years and is largely brought upon by “a prevalent anxiety about the culinary abilities of the population as a whole” (232). One possible explanation for this anxiety comes from the fact that “as home economics was successively downgraded and finally dropped from the core curriculum in the early 1990s” there was “an increasing concern that a whole generation of young people have no cooking experience beyond the operation of the microwave” (232-33). While Humble is referring to non-literary cookbooks for children here, I would argue that a similar anxiety about the potential decline in cooking in future generations has driven the increasing publication of literary cookbooks inspired by children’s fiction not unlike the Revolting Recipes texts. These matters are worth further sustained critical analysis in order to gain a greater

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113 The fantastical food creations envisioned by Dahl have influenced other immensely popular children’s writers such as J.K. Rowling, whose Harry Potter series (1997-2007) features numerous examples of fantastical sweets including chocolate frogs, Bertie Bott’s Every Flavour Beans, and jelly slugs, all of which were developed into sweets in real-life by American confectionery company Jelly Belly Candy Company. Although it is unclear when Jelly Belly developed chocolate frogs and jelly slugs, according to their website, the company’s product, Bertie Bott’s Every Flavour Beans was first sold in 2000 (jellybelly.com).
understanding of the shifts in food culture and how these changes will affect the way in which future generations will prepare and consume food.

The first chapter of this study explored the connections between Dahl’s ideological positions about animal welfare, hunting, food, and power in his biographical and literary works. This chapter identified how the messages against hunting in The Magic Finger (1966) and Danny the Champion of the World (1975) and the message against factory farming in Fantastic Mr Fox revealed Dahl’s at times, contradictory perspectives about power dynamics between humans and animals. While I have examined some of Dahl’s most popular children’s works I have purposefully decided not to explore some of his lesser-known children’s texts featuring animal characters including The Gremlins (1943), The Enormous Crocodile (1978), Esio Trot (1989), and The Minpins (1991) as well as his works of poetry, Revolting Rhymes (1982), Dirty Beasts (1984), and Rhyme Stew (1989). With the exception of “The Pig” in Dirty Beasts, the examples related to excessive and disorderly consumption found in these works are not closely connected to my overarching analysis of food and power in relation to Dahl’s didacticism and British food industry issues in the twentieth century. Although these texts feature important examples of disorderly eating and conspicuous consumption, particularly in Dahl’s updated version of “Hansel and Gretel” in Rhyme Stew, and in texts such as The Enormous Crocodile, which explores the complicated power dynamics between humans and animals, they do not address many of the key issues related to meat consumption and industrialised food production examined at great length in chapter one.

Expanding on the analysis of animal welfare and meat in the first chapter of this study, additional examination devoted to the complicated representation of nature, animals, and consumption would also be interesting and useful in other areas of research in children’s literature. Children’s classics such as Kenneth Grahame’s The Wind in the
Willows (1908), A. A. Milne’s Winnie-the-Pooh (1926) and The House at Pooh Corner (1928), and C.S. Lewis’s The Chronicles of Narnia (1950-1956) would be important sources for research on the increasingly complicated representation of animals and meat in twentieth-century children’s texts. While Tess Cosslett briefly examines food’s role in a few children’s works featuring anthropomorphised animals in Talking Animals in British Fiction, 1786-1914 (2006), there has yet to be an extensive examination of food consumption in children’s novels about animals. The complex relationship between animals and meat in these texts is certainly worth examining in order to gain a more nuanced understanding of the complicated representation of meat, food, and power in early twentieth-century children’s literature. While I have alluded to these texts briefly in the first chapter of this study and although they are certainly worth further examination, it has been my intention to focus on didacticism, power, and the British food industry in Dahl’s works within a late twentieth-century context. I intended to conduct analysis of as much breadth and depth as possible, and in order to do so, it was necessary that I concentrated on the socio-cultural and historical context in which Dahl wrote the majority of his literary works for children.

The second and third chapters in this study focused on confectionery and convenience foods, respectively. The second chapter in particular analysed the power dynamics between adults and children in relation to confectionery consumption in Charlie and the Chocolate Factory (1964), Boy (1984), The Giraffe and the Pelly and Me (1985), and The Witches (1983) while the third chapter examined how Dahl’s didactic messages about the importance of meal routinisation reveal problematic and contradictory attitudes about power and control in The Twits (1980), The BFG (1982), and Matilda (1988). An analysis of Dahl’s position in debates about food, power, control, and eating disorders in children’s and Young Adult fiction within the canon would also be a
promising area of further research. The representation of thin and overweight characters in children’s literature and YA fiction has certainly changed a great deal since Dahl’s most famous overweight character Augustus Gloop was first introduced to readers in 1964’s *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, making a study of how the contrasting tropes of the starving child and the obese child are used in texts published after Dahl’s death all the more important.

The final chapter in this study explored the power dynamics between humans and nature in relation to futuristic food in *James and the Giant Peach* (1961), *George’s Marvellous Medicine* (1981), and *Charlie and the Great Glass Elevator* (1972). The first section of this chapter situated *James* within the context of science fiction and a scientific approach to food while the second and third sections focused on the contradictory didactic messages related to industrial food production, greed, and excess in the characterisation of Mr Killy Kranky and Willy Wonka. As the food industry expands and as more scientific and technological innovations in food production transform the way people consume food, fiction for children will indeed continue to comment on the transformations in the food industry and in some cases, inspire further scientific and technological changes in industrial food production. Examples of futuristic food in the form of the square-meal tablets in L. Frank Baum’s *The Patchwork Girl of Oz* (1913) and *The Magic of Oz* (1919) and in Judi and Ron Barrett’s *Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs* (1978), in which make-believe town called Chewandswallow is beset with “culinary weather disasters” (Satz 239), highlight significant interest in and fascination with the effects and implications of food in the future. It is important to note here that while the food in the Barretts’ text is not developed by a scientific or technological means and is, instead, the result of a mysterious meteorological phenomenon, in Phil Lord and Christopher Miller’s 2009 film adaption of *Cloudy*, the food falling from the sky is
caused by an accidental glitch when an amateur inventor, Flint Lockwood, creates a complex contraption that transforms water into food. In this way, Lord and Miller’s adaptation advances the links between food and scientific innovation previously explored by Baum and Dahl. The recent advent of lab-grown, test-tube burgers, and 3-D food printers, and the development of a real-life meal-replacement food inspired by the meal-in-a-pill foods in science fiction and children’s literature, indicates that technological innovation in food production is more prevalent than ever before. In 2013, American software engineer Rob Rhinehart began manufacturing Soylent, a meal-replacement product named after the sci-fi film Soylent Green (1973) based on Harry Harrison’s dystopian futurist novel, Make Room! Make Room! (1966). According to the Soylent website, the meal-replacement product is “Engineered to deliver all essential nutrients and provide an even release of energy” everyday in smoothie form (soylent.com). The fictional chewing-gum meal envisioned by Wonka is, in a way, made into a reality through Rhinehart’s Soylent in the twenty-first century. While food historian Warren Belasco has written a great deal about historical preoccupations with futuristic food and food systems in Meals to Come: A History of the Future of Food (2006), there has yet to be a significant examination of the relationship between literature and innovations in food science, which I would argue could considerably contribute to important debates about the current and future state of food culture.

Although I have limited the scope of this study to an examination of industrialised food production in Dahl’s children’s fiction, the representation of food and wine in his adult fiction would be a productive area of research on the author more generally. Dahl wrote extensively about food and wine in his fiction for adults, especially in stories such as, “Taste” (1945), “Lamb to the Slaughter” (1953), “The Landlady” (1959), “Pig” (1960), and “Royal Jelly” (1960). While the function of food and wines in Dahl’s adult
fiction certainly differs from food’s didactic function in his children’s works, in his short stories for adults, the representation of food and wine are just as important and potentially significant and useful starting points of critical analysis of Dahl’s works, particularly in relation to other literary traditions including gothic and horror narratives. Moreover, in addition to food, Dahl was also fascinated by other areas of material culture and was particularly interested in inventions, often of the technological or medical variety. Dahl’s curiosity about the inventing process made its way into his fiction for adults in several texts including “The Great Automatic Grammatizator” (1953), “The Sound Machine” (1953), “William and Mary” (1959), “Bitch” (1974), and My Uncle Oswald (1979).114 Further analysis of Dahl’s fictitious inventions could be situated in broader discussions about the role of inventions in literature, specifically in science-fiction and fantasy narratives and in wider debates about mass culture and consumerism.

This study has endeavoured to show how the representation of food and power in Dahl’s children’s fiction is an important part of his literary legacy and indeed his significant impact on children’s literature in the twentieth century. By carefully examining food in relation to power, control, and the many ways in which contradictions in his texts reveal the complex ways in which didacticism functions in his works. This study uncovers potential for further research not only in Dahl’s complete oeuvre but also in wider areas of research in food and power in children’s literature and beyond. The historical and cultural commentary on Dahl’s life and works examined here will hopefully

114 Dahl too experimented with inventing things yet it was more out of complete necessity than a particularly fixated interest in any one subject. In 1960, when Dahl’s son Theo was four months old, he was in an accident in which his pram was struck by a cab in New York City and Jeremy Treglown explains how “One result of Theo’s injuries was that he developed hydrocephalus, a build-up of cerebrospinal fluid which puts pressure on the brain. To drain it, a neurosurgeon used a relatively new technique which involved running a thin tube from his head into a vein, where the fluid would be dispersed into the bloodstream” (127). The problem with this tube was that it tended to clog—recognising this problem, and with the assistance of a hydraulic engineer and amateur toymaker called Stephen Wade and a neurosurgeon Kenneth Till, Dahl was part of a team that invented the Wade-Dahl-Till (WDT) valve, a cerebral shunt designed for children and used to drain excess fluid from the brain after surgery (Treglown 127-33).
open up and propel further discussion on the prolific children’s author and the wide-reaching effects of his works in popular culture. By exploring the representation of significant transformations in twentieth-century British food culture in Dahl’s major children’s works, it becomes clear that the fantastical food in his children’s works is undoubtedly important in understanding the prolific author’s enduring appeal, his literary legacy, and his immense cultural impact.
### Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HRCH</td>
<td>Harry Ransom Center for the Humanities, University of Texas at Austin</td>
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<tr>
<td>KNOPF</td>
<td>Archives of Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., in the Harry Ransom Center for the Humanities, University of Texas at Austin</td>
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<tr>
<td>RDMSC</td>
<td>Roald Dahl Museum and Story Centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RD</td>
<td>The Roald Dahl Archive at the Roald Dahl Museum and Story Centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WLC</td>
<td>Watkins Loomis Collection, Columbia University</td>
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Coen, Fabio. Letter to Roald Dahl. 11/20/68. HRCH KNOPF 1334.5.


---. “Food and Drink”. c. 1932. RDMSC RD 13/3/2/1-2.


---. Interview with Henry Notaker. NRK Skole. NRK, Oslo, Norway. 20 October 1989.

Television.


---. Letter to Asta. 6/16/39. RDMSC RD 14/3/42/1.


---. Letter to his family. 12/21/38; RDMSC RD 14/3/17/4.

---. Letter to Sheila Saint Lawrence. 9/22/58. WLC Series III, Box 24.


---. Letter to Sofie Magdalene. 1/29/33. RDMSC RD 13/1/8/22.

---. Letter to Sofie Magdalene. 10/6/38. RDMSC RD 14/3/5/1.

---. Letter to Sofie Magdalene. Between 9 January and 22 January 1939. RDMSC RD 14/3/19/12.


---. Telegram to Bob Bernstein. 7/19/68. HRCH KNOPF 1334. 5


---. Untitled Manuscript for The Twits. 1979. MS. RDMSC RD 2/16/1.


Saint Lawrence, Sheila. Letter to Roald Dahl. 9/21/61. WLC Series III, Box 25.


Watkins, Mike. Letter to Roald Dahl. 5/12/64. WLC Series III, Box 26.


