

## Season 1, Episode 12:

### Wonka x Antisemitism and Censorship with Leena Norms

#### SPEAKERS

Leena Norms, Marcelle Kosman, Hannah McGregor

**[Material Girls Theme plays: "Shopping Mall" by Jay Arner and Jessica Delisle]**

#### Marcelle Kosman 0:30

Hello, and welcome to Material Girls, a scholarly podcast about popular culture. I'm Marcelle Kosman—

#### Hannah McGregor 0:36

—and I'm Hannah McGregor, and we are positively delighted to be joined by our guest today, Leena Norms. Leena Norms (she/her) runs a podcast called No Books on a Dead Planet, whose tagline is "We read climate books so you don't have to"; a YouTube channel where she discusses books, climate change, and documents her process of building a sustainable wardrobe; and a recycled patch company called Positive Panic Patches (I love alliteration) that makes scout-style badges you can earn by doing climate dares. She previously worked for almost a decade in the book publishing industry and has a poetry collection called *Bargain Bin Rom-Com*. Welcome, Leena!

#### Marcelle Kosman 1:21

Hi, Leena!

#### Leena Norms 1:21

Hey, thanks for having me. I'm here for all the alliteration. **[Hannah laughs]**

**Hannah McGregor** 1:27

Good, that feels thematically appropriate for this episode, right?

**Marcelle Kosman** 1:30

Yes. Wonka...

**Leena Norms** 1:32

Worst Wonka. [**Marcelle laughs**]

**Hannah McGregor** 1:33

Good. Yeah.

**Leena Norms** 1:35

Why, Wonka?

**Hannah McGregor** 1:38

Oh, nothing will ever be as bad as the Johnny Depp Wonka, my God.

**Marcelle Kosman** 1:43

Absolutely not.

**Leena Norms** 1:43

It's nice to have a long pitch to set the standard for, to build into. [**Marcelle laughs**]

**Marcelle Kosman** 1:49

Okay, so obviously, we all have a lot to say about Wonka, but we're not going to talk about it here. We're going to talk about it later. Because what I want to talk about right now instead, just to get us warmed up and feeling good, I want to talk about the whole holiday season blockbuster phenomenon because when I think about the holidays, I think about going to big budget movies, all of which are flawless, like the *Lord of the Rings* films, the *Star Wars* sequels, and *Cats*, the last movie I saw before the world shut down due to the COVID-19 pandemic. All phenomenal, flawless works of cinematic art. So, Hannah, Leena, tell me about your movie-going during the holidays.

**Hannah McGregor** 2:32

Oh my God. Leena, is this a tradition for you? Do you go see a blockbuster at the holidays?

**Leena Norms** 2:36

Do you know what, it hasn't been a tradition but I've recently moved near a cinema where the tickets are—and I kid you not—five pounds a film. Eight Canadian dollars!

**Marcelle Kosman** 2:45

A bargain.

**Leena Norms** 2:46

The price of a posh coffee. So I might be going a little bit more, who can say. But after the Wonka experience, I feel like I've had my fill for a little while.

**[Hannah and Marcelle laugh]** I'm gonna get back to books, I think, or maybe crisp packets, or cereal boxes, I don't know.

**Marcelle Kosman** 3:02

Crisp packets.

**Hannah McGregor** 3:04

Oh my God. Holiday movies were absolutely not part of my childhood holiday experience. But maybe about ten years ago, I stopped going home for the holidays and started either spending it with other family, or more recently, spending it with friends. So it has increasingly been a pretty pivotal part of how I experience Christmas. For example, I watched all of the Star Wars movies for the first time with my uncle and my cousins, because we were going to see the first one of the new ones. What was that, *The Force Awakens*?

**Marcelle Kosman** 3:42

That's right. That's the one.

**Hannah McGregor** 3:44

So we were going to see that and they've never seen the original trilogy. So we binge watched the whole original trilogy together so we could go see *The Force Awakens*.

**Leena Norms** 3:51

So fun.

**Hannah McGregor** 3:52

Probably my favourite, like, seeing-a-movie-at-Christmas memory is going on Christmas Day to see the Greta Gerwig *Little Women* with some friends. That's A-plus Christmas viewing.

**Leena Norms** 4:03

That was my last lockdown film.

**Marcelle Kosman** 4:05

Okay, but have you guys seen *Cats* though? That's my question. **[Hannah laughs]** Have you seen *Cats*? Because it's flawless.

**Hannah McGregor** 4:12

Yeah, with you. **[Marcelle laughs]**

**[Upbeat interlude music plays]**

**Hannah McGregor** 4:19

Our “Why This, Why Now” segment is all about identifying the historical, ideological, and material conditions that allowed our objective study to become Zeitgeisty. Since we're recording during the holidays and talking about a big holiday movie release, Marcelle, I can only assume you've got some festive suggestions for “Why Wonka, Why Now.”

**Marcelle Kosman** 4:41

Oh, you had better believe it Hannah. There is nothing more festive than a frothy collision of antisemitism and anti-censorship. So, this is the approach that I want to take to talking about “Wonka and Why Wonka, Why Now.” So

Leena, as a BookTuber, I believe in my heart that you're familiar with Roald Dahl's books. Is this correct?

**Leena Norms** 5:06

I am well-versed in his canon. I actually reread the book for this as well, I hope you know.

**Hannah McGregor** 5:12

Dedication.

**Marcelle Kosman** 5:13

Okay, so Leena, could you tell us a little bit about Roald Dahl's legacy as a children's writer, why his books are so popular, and, in particular—something that you're probably more positioned to talk about than either Hannah or I—how he figures in, say, Britain's cultural imagination?

**Leena Norms** 5:32

So Roald Dahl is considered a national treasure in the UK. I don't think that's a controversial statement.

We were read his books in class—

**Hannah McGregor** 5:40

Still?

**Leena Norms** 5:40

—most people were. Well, "still"—from those of us who dwell on the internet and read, it's feeling tentative right now. But, for example, there are currently BFG mugs in my supermarket, right now, being sold. There's always lots of merch around just any time of year. We were read his books at school. My first theatre show I went to see was an adaptation of *The BFG*. I actually starred **[laughs]** in *The Twits* theatre show as Mrs. Twit once. There are pics, but I will only show you in private.

**Hannah McGregor 6:13**

Ooh! Twit pics.

**Leena Norms 6:15**

I'll flash you a little twitpic later. **[Hannah and Marcelle laugh]** I also grew up with a massive fascination with *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, in particular, because I grew up in Coventry, which is really near Birmingham, which is near the original Cadbury's Chocolate Factory, which is very, very prominent in British culture. I had my seventh birthday party there. **[Laughs]** They still have a huge working factory—

**Hannah McGregor 6:37**

At a chocolate factory?

**Leena Norms 6:38**

Yes, at a chocolate factory. You can go around, there's a tour, and they have trains. So it's big, as well, just the idea of a chocolate factory. So the Bournville Cadbury Chocolate Factory is kind of confirmed as Roald Dahl's inspiration for *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. He went to a boarding school nearby and they used to send Cadbury's chocolates to the boarding school to test them. And he was one of the testers when he was 13. So he says that the reason he

got the idea for the chocolate factory is because he was imagining all these scientists with potions coming up with great chocolates for the private school boys to try.

### **Marcelle Kosman 7:11**

Quite lovely, but also bleak.

### **Leena Norms 7:14**

Yes. So I was thinking about the reason why he has such a massive appeal for children growing up. And for me, I think the pull of it was that he was quite fascinated with a non-nuclear family. Often kids are adopted by people who weren't blood relations: BFG, Matilda... and he also showed effeminate men in a really affectionate light, which I think a lot of children loved. And I think that probably had a good influence on a lot of people. I'm trying to start with the good.

He also kind of showed a world where grown ups were cruel and children were believed by the author, by the authorial voice. So I think that's kind of unusual. I think I grew up with a lot of books where the parents were the people who were like, "Oh, silly children. You did that thing again," like very *Swallows and Amazons*, Enid Blyton, you go out, you make a mistake, you come home, and there's pie on the table. And I think that because his works were full of lonely children, children who weren't treated very well at home, and that was always shown in a negative light, I think there was a lot of stuff around that that attracted a lot of children in the same way that Jacqueline Wilson does.

I don't know if that's a cultural phenomena outside of the UK, but Jacqueline Wilson is as big if not bigger than Roald Dahl in the UK. And she writes a lot about childhood trauma in children's books and unsafe family environments. So I think in that way, I think growing up before (foreshadowing) I learned what I learned, he was still kind of considered the naughty uncle of the British children's literature. He was always the kind of one who was like, "Oh, you can't read that, that one's about naughty things." Or, "Rude things happen in that



one,” or “There are evil people in that book,” do you know what I mean? He was still considered the kind of slightly naughty uncle, I would say. In an affectionate way.

**Hannah McGregor** 7:14

Edgy. I remember as a child, finding his books edgy.

**Leena Norms** 7:32

Yeah, like essentially *The Twits* is about two people who hate each other. It's about a divorce. **[Laughs]** It's very weird as a subject matter for a children's book. I guess he was kind of somebody who, in inverted commas, “stood up for the underdog” before I really understood what the underdog really involved.

**Hannah McGregor** 9:07

I gotta say, his work sounds downright delightful. Surely there are no incidents of hate speech on record that might mar his beautiful legacy. **[Marcelle and Leena laugh]**

**Leena Norms** 9:16

What could possibly go wrong? The naughty uncle is always innocent. **[Laughs]**

**Hannah McGregor** 9:23

Naughty uncles have never done anything horrifying.

**Marcelle Kosman** 9:25

Never, never once. They've never had a shitty take. But as we LOL, we all know that indeed, Roald Dahl has said some shit. And a number of folks that have drawn attention to his use of antisemitic stereotypes in his books, as well as many, many, many other oppressive shorthands that vilify and dehumanize disabled people and women and Black folks, and the list truly goes on. So Leena, could you tell us a little bit about this part of his legacy?

**Leena Norms** 9:54

**[Laughs]** I mean, in summary, I'd say it's bad. And I think it's something that has been widely publicized in the media that adults read, but I haven't seen a big translation into it being available in the children's market. I don't think people have a wider realization of it outside of people who hang out on the internet like us. Honestly, in Britain, I don't think people really do. A lot of his statements around Jewish people, well, I think a lot of people attribute to being of the time. I don't really think that's valid. I think a lot of people were completely polite and nice and kind during that time **[Marcelle laughs]** and I don't think you needed to be that way. To say it in a very schoolteacher way. I'm like, "Excuse me, Roald Dahl. Your schoolmates were very pleasant."

But yeah, learning about that was really disappointing, and seeing the kind of discourse around it. And I think once you retrospectively read some of the caricatures in his books, they do start to really unravel quite fast. And to me, they didn't really stand out as a child because of the media that it was surrounded by. I don't think it was the exemplary example of prejudice for the other kinds of literature that I was reading at the time. So at the time, it didn't stand out to me at all. Now it does.

**Marcelle Kosman** 11:05

Yeah.

**Leena Norms** 11:05

You can't go back.

**Marcelle Kosman** 11:06

Yeah. Because it's subtle, right? It's "subtle," with huge scare quotes around it. But it's not overt, I guess is the thing. He's not like, "The witches are all Jewish women, and that's why they are ugly and bad." **[Laughs]** Instead, it's like, "These women have long noses and crooked toes and claws. You can't see them in the daytime."

**Hannah McGregor** 11:27

It requires some level of close reading, for sure. Okay, Marcelle.

**Marcelle Kosman** 11:32

Yes.

**Hannah McGregor** 11:32

I know that you're a serious scholar, which means I know that you know that we're here to talk about the 2023 Timothée Chalamet cinematic masterpiece *Wonka* and not the racist, misogynist, antisemitic, and fatphobic novel.

**Marcelle Kosman** 11:47

*Allegedly.*

**Hannah McGregor** 11:48

Allegedly. **[Marcelle laughs]** I've never read it. So couldn't say. But we're talking about the movie, right?

**Marcelle Kosman** 11:57

We are so absolutely talking about the movie. This is an essential reminder. And your interjection is the perfect moment to pivot and start talking about the litany of Wonka movie tie-ins and merchandise. **[Hannah laughs]** Which, Hannah, I would love it if you could talk about specifically.

**Hannah McGregor** 12:19

Yep. So one of the reasons I really wanted us to do an episode about this movie, is that it has been an obsession for months now of one of my favourite podcasts, *My Brother, My Brother, and Me*, who have been talking about it at length, despite not having seen it. **[Marcelle laughs]** I think still, the most recent episode they released, they still haven't seen it.

**Leena Norms** 12:42

Incredible work.

**Hannah McGregor** 12:43

But they have been talking about it a lot, and that got me pretty into it. And particularly, they've been talking about the explosion of tie-ins, which is really fascinating. This movie has been merchandised so heavily, and its partnerships are kind of bonkers. So let me give you some examples.

**Marcelle Kosman** 13:05

Please.

**Hannah McGregor** 13:06

Multiple shoe tie-ins, **[Marcelle laughs]** both exclusive Nike Dunks designed by Timmy himself. Only five pairs made. But then also—only five pairs—but then also, for the rest of us, a bunch of Converse tie-ins including some shockingly ugly gold sneakers—

**Marcelle Kosman** 13:26

Oh, I want them.

**Hannah McGregor** 13:27

—that you could get that look like they're from space. They're amazing.

**Leena Norms** 13:31

Golden ticket sneakers!

**Hannah McGregor** 13:33

Golden ticket sneakers.

**Marcelle Kosman** 13:35

Which is incredible because this movie has no golden tickets in it!

**Hannah McGregor** 13:37

Absolutely no golden tickets, **[Marcelle laughs]** absolutely no reference to the golden ticket. The only food tie-in I could find is with IHOP, who released a range of upsettingly purple food. That's not what they're calling it, it's what I'm calling it. It's upsettingly purple.

**Marcelle Kosman** 13:56

Incredible.

**Hannah McGregor** 13:57

There's a lot of fashion tie-ins. So there's a \$300 Wonka x Fossil beaded clutch covered in images of...

**Marcelle Kosman** 14:06

Oompa-Loompas.

**Hannah McGregor** 14:07

Come on, guess.

**Marcelle Kosman** 14:08

Chocolate. Poor people!

**Hannah McGregor** 14:10

Absolutely not. Fruit.

**Marcelle Kosman** 14:12

What?! [Laughs]

**Leena Norms** 14:13

Oh, because of the lickable wallpapers. These are references to the book. I'm so confused. **[Hannah laughs]** This is the bad place, I'm so sure this is the bad place. Continue.

**Hannah McGregor** 14:22

There's a Wonka x Revolution Beauty advent calendar filled with, you know, advent calendars are filled with...

**Marcelle Kosman** 14:28

Chocolate, chocolate.

**Hannah McGregor** 14:30

Beauty products, correct. You can also buy branded Wonka Bar wrappers with golden tickets, but guess what they don't include?

**Marcelle Kosman** 14:40

Shut up. If you say they don't include chocolate...

**Leena Norms** 14:43

Noooo...

**Hannah McGregor** 14:43

There's absolutely no chocolate.

**Marcelle Kosman** 14:44

**[Whispers]** What the fuck?

**Hannah McGregor** 14:44

No, no, there's no chocolate. In fact, it's basically impossible to acquire any kind of branded chocolate. Am I nefariously leading towards my own hypothesis about the movie's fraught relationship to chocolate? Yeah, maybe I am, maybe I'm going rogue, maybe I have my own hypothesis.

**Leena Norms** 15:03

Okay, my hypothesis is that they don't think that their merchandising strategy is going to work. So they don't want to use anything that's going to expire. In the UK, there was a Wonka line of chocolate in 2005. And it completely bombed. The people didn't want it. So I think it's an expiry issue. That's my theory.

**Hannah McGregor** 15:22

Also, one of the plot points in the movie is the chocolate getting poisoned.

**[Marcelle and Hannah laugh]** They've released this clip, so I'm not sure if it's a spoiler, it's a scene where **[laughing]** Willy Wonka has to shout, "The chocolate is poisoned!" **[Marcelle laughs]** So maybe they were afraid that would discourage people from eating branded food.

**Marcelle Kosman** 15:46

We can all agree that there's a lot of money riding on the success of this movie. So let's pivot back to Hannah's interjection. Because I want to talk about this whole notion of separating the movie from the book and its author, and whom that separation serves, because I'm now questioning my own thought process here. Because if the merch is more tied to the book than to this prequel film that really could exist entirely without the book, **[laughs]** what is the relationship here? Okay, I have a timeline. Here's what I have for you. The



movie *Wonka* has been in the works since at least 2016. 2016 is the earliest date I could find while doing my thorough Googling. Are we all familiar with the Roald Dahl Story Company?

**Leena Norms** 16:36

Yeah.

**Marcelle Kosman** 16:37

So Leena, yes, Hannah, no. That's okay. That makes sense. This is the organization that, to quote its own website, "Manages the copyrights and trademarks of author Roald Dahl, and works with publishers, filmmakers, theatre producers, merchandisers, and other licensees worldwide."

**Hannah McGregor** 16:54

Okay.

**Marcelle Kosman** 16:55

So this is like, the estate. In November of 2018, the streaming service Netflix announced a collaboration with the Roald Dahl Story Company to create a whole bunch of animated extended universe adaptations of Roald Dahl's books. Leena, could you kindly read the following quotation for me, please?

**Leena Norms** 17:14

"Netflix and the Roald Dahl Story Company jointly announced today that Netflix is extending the Roald Dahl universe of stories for global family audiences with an exclusive new slate of original animated event series, based on the books from the acclaimed and award-winning author's best-selling library, including *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, *Matilda*, *The BFG*, *The Twits*, and many other beloved titles."

**Marcelle Kosman** 17:39

Perfect, thank you. So this quote tells us what the Roald Dahl Story Company brings to the collaboration. Hannah, could you please read the second half of the statement, which tells us what Netflix is bringing to the collaboration?

**Hannah McGregor** 17:54

“Netflix will bring together the highest quality creative visual and writing teams to extend the stories in this first of its kind slate of premium animated event series and specials for audiences of all ages and for families to enjoy together. Netflix intends to remain faithful to the quintessential spirit and tone of Dahl while also building out an imaginative story universe that expands far beyond the pages of the books themselves.”

**Marcelle Kosman** 18:23

Beautiful, thank you both. Okay. And among the many Roald Dahl extended universe projects, who should be hired to “reimagine the world of Willy Wonka and to develop an original Oompa-Loompa series”? Why, it's Hollywood's most famous Māori Jew, Taika Waititi! Pretty impressive!

**Hannah McGregor** 18:44

Yeah. **[Hannah and Marcelle laugh]**

**Marcelle Kosman** 18:48

Waititi's involvement was announced by Netflix in March of 2020.

**Leena Norms** 18:53

Interesting.

**Hannah McGregor** 18:54

Marcelle, in the wrong hands, this timeline could appear on Breitbart.

**Marcelle Kosman** 18:57

[Laughs] And I'm just getting started! Okay, so you may have heard that the Roald Dahl Story Company issued an apology for the late author's antisemitism, but more likely you never heard about that because the apology, according to the BBC, is found in a discreet part of the Roald Dahl Story Company's website.

**Hannah McGregor** 19:17

Oh, they posted an apology, but they hid it.

**Marcelle Kosman** 19:19

They've also moved it since it was first published about, because I followed the link and it was a broken link. And I was like, "Oh, did they retract the apology?" No, they just moved it somewhere else. So we don't even know when exactly the apology first appeared, because they just put it up, and were very quiet about it. But then the *Sunday Times* noticed it, and they were the first people to publish about that discovery on December 5, 2020. So that's the earliest point that we can confidently say the apology appears. December 2020.

We're going to fast forward about six months to May of 2021 when Warner Bros. announces that "Timmy the Chalamet" will play the eponymous character in *Wonka*. Okay? So Jewish social media has feelings about this, because Jewish social media is aware of Roald Dahl's antisemitic legacy. But I have two examples. *Hey Alma* suggests that "a Jewish actor once again portraying Wonka? That can be a nice big *fuck you* to Dahl." And then *Hey Alma's* sister publication *Kveller* takes the opportunity to write a listicle called

“13 Things We Love About Jewish Icon Gene Wilder.” So Gene Wilder—RIP—the OG cinematic Willy Wonka, and absolutely the only person to play Wonka of note prior to Timothée Chalamet. So Gene Wilder is Jewish and Timothée Chalamet is Jewish. Well, that casting seems to suggest that Willy Wonka himself is canonically Jewish.

**Hannah McGregor** 20:56

I have no issues with that interpretation.

**Marcelle Kosman** 20:59

That's right. That's why Hogwarts can't be antisemitic because Daniel Radcliffe is Jewish.

**Hannah McGregor** 21:04

Exactly.

**Marcelle Kosman** 21:04

So, you know me. I love to research and I'm curious about the difference between, say, optics versus genuine attention to detail. So, I wondered—I put myself on a list Googling a number of the writers of the script to find out whether or not they were Jewish writers working on the script. Okay. So I Googled every single one of the writer's names with “Jewish”. So I have learned from—

**Hannah McGregor** 21:32

You are absolutely on a list.

**Marcelle Kosman** 21:33

—the Tampa JCC newsletter, “Jews in the News,” that no less than three of these writers are Jewish. So Simon Rich, Jeff Nathanson, and Steven Levenson. So there were Jews working on the script. Is this relevant? Can I prove that it's relevant? Eh, it's a bit sticky. But here's why I think it's interesting, because I don't think that it's a stretch to suggest that adapting a racist text for a diverse audience benefits from the contributions of racialized writers, right? So the fact that they have pretty famous Jewish writers working on the script seems to me to be a genuine attempt to escape accusations of reproducing antisemitism.

**Hannah McGregor** 22:19

All right, I buy that.

**Marcelle Kosman** 22:21

A few months later, Netflix buys the Roald Dahl Story Company. They just bought it.

**Leena Norms** 22:26

Wow.

**Hannah McGregor** 22:26

Does Netflix now own the whole Roald Dahl estate, functionally?

**Marcelle Kosman** 22:31

I think so, because the phrasing is “acquired.” On the 22nd of September 2021, Netflix announced that it had *acquired* the Roald Dahl Story Company. I don't think you acquire something if you're still just doing a handshake business. I

think Netflix owns it. And there was another article, I can't remember who published it, that referred to it as Netflix's "golden ticket." So Netflix now owns Roald Dahl's legacy.

**Leena Norms** 23:01

Forever.

**Hannah McGregor** 23:02

That's wild.

**Marcelle Kosman** 23:03

So I really want to know if that means that technically Netflix is a co-producer of *Wonka* because the relationship here is so curious. Because the Roald Dahl Story Company is one of the producers of *Wonka*. And so if Netflix owns it, then technically yeah, right? But maybe there's some business nonsense about separate entities. I have no idea. So we know that between 2016 and the release of *Wonka* in December of 2023, the Roald Dahl Story Company, Netflix, and Warner Bros. have all taken significant public measures to disavow Roald Dahl's notorious antisemitic legacy.

**Hannah McGregor** 23:43

Because they want to profit off this thing they just bought.

**Marcelle Kosman** 23:47

Exactly, right? It is in their financial interest. So the Roald Dahl Story Company puts a little apology so that anybody who's curious about it can Google "Roald Dahl and antisemitism" and the apology will show up. And Netflix and Warner

Bros. are putting actual famous Jewish creators in charge of adapting the story content. So none of this is accidental.

**Hannah McGregor** 24:10

I hesitate to ask this, but you said earlier that you wanted to look at *Wonka* in the context of anti semitism and censorship.

**Marcelle Kosman** 24:19

As always, Hannah, perfect pivot. One of the big issues that we in the 21st century have to contend with when it comes to adapting beloved works of infamously oppressive literatures is the problem of adaptation itself. Because readers do not like it when their favourite books get changed. And out of curiosity, are either of you familiar with the controversy about Puffin Books updating the “colourful language” that Roald Dahl used in his books to make them more inclusive?

**Leena Norms** 24:55

I am. I'm not on Jewish Twitter but I am on publishing Twitter. So I have seen—oh, the screen shots.

**Marcelle Kosman** 25:02

Yeah. So people are upset about it, right? Do you want to give some examples, Leena, of what they're updating?

**Leena Norms** 25:10

So the upset was caused because it wasn't just a few changes. The *Telegraph* actually went through and did a very, very big deep dive into every single change they made. And they actually hired an outside company to do it, a kind

of consultancy company around diversity, which is a good instinct. But they changed a lot of very strange things around the genders of the Oompa-Loompas, for example, because we need female representation among the Oompa-Loompa population, of course, and the reference to the fact that women—

**Marcelle Kosman** 25:40

Oh, that was a big problem with the original text, was the lack of **[laughing]** femme Oompa-Loompas.

**Leena Norms** 25:43

Yeah, that was the biggest problem. That was what was very upsetting about those books. They took out the word “fat” a lot. Like they basically took out the word “fat” from all of his texts, but they left in words like “flabby,” and “enormous.”

**Marcelle Kosman** 25:57

Enormous!

**Leena Norms** 25:59

And other descriptive words that I think are a lot more careless and more harmful.

**Hannah McGregor** 26:04

Man, really weird to be taking the word “fat” out of the books while making a prequel that prominently features a fat suit.



**Marcelle Kosman** 26:15

Right?

**Leena Norms** 26:16

It's wild.

**Marcelle Kosman** 26:16

Yeah.

**Hannah McGregor** 26:17

Yeah.

**Leena Norms** 26:17

What else did they change? There were lots of very strange changes around referencing women workers, secretaries, they didn't like that that was a thing. Even though lots of women do work as secretaries.

**Hannah McGregor** 26:28

Women can be more than secretaries. Women can also be Oompa-Loompas. **[Everyone laughs]** This is a rhetorical question, but I'm going to ask it anyway, what were critics of this process objecting to?

**Marcelle Kosman** 26:41

Okay, so as Leena, I'm sure you are aware, there were a lot of different criticisms for different reasons. And so I thought that I would pull out a maybe

nuanced example. Perhaps it's more nuanced. We'll see. I don't disagree with it, that's why I'm calling it nuanced. [Laughs] I wanted to look at Suzanne Nossel. So Suzanne Nossel is the CEO of PEN America. And PEN is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to free expression and literature and it's against book bans and educational censorship, that kind of thing. Leena, could you kindly read this two-part quotation from Nossel?

#### **Leena Norms** 27:24

“If we start down the path of trying to correct for perceived slights, instead of allowing readers to receive and react to books as written, we risk distorting the work of great authors and clouding the essential lens that literature offers on society.”

Armani Syed from the *Time* asks more context from Nossel’s thread. “‘The problem with taking licence to re-edit classic works is that there is no limiting principle,’ Nossel said. ‘You start out wanting to replace a word here and a word there and end up inserting entirely new ideas.’ Instead, she suggests, publishers should include introductions to work with offensive language to prepare readers with context.”

#### **Marcelle Kosman** 28:03

Thank you so much, Leena. So maybe this is the academic in me, but I love a literary apparatus. And so this is why I find myself agreeing with Nossel. Like, if you just go in and sort of comb through the text and be like, “Well, the word ‘fat’ is clearly offensive. So instead, we shall call this bad character enormous, that will make it acceptable,” that's bonkers. But if instead you have a literary apparatus that, say, informs readers of the unacceptable framing of the text in the first place, you know, you can accomplish different things. My feeling is that all of Dahl’s books should have a general introduction that acknowledges this. No?

#### **Hannah McGregor** 28:43

I've got kind of a different take on what you do with books that equate fatness with villainy, which is that we just stop obsessively reading them and adapting them and talking about them and instead we read other better books.

**Marcelle Kosman** 28:56

Oh my God, Hannah. Yes, you are suggesting that we just let them go out of print.

**Hannah McGregor** 29:02

Sure.

**Marcelle Kosman** 29:03

So Philip Pullman apparently also responded to the uproar about censorship by suggesting exactly that. Read things by other writers. So he listed off a dozen writers and said, "Read all these wonderful authors who are writing today who don't get as much of a look-in because of the massive commercial gravity of people like Roald Dahl."

**Hannah McGregor** 29:29

Eh, problem with that is that it doesn't let Netflix make a shit ton of money off resuscitating his reputation.

**Marcelle Kosman** 29:36

Indeed. So obviously, I'm interested in the timing here, because the Puffin Books language review started before Netflix bought the Roald Dahl Story Company, but certainly not before the two were in partnership. And definitely not before *Wonka* was percolating at Warner Bros. So there's something that is connecting all of these moving parts, right?

**Leena Norms** 29:59

Marcelle, do you think a theoretical framework might help us with this? Do you have any in mind?

**Marcelle Kosman** 30:05

Let's see what I got.

**[Upbeat interlude music plays]**

**Marcelle Kosman** 30:13

Well, it's not the theory we want, but it is the theory we deserve. So even as I was down to the wire continuing to piece together this theory section, one of the things that I'm really struggling to put together in straightforward terms is the relationship between antisemitism, accusations of censorship, and profiteering, for lack of a better term. So whose books, for example, get censored, pulled from a reading list, and whose books get posthumous editorial facelifts and an extended universe? So I'm going to start us off with Lawrence Hill, and in particular, a 2013 lecture that Hill delivered at the University of Alberta, where I did my PhD, and Hannah did her postdoc.

**Hannah McGregor** 31:00

Do you want to give just a little gloss of who Lawrence Hill is?

**Marcelle Kosman** 31:03

Yes, absolutely. He is a Black Canadian author. And he has written in particular about Canada's role in the slave trade, the transatlantic slave trade. And, in particular, highlighting the parts of that history where Canada was actually

involved in the trafficking of humans, which, if you are a Canadian, is often a surprise to learn about, because that's something that bad countries do. And not something that good countries like Canada, who believes in multiculturalism, does.

So Lawrence Hill wrote a novel called *The Book of Negroes*, which is sort of his really big breakout Canadian novel. And *The Book of Negroes* was translated into languages and published in countries all over the world. But in one community in Europe, it was a subject of book burning, because the community didn't like the use of the word "Negro." And anyway, so that's a quick primer. So he, in response to this experience of having his book burned, which is very traumatic, he wrote and delivered a lecture at the University of Alberta, that was called "Dear Sir, I Intend to Burn your Book: An Anatomy of a Book Burning." And so this lecture includes a series of anecdotes that represent these different considerations of censorship, and how censorship functions.

So of books as burnable objects, Hill writes, "We can hate them, dissect them, learn from them, or praise them. But we need to leave books alone and let readers come to terms with them. We can teach young people to be aware and to be critical thinkers, but to believe that we can protect young people from the ideas and literature is self-delusional in the extreme." So this thinking really puts him in alignment with Nossel, who we quoted from earlier. It's a perspective that opts for more information over less information. In the lecture, he talks in particular about how his thesis gets thorny when it comes to teaching and curricula. That's not exactly in our scope. But he does give us a very useful example of the kind of book that gets pulled from schools and classrooms, which is *Three Wishes* by Canadian author Deborah Ellis. Leena, would you pretty please read Hill's description of *Three Wishes*?

### **Leena Norms** 33:26

"It contains the real monologues in the voices of real children, some Jewish, others Palestinian, who are caught up in the tensions and hatred of living in what is essentially a warzone. Some of the children express fear and hatred of the other, many lack opportunities to get to know children on the other side of the divide. One of the children interviewed was the sibling of a suicide bomber.

This inflamed the Canadian Jewish Congress, and the next thing you knew, this incredibly thoughtful and insightful book in the voices of children about their very lives as children in the Middle East was removed from the hands of children in the Toronto District School Board. Apparently Palestinians and Israeli children are old enough to live through hell, but the children in Canada are not old enough to read about it.”

**Marcelle Kosman** 34:10

Thank you, thank you so much. So this anecdote naturally makes me turn to perennial favourite Judith Butler, because they are particularly insightful on the matter of antisemitism and its deliberate, inconsistent limits. For Butler, the biggest problem with the way that we think and talk about antisemitism is that it is not adequately historicized.

**Hannah McGregor** 34:36

Coach, we're gonna need that stinger. You know the one.

**[Soundbite of Coach singing “Historicize” plays: “Historicize, historicize, it’s always time to historicize.”]**

**Marcelle Kosman** 34:47

Butler writes, often, that criticism of the state of Israel has become the dominant site for charges of antisemitism, and that this is a problem. In short, if public support for Israel is the only real criteria for *not* being antisemitic, then notorious right-wing and white supremacist pundits like Steve Bannon, who Butler writes about specifically, they can circulate pernicious stereotypes about Jews with impunity, simply by supporting Israel. And so in this way, genuine antisemitism has been discursively prised apart from the other flavours of racism and xenophobia. Hatred of Jews boils down to hatred of the Jewish

state, and is imagined therefore to be separate from the dehumanization of other racialized groups.

**Hannah McGregor** 35:35

Yeah, I mean, it makes me think of other forms of failures of intersectionality, like white feminism attempting to discursively separate out race and class as though poor Black women's experiences of misogyny are not feminist issues, but race issues or class issues.

**Marcelle Kosman** 35:53

Precisely. So while some might argue that, say, overt white nationalist rhetoric is more dangerous than stereotypes about Jews informing, I don't know, who runs the banks in the wizarding world, I'm not convinced that they're so particularly different. And so that will bring us to the third and final scholar of this itty-bitty little theory section, David Feldman, who has written a primer on the origins of the term antisemitism.

**Hannah McGregor** 36:24

Oh, interesting.

**Marcelle Kosman** 36:25

Yeah. And in this primer, he relies heavily on the early 20th-century writing of Lucien Wolf, who is actually the author of the Encyclopedia Britannica's first entry on the term antisemitism. So Feldman brings in Wolf to provide us with antisemitism's villain origin story, if you will. So, Feldman tells us that Wolf understood antisemitism to express "the erroneous view that Jews were members of a distinct race whose interests were separate from those of their fellow citizens or subjects. Anything that gave the impression that Jews claimed a nationality for themselves was likely to feed it." Sounds reasonable. And, like

all terms, the term antisemitism changes, its meaning changes over time in response to different kinds of political pressures.

So again, Feldman, vis-a-vis Wolf, "It [antisemitism] proved a flexible category that allowed Jews and non-Jews to make sense of and respond to successive political challenges. It is also apparent that objections to antisemitism drew attention to a value or project concerning Jewish rights that was being violated. That violation is what defined antisemitism. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, antisemitism was identified with an assault on Jewish emancipation."

**Hannah McGregor** 37:52

Can you explain what the key differences are between those two definitions? Right? So the treatment of Jewish people as a distinct race, and the idea that Jews are claiming a nationality. Like, that's the first one, and then the second one is about Jewish emancipation.

**Marcelle Kosman** 38:09

Yes, yes. So Wolf is writing and thinking about what antisemitism means in the early 20th century, in a specifically German context. And he's thinking about the way that in Europe, the fall of several different empires and the rise of nationalism, he's thinking about the ways in which Jews have gone from one of numerous minorities in a sort of big mishmash of empire into a specific, problematic minority in a newly developing national—

**Hannah McGregor** 38:47

Oh, like the positioning of Jews shifts with the rise of the nation state. And its alignment of nationality and ethnicity and statehood. Whereas when Europe was mostly empires, there wasn't that close alignment of the political body with the ethnicity of the people. So the way that Jews get framed in Europe changes.



**Marcelle Kosman** 39:16

Yes, yes. So what is, I think, interesting, and the reason why I wanted to use this villain origin story for antisemitism is because—I'm still quoting from Feldman, who's writing about Wolf—antisemitism “was not synonymous with all forms of Jew hatred through the ages. Although it interacted with medieval religious prejudices, Wolf understood antisemitism to be something distinct from them. It was a political ideology inspired by nationalism, an attempt to reverse the social and political gains of emancipation and to exclude Jews from public life and” —because he's writing about Germany—“German civil society. All these ideas had gained political momentum, Wolf believed, from the conflicts generated by capitalism, from the migration westward of Jews from Eastern Europe, and from appeals to the mass electorate.”

Okay, so to recap, the history of the term antisemitism is directly tied to industrial capitalism and nationalism. It's not that racialized hatred towards Jews started in the late 19th century. Lawrence Hill gives us an example of when the Talmud was burned for blasphemy in 1141 in Paris. Rather, the issue is that antisemitism, as we know it today, is born from the dissolution of several European empires and the rise of nation states. It might actually be really useful for folks to go and listen to our *Witch, Please* episode on nationalism. Just a suggestion.

**Hannah McGregor** 40:52

Okay, I mean, man, this really makes me immediately want to talk about the rendering-Jewish-via-casting of a book that is about a factory, for one thing, and also the movie's careful attempt to remove Willy Wonka from a specifically British context, but I'm getting I'm getting ahead. I'm getting ahead!

**Marcelle Kosman** 41:15

You're getting ahead, but you're not wrong. I'm going to leave us with one final quotation from Feldman. And this one is about Europe in the 1930s. “Over the

next decade, the integration of Jewish minorities in these states was shaped not only by legal disputes over the meaning and implementation of the Minorities Treaties”—these were the treaties that gave minorities, including Jews, legal status and rights in these new countries—“but also by majoritarian nationalist movements, many of whose proponents saw no place for Jews and other minorities, least of all on terms of equality.”

So from all of this, what I want us to be thinking about is the way that the history of antisemitism, as we know it today, comes out of a sort of self-determination nationalist rhetoric, in the context of ethnocultural groups finding a path for themselves as sovereign states post-dissolution of empire, and the ways in which antisemitism can, I think, be seen to weave their ways into the fabrics of national identity.

**Hannah McGregor** 42:36

Which is why it's so important not to erase the realities of antisemitism from the history of British literature, in particular, because that sort of rewriting of the history of antisemitism in Europe, in the wake of the Holocaust, has been this really pivotal political tool to basically claim that Nazis hated Jews and nobody else did, as though antisemitism wasn't a part of the political fabric of the UK. And also as though Canada and the US were not turning away boats full of Jewish refugees.

**Marcelle Kosman** 43:16

Right. I know that this isn't specifically an episode about the Holocaust. But we might think, for example, about why it is that as Nazi Germany was gradually annexing all of these other nation states, like Poland and Hungary, why it was so seamless to incorporate the genocide of Jewish people into these other nation states as well. It was not more difficult to ethnically cleanse Ukraine of Jews than it was Poland. Does this kind of make sense?

**Hannah McGregor** 43:50

Because antisemitism was already deeply woven into the rise of nationalism.

**Marcelle Kosman** 43:55

That's right.

**Hannah McGregor** 43:56

And the nation state in Europe.

**Marcelle Kosman** 43:58

That's right.

**Leena Norms** 43:59

Which is something that Roald Dahl participated in. He was a spy. He was in World War Two. He was friends with Winston Churchill, he was friends with him! It's all a thing!

**Marcelle Kosman** 44:07

Leena, I didn't know that.

**Leena Norms** 44:09

He is—he was a spy. He used to go around his house. It was a whole—this rabbit hole. This is why you're making me think this is a very British kind of antisemitism that I didn't realize until you just said all that. And now it's all starting to make sense. And if you start correcting Roald Dahl's books and then people learn that, actually, Roald Dahl was a military person as well, he was

actively involved in all these geopolitics by name and advising Winston Churchill, it would be confusing to that not to seep into his books. Anyway.

**Marcelle Kosman** 44:41

Oh my God.

**Hannah McGregor** 44:43

Oh, man. Marcelle, I feel like we're percolating towards a thesis here.

**Marcelle Kosman** 44:46

Sure, let's do it.

**[Upbeat interlude music plays]**

**Hannah McGregor** 44:51

Now that we've sampled all of the delectable flavours of scholarship, it's time for la pièce de resistance: a thesis in the form of a song!

**Marcelle Kosman** 45:02

**[Singing]** I put everything I had into my chocolate. **[Hannah laughs]**

**[Normal voice]** Anyway, I'm actually not going to sing my thesis. With all of this investment in keeping Roald Dahl books in publication, as well as developing new adaptations and extended universes, not to mention the opportunities for merchandising and tie-ins not only for the movie, but also for the book that inspired the movie that has truly nothing to do with the book. The notion that we can separate the artist from his work? Clearly the wrong question. We

might more productively ask, how does scrubbing out a measure of oppressive language allow all of the various parties to continue profiting off of the collection of books that could, in fact, just stop getting printed?

**Hannah McGregor** 45:50

And adapted.

**Marcelle Kosman** 45:52

What is so essential about the role of this author, Roald Dahl, in the national literary imagination, that letting him go out of print is unthinkable? And more to the point, how does slapping a hot Jewish twink onto *Wonka* invite Jews and other minoritized groups to literally buy into the ongoing reproduction of racist discourse? In this essay I will argue...

**Hannah McGregor** 46:15

Okay, can we talk about the movie now? Can we please talk about this bonkers movie now?

**Marcelle Kosman** 46:20

We absolutely must talk about this movie. I turn it over to Hannah and Leena.

**Hannah McGregor** 46:26

I want us to start with this question of the Britishness of this movie. Because where is this movie set?

**Leena Norms** 46:35

I have got no idea. But what is confusing to me, and this is what I was reflecting on afterwards, is that they employed so many British actors that might only be known by British people, like so many of them are British in-jokes, it felt almost like a Harry Potter film in that way. But then everybody else was American or from another nationality, and they weren't asked to change their accents at all.

**[Laughs]** And then the part where Wonka is coded as a Irish traveller, and he lives on a canal boat growing up with his Irish mother, filled with Irish traveller culture and paraphernalia, everything, and then immersed in that and then the next time we see him he is completely devoid of that and has an American accent. It was like a fruit salad of cultures where they were just like, put it all in.

**Hannah McGregor** 47:25

Put it all in for, I assume for a globalized viewership, right? Because we know that when movies are attempting to be real box office hits, they are always thinking about global audiences. So it's really interesting to see the attempt to package a, like, extremely British movie to also be appealing to American audiences, appealing hypothetically to global audiences, through a sort of mishmash.

**Leena Norms** 47:56

Yeah, from a commercial point of view, I think that the exploitation of Britishness is proof to make money, right? I'm confused. I'm like, did we not just have like five Jane Austen adaptations, didn't that work? I'm not saying it's good or bad, but I'm pretty sure it's profitable.

**Hannah McGregor** 48:11

And there's so much Paddington DNA in this, right? So it's not Britishness in general, it's a very particular packaging of a, like, ahistorical British past that is characterized primarily by a kind of quaintness—

**Marcelle Kosman** 48:33

Like the Ploughman's Lunch.

**Leena Norms** 48:35

Exactly. [Laughs]

**Hannah McGregor** 48:36

Yeah, the Ploughman's Lunch. A great example of an invented British historical thing. Not a traditional British food, but rather a contemporary invention based on the romanticized British past. So it's so obviously trading in Britishness. And trading in Paddington™ Britishness, in particular, even down to some of the casting. But then, also this attempt to be like, but we're not in Britain. No, no, we're maybe in Paris?

**Leena Norms** 49:12

Yeah.

**Hannah McGregor** 49:13

And the mall where they all sell chocolate feels like we're in Paris.

**Leena Norms** 49:21

Yeah, although I think that is a British set. I'm pretty sure that's a place in London. And then they also show the Bodleian Library in Oxford. There's lots of very expensive scenery that I'm like, that must have taken—but to what end, you spent all this money. It does again, feel in the same way that Barbie did, feel like cinema by committee. Like everybody got to pick one thing they

wanted in the movie **[Marcelle laughs]** but nobody actually got their way. It feels very weird.

**Marcelle Kosman** 49:46

It's such a tiny example, the thing that really stood out to me is that Noodle, who was raised by Mrs. Scrubbitt and Mr. Bleacher—

**Hannah McGregor** 49:56

Who's like, fucking in a Mary Poppins movie. **[In a Dick Van Dyke-esque Cockney accent]** “‘Ello, ‘ello, ‘ello!” **[Normal voice]** And then Noodle’s just—

**Marcelle Kosman** 50:02

Noodle just has an American accent. She has an untraceable American accent but she was, according to the movie, also born there.

**Hannah McGregor** 50:12

She was born there.

**Leena Norms** 50:13

Yeah, she's British.

**Marcelle Kosman** 50:15

The argument can't even be that it's just American DNA. **[Laughs]** She's from there. And she just is American.



**Hannah McGregor** 50:25

And also, the Chief of Police has like, a Brooklyn accent.

**Marcelle Kosman** 50:29

Totally. That's right.

**Leena Norms** 50:31

They were cops, not police.

**Hannah McGregor** 50:33

Yeah. And so I think that there's what strikes me as quite a deliberate attempt to pull the story out of anything like a real place, which, if you think in contrast to the recent adaptation of the *Matilda* musical, which is, for better or for worse, does seem to be in Britain.

**Leena Norms** 50:54

Yeah, definitely.

**Hannah McGregor** 50:55

They do seem to be like, yeah, we're in Britain, here. Everybody here is British.

**Leena Norms** 50:59

The sun does not shine once in that film. It's very accurate.

**Hannah McGregor** 51:02

Not a single time. It's so fucking grey.

**Leena Norms** 51:05

It's a very muddy, grey film, and I appreciate the authenticity.

**Hannah McGregor** 51:08

Yeah. And this is sort of in a fantastical nowhere space that seems in keeping with this larger project, of attempting to divorce the sort of profitable brand of Wonka from the very specific history of Dahl's British antisemitism.

**Leena Norms** 51:35

I think as well a lot of the caricatures in it prop up some of the other books. It feels like it's more into promoting—so like, Noodle is very Matilda-coded.

**Marcelle Kosman** 51:43

Yes.

**Leena Norms** 51:44

The innkeepers couple are very Twits-coded. I could probably go in—if I watched it again, which I shan't, I know that I could find more. It felt like they were filling in the universe.

**Marcelle Kosman** 51:55

It really did. Yeah.

**Leena Norms** 51:57

And propping up for maybe other adaptations, or just for people to feel warmly about the other Roald Dahl books rather than referencing the culture that it was surrounded by. As for the other comments about the devoidness of it being the construction of a factory, so yeah, Wonka doesn't kidnap the Oompa-Loompas. He actually goes, and they've come back for revenge, and they do a business deal at the end—

**Hannah McGregor** 52:22

—they follow him.

**Leena Norms** 52:22

It's all very amicable; it's a team effort. And also the fact that the factory at the end appears in a castle out on a hill, which completely doesn't set it up to be a prequel, because the whole point of the factory is it's in the middle of the town, and then they discharge all of their employees **[laughs]** and replace them with Oompa-Loompas, which is a great British fear of being replaced by foreign labour.

**Marcelle Kosman** 52:46

That's right.

**Leena Norms** 52:47

So the building it on a castle on a hill somewhere completely different, it doesn't become this overshadowing castle that the whole village, or the whole town lives in fear of. The whole idea of the chocolate factory, this mysterious building that's in the middle of the town that everybody talks about, that

nobody can go into. So making it more of a tourist destination that's beautiful. And they're just redoing a dilapidated castle is again—

**Hannah McGregor** 53:11

Yeah. And the fact that in the scene where we most immersively get to see the magic of the factory in practice, which is the failed launch of the location in the Parisian arcade. The film makes a point of continuously showing us how the magical-seeming things are happening, and showing us that they're being powered by the enthusiastic pleasurable, voluntary labour of Wonka's friends.

**Marcelle Kosman** 53:46

That's right.

**Hannah McGregor** 53:46

Who are powering it all by bicycles. No exploitation happening here.

**Marcelle Kosman** 53:52

No. And then when it burns down, and they are as sad as he is that it didn't work.

**Hannah McGregor** 53:58

Because it was a group effort. They all really wanted this to work out.

**Marcelle Kosman** 54:03

That's right. So what the two of you are describing is the cinematic equivalent of revisionist history. Because *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* and the

original Willy Wonka movie, these are not real. These are literary representations of British anxiety. And then in this so-called prequel, which does not “pre-” anything, it invents a whole new history. There's no way *this* Willy Wonka is the villain played by Gene Wilder who watches children get murdered in his factory. There's no way. Like, what happened? That's what I want to know. What happened after this movie that all of a sudden, our beloved twink Timothée Chalamet is like, you know what? Fuck kids, though.

**Hannah McGregor** 54:53

Some kids can probably die. That's probably fine.

**Leena Norms** 54:57

I'm just so confused about—there was no character development of Wonka. We don't really understand why he's so interested in chocolate, apart from his mom made it and he thinks that if he perfects chocolate, then his mom will reappear, which is a trauma dump, but not a plot point. I was very confused about him generally as a character.

**Marcelle Kosman** 55:14

**[Singing]** He put everything he had into his chocolate.

**Leena Norms** 55:17

But remember—and I wrote this down in the cinema, even though it was dark, because I felt like it needed to be remembered—It's not the chocolate that matters. It's the people you share it with.

**Hannah McGregor** 55:26

Okay, okay.

**Leena Norms** 55:27

That's the last line of the freakin' movie. I'm gonna murder somebody.

**Hannah McGregor** 55:31

Can we talk about the anxious signifier of chocolate?

**Marcelle Kosman** 55:35

Yes.

**Hannah McGregor** 55:36

Which is to say, my guerilla thesis?

**Marcelle Kosman** 55:40

Yes.

**Hannah McGregor** 55:41

Because I couldn't stop thinking the whole way through this movie, how freaked out this movie is about chocolate. How desperately this movie wishes that it could not even remotely be about chocolate itself, and is constantly working through this anxiety in relation to the actual material thing that is candy. So one, the movie is so anxious about the origin of the cocoa beans.

**Marcelle Kosman** 56:12

Oh, yeah.

**Hannah McGregor** 56:13

Right? Because it has to grapple with imperialism. Because cocoa simply does not grow in Europe, no matter what kind of fantastical imagined Europe you're set in. And so instead, the cocoa beans were stolen from the island of the Oompa-Loompas. But the whole character of the one Oompa-Loompa we have, played by Hugh Grant as a really transparent effort to shift the association of Oompa-Loompas with foreign labour, like, just make the most British imaginable man the one Oompa-Loompa. But also, his entire narrative role is extracting reparations from Wonka. And that is all he does.

**Leena Norms** 56:59

But like, very politely.

**Marcelle Kosman** 57:01

And responded to very positively by Willy Wonka, right? He's like, "Oh, I had no idea that cocoa beans were so rare on your island. I only took three." And he's like, "You took four!" And he's like, "Four. Sorry, my bad."

**Hannah McGregor** 57:15

Yeah, essentially, he has taken the raw material illegally from this island. But he is now using his industry to reshape that raw material into something that the Oompa-Loompa acknowledges is more valuable, and thus is willing to allow the theft, because he has used industrialization to render it, to add value to it.

**Leena Norms** 57:41

Since you're selling it, then that's fine.

**Hannah McGregor** 57:43

Yeah.

**Marcelle Kosman** 57:43

Yeah, you're right, you were able to use our resources more effectively than we ourselves were able to use them.

**Hannah McGregor** 57:52

Absolutely.

**Leena Norms** 57:54

And I will go back and tell the others.

**Hannah McGregor** 57:56

I will let them know. Actually, this white guy, not a problem.

**Marcelle Kosman** 57:59

So, debt paid in full. And let's now invest in this business opportunity. Let us join forces.

**Hannah McGregor** 58:08

Yeah. But then on top of that, we've got the bonkers narrative of the Chocolate Cartel, who are cutting their chocolate in order to amass a secret supply of chocolate that they use to pay off the chocolate-addicted Chief of Police.



**Marcelle Kosman** 58:28

And the priest.

**Hannah McGregor** 58:30

And the priest. So chocolate is also transparently a synonym for drugs.

**Marcelle Kosman** 58:35

Yes.

**Hannah McGregor** 58:36

Like, very clearly a synonym for drugs.

**Marcelle Kosman** 58:38

Yes, and hoarding wealth.

**Hannah McGregor** 58:41

And every person who likes chocolate too much is a villain. I mean, the fact that in this fucking attempt to remake and reimagine the world of Willy Wonka, there still has to be a central character who is shown liking chocolate too much, getting fat as a result. And ultimately, his fatness is a visual signifier of his greed and his immorality, shown via Keegan Michael Key's bigger and bigger fat suit, until ultimately, the fall of this villainous character. Because fatphobia is so deeply embedded in our culture, arguably, more now than ever. It's not getting better, it's getting worse. And the fact that the movie still has to be like, okay, only thin people can eat chocolate. And we have to see that thin people only like eating a little bit of chocolate. So when he ultimately breaks that bar apart,

it's actually really important that the thing isn't the chocolate, it's who you share it with.

**Marcelle Kosman** 59:57

That's right. You can't eat the whole bar yourself. If you share it, each person gets one piece.

**Hannah McGregor** 1:00:03

And that's why it's so interesting to me that none of the merchandising is food. That almost none of the merchandising is food. That they're not trying to sell you chocolate, because this movie's not selling your chocolate.

**Marcelle Kosman** 1:00:13

It's about the idea of chocolate, but not the tasty, tasty taste of it.

**Hannah McGregor** 1:00:18

No.

**Leena Norms** 1:00:20

Because you can't break Converse apart and share them, you need to shift units. And if people are sharing stuff, we're not going to sell stuff.

**Marcelle Kosman** 1:00:27

That's exactly right.

**Leena Norms** 1:00:28

I had a funny note that I wrote in the cinema and I didn't realize the context until just now. I remember that there's a part where the chocolate Wonka's first shop malfunctions and poisons people and their hair starts growing and stops things from happening. And what I wrote in the cinema was—and then they get really angry, and they start throwing stuff and they trash the shop and what I wrote was, imagine if British people rioted that easily. **[Everyone laughs]** For me, that was the most historically inaccurate part. I was like, imagine people kicking up—we didn't even kick up at Brexit. Energy prices, let's go. You know what I mean? Like we're not a nation of people who kick off and I'm not proud of that. But the riot in the chocolate factory was the funniest part to me. I was like, no.

**Hannah McGregor** 1:01:08

Yet another way in which the movie's also kind of set in France.

**Leena Norms** 1:01:13

I have a question. Would your feelings about this change, if all of the Roald Dahl universe went into the public domain? Because it should, and it sounds now like it's not going to. Because it sounds like it's going to live on forever, like Mickey Mouse in this long-rolling Netflix Story Company. Is the fact that it is profitable is what is most gross to all of us, it sounds like.

**Hannah McGregor** 1:01:41

Yeah, I mean, it's the profitability and the contortions of attempting to render it continuously profitable. So many of the things that we're naming are the really cringey weird ways that this is very clearly an American production company trying to figure out how to render this IP maximally profitable for themselves in the 21st century. And if it was in the public domain, there would just be a thousand more weird things happening.

**Marcelle Kosman** 1:02:20

There's an episode of *The Simpsons* when Marge finds a beautiful pink Chanel suit on a clearance rack, and it's \$99. And she's like, \$99, I can't afford that. And her daughter Lisa is saying, Mom, but it's on clearance from like, \$10,000, or whatever, you can't afford not to buy it. So Marge buys it, and immediately starts to encounter all of these opportunities because she's dressed like a classy fascist business lady. And then she starts to get teased by her classy fascist business lady acquaintances about the fact that she only has one suit.

And so then she starts to tailor and retaylor the suit, trying to stretch it to its limits, to the point where the suit, the dress is—and it's always recognizable as the same suit that she's contorted into new iterations—to the point where she then, in trying to stretch it to its limits, tears the fabric completely, and then it becomes useless. And the rich fascist ladies are like, why don't you just buy a new dress? And then Marge, she does buy a new dress, but that's not the point of my story. Point of my story is that, unlike a working class family with three children and a single income, we have the capacity to just tell new stories. Yeah, we do not need to continue to stretch and pull the fabric of a story that served a purpose one time.

**Leena Norms** 1:03:56

You're so right, because I think the merchandise that you listed at the beginning, what of that is for children, like all of the merchandise is aimed at affluent adults, right?

**Marcelle Kosman** 1:04:08

That's right.

**Hannah McGregor** 1:04:09

Yeah.

**Leena Norms** 1:04:09

What do the children have? If the children want to go to the cinema and get something that's theirs, not a nostalgia passed down from their parents, what do they watch? They don't have anything.

**Hannah McGregor** 1:04:19

No, no.

**Leena Norms** 1:04:19

That's so sad.

**Hannah McGregor** 1:04:20

No, because there's no new stories. There's just the recycling of old ideas.

**Marcelle Kosman** 1:04:26

Old fascist ideas. **[Hannah laughs]**

**Leena Norms** 1:04:32

Oh my God.

**Hannah McGregor** 1:04:39

*Material Girls* is a *Witch, Please* production and is distributed by Acast. Once you're done burning your copies of *Matilda* and then feeling awkward about it, you can head over to [ohwitchplease.ca](https://ohwitchplease.ca) to check out the rest of our episodes as well as transcripts, reading lists, and merch. We also have an excellent newsletter at [substack.com/ohwitchplease](https://substack.com/ohwitchplease) and an even better Patreon at [patreon.com/ohwitchplease](https://patreon.com/ohwitchplease). Also, we're on Instagram and X and Threads @ohwitchplease, TikTok @witchpleasepod. My God, we do a lot of things. Leena, where can people go to find out more about your work?

### **Leena Norms** 1:05:20

So you can search “No Books on a Dead Planet” on your favourite podcasting app, or you can follow me on YouTube at Leena Norms, L-double-E-N-A N-O-R-M-S.

### **Marcelle Kosman** 1:05:30

Thank you, Leena. Thanks to Auto Syndicate for the use of our theme song “Shopping Mall.” And of course, thanks to the whole Witch, Please Productions team: our digital content coordinator Gaby Iori [**Sound effect of BOING**], our social media manager and marketing designer Zoe Mix [**Sound effect of record player reversing**], our sound engineer Malika [**Sound effect of chimes**], and our executive producer Hannah Rehak, aka COACH [**Sound effect of sports whistle blowing**]!

### **Hannah McGregor** 1:06:01

At the end of every episode, we will thank everyone who has joined our Patreon or boosted their tier to help make our work possible. Our enormous gratitude this episode goes out to: Josie E, Lorraine B, Valerie S, Emma, Amanda VL, Anna MJ, maggie, Andrea B, Melian\_522, Vikram S, Georgia K, Lotta B, Fredman, and Ryan C.

**Marcelle Kosman** 1:06:31

We'll be back next episode to tackle another piece of pop culture through a whole new theoretical lens. But until then:

**Leena Norms** 1:06:38

Later, great glass elevators!

**[*Material Girls* Theme plays: "Shopping Mall" by Jay Arner and Jessica Delisle]**