

From Black to Tricolor: Shades of the Oompa Loompas' Colonization

Roald Dahl's *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* revives a trend that was rampant in novels from the Victorian era—that of endorsing and reinforcing Britain's imperialist agenda. Child protagonists have frequently been used as depositories of the country's aspirations of conquest and domination. The journey of the child as it progresses from an unformed, empty vessel to the confident imperialist that Britain needs is presented alongside thinly-veiled propaganda. My paper explores the relationship between childhood and colonized subjects and establishes how the depiction of the Oompa Loompas, insofar as it relates to their race and childlikeness, is at the heart of the book's imperialist discourse. The novel employs unempathetic imagery—such as the depiction of the Oompa Loompas as juveniles decked in Indian tricolor—to reinforce the ideologies of imperialism. This paper also deconstructs the representation of Wonka as a master seeking a fitting successor, and his role in Charlie's development from insipid child to ideal imperialist. Written just 17 years after the sun finally set on the British empire in India, *Charlie* is a belated pang of nostalgia for the former power, glories, and magnanimities of the colonial era.