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 ***Charlie and the Chocolate Factory and Other Excremental Visions***

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In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

Charlie and the Chocolate Factory and Other Excremental Visions

Hamida Bosmajian (bio)

An adult engaged in writing a book for children may well intend to present a life-affirming vision that communicates cultural values and traditions, but at the same time that adult may consciously or unconsciously induce, even seduce, the child to accept and repeat the neurotic discontents of culture and civilization. Works such as L'Engle's *Wrinkle in Time* or O'Dell's *Island of the Blue Dolphins* exhilarate the reader with new role models or the breakdown of stereotypes but undermine such innovations by a displaced traditional metaphysics (L'Engle) or by renegeing on the break with conventions once the character is reintegrated into cultural norms (O'Dell). Children's literature is a complicated artistic, psychological, and social phenomenon, in some ways more so than adult literature because the author projects memories and libidinal releases through forms pretending innocence.

Comedy and romance, still the most prevalent patterns of children's literature, are modes and genres that have generally established values and traditions even as they seemed momentarily to subvert them. Conventions such as the topos for poverty- "Hard by a forest dwelt a woodcutter with his wife. They were so poor that they no longer had daily bread"-have become such rigid figures that their social and historical ground is no longer perceived. A slight displacement as in Roald Dahl's *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* opens up new possibilities: "The whole of this family-the six grownups (count them) and Charlie Bucket-live together in a small wooden house on the edge of a great town."¹ The ground against which the figures (conventions, symbols, characterizations) are outlined is often indistinct and obscured even though it energizes the figures. The ground of children's literature should be of special interest to the interpreter because the figures often pretend to be a part of songs of innocence or nothing but fun and frolic as in *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*.

Dahl's tale, this "Hansel and Gretel" displaced into industrial or post-industrial society, is a libidinal, aggressive, and wildly indulgent fantasy with guiltless sweet assurance, for we all simply "love chocolate," even to

the extent that we cover one of our favorite lax-atives [End Page 36] with it. In the chocolate factory everything can be licked and eaten and consumed, but the orally greedy will also be swallowed, pushed down or sucked up through the great digestive system on Wonka's machinery which finally expels them in altered form. *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* is a clever displacement of what has come to be called the "excremental vision." In this children's book, the usual grimness of that vision is euphemistically meliorated by the structural figurations of comedy and romance and by the pleasing associations of chocolate, whose high concentration of energy-producing compounds combined with caffeine and theobromine makes it truly a food for the gods as well as for those who, like Charlie, are empty buckets of deprivation.

If we view the story through the figures of Northrop Frye's five modes of action (33-52) we begin to get a sense of its complexity, a complexity paradigmatic of many classics in children's literature, and we get a sense of the ground against which the story's figures stand out:

1. In the *mythic mode* Willie Wonka is a god-like being who has created a universal empire transcendent of our experience. From this realm Wonka extends himself in power through all the chocolate-loving world.
2. In the *romantic mode* five children go on a quest through Wonka's world which is both a garden of delights and an inferno. Willie Wonka becomes here Charlie's guide, an omniscient and wise old man.
3. In the *high mimetic mode* Wonka is the childless king who seeks a successor for his kingdom peopled by the child-like Oompa Loompas. He is also the Aristophanic trickster of high comedy who exploits the greed and infantilism of the establishment and ends up, along with his heir, triumphant over the society he exploits.
4. In the *low mimetic mode* Wonka is a capitalist in...

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