Chapter 4

The Axis of Crime

4.1 Introduction

A crime is a punishable act of rebellion against the law. As such, the crime and the offender are not excluded from the limits of the law. The law is, essentially, about transcribing the unlawful rather than the lawful. The normative is fixed in law only in the form of the explicit statement of its violation. The law is a 'rule', writes Agamben, because

> it must first of all create the sphere of its own reference in real life and make that reference regular. Since the rule both stabilizes and presupposes the conditions of this reference, the originary structure of the rule is always of this kind: "If (a real case in point [...]), then (juridical consequence [...])," in which a fact is included in the juridical order through its exclusion, and transgression seems to precede and determine the lawful case. (Agamben)

Crime, therefore, unlike evil and the monstrous (Ch. 5), is a category of transgression ascribed within culture, within the purview of social or legal law; there are socially or legally warranted forms of punishment to treat crime, in proportion to its (perceived) magnitude.

Crime does not merely involve the idea of rule-breaking; it also means acts that are judged to be wrong, in the Puritan sense of socially condemned acts of wickedness. Crime is essentially disorder, an instance of irregularity, which is in turn, of a determinate, calculable, if not predictable, character; punishment is instituted to regularise the norm, to bring back order, to reinforce the law.[1] The criminal must, necessarily, par-

[1]The scope of attribution of criminality, however, is subject to change and is contextual. As Garland Allen notes, "What is criminal in one context – for example, killing in time of peace – becomes

take of this regularisation and re-enforcement by accepting guilt—of having violated the law in the first place and of being situated in the status of the exclusion within the law—and in his/her punishment, help represent the force of the law (Agamben). In order for the assignation and/or acceptance of guilt, that is, in order to punish and be punished, Foucault argues, crime must be rational in two ways; first, the criminal act should be intelligible, or, in other words, the motives should be reasonable, and second, the criminal should be capable of reason (Foucault, *Abnormal* 116). The criminal has to be a rational being in the sense that there must be intention and/or purpose; the mental processes behind the act need to be mapped into a coherent narrative using a series of juridico-medical techniques, such as an investigation into the psychology, behaviour, and the past of the offender, especially his/her childhood.

My focus in this chapter is the criminal aspect of the child's behaviour or action positioned within a quasi-legal and quasi-medical discourse in the texts. The act or non-act committed by the child is a socio-legal violation, often a breach of some implicit or explicit contract or promise. In the domestic settings of the narratives, the contract is usually with the family. An act ranging from one as simple as distrust to more serious ones like the murder of a family member comes under the purview of the criminal aspect examined in this chapter. These acts are however, it is important to note, not treated in the narratives merely as crimes or offences, but as we have already seen in 3, distorted, layered with signification, and amplified to connote a threat to dominant ideology and the status quo.

Václav Havel's theory of power, Foucault's concepts of the dangerous and the abnormal individual, and Agamben's reworking of the Foucauldian concept of biopower, are used. The chapter is organised into three levels—a historical overview of the concept of crime and the juvenile delinquent is provided first; the nature of criminal childhoods as represented in the texts is then dissected with reference to its conceptual and historical elements; finally, the questions of difference and power relations are problematised using Havel's theory.

noncriminal, even heroic in another context – wartime" (Allen).

4.1.1 Brief Historical Overview of Crime

By the middle ages, crime came to be understood as no longer an offence against God or the king, or a single individual vested with enormous power. Law had become more moral law than legal, mutually-agreed contracts between members of a society and breaking the law meant violation of the pact, which was of the order of treachery, an attack from within, and necessarily a sign of dangerous imbecility; it reflected a lack of awareness that to inflict harm was to self harm. Historically, criminality was a negative virtue, a privation of right understanding, motivated by selfish interests. By the eighteenth century, argues Foucault in *Abnormal*, criminal desire was understood to arise from biological and psychological developmental shortcomings such as 'immaturity', 'infantilism', 'behavioural archaism', or 'defective development' (21). It was considered regressive; firstly because it was rooted in amoral, primitive impulses and instincts; secondly, it was a sign of irrationality, 'immaturity' in the Kantian sense; thirdly from an evolutionary perspective, it came to be associated with degenerationism and its related concepts of atavism and animalistic instincts. By this third interpretation, the concept of criminality had moved from the moral to the biological realm.

The governmentalisational ambition to effectively control all aspects of life in the age of Enlightenment marked a new manner of treating the irrational, the abnormal, and the mad; instead of exclusionary practices, they were increasingly included within the system itself as a way of governing better (48). The biopolitical nature of this inclusion, according to Agamben, was not new in the history of Western politics; zoe, or bare life, which had always been a kind of 'inclusionary exclusion' in favour of bios, or political, 'authentic' life, merely increased in significance, as power became welded to the task of managing life (Agamben). On the 'degenerate' population identified in the discourse of degeneration (of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries), Foucault writes:

> they circulated through the pores of society; they were always hounded, but not always by laws; were often locked up, but not always in prisons; were sick perhaps, but scandalous, dangerous victims, prey to a strange evil that also bore the name of vice and sometimes crime. They were children wise beyond their years, precocious little girls [....]. (Foucault, "The Repressive Hypothesis" 320)

It was felt to be imperative to mobilize a system of surveillance to root out criminal degenerates.[2] The degenerate was a different biotype, embodying lack, deviance, and organic difference (Sekula 15-16).

The anthropological school of criminology, founded by the Italian physician and father of modern criminology, Cesare Lombroso, believed that criminality was inherited, and its telltale signs could be observed in the physiognomy of the individual. Clues to inner character were manifest in the surface of the body, which, through rigorous close analysis by 'experts', revealed patterns formulaic in predicting degeneration (10). This implied that the criminal biotype exhibited its characteristic traits in childhood itself and these traits were 'incurable'. The criminal, like the child (as well as primates and savage tribes), was morally undeveloped (or even incapable of moral development) and "instinctively aggressive and precocious unless restrained" (Platt 152).

From the late nineteenth century to the early decades of the twentieth, criminality was believed to be a hereditary class. In the aftermath of the Holocaust, this theory fell into relative disfavour. However, in the late 1960s, genetics had resurrected as a popular branch of medicine, studying among other human traits, criminal behaviour as rooted in "heritable predispositions" which manifest in favourable environmental conditions (Joseph 211). In the management of "life and survival, of bodies and the race", the "dangerous individual" posed a threat not only to society but the human species as well, by tainting the gene pool (Foucault 260). Crime was now again a matter of social hygiene, preservation and survival of the species, and the stability of the state. The hope of rehabilitation and cure of the abnormal subsided to identifying dangerous individuals and protecting the social body from them. The duty of the juridical authority, which is dispersed across various medico-legal-political disciplines, is to ascertain the 'dangerousness' of the offending elements, the abnormal, the anomalous, by gauging the visible and invisible symptomata of criminality, the motives, influences, innermost thoughts, history, and redeemability.

By the turn of the twentieth century, crime was clearly in the domain of medicine. Psychiatry, what Foucault calls "a science of behavioral and structural infantilism" (Foucault, *Abnormal* 307) had become a formidable new scientific discipline, of crucial importance to the juridical process. Now, crime was not merely an objective physical

[2]They were fundamentally different from the "exceptional criminal", the 'criminal genius' who was no different from the bourgeoisie "save for a conspicuous lack of moral inhibition" (Sekula 15-16).

expression of an offence, perceivable by all, but something esoteric, invisible to all but the psychiatrist, and the crime was only the tip of the iceberg which lay mired in various psychological disorders, childhood behaviour, genetic predisposition, and so on. "[E]xpert psychiatric opinion," argues Foucault,

> allows the offense, as defined by the law, to be redoubled with a whole series of other things that are not the offense itself but a series of forms of conduct, of ways of being that are, of course, presented in the discourse of the psychiatric expert as the cause, origin, motivation, and starting point of the offense. (15)

The aim of medicine was to "show how the individual already resembles his crime before he has committed it" (19). Psychiatric opinion was responsible for answering three questions with regard to the offender: '"Is the individual dangerous? Is the accused indictable? Is the accused curable?"' (317). Now firmly established in the principle of 'biological', innate, inherited lack, criminality was outside the scope of the traditional question of responsibility; in the words of Foucault, "the subject is responsible for everything and nothing" (21). Consequently, the classical method of punishment in proportion to the crime was superseded by punishment tailored to the criminal rather than to their crimes (Covey 1387). The juridical problem of the attribution of responsibility shifted to the assessment of the degree of dangerousness the individual poses to society and the possibility of cure or reform (Foucault, *Abnormal* 25). The past of the criminal is of utmost interest in proving culpability and dangerousness. Childhood is the clue to unlocking the nature of the criminal; the future is contained within the microcosm of childhood behaviour. A narrative of the life of the criminal, starting from earliest childhood had to be weaved to show how "his whole life resembles his crime," that "[h]e was already this; he was already what he is" (302-303).

This brings us to the problem of the criminal child. Theoretically, the phrase is an oxymoron; as socio-legal code binds only those individuals who are, in a sense, autonomous and enjoy the full socio-legal rights and privileges under the code, the child on account of its nonage is exempt from the code. Criminal proclivity, however, because of the child's amorality and lack of self-control (see 3.1.2), is, paradoxically, inherent in children which they grow out of by acquiring moral self-control. For someone not yet capable of reasoning or still in the process of assimilating socio-moral values and

therefore devoid of full subjectivity, can such a complex psychological and subjective concept as intention, let alone the 'wicked' intention, be applied? However, if developmentality is the only roadblock to the conception of the criminal child, this leads us to the related issues of prematuration (see 2.2.3), evolutionary morality (see 3.1.1), and normative human nature (see 3.1.2) that can counter the assumption of childhood innocence in the case of 'abnormal' digressions.

4.1.2 Biologisation of Crime

Modernity is marked, in Agamben's words, by a "new centrality of the body" (Agamben). Thus the state, the law, and even human society in general could be biologised, such that one could speak of the body of the state or society ravaged by parasites, viruses or germs, and symptoms of degeneration or disease. In the degenerationist discourse of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, metaphors from medicine and parasitology were extensively used to discuss perceived social ills. The ease with which crime, personality disorders, and social phenomena like poverty or unemployment could be read through a biologico-nosological lens is characteristic of the modern biologisation of culture and politics. Everything could not only be understood in terms of biology but is supposed to be rooted in the biological.[3] Crime was no longer a single individual's offense, but could be traced back and across what Foucault calls a "background-body" that included the bodies of the criminal's parents, ancestors, or race (Foucault, *Abnormal* 313). If no deviance is discoverable in one's lineage or environment, the criminal and his/her crime appears all the more monstrous, for their apparent lack of history, or cause.

In 1911, T E Hulme wrote that modernity has reverted to classical humanism[4] which held that "[m]an is an extraordinarily fixed and limited animal whose nature is absolutely constant. It is only by tradition and organisation that anything decent can be got

[3]The influential late nineteenth-century criminologist Alexandre Lacassagne emphasised the environment as the "cultural broth of criminality" in which the criminal "microbe" becomes dangerous "only at the moment it finds the broth that makes it ferment" (qtd. in Pick 140). Aldous Huxley writing in 1952 about the pathology of the crowd, uses the metaphor of the body: "The organs of the body politic are purposive groups. A crowd is the social equivalent of a cancer. The poison it secretes depersonalizes its constituent members to the point where they start to behave with a savage violence, of which, in their normal state, they would be completely incapable" (Huxley 367). Similarly, Hannah Arendt famously described evil using the analogy of fungus as seen in 3.1.1.

[4]The classical antithesis of culture and nature, between the primitive and the civilising impulses within human nature, had given way to the romantic view of nature as benevolent, divine, and purposive.

out of him" (Hulme 61). This bleak view of human nature is a rejection of Romantic humanism and its ideas of infinite progress derived from the Enlightenment.

Furthermore, he argues, modern humanism also has "an appearance of scientific backing" from Hugo de Vries's theory of evolution that rejected the slow directionality of Darwinian evolution in favour of random and sudden mutations (61). Darwinian discourse of evolution interprets natural selection as a brutish, inexorable process indifferent to human values. Indeed, as Gillian Beer argues, Darwin's evolutionary theory had proved too nihilistic and radical for the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Beer). It posited decadence, mutation, and extinction as certain, albeit distant, possibilities that are beyond human control. Darwinian theory was 'domesticated', through simplification and reduction, by assimilating it with more compatible, existing theories such as Malthusianism, Lamarckian evolution, and recapitulation. The principles of evolution were effectively applied to society, to the solving of social problems including the increase in population of underprivileged sections, crime, poverty and racial health. Evolutionary theory, therefore, rather than displacing the human from the centre, firmly established the human–now understood to be under threat of extinction–in control of the fate of humanity, vested with a moral responsibility to rescue the race and even the species. As one of the intellectuals, Zellaby, remarks in John Wyndham's *The Midwich Cuckoos* (1957), "It is because Nature is ruthless, hideous, and cruel beyond belief that it was necessary to invent civilization" (Wyndham). Despite the civilisational progress the human species had achieved, the threat of primitivity, of the enfeeblement of the species, the pull of nature down the evolutionary ladder, was a moral and sociopolitical challenge that needed to be guarded against.

The late Victorian theory of degeneration, located in biology, not in social conditions, was "the condition of conditions, the ultimate signifier of pathology" (Pick 8). In the popular intentionalist account of evolution proposed by Lamarck, one could inherit and pass on to offspring acquired traits. Madness, criminality, and other forms of degeneration for nineteenth-century thinkers of degeneration inhered in the body and was often imperceptible, and could be passed on from parents to children, and either lie dormant or become manifested (51). In popular narratives—William March's *The Bad Seed*, Lawrence Block's *Ariel*, Christie's *Crooked House*, devil-child horror narratives such as *Rosemary's Baby*, *The Omen* franchise, to mention a few—the presumption of

inherited sin and virtue determines the fate of afflicted or blessed characters.

The Malthusian fear of the colonisation and the taking over the entire world by any species whose fecundity and propagation went unchecked fed into the degeneration discourse of the nineteenth century (Beer). The panic that "a burgeoning residuum of degenerate urban poor"—a category conflated together with the category of the criminal—will outnumber and overtake the middle-class whose birthrates were declining corroborated the timeliness of eugenic philosophy (Sekula 44). Thus, poor, working class children, if bereft of timely intervention, were thought to inevitably grow to become unfit, degenerate, and criminal.[5]

The 'survival of the fittest' catchphrase of evolutionary theory, which originally meant natural selection through reproductive success, was appropriated by the eugenics movement to mean intellectual and physical fitness. The 'wrong' kind of population increasing in the state and the oppression of the 'good kind' was thought to inevitably result in the deterioration of values, of national vitality, and of civilisation as a whole. American sociologist Edward Ross's term "race suicide" captures this anxiety at the turn of the century (qtd. in W. S. Thompson 22).[6] Stringent legislative measures were taken to curb the influx of racial, ethnic and social groups. Edwardian legislation on 'alien' immigration in the 1900s also included within the category of "undesirable aliens" anarchists, criminals, prostitutes, the diseased and the poor (Pick 216). Similarly, the turn of the century Eugenics movement in the USA garnered strength with restrictive legislations against immigrants and non-whites.

The dissatisfaction with Darwin's theory of lack of intentionality in the process of evolution prompted the English polymath and Darwin's cousin, Francis Galton to advocate active intervention in evolution through artificial selection (Mitchell and Snyder 863).[7] Indeed, according to apologists for eugenics, as G K Chesterton remarked in

[5]Urban spaces and lifestyle were the sites of degeneration and improper for the rearing of children. Delinquents were sent to institutions located in the countryside, where, through traditional activities like farm work, they would be socialised into society. The strategy of "rural regeneration" did not always apply though (Pick 213); paradoxical to the anti-child-labour stance of middle-class ideas of childhood, one of the strategies of dealing with delinquent working-class boys in England was sending them away to the colonies as labourers (Hadley 431).

[6]A 1917 article in the *Scientific Monthly* addresses the popular fear of such an eventuality: "Are the people of the older stock—those of Anglo-Saxon and Teutonic descent—gradually dying out and are they being replaced by the immigrants from southern and eastern Europe? If this is the case what are the effects upon our civilization going to be? These are the questions of vital concern to Americans" (W. S. Thompson 22). The paper reasons why there is not need for panic as of now because the urban conditions of living take a higher toll on the lives of the immigrant races (22).

[7]Eugenics, a term coined by Galton in the late nineteenth century, is based on the theory that the

1922, "we should really feel that marrying an invalid is a kind of cruelty to children" (Chesterton). While Galton advocated for positive eugenics, which involved the encouragement of sexual union between people with 'desirable' traits, many prominent degenerationists including Maudsley argued for a negative eugenic practice which involved more radical active measures such as forced sterilisation or segregation or even, extermination (Pick 159). Frank Taussig, a Harvard professor of economics, remarked in 1921 on the unemployable class that included the feeble-minded, persons with hereditary disease, "irretrievable criminals" and tramps: "We have not reached the stage... where we can proceed to chloroform them once and for all; but at least they can be segregated, shut up in refuges and asylums, and prevented from propagating their kind" (qtd. in Leonard 214).

Eugenic ideas disseminated in the larger public through the popularity of cultural events such as the American Better Baby and Fittest Family contests that measured, compared, and judged physical and cognitive capacities of children. School children were subjected to physical and intellectual assessments and competitions. Eugenic philosophy and practise was a respectable 'science' by the inter-war period, with wide, pan-Atlantic, sanction, and this is reflected in legislation, policies, medical discourse and popular culture. After the second world war, however, degeneration discourse as well as eugenics became shameful, with notorious Nazi associations (Pick 237-8). The Final Solution had resorted to the most radical of negative eugenicist measures to deal with the problem of the racial and political threats of degeneration. Nevertheless, despite the popular postwar backlash to ideas of racial purity and selective breeding, the assumptions originating in the discourse still circulate, inflecting and informing many aspects of western culture and around the globe.[8] Even as recently as 2012, the epilogue to Dawn Kopman Whidden's *A Child is Torn: Innocence Lost* asks,

> Can we inherit from our DNA something that can become a stronger force than years of love and nurturing? Can one gene that has been dormant for

genetic quality of a race or species can be bettered by breeding out undesirable inheritable traits. Eugenic discourse uses the language of animal breeding, referring to certain genetic inheritances as being of 'good stock' and the combination of ideal mating partners as 'selective breeding'.

[8]Sterilisation as part of population control, coerced or incentivised, is endorsed as an ecological or economical necessity, as a matter of national urgency to regulate certain sections of the population. For instance, a 1967 American petition requesting the sterilisation of a 'promiscuous' 'feeble-minded' thirteen-year-old girl gave this justification: "This will at least prevent additional children from being born to this child who cannot care for herself, and can never function in any way as a parent" (qtd. in Russeau-Pletcher 79).

> generations suddenly turn up and turn the most innocent newborn into a monster as the years go by? Should we all take a good look at our future mate's family history before we decide to marry and have a family? Will science in the future help us determine if someone's genetic make-up will produce a Jeffrey Dahmer or Ted Bundy and we can avoid the horrors and heartache that this type of individuals cause? (Whidden).

Twentieth- and twenty-first century horror, argues Stephen T Asma, is characterised by "the terror of all things biological"(Asma 198). New medical technology and biological discoveries became the much-favoured premise to envision terrifying scenarios that challenge human control. Scientific and journalistic language, in turn, feed on the imagery of monster folklore to describe criminality and psychopathy. Psychopaths are described with animal or sci-fi metaphors–as predators, parasites, snakes, chameleons, aliens, etc–to emphasise their difference from the 'normal' populace and their lack of 'natural' human emotions and moral values (Jalava et al. 178-179). Jalava et al. argues that the concept of the psychopath–the reincarnated myth of the nineteenth century born criminal–is an attempt to solve, once and for all, the mystery of evil by attributing a biological cause to evil (4).

4.1.3 The Child Criminal

As Nietzsche argues in *The Genealogy of Morals*, the penal system is built on the assumption that "the criminal deserves to be punished because he could have acted otherwise" (Nietzsche, "Genealogy of Morals" 195). The doer is separated from the action, the offender from the offence, the subject is posited as possessing autonomy. The child, similarly, in choosing bad over good, makes a moral choice; punishment then is a corrective to choice. Children who commit wicked or harmful actions, however, have historically been subject to familial correction rather than formal state-instituted penal measures; in the case of juridical punishment, there has also been an age bar, generally seven, in accruing criminal responsibility.

Although punishment was mostly lenient for the child compared to the adult offender, child criminality was not seen as wholly distinct from adult criminality. The special category of juvenile delinquent is a relatively recent development in legal history. The exemption of tender years or infancy as a defence was put in place in the

fourteenth century, according to which, children aged below seven accrues no criminal responsibility (Chesney 641). By the sixteenth century, parallel to the developing concept of childhood which extended even further than the commonly accepted age of seven, a discretion test was in place in the UK to examine knowledge of right and wrong in individuals aged 7 to 14 (641-642).

Pro-child sentiments in the late nineteenth century saw reforms to bring about a more inclusionary approach in the treatment of juveniles, compared to the punitive and strict practices of institutionalisation which were increasingly being thought of as ineffective and counter-productive. Social reformers, or 'child savers' as they called themselves, were instrumental in redeeming the child embroiled in crime. The category of the juvenile delinquent distinguished the child—by definition, innocent, vulnerable, and with the right sort of environment and training, malleable into the well-socialised child—from the adult offender. Although reformatories for young offenders had existed in England and America since the mid-nineteenth century, the juvenile courts[9] that came to be established from the late nineteenth century solidified the split between young and adult offenders; informal in constitution and procedure, the court had the chief motive of rehabilitation of its wards rather than punishment (Bradley). Often, the hearings were "a blend of justice, religious conversion, and therapy" (Jones, "Constructing the Troublesome Child" 34). The children were sent to borstal homes or given probation instead of imprisonment (Gavin, "Unadulterated").[10]

By the 1880s, new specialisations in the study and treatment of young children were established, separate from obstetrics and gynaecology (Jones, "Constructing the Troublesome Child" 25). The nineteenth century (pre-delinquent) 'troublesome child', who was often located in the poor, immigrant, urban population, was thought to result from the stress of urban living and parental negligence or incapacity while for middle

[9]The first juvenile court, the Children's Court of Law in Chicago, was established in 1899 (Illinois Juvenile Court Act) in the USA. Eventually, after the creation of the Children's Act of 1908, courts for child offenders were established in the UK. The acts of delinquency under Illinois law included various status offenses such as associating with immoral persons, absenting self from home, knowingly frequenting a house of ill-repute, pubs, etc, wandering about the streets at night without legitimate reasons, habitually using profane language in a public place (Jones, "Constructing the Troublesome Child" 33)

[10]London's Old Bailey court records show a shift in sentencing patterns of ten-year-old and younger children between 1674 and 1913. For many nineteenth century cases (almost all of them theft), judgment is respited for an indefinite period of time, compared to the earlier century during which the typical punishment (for both girls and boys) was transportation to the colonies, whipping or sending off to a correctional facility. From the 1900s, children aged ten and younger are encountered more often as victims of various (sexual) assaults rather than as defendants (Hitchcock et al.).

class children, over-education was causing an "epidemic of precocity" which however stayed a matter of private concern rather than that of public child-saving campaigns (21). Troublesome children, used almost in the same sense as the twentieth-century 'problem child', disrupted family tranquillity and failed to conform to social standards of morality and childhood behaviour (36). "If left to grow up without restraint and supervision," writes Kathleen Jones, "troublesome children promised to become the nation's burdensome adults—the criminals, defectives and dependents who drained the public treasury, threatened class welfare, and made urban life so unpleasant" (37).

While the criminal adult was thought to be intractable, the working class child could be saved even though biological propensities to crime existed. The nineteenth century British social reformer, Mary Carpenter, wrote that the child hardened by crime is forced to "conceal their *true nature* with a cloak of conventionalism and hypocrisy" (emphasis added, Carpenter 298). The concealment of a 'true' nature of childhood echoes the Romantic optimism seen earlier in Rousseau and Montessori (2.1). This child could be re-moulded by a good environment that will rectify the false 'independence' and restore trust, vulnerability and dependence in the child:

> [H]e must be placed where the prevailing principle will be, as far as practicable, carried out, where he will be gradually restored to the true position of childhood. He must be brought to a sense of dependence by re-awakening in him new and healthy desires which he cannot himself gratify, and by finding that there is a power far greater than his own to which he is indebted for the gratification of these desires." (298)

Juvenile delinquency in late 19th century US encompassed, besides those acts which if committed by adults would also be criminal, vaguely defined "immoral behaviour", "incorrigibility", truancy, and "vicious behavior" (Platt 159). The juvenile court had a preventive function in that it could intervene in cases "where no offence had actually been committed" (159). The "moral reputation" of the child was examined for motive rather than intention (159). "What seemingly began as a movement to humanize the lives of adolescents," writes Anthony M Platt, "soon developed into a program of moral absolutism through which youth was to be saved from movies, pornography, cigarettes, alcohol, and anything else which might possibly rob them of their innocence" (157).

In the early twentieth century, child guidance clinics worked alongside juvenile

courts to deal with delinquents. The 'problem child' of this period did not have the class-specific associations as its former counterpart, and was 'normal' in physical and mental respects except for "behavioural attributes that contravened some system of authority—usually school or family—and personality attributes that created tense relationships with parents, peers, and teachers" (Jones, "Introduction" 7). As seen in 2.2.4, with the postwar advancements in children's special economic status—spenders but not earners—and legal rights, a mainstream cultural anxiety surrounding childhood took shape. The child's knowledge (of adult affairs, primarily sexuality and the law) posit dangers to traditional power structures. In a plethora of fictional narratives, criminal children often work behind the legal protection afforded to them by virtue of their age, in effect mocking adult paternalism. "Revolting children", writes Scahill on the rebellious-repulsive children of horror cinema, "often have a veneer of innocence to protect them: not an ignorance enforced and inculcated upon them, but a knowing performance of cultural norms—they outwardly bear the mask of seemliness to avoid suspicion" (Scahill).

In their analysis of television media representations and political discourse in the UK, Wayne et al. write that the post war "creation of a veritable rogues gallery" of delinquent juveniles (ages 14-25) – teddy boys, mods, rockers, skinheads, punks, crusties, ravers, and other subcultures – has resulted in manufacturing panic around the category of youth itself (Wayne et al. 75): "young people in general are becoming identified as folk devils" (76). The problem of disappearing childhood (see 2.2.4) in an age of free and indiscriminate access to knowledge—a challenge to the notion of the 'child from a good home' as opposed to the street child—was a source of anxiety in the late twentieth century. The entry of children into the public sphere as individuals with legal rights and privileges, the pervasive state intervention in adult-child relations, the increase in a 'self-conscious,' politically-aware child public drastically disrupted the traditional parent-child, generational age dynamic such that the cultural ambivalence towards childhood exacerbated. Existing alongside the permissive, liberal approach to parenting and children was the excessively punitive, retaliatory, societal paranoia around childhood. As in all moral panics, the remedial and preventive policies enacted are harsh. The changing attitudes to childhood is seen in the changes in policy and legislation regarding juveniles; criminal legislation has adopted more punitive measures against juveniles since the eighties, particularly for the working class. Among the out-

comes of the superpredator myth—in the nineties USA that posited a new breed of criminal teenagers without restraint or remorse—include the legal treatment of children as adults, harsher penalties, and the general loss of confidence in the rehabilitative approach of juvenile justice (Muschert 365). In England, the rebuttable presumption of doli incapaz[11], the legal maxim that puts the onus of proving intention on the prosecution—for ages 10 to 14 was abolished in 1998 (post-Bulger) with the reason as stated in a later case:

> Children in the 20th Century[sic] had to go to school where they were, or were supposed to be, taught the difference between right and wrong. In the case of some offences it beggared belief to suggest that young defendants might not have appreciated that what they were doing was seriously wrong... Whatever may have been the position in an earlier age, when there was no system of universal compulsory education and when, perhaps, children did not grow up as quickly as they do nowadays, this presumption at the present time is a serious disservice to our law (Laws J, qtd. in "Opinions" 7).

In child-centred fictional narratives, the crimes the children commit range from status offences like lying, insubordination and disobedience to larceny, fire-setting and homicide. Remarkably, a crucial mitigating narrative strategy is the re-presentation of the child as a non-child—a supernatural agent, an adult, or a biological monstrosity. The association between acts that are eerily similar to actual crimes and the inhumanity and lack of innocence of the perpetrator echoes popular moral panic around child-committed crime. The serious nature of the crime apparently justifies the harsh and absurd treatment—sometimes a domestic extra-judicial capital punishment—that the child gets. The child's immunity from full moral-legal responsibility in consideration of his/her incomplete personhood, still a powerful argument, is circumvented by representations of children who are—either in a literal or criminologically figurative sense—already adults.

[11]The legal presumption of innocence of child defendents (Latin for 'incapable of doing harm'). The minimum age of criminal responsibility (MACR) had been increased from 7 to 8 in 1933, then later to 10 in 1963.

4.2 Deconstructing the Concept of the Criminal Child

This section will examine how the child has been constructed as criminal, with respect to the legal concept of intention, and the biological and evolutionist notions of atavism, abnormality, and psychopathy.

4.2.1 Criminal Intention

Establishing the relation between the criminal act and the responsibility for it is the crux of juridical sentencing. The concept of mens rea or the principle that a guilty mind is necessary to be punished was introduced in the twelfth century in England. Previously, the damage incurred by the victim determined the punishment for the offence, be it intentional or accidental; the mental factor had not mattered in the 'doctrine of damages' (Chesney 632-633). The medieval notion of moral blameworthiness or guilt, however, diverted attention from the victim or the crime itself and directed it on the offender, whose mind and soul had to be examined for the very material to punish. By the age of the Enlightenment, evil intention was generally accepted as the foundation of guilt (634). In later eras, intention was divorced from motive or purpose and came to mean the will to do a particular action. The medieval criterion of ascertaining wicked intention, 'malice aforethought,' had reduced from a test for physical expression of malice to malicious intent (636).

Acts committed by the insane, by children, and by the ill, do not, traditionally, have the necessary malafide intention behind them to qualify as crimes because these classes of persons lack the 'mature' capacity for reason without which it is not possible to know right from wrong. The child, lacking the faculty of reason, could not be punished therefore, regardless of the damage done: "Wholly immoral in his actions," writes Rousseau, "he can do nothing morally wrong, and he deserves neither punishment nor reproof" (Rousseau, *Emile* 56). This does not deny the potential and actual harm the child is capable of or may commit; the classical understanding of intention as arising from the capacity to reason simply excluded children from its range of application. Tamar Schapiro argues that the fact that an action was performed by a child is, therefore, "a prima facie reason to modify our 'reactive attitudes'" (Schapiro 733). This is crucial in the case of children who commit crimes. The question then becomes

'who did this' rather then 'why they did it'. The seriousness of the act is irrelevant and retributive punishment inappropriate in this approach.

The juridical significance given to intention became contentious in the latter half of the twentieth century, particularly with respect to the Nuremberg trials. The banality of the intentions of most Nazi officers, who were simply following orders, or were intimidated to perform their duties religiously, or naively believed in the system, demonstrated a profound lack of wicked intention. This led Hannah Arendt to espouse a new approach to legal judgment in the aftermath of the Holocaust; the new approach was in essence a return to the Enlightenment notion of intention as mature, adult reasoning capacity: "To have 'intentions'," writes Judith Butler on the Arendtian approach, "was to think reflectively about one's own action as a political being, whose own life and thinking is bound up with the life and thinking of others" (Butler). The lack of wicked intention, in contrast to eighteenth-century ethics, does not exonerate the offender. It was the failure to think or the lack of intentions which was the ultimate crime of Adolf Eichmann and people like him: "his failure to be critical of positive law, that is, a failure to take distance from the requirements that law and policy imposed upon him; in other words, she faults him for his obedience, his lack of critical distance, or his failure to think" (Butler). The specific nature of modern crime is that it becomes so normalized that individuals fail to maintain a critical distance, fail to think reflectively, which, however, does not ameliorate the individual's responsibility to the crime. Arendt wanted the court handling Eichmann's case to say: "We are concerned only with what you did, and not with the possible noncriminal nature of your inner life or with the criminal potentialities of those around you" (qtd. in Neiman 276). However, this approach to morality in which one has a moral obligation to think for oneself, irrespective of socio-political influences, and is also punishable for shirking this obligation, presupposes an individualistic, autonomous core to subjectivity, capable of insulating itself from external influences.

Criminalising or medicalising the lack of a right emotional attitude (be it malicious or bonafide intent) as a technique of normalisation of desire, of 'moral feeling', presupposes an innate core of goodness to humanity (see 3.1.2). An absence of good sentiments would then be seen as symptomatic of pathology (Foucault, *Abnormal* 150). In the classical tradition, the lack of a 'guilty' mind exonerates the criminal and dissolves

the crime altogether, but the mid-twentieth century popular disillusionment with an inclusionary, pro-rehabilitation, social disorganisation theoretical approach to criminality that gave prime importance to environmental causes of crime began to waver towards the ancient system of retribution in proportion to the magnitude of harm caused. Susan Neiman, supporting Arendt, argues that in the case of contemporary 'evil', one must depart from the traditional understanding of crime and look at the magnitude of the evil caused, rather than at the subjective states of the individual (Neiman 273). This argument is linked to the popular sentiment that regards the insanity defence and the minimum age of criminal responsibility (MACR) as legal 'throwbacks' to get away with the most heinous offences. Pointing out the inherent contradiction in assigning the minimum age of criminal responsibility (MACR)—usually ten—at an age far below the age of maturity, Claire McDiarmid argues that attributing criminal intention to children who are, to all intents and purposes, immature, is detrimental to the child's development free from stigma. Intention involves a rational thought process involving a sophisticated moral consciousness which in turn requires 'lived experience' rather than mere knowledge of morals (McDiarmid 152).

Pertinent to this discussion is the association of the 'adult' quality of the crime committed by the child (as discussed in 4.1.3). In *The Midwich Cuckoos*, for instance, the alien children grow at a remarkable pace such that by the time they are nine earth years old, they have the physical and mental growth of sixteen-year-olds. They can and indeed do cause violence, and even death, at will. In *The Bad Seed*, Christine and Kenneth "knew" that Rhoda was not an "ordinary" child; what ordinary children stole were fruits and flowers disregarding property rights, the lies they told "were the magical lies of the imaginary worlds they lived in at the moment" (March 83). Rhoda was not like that; she "was interested in material things for their own sake; and the lies she told were the hard, objective lies of an *adult* whose purpose was to confound and mislead" (emphasis added, 83). This adult quality leads to a quandary; if a child (by statute) commits crimes that only adults are capable of doing, should the child be treated as an adult or a child? McDiarmid points out the contemporary trend of juridical treatment of children as adults because ironically it is the quality of the crime that determines the nature of the criminal, rather than vice versa; the adult quality of crime apparently allows for the possibility of the child who committed it to not be treated as a child

(McDiarmid 147).

Precocity (see 2.2.3) has been very much tied to childhood criminality. Intellectual precocity[12] implies an early access to often-guarded knowledge that one conventionally needs to attain at specific periods of one's lifetime. The biggest concern of the child-savers was that the delinquent was "a little stunted man already—he knows much and a great deal too much of what is called life" (Hill 5). Children's precocious access to forbidden knowledge is often the source of the conflict in narratives ranging from Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw* (1898) to William Wyler's *The Children's Hour* (1961) to Ian McEwan's *Atonement* (2001). "[H]ow could a child that age even know about such things? She could hardly invent them" remarks Mrs Tilford in the American film *The Children's Hour* (1961) about her pre-teen granddaughter's accusation of lesbianism against her teachers.

The child's knowledge is dangerous partly because the negative attributes of childhood —under-developed critical ability, need for immediate gratification, and solipsism —have not yet been overcome (see 2.1). In *Crooked House*, twelve-year-old Josephine plays at being detective, overhearing at doors, surreptitiously monitoring adults' private lives, and, in a metafictional doubling of the author herself, fabricates plot events, sequences, and twists to make reality imitate the intricate plots of the detective mysteries she loves to read. Like the author, Josephine creates mystery where there is, in truth, simply an act of killing and nothing mysterious; she foreknows the murderer—it is she herself—and her task is then the opposite of the detective, but the same as the author-narrator: to construct the plot so as to derail and delay the discovery of the murderer. The many red herrings and genre conventions she throws in the face of the adults in the narrative are but elaborate play to her.

The child's gaze, in particular, is endowed with interpretative agency to (mis)construct and even actualise what is seen or heard or imagined. In *The Children's Hour* (1961), Mary Tilford—"a bad influence" and "a bad girl" in the opinion of the teachers—watches moments of intimacy and passion in the lives of the two female teachers who run the boarding school (*The Children's Hour*); in a desperate moment, out of spite, she spreads the 'fiction' about the sexual intimacy between the teachers. The fiction, however, turns out to have touched painfully upon the truth; one of the teachers is revealed to have

[12]Physical prematuration does not get the same degree of cultural censure or fanatic encouragement the former does.

indeed been repressing her homosexual attraction for her colleague and friend.[13]

Cathy Ames, the antagonist of John Steinbeck's *East of Eden* (1952), is described, by a closely Steinbeckian narrative voice, as precociously aware of the power of sexuality and not feeling any of it herself, but was not loath to use it to her advantage. "At ten," states the narrator, "Cathy knew something of the power of the sex impulse and began coldly to experiment with it" (Steinbeck). The ten-year-old Cathy allegedly frames two fourteen-year-old boys accusing them of tying her hands and attempting to rape her, which leads to their punishment of whipping and institutional detention; the boys however insist on their story that Cathy had "started the whole thing, and they had each given her five cents" and that they had seen her playing with a rope (Steinbeck). Unsurprisingly truthful to the turn-of-the-century attitude towards middle class childhood, public opinion was incredulous: "Do they mean to say she tied her own hands? A ten-year-old child?" (Steinbeck). The narrator paints a sympathetic picture of the two teenaged boys who paid money to a ten-year-old girl for sex, while Cathy is depicted as a sexual manipulator and intriguer.

The argument for bringing children into the moral-legal gambit of intention and moral responsibility implicitly and often, unintentionally, gets reflected in serious academic discourse. Naomi Wood argues, for instance, that innocence is wrongly attributed to the child, in oblivion of children's "naked pursuit of power and prestige in play" (N. Wood 543). The label of innocence, it is argued, strips them of moral responsibility, preventing them from being morally conscious (545). Play, which is the only action the child is capable of, is then always already morally situated and the child is always already a moral being. Arfan Khan, arguing for a modification (or rather a classical reversion) of the concept of intention, writes that there is "a moral difficulty inherent in the suggestion that an individual has the intention to kill or cause grievous bodily harm, merely because he foresaw the former and latter as a virtual certainty" (Khan 236). Instead, a person can be said to have the intention to cause certain harmful results, only when accompanied by "a wicked desire" (238). Ascertaining criminal responsi-

[13] Interestingly, the original 1934 play by Lillian Hellman sparked controversy due to its lesbian theme rather than Mary's precocity. It took a 1995 article to focus on the original conflict in the text which had been sidelined by the issue of queer sexuality. The article, unsympathetically exaggerating the facts, describes Mary Tilford of the 1961 film as a "proven liar and troublemaker", a "manipulator", "more advanced than her classmates, particularly in matters of sexuality" (because she surreptitiously reads and circulates a novel seemingly about lesbianism) (Erhart 91-92).

bility then rests on the question of criminal desire; knowledge of consequences should merely support the primary motive of causing harm. The child who knows or is depicted as knowing, and who is malicious enough to will harm, whether or not the harm ever takes place, is, by this argument, guilty. And the guardian in the narrative texts who decides and executes punishment on the child would be exonerated because although there is intention it is without malicious motive; it is ultimately in the best interests of the child and even humanity that the act is done.

4.2.2 Primitivity

In *The Bad Seed*, Rhoda submits to the caresses of her mother "with that tolerant but withdrawn patience of the pet that can never be quite domesticated" (March 14). On her mother's discovery of the murder weapon, "Rhoda pulled away from her[the mother] in unpredictable panic, and suddenly began biting and kicking like some insane, trapped animal [....] the child's sharp teeth sank into her wrist" (156) and "making little primitive, animal sounds, the child flew at her mother again, as though she'd lost lost control of her senses" (157).

One of the assumptions in the idea of civilisational progress is that human consciousness has evolved from the stage of selfish egoism to that of altruism, capable of compassion and group feeling. Susan Neiman, for instance, writes about the spectacle of public punishment in former days which people used to watch enthusiastically while modern audiences would feel distaste and horror at such violence (Neiman 99). As previously seen in 2.2.2, Lloyd deMause argues that society has entered the 'Helping Mode' with regard to child-adult relations, by which he meant that parents behaved to children in a more humane, pro-child, and supportive manner compared to earlier ages (DeMause 54). In this optimistic light, human decency appears evolutionary and natural while crime appears regressive, atavistic, and the criminal as lagging behind in the march of progress.

The criminal class, particularly its subclass, the 'born criminals', were seen by the influential Italian criminologist as evolutionary throwbacks, a case of ontogeny "languish[ing] behind phylogeny" (Pick 126). Degeneration was a "bio-historical anachronism" (126), the presence of primitivity within civilisation. The early twentieth century Freudian theory of instincts stressed the possibility of the return of the primitive stages

of development in the individual (228). According to the early American eugenicist, Charles Davenport,

> The acts of taking and keeping loose articles, of tearing away obstructions to get at something desired, of picking valuables out of holes and pockets, of assaulting a neighbour who has something desirable or who has caused pain or is in the way, of deserting a family and other relatives, of promiscuous sexual relations – these are crimes for a twentieth century citizen but they are the normal acts of our remote, ape-like ancestors.... (qtd. in Joseph 181).

The criminal, in resorting to primitive violence, is then an evolutionary throwback. The recapitulation theory of the nineteenth century, succinctly expressed by the German scientist Ernst Haeckel as "ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny", held that the development of the embryo goes through all the successive stages of the evolutionary development of the species (Pick 28). The individual is the "summation and standard bearer of the history of the race" (28). The influential American psychologist G. Stanley Hall's 'theory of recapitulation' bestowed great significance on individual child developmental processes which were directly linked to "the development, future vitality, and overall progress of civilization" (Levander 502). This evolutionary understanding strengthened prevailing beliefs in the primitivity of the individual at birth and his/her 'evolution' into the highest developed form of the species, precisely, the healthy adult (before the age of senility). Maudsley believed that a "brute brain" existed in man's brain, irrespective of class, which must develop to become human; if it does not, it is merely capable of savage traits or functions (qtd. in Pick 208). Here we find a distinction being made, in scientific terms, between man and human. The child as well as marginal adults, who live 'brute lives', have to grow from the animalistic, not simply into an adult, but a human being.

The eugenic belief that criminality is animalistic, primitive, or atavistic curiously persists in representations of juvenile crime. In Richard Hughes's *A High Wind in Jamaica* (1929), Stephen King's "Children of the Corn," and William Golding's *The Lord of the Flies*, free and 'unsupervised' childhood is depicted as barbaric, cruel, and amoral.[14] Feral language, as Renner observes, is frequently used in the media to de-

[14] Sabine Büssing takes exception to the view that these texts, particularly the latter, portrays the society

scribe juvenile delinquents, such as, for instance, the "wilding scare" in the late 1980s, the nineties' "superpredators[15]" (Renner 12), and in the 2010s lower class "chavs" and hoodie horror in UK (128). Feralisation of juvenile crime has severe consequences including the exclusion of juveniles from the category of child and thereby their socio-legal treatment as adult criminals (128). Renner argues that the child's "inherent feralness" (134), referring to his/her apparent uncorrupted naturalness, has transformed at the close of the twentieth century from being the trait of a romantic cultural icon to that of the monstrous presence of the brute in the midst of civilisation (129, 134).

4.2.3 Pathology

Central to the discourse of degeneration was the problem of identifying its manifestations in the individual. Although the Lombrosian criminologist school had relied on phrenology and physiognomy to detect atavistic individuals, to a large extent, degeneration in the social body was believed to be ubiquitous and invisible. This added to the panic that "the very overthrow of civilization and progress" was threatened by pervasive debility (Pick 9). Behind the sustained emphasis on child development may be perceived the degenerationist concerns about national and racial vitality and progress. The child guidance movement of the inter-war years delved even further into the realm of psychology—the "emotions, fantasies, dreams, instincts and habits"—of the child (Hendrick 49). Maladjusted and delinquent children were treated by specialised experts in these clinics, which functioned under the belief that future antisocial behaviour could be rectified through medical intervention in childhood itself (Hendrick).

From the 1940s to the early 1960s, recovering from the excesses of social Darwinism, the eugenicist ideals, and the horrors of Nazism, the external markers of difference such as disability and race could not be used to represent the horror of degeneration. Instead, criminal madness was reinvented as an invisible threat that could not be differentiated easily from the bourgeois 'normal'. The modern heir to the 'morally insane', the psychopath emerged, outwardly normal, but whose signs of criminality could be decoded only by the medical doctor, particularly, the psychiatrist (Covey 1392).

of children as primitive; the children do not establish any radically different world order, but merely builds on the societal form already available and familiar to them in order to impose "a wild, hard, cruel form of life that tolerates neither compromise nor weakness of any kind" (Büssing 38).

[15] coined by John Lilulio, Princeton Professor, prediction for end of the millenium, explosion of violent crimes committed by a new kind of "fearless and ultraselfish" youth (Jalava et al. 66)

Psychiatric intervention for 'abnormal' behaviour was a mode of preventive justice, in the new paradigm where criminality was nothing but pathology and a proper object of medicine. Psychiatric discourse gave pride of place to childhood, the be-all and end-all of criminal behaviour. As early as the mid-nineteenth century, the English psychiatrist Henry Maudsley cited several cases of the 'homicidally insane', whose symptoms were observable from childhood and was a hereditary predisposition.[16]

> In younger children of three and four years old, attacks of shrieking, stubbornness, rage, biting, and destructive propensities, which come on periodically, are sometimes met with. And if any one should think that these are instances of early depravity, what will he say to the case of a child raving mad immediately after birth? (Maudsley 332-333)

American child savers borrowed their ideas from the medical imagery of pathology and treatment, the criminological theory of biological origins of crime and the Social Darwinist notion of the intractability of human nature (Platt 152). By the 1890s, the pathologies of idiocy, epilepsy, insanity and delinquency in children had acquired associations with heritability and incurability, which meant (even, lifelong) institutionalisation (Jones, "Constructing the Troublesome Child" 26-27). Foucault cites the case of five-year old Claude, the child of "respectable parents", who was put in asylum for five years although no 'crime' per se had been committed; his misdeeds included indocility, meanness, insulting his mother, lack of fear of adults, hurting animals and peers, stealing, fire-setting, inability to learn to read, and incorrigibility (Foucault, *Abnormal* 148-149). The recent discovery of 'callous-unemotional' youths—potential future sociopaths and psychopaths—is largely based on the pathologisation of the 'absence of good sentiments'. Showing disaffection, indifference, emotional apathy, lack of fear, aggression towards peers, siblings or pets, duplicitousness, and manipulativeness, are seen as signs of maladjustment or genetic abnormality, which require urgent medical intervention (150).

Russell D Covey argues that psychiatry, initially, was chiefly regarded as an effective curative medicine and therefore the films from the 1940s up to the sixties depict psychopathy as a curable illness, rather than as a biological defect (1398-1401). The

[16]The Lamarckian explanation Maudsley provides is that the parent's "acquired irregularity" became "the natural infirmity of the offspring" (336). Similarly, J Crichton Browne, a prominent late-nineteenth century British psychiatrist, declared that 'homicidal monomania' was not uncommon in childhood (308).

Freudian psychopath exhibited all the symptoms of the pathology, could be diagnosed in psychiatric terms on-screen, and ultimately could be trusted with the law enforcers, the courts and the medical doctors to cure, rehabilitate, or quarantine. Mental illness was the root of criminality; therefore, the criminal evoked sympathy, and this was sufficient to rule out strict punishment.

However, since the 1960s, faith in legal and medicinal systems declined; criminals were increasingly regarded as ubiquitous but invisible predators and parasites, whose violence was inexplicable, innate, and incurable (1414-1416). The psychiatrist was still the only legitimate authority who could detect the 'dangerous individual' by recourse to various 'scientific' clues to behaviour. Nevertheless, beyond detection and management, the psychiatrist could do little to treat criminal madness (1417). The function of the psychiatrist had radically changed from treating and curing madness to "'scientifically' affirm the psycho-killer's utter untreatability" (1416). He cannot treat the abnormal individual, who is pure evil, but can protect society from the danger he poses by locking him up, pursuing him, warning others, and finally, shooting him. Infantile wickedness condemns the individual to a future of evil; to restate Foucault, "He was already this; he was already what he is" (Foucault, *Abnormal* 303).

In *Mirrors* (2008), twelve-year-old Anna hosts a malignant demon. Her case is described by doctors as 'a rare form of personality disorder,' of severe schizophrenia, causing violent fits, screaming, and delusional behaviour. Previously confined to a special basement by her family, she is taken away by psychiatrists for an experimental 'mirror cure,' in which the patient is strapped to a chair inside a room walled by mirrors. She is implied to have killed her sister prior to her confinement and caused a killing spree among the inmates of the mental asylum from which she escapes, leaving the unappeased demon to infect mirrors and capture the souls of those who look into them. Ultimately Anna returns as an old nun to take the demon back into her to stop the epidemic of vengeful death and, predictably, she is destroyed by the demonic force. As the psychiatric treatment was responsible for the epidemic of the mirror virus, the film appears to decry the futility of medical rehabilitation for the criminally insane. There is fundamentally no cure for (moral) insanity; the patient with such a condition is 'doomed' to commit crimes against the moral law, to pollute, infect society, and the only cure would be in the cleansing of the pollutant.

In gothic narratives, it is conventional to distance aberration from sacred values and institutions by attributing an external, often exotic, cause to the aberration. Allusions to the child's mean origins, in the form of adoption, environmental influence, or possession, are made. The criminal child in the upper middle-class home has his/her roots in unknown, lower-class, biological parentage or genetic abnormalities. Cathy Ames is "born with a malformed soul" (Steinbeck) in a nondescript but 'normal' family. Josephine and Rhoda are genetically tainted by their ancestors; while Josephine Leonides is the descendent of a lower-class Greek immigrant, Rhoda's lineage is traced back to a woman who was executed for homicide, including filicide and, allegedly, patricide. Regan is possessed at first by the spirit of a 'Captain Howdy'. Damien in the Anti-Christ franchise *The Omen* is literally Satanic offspring; he is an adoptee, the offspring of the union of Satan and a wolf. An exception to the middle-class child, Father Time in *Jude the Obscure*, whose experience of neglect during his early years living with his grandparents in Australia is implicitly suggested as formative of his world-view, is symbolically "Age masquerading as juvenility" (Hardy 338). Miles and Flora have roots in colonial India, a point mentioned in passing, but which perhaps, influenced contemporary perceptions about the (sexual) precocity of the children; this would be aggravated by the inappropriate tutorship – "incongruity, of so close an alliance" – they had, particularly of the caretaker who was not a "gentleman", but "a base menial" (H. James).

In *Crooked House* (1947), the Leonides are descended from the tyrannical patriarch Aristide Leonides, an illegal Greek immigrant who, through sheer force of personality, had married into a landed English aristocracy. His grand-daughter Josephine, the plot-maker par excellence, possesses all the street-Arab qualities which might have been at home with the Artful Dodger's company, but which are strictly abhorred in an aristocratic, 'privately-tutored' female child.

A bourgeois Christian moral code is the value system under attack in these narratives. In some texts, aristocratic and despotic children intimidate and seek to usurp power by overthrowing middle-class[17] parents and guardians such as in *Village of the Damned* and in most others, children with 'working-class' morality such as in *The Fifth*

[17]Criminal children hailing from actual working class backgrounds are remarkably rare in portrayals of deviance; an exception is the ineffectual 2007 remake of *Halloween* in which environmental factors are explicitly shown to be the origin of criminality.

Child destroy the foundations of the middle-class family. Rhoda in March's *The Bad Seed* is a juxtaposition of both; her polished manners, however, disguise her criminal roots in the working class. Various parallels between her and the caretaker Leroy locate the former as an imposter in the middle-class domestic space she is born into.

In *The Bad Seed* (both 1954 novel and 1956 film), the theme of inherited criminality forms the backdrop of the extreme punitive approach of the narrative to the titular ten year old[18] Rhoda. In a discussion within the novel about the 'criminal type' who would commit serial murder, Tasker says that "a *lack* of something in them from the beginning, not something they'd *acquired*" make them what they are (emphasis in the original, 203).[19] Rhoda's crimes of homicide, although motivated by ambition and covetousness, are then revealed to be genetically influenced; her maternal grandmother had been a notorious murderer who was caught only after she had committed a long string of murders, the victims including her father and her own children. Rhoda, then, is a throwback to an earlier age, far removed from the moral and cultural standards of the fifties in the US, a replica of her criminal ancestor, reflected in both criminal propensity as well as fashion. Despite the 'good' upper-middle class environment she grows up in, Rhoda was simply born bad. To prevent history from repeating itself, the narrative makes it imperative that Rhoda should be killed; this eugenic necessity, while thwarted in the novel, succeeds in the film with the help of a device of divine intervention.

The theme of eugenics also runs strong in the novel's narrative. Rhoda's mother Christine speaks of "the horror of Rhoda's inheritance" (201) and "the dark, terrible instincts that were in her[Rhoda]" (249). It is revealed that her mother-in-law had disapproved of Christine, whom she considered as hailing from "a family of international vagabonds who had never taken root anywhere"; "dissident Bohemians" (102) who were "forever taking issue with the fundamental and established order of things, the things that more stable people revered and perpetuated from generation to generation" (102-103). It would be "mad folly" to get married to her (103). Christine shares in Rhoda's culpability and finally approves of the mother-in-law's apprehension; she decides that her husband, being of good respectable stock, must "abandon" his wife and child and remarry and have the "children you are entitled to, children who will be healthy and average without this hateful taint that is in my daughter and me" (206).

[18]Originally, eight in the US version.

[19]He adds that 'feeblemindedness' was also a 'lack' which "certainly" was inherited (204).

4.2.4 Psychopathy and the Child

Since the 1920s, the dangers of Freudian isolation—the disconnect between affect and thought—had been predicted (Nandy 102). Such 'dissociation of sensibility', to adapt Eliot's term, was not limited to individual psychopathology, but was thought to be the nature of the times, a product of capitalist modernity. Particularly after the second world war, the global appeal of fascist ideals during the pre-war period came to signify the modern tendency toward "affectless sanitized cognition" (102). "[F]ascism," writes Nandy, "was the typical psychopathology of the modern world, for it merely took to logical conclusions what was central to modernity, namely the ability to partition away human cognition and pursue this cognition unbridled by emotional or moral constraints" (102). Horkheimer, in 1947, called the fragmentation of identity that allows one to behave and think in disparate ways in different contexts the "schizophrenic trait in modern life"; this is manifest even in childhood wherein the child plays the "role as a naive child" when required for adults, and when among peers, exhibits "his shrewder insight" (26).

The behaviourist method of child rearing, as discussed in 2.2.2, was feared to fashion children into future fascists. A 1938 child-rearing manual argued that behaviourism makes children "unspontaneous, efficient, and cold" adults; furthermore, it compared such children to robots and adds: "The spectacle of someone acting correctly without feeling anything is so inhuman that it is vaguely unpleasant" (qtd. in Sammond 156).

The analyses of the authoritarian or fascist personality by the Frankfurt school theorists attempted to shed light on the distinct personality type who would support and engender a fascist social order. The fascist individual was both childish and highly rational; unable to tolerate true freedom, immature, dependent on the approval of others, the individual could function only in an authoritarian hierarchy, either as the subordinate or the tyrant. The mental and cognitive skills were those of adults, but they were unaccompanied by emotional and moral maturity. The same characteristic of moral incapacity, insanity or disability refigures as the chief feature of the socio-medical category of the psychopath.

In the late nineteenth century, Browne, wrote that moral insanity,[20] the former term

[20]Interestingly, Browne considered Rousseau a "moral monomaniac", lazy, deceitful, lying and pilfering, "thoroughly disreputable even when a boy" (315).

for psychopathy, can occur in children and adults alike, but is not always incurable (Browne 314-315). The characteristics of the impaired individual[21] are described as follows:

> The intellectual faculties of the person affected by it, remain entire and unimpaired....He cannot, in the ordinary and legal adaptation of the term, be pronounced insane, [sic] And yet he is, to all intents and purposes, of unsound mind, and as much requiring guidance, restraint, and treatment, as the furious maniac. He suffers from entire perversion of the moral principle, from the want of every good and honest sentiment. (313-314)

This, it will appear, is a return to the adultlike child who knows the rules of the game but who is developmentally incapable of following those rules. The psychopath's moral competence, paradoxically, involves the ability to understand moral dictums while lacking the capacity to have a moral sense.

A thematic precursor of Golding's *Lord of the Flies*, the 1929 novel *A High Wind in Jamaica*, questions "the self-deceiving myth of childhood innocence" (March-Russell 206-207). It tells the story of a group of white children from a Jamaican plantation who are kidnapped by pirates en route to England; the pirates are shown to be more humane, rational and morally-bound than the former. Emily and the other children are depicted as a different species, closer to animal than human. They exhibit psychopathic traits: they are capricious, untrustworthy ingrates, and are devoid of any sense of fairness. Similarly, in *The Midwich Cuckoos*, psychopathy is not named, but the mythical psychopathic traits of superficiality, impulsiveness, cold rationality, and predatorial power are displayed by the Children.

Just as in the degeneration discourse of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the threat of psychopathy was perceived and approached in two contradictory ways. The individual could be identifiable through various behavioural, hereditary and physiognomic clues and thus could be segregated from society. Genetic explanations for crime claim the nineties' discovery of MAOA—monoamine oxidase A—or the 'warrior gene', a variation in the X chromosome, as the cause of aggression and male violence (Jalava et al. 157-158). Further, psychopathic individuals are physiologically different

[21] Henry Maudsley argued that moral insanity, particularly between ages eleven to twenty-three, is caused by masturbation, "self-pollution" (Jones, "Constructing the Troublesome Child" 20-23).

in that the moral-emotional centre of their brains, the amygdala, is abnormal, causing them to not recognise fear, disgust and crucial emotional clues to behaviour (145). Psychopathy was also posited to be invisible or unrecognisable. The hidden presence of psychopathy and psychopathic individuals among the 'normal', healthy populace, reminiscent of the degenerationist discourse, is supposed to warrant more pervasive state supervision, surveillance and vigilantism.

The mid-century discovery of a new breed of criminal, of a species itself—the psychopath–attracted huge scientific and popular interest and the Psychopathy Checklist[22], a psychiatric tool to identify psychopathic individuals, was adopted by juridical systems in many countries. One of the items on the checklist, of particular relevance to this thesis, is early behavioural problems, which include bullying, arson, violence towards animals, and deceitfulness.

Although not yet classified as a 'formal personality disorder' in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition* (DSM-5) and used interchangeably with antisocial personality disorder, psychopathy is, nevertheless, a key juridico-medical diagnosis to measure 'dangerousness'.

The specific trouble posed by 'psychopaths' is the inability to learn or to be reformed; they do not merely lack moral sense, but the very capacity for developing it. Psychopathy is largely considered heritable and discernible from early childhood onwards. Moral sense, in its evolutionary makeover, was now thought to be innate and natural, and it meant among other things, the ability to discern between what was just and unjust and the 'inner break' that allowed self-discipline. Criminality, with the discovery of the psychopath, recalls the controversial Lombrosian 'born criminal' theory, according to which criminality was an inborn trait; a psychopath had no corrective or cure, no environmental origin, and the best anyone could do was identifying, detecting, predicting psychopathic behaviour and protecting oneself from it.

The pseudo-scientific term and its popular reverberations, including pop psychology books, news reporting and films, as well as its subsequent, have gained social and legal legitimation with, perhaps, formidable consequences for positive diagnoses. Despite the term's vagueness of definition and usage, psychopathy has long-term and often

[22]Robert Hare, the Canadian criminal psychologist and author of the Checklist, describes psychopaths as "predators who use charm, manipulation, intimidation, sex and violence to control others and to satisfy their own selfish needs. Lacking in conscience and empathy, they take what they want and do as they please, violating social norms and expectations without guilt or remorse." (qtd. in Ronson 61).

fatal effects on persons on whom the label is bestowed, including death penalty, denial of psychiatric treatment because the condition is seen as incurable (Cavadino 7) or indefinitely prolonged hospitalisation (Bower 379). As Michael Cavadino argues, this contradicts classical legal common sense as it would be a violation of "the principle that punishment is for past crimes committed not future crimes feared" (Cavadino 8). He sardonically argues that the label of psychopathy is

> simply a prime example of moralism masquerading as science. Perhaps we should strip away the mask completely, and for the term 'psychopath' substitute the word 'bastard'....Would not much be gained in the honest expression of the essentially moral judgement and the dehumanizing contempt with which we view the 'psychopath'?" (6).

Identifying signs of psychopathy in children, involving the detection of 'callous-unemotional traits', have become part of the parenting discourse, diffused into society through hyped media representations and scientific reports which 'prove' that such children are mostly incurable (Bower 380). The horror genre, particularly the evil-kid subgenre, tends to be educational for parents and concerned adults in this respect, depicting the latest scientific insights into juvenile disorders, feeding into the cultural anxiety around the detection of behavioural 'abnormality' in children as early as possible, even as early as the pre-natal stage.

The notion of innate wickedness and absolute incorrigibility, imperviousness to influence, education and upbringing dramatised in *The Bad Seed* (1956) became inevitable for future portrayals of evil children. As Lennard observes in his analysis of *The Bad Seed*, the emphasis of the narrative on genetic inheritance as the root of the problem is both comforting and confrontational; it comforts because, in constructing Rhoda as a genetic aberration, the adults are effectively excused from responsibility (*Bad Seeds and Holy Terrors* 40), the idea of normative childhood is salvaged and the contemporary permissive parenting style is vindicated; the confrontation is in the suggestion that a middle class family from a wholesome, 'respectable neighbourhood' could rear such a corrupt, criminal child. As the title suggests, the child is a rotten seed, born bad, innately corrupt, without any possibility of cure or redemption; nurture could possibly do nothing to transform the child to behave normatively. Lennard makes a strong argument that the diegesis supports the theme of material corruption—Rhoda's

consumerism—and class exploitation rather than innate corruption (40). The reading of class and consumerism in the film, however, only goes so far; the notion of Rhoda's approach to others as class exploitation does not hold ground; her killing of an old neighbour and the likely plot to kill the landlady, Mrs Breedlove for certain promised possessions, are motivated not by any class considerations, but utilitarianism and the need for immediate gratification. Her passion for her possessions (or what she believes are hers) is extreme, and her fundamental flaw is, perhaps, her treatment of living beings as objects and objects as living extensions of her own self-image. In the crucial nature versus nurture debate scene, the writer Tasker claims:

> REGINALD TASKER: Some fellow criminologists, including some behaviour scientists, have begun to make me believe we've all been putting too much emphasis on environment and too little on heredity. They cite a type of criminal born with no capacity for remorse or guilt, no feeling of right or wrong, born with the kind of brain that may have been normal in humans fifty thousand years ago (*The Bad Seed* 1:06:55-07:20).[23]

These nurture-proof children are "born blind – permanently – and you just couldn't expect to teach them to see" (*The Bad Seed* 1:07:56). The child is born with a malformed soul, morally insane, devoid of the essentials conducive for the inculcation of moral sense; s/he cannot be influenced, corrected, or kept from committing wicked actions. In a sense, the child is helpless and a victim to nature's caprices—"poor deformed children born without pity" (*The Bad Seed* 1:10:22).

4.3 Power: The Norm and Rebellion

I take the Nietzschean position that the pleasure in cruelty has only undergone a "sublimation and subtilization" rather than become extinct (Nietzsche, "Genealogy of Morals" 200). As Žižek observes, subjective violence of any form is vehemently opposed by an apparently developing human subjectivity, against the backdrop of a presumed "non-violent zero level", a "'normal', peaceful state of things" (Žižek, *Violence*). Violence

[23] In March's original novel, Rhoda has a "strange affinity" for Old Testament cruelties, "something as terrible and primitive about her" (208), "had the same primitive instinct for avoiding danger, the same ability to sniff out and avoid the set trap, that animals possess" (247). The type of criminal described by Tasker in the novel kill for profit and self-survival (147). March cites "true" (as he claims in the epigraph) cases in which children were caught committing brutal murders in order to rob victims of their money.

becomes intolerable, an infringement of one's right to be undisturbed, while objective, systemic violence inherent to the normal, the status quo, within modern institutional forms remains invisible (*Violence*).

That crime is a disruption of the cultural norm is endorsed by the narratives only to pronounce the disruption as an evolutionary regression. The narrative is quick to impute innate difference to the criminally precocious child, depicted as belonging to a special type, a class of persons markedly different from 'normal'. The central child figures in the texts deviate from normative childhood behaviour, refuse to or cannot conform, and are perceptibly different through behavioural deviance (and rarely, physiognomic or physical clues) that narratives take pains to emphasise. In Steinbeck's *East of Eden*, the narrator-author describes Cathy, the future antagonist, as independent, standing out from the crowd, unlike other children. Cathy is an anomaly whose difference is marked by her refusal to adhere to group rules, be it fashion or morals. Seeking the protection of the crowd—"slavishness to the group"—the obscuring of differences, is posited to be an evolutionary strategy, benefiting survival and therefore natural and innate in children:

> Cathy was different from other children in many ways, but one thing in particular set her apart. Most children abhor difference.... slavishness to the group normally extends into every game, every practice, social or otherwise. It is a protective coloration children utilize for their safety. Cathy had none of this. She never conformed in dress or conduct. She wore whatever she wanted to. (Steinbeck)

Conversely, a cultural panic around the banding together of children and youths, associated with street youth gangs, the Hitler Youth, and youth subcultural influences (2.2.2), is reflected in fictional works like *A Clockwork Orange* (1962), *Lord of the Flies*, *The Midwich Cuckoos*, *The Sailor Who Fell from Grace with the Sea* (1976), *Children of the Corn* (1984), *Devil Times Five* (1974), *The Brood* (1979) etc. In the inter-war and post-1945 eras, the discourse of degeneration had shifted focus from individual degenerates to the mob (Pick 222). "To enter the crowd," writes British historian Daniel Pick, "was to regress, to return, to be thrown back upon a certain non-individuality, the lowest common denominator of a crowd of ancestors - a world of dangerous instincts and primitive memories" (223). The American psychologist, Robert Lindner wrote in 1956, of the "mass man" who, overriding evolutionary instincts (towards autonomous

identity), succumbs to conformity, to being one of the mob (Lindner 26).

The cold war dread of conformism, automatism, and the corrosion of individuality in mass movements echoes in youth-centred gothic narratives in which it is in their adherence to esoteric, regimented groups that the children are marked as different from the common-law-abiding populace. Büssing writes in her seminal study of children in horror fiction that the most popular and effective social constellation in horror is "a group of children who all act in perfect harmony with the whole, like limbs of one monstrous body" (35).

In Wyndham's *The Midwich Cuckoos* (1957), the Children are psychically conjoined, their loyalties are never aligned with the host family, but always lie towards themselves, "two super-spirits"—one male and female—manifested as fifty-eight identical bodies (Wyndham):

> They have a different sense of community—their pattern is not, and cannot by their nature, be the same as ours. Their ties to one another are far more important to them than any feeling for ordinary homes.... they can't really become one of the family, they're too different; they were little good as company for the true children of the family, and the difficulties looked like growing. (Wyndham)

The narrator later adds that due to their "progressive segregation" into specially-made "dormitories", "[i]n quite a short time most people .... found them difficult to tell apart, got into the habit of regarding them collectively so that they have tended to become two-dimensional figures with only a limited kind of reality" (Wyndham). This two dimensionality is the decisive factor in the denouement's 'Final Solution' of total annihilation of the Children.

The appalling factor in such narratives is the incongruity between behaviour and expectation of the child brought up amidst middle-class values. The child's adherence to group values over family loyalty evokes the ethos of the street child whom child savers of the late nineteenth century were keen to redeem. The street child, mythically, is a composite creature—both child and adult—more intelligent, independent, and aware than the sheltered middle-class child at home, and against the modern ethos of isolation and individualism, tended to gather into groups and show group solidarity (Boyden 193). In *Village of the Damned* (1960), for instance, the Children, irrespective of their

births in families of different social strata, all adopt an aristocratic mien, with formal and polished language and demeanour (*Bad Seeds and Holy Terrors* 46).[24] Nonetheless, the Children's adoption of upper-class signifiers may be read as an ageist subversion that provides shock value. The Children evoke horror precisely due to their air of cold, formal intellectual superiority and their condescension towards the adults in authority. The class assumption, it will be evident, still holds good in these narratives; the alien children are purported to belong to a highly evolved species, and although the struggle between the village humans and themselves is depicted purely as a battle for survival between competing species, the Children pose a threat to class hierarchy too because of their inter-class solidarity and their usurpation of power from the upper classes. Ultimately, the classes retain their status quo and the criminality of the Children is shown to be a biological aberration.

While the dual vilification of individualism as well as group conformism may appear contradictory, it is, in fact, difference from the dominant ideology that becomes criminologically suspect. "Conduct is healthy", writes Foucault, "when there is minimal deviation and automatism, that is to say, when it is conventional and voluntary" (Foucault, *Abnormal* 159). Automatism is a serious 'status offence' within these narrative universes. Mimicking without true affect, speech without sincerity, the involuntary subjection to mean impulses and instincts, and performed sophistication ring danger alarms that trigger and justify suppressive violence (see 3.3.2). In choosing to follow a different moral code, to be different, a criminal mastermind who operates solo, or to be part of a cabal with interests that conflict with mainstream ideas of moral-social order, the unity and cohesion of the body-politic is thrown into jeopardy. The political issue of integration of a culturally and morally different other is the ideological problem at the heart of these narratives. For instance, although the Midwich Children are friendly with the intellectual Zellaby, it is perceived to be superficial, a means to gain power over the human race through the acquisition of knowledge. They can never be integrated into the village community because they follow a different morality.

The criminal child in the texts follows a brutal 'warrior morality', a Nietzschean will to power, so to speak, which values ambition and power over egalitarian, liberal

[24]This is indirectly explained in the original novel, however, by the theory of the hive mind which entails a transparent, collective and simultaneous access to the knowledge that every individual Child acquires.

democratic values espoused by the narrative. The non-integrable child tests the limits and exposes the fissures in the conservative socio-political fabric of the narrative.

Building on Scahill's and Twitchell's interpretation of the gothic child's nonconformism as the child's revolt against traditional patriarchal oppressors, I make use of the Havelian framework of power play to further illuminate the representation of the criminal child. The non-conforming rebel, according to the political theorist Vàclav Havel, is a threat not merely to those in power but the whole ideological structure whose interests they serve, that which sustains itself through the implicit and explicit conformism of each individual to its rules (Havel 31). Individuals are both the victims and the instruments of the system, "the line of power runs de facto through each person, for everyone in his or her own way is both a victim and a supporter of the system" (37), and through their participation, they create a general norm, and help enforce the norm on others, "so they may learn to be comfortable with their involvement, to identify with it as though it were something natural and inevitable and, ultimately, so they may – with not external urging – come to treat any non-involvement as an abnormality, as arrogance, as an attack on themselves, as a form of dropping out of society" (37). The individual who refuses to conform, to follow the ritual, "has exposed it as a mere game. He has shattered the world of appearances, the fundamental pillar of the system" (40).

Mark Tesar, writing on the politics of conformism in early childhood education, argues that the child is an active participant in maintaining and continuing the dominant ideology and a refusal on the part of the child to participate in the ritual, follow rules and conform with the system's demands, marks him/her as "an anomaly of the system" (Tesar 364): "The Child would expose and let other children see that it is possible, albeit not without consequences, to challenge the system" (366).

In the permissive parenting style, a 'covert' authoritarianism is inherent that makes the power relations in the new child-centred adult-child interactions invisible (Fromm, "Foreword"); the child's disobedience, however trivial, in such a framework would have significant implications, because "the boundaries between who is in power and who is not are shattered and exposed" (366). Perhaps this ideological precariousness explains the extreme punitive approach toward the child whose very personality demarcates him/her as criminal, who can be nothing other than a threat. The narrative framework pits the child as a destroyer of traditional hierarchies and values against the

adult who is both resistance as well as the guardian of the status quo. This in turn compels a spectatorial/readerly co-optiveness with the underdog, the adult, who stands for the cause of democracy and cultural decency.

4.3.1 Mimetic Rivalry and Adult Envy

René Girard's theory of mimetic desire illuminates this adult-child conflict. Traditionally, the mimetic conflict is nonviolent in nature as the child's imitates the adult or the disciple learns from the master in order to be, respectively, an adult or the master eventually. Although there is a potential for such imitation to result in envy and rivalry if the same object becomes the target of imitated desire (such as in the Oedipal conflict), this is usually diverted nonviolently in the parent-child relation by focusing desire on different objects. In the narratives under study here, the direction is reversed, the adult is locked into rivalry and mimetic conflict with the child, whose power and privileges far surpass that of the adult. In "The Turn of the Screw," there is a scene in which Miles entertains the governess with his fascinating playing of the piano. Just as the governess realises that the performance was a diversion for his sister Flora to escape unobserved, he prolongs the entertainment by breaking into "incoherent, extravagaint song" (H. James). After he finishes, he lets out a "happy laugh" that appears sinister in context (H. James). Similarly, Josephine controls the narrative in *Crooked House*, and Anthony dominates and tyrannises the people, animals and environment of Peaksville in "It's a Good Life".

In *Home Movie*, the parents are depicted as idealistic and ineffectual with absolutely no clue about what their ten-year-old children have become. They seek refuge in religion or science in order to understand and cure their strangely deviant children. Fearing that they have been possessed, their father ties them up and conducts an exorcism. Their mother, a psychiatrist, watches them as her case studies. The traditional parental right to power and violence is subverted eventually when the children use the very skills their parents had taught them and abuse and torture the parents themselves. Tied to a chair, the father foolishly scolds them as they stab and chase their mother, "Jack, Emily, stop this shit right now." (*Home Movie* 1:07:22-27).

In the film *The Bad Seed*, a strong mother-daughter antagonism is evident from the beginning. Apart from the subtle electra complex at work in the family's interac-

tions, both mother and daughter, representing two polar extremes–the docile, proper, genteel maternal woman and the self-willed, fearless, amoral pre-pubescent girl–are locked into performative roles. As Christine struggles to perform at ideal motherhood, she feels frustrated by her daughter's refusal to cooperate with the performance. Rhoda does not allow any physical coddling or any public show of maternal affection; she cannot be scolded about making her bed or doing other childish chores, because she denies any such opportunity with her meticulous perfectionism. Rhoda, meanwhile, as and when required, performs the role of ideal daughter, but is repeatedly rebuffed by her mother's refusal to play along (unlike her father[25] or landlady Monica). Both ultimately see through each other's performativeness, frustrating and short-winding each other's attempts rudely. The scenes of bedtime reading or the trip to the picnic spot are pervaded by a sense of unease, foreboding and watchfulness between the two performers, foreshadowing the later scenes of disaster and horror at these same places.

There is a concentration of power and control in the child while the mother finds herself passive and inconsequential. She often tries to admonish an improper Rhoda, but her voice is drowned out by others–her husband Kenneth, the landlady Monica, or even Rhoda herself. In a prescient scene, Monica scolds Leroy for sprinkling water on Rhoda's shoes as she was leaving for the school picnic; Christine tries to brush it away as an accident, but Rhoda vehemently joins in, saying, "He meant to do it, I know Leroy," as Christine watches her apprehensively from the background and continues to look wide-eyed at her daughter's fury (*The Bad Seed* 00:10:49-51). In another scene, Christine, herself traumatised by the memory of her mother's strangling of her brother but the memory of which she had repressed, attempts to assuage the trauma she believes Rhoda is experiencing after her apparently first encounter with death–Claude's. Rhoda snaps with "I don't know what you're talking about. I don't feel any way at all" (*The Bad Seed* 00:25:31-35).

On discovering her sordid family history, Christine undergoes a makeover, she loses her passivity, her genteel moral superiority, and in a mimetic reversal, becomes akin to Rhoda in her act of helping her hide incriminating evidence of Rhoda's murder of Claude. In becoming her accomplice, Christine wins over Rhoda, both foregoing per-

[25]In the novel, Kenneth is not as clueless about his daughter as he is in the film; Rhoda's "singleness of purpose, her evasiveness, her innocent pluasibility when trapped, her incesant lying" were known to both parents (84).

formativity for a while with each other. However, when she tells Rhoda that she will make everything alright, the maternal aim of filicide as the answer to keeping her child safe from a violent fate is at odds with Rhoda's own aim of seeking survival. In the first climax–a travesty of her dutiful, warm domestic actions from earlier–Christine reads Rhoda a story and passes to her a glass of milk and a handful of sleeping pills. Both mother and daughter, like their notorious ancestor, in their common act of killing another (although not successful in Christine's case) become participants in the same network of mimetic action. While Rhoda and her grandmother kill for material possessions, Christine kills for life itself, or what she imagines life would be like if Rhoda were not born; all three are motivated by a feeling of moral superiority that allows them to 'take' what they believe is rightfully theirs to take.