Chapter 5

The Monstrous: Liminality and Expulsion

5.1 Introduction

> *"We put down mad dogs; we kill the wild, untamed ox; we use the knife on sick sheep to stop their infecting the flock; we destroy abnormal offspring at birth; children, too, if they are born weak or deformed, we drown. Yet this is not the work of anger, but of reason - to separate the sound from the worthless"* (Seneca 32).

The monster reminds you of something forgotten, it triggers your repressed memory, it conjures up the past buried under yarns of civilisational amnesia. The Latin root *monere* means 'to remind' as well as 'to warn' and the derivative *monstrum* refers to a divine portent often presaging misfortune ("Monster"). The monster manifests in popular representations as a cautionary exercise, a warning, an uncanny remembrance of something or someone best forgotten. By the early fourteenth century, the word monster was used to mean a biologically malformed organism, and later a composite creature, a fabulous being made of parts. By the mid-sixteenth century, the term's compass extended to mean moral deformity in persons; a monster is a "person of inhuman cruelty or wickedness, person regarded with horror because of moral deformity" ("Monster"). The association of the monster with extraordinary form or power places the monster outside of the human realm. According to Foucault, the monster offends the law of society as well as that of nature. By violating legal dictums, it establishes itself as illegal and simultaneously extralegal. By disrupting nature, which implies either a divine order or a purely materialistic scheme rooted in biology, the monster is blasphemy or a zoonotic anomaly respectively. It is located in a "juridico-biological domain" in which "[t]he monster is the limit, both the point at which law is overturned and the exception

that is found only in extreme cases. The monster combines the impossible and the forbidden" (Foucault, *Abnormal* 55-56). The monster occupies a liminal space, sharing attributes of both the divine and the inhuman, but nonetheless it is only in relation to the human realm and human norms that the monster bears any significance.

The limit, while serving the useful function of demarcating and classifying the variegated forms in nature, of giving order to chaos, also serves to exclude the liminal as pre-existing the limit, as validating the exclusion as a matter of necessity. The monster who occupies the liminal space performs dual roles: it embodies the taboo and therefore, creates fear, which, in turn, helps stabilise the limit as the necessary normal (Carroll 42). The monster's existence first comes up against the norm–social, moral, and religious–frustrating and threatening the dissolution of the norm itself. "[T]he breach of natural law," writes Foucault,

> is not enough to constitute monstrosity. Monstrosity requires a transgression of the natural limit, of the law-table, to fall under, or at any rate challenge, an interdiction of civil and religious or divine law. There is monstrosity only when the confusion comes up against, overturns, or disturbs civil, canon, or religious law. (Foucault, *Abnormal* 63)

The term *monstrous* in this thesis bases itself on this Foucauldian juridico-moral-biological interpretation. The monstrous child is portrayed as a transgression at multiple levels, offending both moral and natural laws. The two threads of evil and crime that have been examined in the previous chapters are woven into the larger fabric of the monstrous in this chapter. The offence or deviance of the child figure is constructed so that it belongs to the order of a blasphemy, offending some religious or divine order of things; it is also at core a contractual breach; it is ultimately against 'nature', a biological anomaly as well as a categorical violation. The child figure's act triples in enormity of significance and resists all understanding within the narrative worlds. This chapter first analyses the ways in which childhood is represented as a liminal phenomenon, as category violation, and proceeds to explore the ideological context behind the concept of monstrous childhood. It finally attempts to theorise the logic of the death condemned upon the 'monstrous' child; the extermination of the monster is read in the light of Girard's views of sacrifice, Derrida's arguments against the death penalty, and Agamben's notion of *homo sacer*.

5.1.1 Moral Monstrosity

The "abnormal offspring" of Western antiquity, also mentioned in Seneca's quote at the beginning of this chapter, referred to physical deviance from the norm. The monster as a product of biological error, a corruption of normal reproductive processes, is an idea as old as Aristotle (Asma 47). The natural and the normal however extended to encompass emotions, feelings, and thoughts, well by the eighteenth century. The champion of the free child of nature, Rousseau, for instance, remarks rather vehemently that a boy who disrespects his mother[1] is so "monstrous" and "unnatural" that he should be killed at once:

> There are occasions when a son may be excused for lack of respect for his father, but if a child could be so unnatural as to fail in respect for the mother who bore him and nursed him at her breast, who for so many years devoted herself to his care, such a monstrous wretch should be smothered at once as unworthy to live. (Rousseau, *Emile* 5)

Rousseau's indignation is as much about normative motherhood as it is about deviant childhood. A sacrificial, dedicated, caring mother is pitted against an ungrateful, unloving, disrespectful wretch of a child. The term "unnatural" is significant; respect for one's birth-giver is considered here as an *a priori* virtue, the lack of which would then be anomalous and serious moral deformity in the light of the law of nature. Nature here could be read not merely in the general sense of a universal, normative and transcendental order but also as signifying human nature understood as innately compassionate and good. One who fails to adhere to this apparently innate natural order foregoes his/her right to live. One then must be worthy of life to be allowed to live, and one's worth may be decided by others (here, probably male adults). This disquieting stance by an advocate of human individualism and equality carries echoes of *lebensunwertes leben*[2] and the principle behind involuntary euthanasia.

The monstrosity of the juridico-moral monster that superseded the juridico-natural monster lay in its conduct rather than nature (Foucault, *Abnormal* 73). A breach of law (be it civil, canon, or religious law) alone could indicate monstrosity (75). Conversely,

[1] Disrespect for fathers may be excused and on the topic of disrespectful girls, Rousseau is silent.
[2] Nazi phrase, literally, 'life unworthy of life'

any breach of civil and moral law came to be, in effect, evidence of monstrosity. Monstrosity was suspected behind all criminality (81). Rousseau's apprehension regarding the 'unnatural' child whose monstrosity lay in his repudiation of his mother is a case in point; remarkably, what is morally monstrous is perceived to be a breach of natural law as well. In breaking the social law, the criminal 'egoistically' breaches the social contract, thereby restoring nature, the presocial realm. This *natural* individual is paradoxically unnatural (in terms of human nature) because the law had been originally made in the individual's interest, in order to protect him/her against nature (90-91). Foucault succinctly words this paradox: "Is he not a natural individual who brings with him the old man of the forests with all the fundamental presocial archaisms and who is, at the same time, an unnatural individual? In short, is not the criminal precisely nature against nature? Is this not the monster?" (91).

Reflecting the nineteenth-century shift from physiognomy to depth psychology, monstrosity has became a function of interiority, hidden beneath the surface. As Steinbeck's narrator in *East of Eden* remarks: "The face and body may be perfect, but if a twisted gene or a malformed egg can produce physical monsters, may not the same process produce a malformed soul? ... As a child may be born with-out an arm, so one may be born without kindness or the potential of conscience" (Steinbeck). The definitive quality of the monster is a lack, some sort of deficiency that sets it apart from others; if the monster enjoys excessive freedom, power, or strength, this excess is marked by its lack of moderation, mediocrity or conformability. It is this difference arising in disability or deformity–be it physical, moral or emotional–that indicates the monster. Steinbeck's narrator believes, for instance, "that Cathy Ames was born with the tendencies, or lack of them, which drove and forced her all of her life. Some balance wheel was misweighted, some gear out of ratio. She was not like other people, never was from birth" (Steinbeck).

The cultural impact of the disability rights movement of the 1970s ensured that physical handicap could no longer be a spectacle of horror;[3] abnormality came to be

[3]Exceptions are films such as *The Brood* (1979) and the Irish film *Citadel* (2012). In the latter, teenagers create an army of deformed, cannibalistic, and violent criminals through inbreeding. Although clearly having biological origins, these 'folk devils' are represented as non-human, feral, perpetual teens lacking all sensory powers except the ability to smell fear and pursue it. Their face and body design incorporates elements that make them appear stunted, aged, and disfigured as though by drug use. Rather than an indictment of physical deformity, these narratives flout socially approved heterosexuality only in order to showcase the horrors this would entail.

applied in pop discourse primarily to psychological and moral variation from the norm; monsters could appear normal without, but deformed within (Renner 26). Thus "the very absence of all markers of overt monstrosity, bodily and behavioral" could be construed as "pathological" (Hantke 111). Thus, in Stephen Asma's definition of the modern monster, only conduct qualifies for the epithet; "[t]he label of monster," he argues, "is usually reserved for a person whose actions have placed him outside the range of humanity" (Asma 205). Particularly, the "criminal monster"–which Asma argues is a more descriptive and "essential" term rather than 'psychopath'–is "one who *chronically* acts from a malignant heart" (228).

Nevertheless, in the child-horror genre, although deformity is largely limited to moral consciousness or the psyche of the child, the manifestation of this deformity frequently resorts to physical signs and symptoms. Hidden monstrosity must manifest itself in some form or the other in the gothic universe. The animal-like or demonic transformation of Rhoda, Ben, or Regan constitute the revelatory moment where monstrosity rises to the surface and what had remained mere speculation is physically confirmed. Rhoda's ugly tantrums (*The Bad Seed*), or Regan urinating on the living room rug in front of the guests or her infamous act of masturbation with a crucifix (*The Exorcist*), Ben eating raw meat crouched upon the dining table (*The Fifth Child*), the zombie girl eating her parents in *Night of the Living Dead*, or the villainous expression on Gage's face in *Pet Sematary* are quintessential moments of the genre.

5.1.2 Liminality

Monsters, according to the anthropologist Mary Douglas, "are unnatural relative to a culture's conceptual scheme of nature. They do not fit the scheme; they violate it. Thus, monsters are not only physically threatening; they are cognitively threatening. They are threats to common knowledge" (M. Douglas 56). The monster is an interstitial being, essentially disorder symbolising "both danger and power" (M. Douglas). To be in the margins is to be in contact with danger as well as to have access to an untapped power source; marginality involves a dangerous potentiality that could destroy order itself (M. Douglas). The child, who, in his/her interstitiality, realises and wields power, is dangerous. The danger threatens to dissolve both adult centrality and child marginality. According to Asma, the monster is Nature in its untameable, unapproachable avatar

(Asma 153). It does not allow persuasion, control, or negotiation. And since it does not bend to reason, it symbolises pure opposition and is therefore, something that, when defeated, "reaffirms" our "infantile power", and, when cannot be defeated, "curbs and checks our narcissism" (191).

The monster, argues Foucault, was conceptualised from the middle ages to the eighteenth century as a mixture that was "juridico-natural": "It is the mixture of two realms, the animal and the human [...] It is the blending, the mixture of two species [...] It is the mixture of two individuals [...] It is the mixture of two sexes [...] It is a mixture of life and death [...] Finally, it is a mixture of forms" (Foucault, *Abnormal* 63). The monster, in Kristeva's terms, is abject, in that anything that transgresses and disrespects a limit, an identity, a system or a law is the abject. "It is the in-between, the ambiguous, the mixed" (Kristeva and Lechte 127). The abject corrupts and subverts "an interdiction, a rule or a law" by using them so as to deny them (136). Nazi crimes, in her view, is abject particularly because it mixes death with what is supposed to oppose death or symbolise life, such as childhood and science (128).

The child's sacralisation (as seen in 2.2.1) has made it impossible for impurity to get mixed with it. The child has become holy. Holiness, according to Mary Douglas, "requires that individuals shall conform to the class to which they belong. And holiness requires that different classes of things shall not be confused" (M. Douglas). The holier an object, the more rigid its boundaries, definition, exclusions and inclusions. Childhood is vested with a sacred function so profound, of being pure, being good, and representing hope, that any aberration or corruption of the child is a profanation. The gothic child villain is profaned by virtue of his/her transgression of the sanctified space of childhood. The narrative is compelled due to this ideological pressure to declare the child a changeling. "The child's villain's anomalous evil", writes Lennard, "ensures that he or she can only be ejected altogether from categories of childhood, leaving entrenched definitions of desirable children unquestioned[...]" (Lennard, *Bad Seeds and Holy Terrors* 4).

Monstrous intermixing is a constant motif in gothic narratives wherein the human and the animal, god and animal, adult and child, the bad and the good, life and death, readily trespass against each other, cross borders, seep into the interstices between meaning. While Thomas Hardy's Father Time is only figuratively an aged man in the

body of a child, the possessed Regan in *The Exorcist* literally becomes an ancient demon or a horde of demons. The birth of Damien in *The Omen* franchise parodies the birth of Christ born of God and human; Damien the Anti-Christ is born of the devil and animal. The incessantly wailing deformed infant in David Lynch's *Eraserhead* has an amphibious form with gills. Ben in Doris Lessing's *The Fifth Child* is a proto-human throwback. The toddler Gage in *Pet Sematary* is an animated corpse. The gothic mode revels in border crossings, overlaps, and intermixing of disparate elements in order to unsettle preconceptions and conventional categories; however, the narratives in the mode allow for such intermixing only in order to restore the status quo and reinstate the separateness of the elements. Intermixing is permitted so that it may be forbidden.

In "The Law of Genre", Derrida pronounces, "genres should not intermix" (Derrida and Ronell 57). The catch in this seemingly straightforward dictum is the possibility of a counter-law, one that speaks of intermixing and contamination just as the very law of genre is uttered: "What if there were, lodged within the heart of the law itself, a law of impurity or a principle of contamination?" (57-58) Contamination inheres in sanctity. In *The Other* (1972), the conflict centres on the coexistence of two irreconcilable 'genres' in the same 'corpus'; the persona of the dead and malevolent twin haunts the persona of the 'good' son, Niles. Horror arises not from the criminality of the 'other,' but from the monstrosity of the composite, where the one becomes inseparably intermixed with the other. The denouement warrants the destruction of the anomaly, the monstrous, but, true to the convention of the modern gothic, fails in the attempt; Niles's grandmother sets the barn alight with the boy and herself in it, but her 'self-sacrifice' is in vain because the child manages to survive. The film ends with an outdoor shot of the boy looking out of the window, a recurrent image that had previously signified the persona of the other, leading to the horrific realisation that the good child's persona has been immolated and the other has usurped the body as the sole owner. This trope of the good child's sacrificial death recurs across narratives and serves to alleviate the anxiety triggered by categorical intermixing; by dying, the purity and innocence of the child and childhood is reinstated and restored to sanctity; by escaping death, the evil (in the body of the child) continues to threaten but can now be non-ambivalently condemned as the monstrous.

The monstrous child embodies a mixture, a confusion of categories–of age, identity,

time, race, and species. The creature in *Frankenstein* (1818), in a way, is a precursor of the twentieth-century monstrous child, in its dual status as child and adult. The creature is, by virtue of age, an infant deprived of childhood and, biologically, a mature adult with an adult mind and eloquent voice. The monster-child, always already an adult, disturbs a linear and hierarchical order, and indicates the co-existence of a frightening future in the present. In Scahill's words, "s/he is locked in a liminal stasis predicated upon contradiction: s/he is already-arrived, both-at-once, growing—but not growing up—in a land of never-never" (Scahill 5). In Wyndham's *The Midwich Cuckoos* (1957), Bernard, an adult in power, remarks of the alien Children: "The child-adult combination seemed to be full of a terrifying significance that knocked away all the props from the right order of things [....] I suddenly saw them double: individually, still children; collectively, adult; talking to me on my own level" (Wyndham). The sage-like, Father Time in *Jude the Obscure*, Miles and Flora in *The Turn of the Screw*, the sexually precocious boy in *The Pit* (1981), or Josephine in *Crooked House* share the quality of precocity, of the sort that presents an intimidating future adulthood and juvenilises the adults around them.

In March's *The Bad Seed*, in which the theme of heredity runs strong, the narrative emphasises the old-fashionedness of ten-year-old (eight in the US version) Rhoda; unlike the other kids of the late fifties US, she is "*outmoded*" (emphasis in the original, 11), dainty, "*ladylike*" (emphasis in the original, 19), "penurious" (20), polite, well-mannered, and prefers older fashions and games–a throwback to an earlier generation, precisely that of her late grandmother.[4] This is pertinent because she is supposed to have inherited criminality from her grandmother, the notorious homicidal criminal Bessie Denker. Rhoda also upholds apparently outdated cultural values of the late nineteenth century, especially in her commitment to materialistic wealth, individualism, and cold pragmatism. She refuses to sentimentalise the grief of Claude's parents asking instead why they could not replace the lost child by adopting another. Evidently, this 'callous' question, that shocks her mother and the implied reader, is in keeping with the diminished cultural value that childhood and children enjoyed before the twentieth century (see 2.2).

[4]Monica Breedlove, at a point in the novel when she is admiring Rhoda's behaviour and appearance, is reminded of the way children looked in her grandmother's time, an association made by the photo of a skating girl who resembled Rhoda strongly at her grandmother's house (11).

Without this temporal intermixing of the adult in the child, the presence of a violent past in the compassionate present and possible future, Rhoda cannot be construed as a monster. Rhoda must be killed, argues her mother and the narrative, so as not to repeat the past, so that the present may be cleansed of the sins of the past. What is ironical, however, is that the very act of eradicating the past involves a repetition of the past; although for different motives, Christine, the daughter of the woman guilty of filicide, attempts to take the life of her own daughter. It is therefore crucial for the narrative and generic convention that Christine fails at this task and instead, by her act of committing suicide, is ultimately redeemed, at least in the eyes of the implied reader, as the good, virtuous mother. The child remains, unknown to the rest of the characters, a promising Bessie Denker plotting the death of her next victim for material benefits. In the film adaptation, however, Christine survives the shot to her head and a deus ex machina device electrocutes Rhoda, enabling a simplistic separation between past and present which the novel had declined to provide.

In another instance of the adult-child, the governess in *The Turn of the Screw* declares of little Flora: "she's not a child: she's an old, old woman" (H. James). The narrative suggests that this transformation occurs when Flora is 'with' Miss Jessel's ghost, or is perhaps possessed. When the governess asks the child to look at the ghost standing nearby, Flora's expression immediately changes: "She was literally, she was hideously, hard; she had turned common and almost ugly" (H. James).[5] In *The Exorcist* (Blatty), Priest Karras observes Regan's body which is now viscerally suffering under demonic possession: the initial duality of identities is lost and unity regained as the mind of the demon completely possesses the girl, who can now only be described as "the thing that was Regan" (Blatty). The eyes that shine "with mad cunning and burning intelligence" are now unequivocally the demon's eyes (Blatty). The child's mind has been overcome and only the mind of the demon sits in its place. The demonic mind grotesquely transforms the body of the girl through starvation, cold, and mental and physical self-torture. Regan's mother 'intuitively' declares that Regan is absent in the body upstairs: "I know that thing upstairs is not my daughter!" (Blatty). The mind is not within the body, but ousted, expelled, the body is no longer that of Regan, all connection with the child has been lost. The symbolic significance of this loss is the taking over of human dignity,

[5]She also uses "appalling language" which the governess suspects she picked up in the company of Quint and Jessel.

hope and innocence by hate and malice, particularly relevant to the narrative's theme of erosion of faith, universal guilt and the memory of the holocaust.

In Irvine Welsh's darkly humourous "The Acid House" set in the eighties, a Scottish youth Coco Bryce trips on acid and gets struck by lightning, and in the process, mysteriously swaps bodies with the newborn of a middle class 'progressive' couple. The image at the heart of the narrative is a sexually aware, vulgar-tongued baby boy who like the infant in "The Small Assassin" has nearly all adult locomotor abilities. The breastfeeding Coco, according to his 'father', looks like "a leering, lecherous old man" (Welsh). On hearing the infant speak, his 'mother' "froze as she heard the voice coming from that small mouth which twisted unnaturally to form the words. It was an ugly, shrieking, cackling voice. Her baby, her little Tom; he looked like a malevolent dwarf" (Welsh).

Doris Lessing's similar tale of a prodigy, *The Child*, presents an evolutionistic thought problem: what if an individual belonging to an extinct proto-human race gets born through normal biological process, and how will family and society cope with it? (Lessing and Tomalin 176). How can one accommodate a biologically born oddity, one who is particularly pre-wired (as the narrative declares) to be violent and untamable? The 'scientific' premise of Ben, the proto-human child–belonging to a race of "little people"[6]–born to middle-class, old-fashioned British parents raises the question of inter-species ethics (176). Harriet, pregnant with Ben, endures unbearable pain unlike all her earlier pregnancies; her imagination becomes monstrous, perhaps reflecting the foetus inside her or perhaps creating the monster as was once popularly believed:

> Phantoms and chimeras inhabited her brain [....] She imagined pathetic botched creatures, horribly real to her, the products of a Great Dane or a borzoi with a little spaniel; a lion and a dog; a great cart horse and a little donkey; a tiger and a goat. Sometimes she believed hooves were cutting her tender little flesh, sometimes claws. (Lessing, *The Fifth Child*)

The child who is not human, by right or by natural birth, eases the problem of classification. There is no point in the child's lifetime in which he or she belonged to the human species. The child is, by birth or constitution, extraterrestrial, subterranean,

[6]This is reportedly inspired by a real-life anecdote about "a Neanderthal girl" who "had [...] flaring eyebrow ridges and funny back to the head" (Lessing and Tomalin 175).

or, as in psychopathy narratives, "a biologically unique subspecies of humanity" (Jalava et al. 12) or simply belonging to a different species altogether. The language of science, especially Darwinian naturalism, is used in support of the fundamentally theological or moral liminalisation of the child. Damien born of the devil and animal (*The Omen*), the alien Children of Midwich (*The Midwich Cuckoos*), or the parthenogenetically-born offspring in *The Brood* make it possible for human protagonists to wage war against them in a battle for survival rather than vengeance.

5.2 The Construction of the Monster

Like its 'monster' that defies conventional categories, the genre itself is subject, in various degrees, to a monstrous interstitiality. The difficulty to pin meaning according to existing structures of knowledge and the plurality of interpretative positions is one of the hallmarks of texts in the gothic. While a text like *The Turn of the Screw* celebrates its ambiguity, more generic texts such as "Problem Child," "The Small Assassin," or *The Fifth Child* merely confuse and upset the reader's moral stance regarding the truth about the child before confirming once and for all the 'impossible': the child is not a victim of trauma, adult projection or ambivalence, the idea of which would be seriously entertained before the condemning discovery is made–precisely that the monster is indeed the child, albeit an unnatural or abnormal one.

For instance, in Ray Bradbury's 1946 short story, "The Small Assassin," what appears like an ambivalent mother's dislike for her newborn turns out to be justified. As the infant's true nature reveals itself (to the characters as well as the reader), the narrator's limited point-of-view, restricted to the mother, Alice, rises up a symbolic social hierarchy[7] to include her husband David's pov, and ultimately that of the doctor, who then decides to kill the baby. During the course of these events, an evolutionary premise rationalises the possibility of a murdering newborn. Borrowing from the detective thriller and evolutionary science[8], the baby's father addresses the doctor who exhibits a remarkable 'scientific temper' in being willing to entertain the reasonable though improbable conjecture: "Suppose that a few babies out of all the millions born

[7]In child centred gothic, the process of disclosure advances from the lowest point of authority, usually a child or the mother to the upper echelons of power such as the father or a doctor.

[8]Despite the allusion to science, the narrative incorporates strong supernatural, demonic elements; the baby is oftern described as being "red, moist with perspiration" and towards the end, his father contemplates christening him under the name Lucifer (Bradbury).

are instantaneously able to move, see, hear, think, like many animals and insects can. [....] Wouldn't it be a perfect setup, a perfect blind for anything the baby might want to do? He could pretend to be ordinary, weak, crying, ignorant (Bradbury)." He goes on to accuse all human babies of having selfish, egoistic, brutal primitive instincts: "Strange, red little creatures with brains that work in a bloody darkness we can't even guess at. Elemental little brains, as warm with racial memory, hatred, and raw cruelty, with no more thought than selfpreservation" (Bradbury).

The child-centred gothic narrative is largely set in domestic spaces where the child-parent nexus forms an inviolable bond, one that cannot be breached from the outside; therefore, the crimes of the child usually stay hidden from the outside world, often through an oppressive pact, as a forbidden secret, a personal burden or curse. Within this inviolable domestic prison, there is intervention neither by the public nor the state. The domestic world of the narrative is transformed into a space for juridical reckoning, in which the child is judged by the medico-juridical gaze of a seemingly objective third-person point-of-view. The currents of biological determinism, eugenics, psychopathy theory and genetic criminology seep into the ideological structure of the text. The narrative mimics the juridico-psychiatric case study, surveilling the actions, thoughts and words of the child, probing into witness accounts, and reaching an implicit verdict that is carried out by one of the characters, necessarily someone close to and responsible for the offending child and who is exonerated for the same.

The problem of disclosure however is not easily resolved; even with the eclectic few who discover the monster intradiegetically, it is difficult to suspend disbelief and acknowledge the child-being as *the* monster. In Peter Oldale's "Problem Child" (1970), Lessing's *The Fifth Child* (1988), or *The Omen*, the monster typically remains unknown to the majority of the characters, while the protagonist and the reader/spectator are distressingly aware of the monster but are unable to do anything about it. The cinema, particularly, caters to a perverse scopophilic desire to look at irrational or pre-rational monstrous formations; the monster may be exposed, inspected, and dissected (metaphorically or literally) in the cinematic narrative and mise-en-scene. The gothic therefore delays the revelatory moment, the witnessing of the hitherto elusive monster, the moment of clarity and power, and once it arrives, exults in the absolute spectatorship of the abject.

As Büssing argues, "the child's uniform, almost two-dimensional representation undersores its remoteness from adult understanding" (Büssing 137). Thus the novel *We Need to Talk About Kevin* presents the child unequivocally as a psychopath whose future crimes could have been averted had the parents ever had a 'talk' about their son. The first-person maternal narrative with its rational tone and "perceived authenticity" depicts Kevin as challenging and oppositional even before birth (Jager 53). According to Gregory Phipps, "[T]he strongest unifying idea in her narrative is her belief that her son was born a psychopath. The episodes she relates all contribute to building this case. She assembles his childhood retroactively, presenting the memories (even the one of his painful birth) as a sequence of warning signs" (Phipps 109).

In film syntax, deviant child figures are spotlighted and tracked as a sort of cautionary message to viewers to be wary of this child, to not mistake appearance for innocence. The gaze of the camera and the relative placement of characters within the frame forbid any unmediated access to the child. For instance, in *The Bad Seed*, shots of Christine's appehensive gaze accompany every shot of Rhoda. This judgmental point-of-view impresses upon the spectator from the earliest the sense that something is awry with Rhoda and we are compelled to pay attention, observe facial, attitudinal and tonal changes in the child, and judge the propriety of her affective behaviour. Christine looks directly at the camera in a shot after she realises the truth about her daughter. Rhoda is momentarily in the foreground as Christine watches from the background of the frame. Once Rhoda goes off-frame, Christine's worried direct look intersects with that of the spectator's at the point where Rhoda stood, thus establishing complicitouness between herself and the spectator. Christine's framing by the doorframe, the lighting and the shadows, although in long shot, suggest helplessness, a plea for help to the spectator who must also think of a solution to her problem.

In this and other texts, the narrative is structured along disambiguating plot events that seemingly leave no trace of doubt regarding the innate corruption and incorrigibility of the child concerned. The diegesis is usually about duly reading the symptoms and identifying the pathological offender in time to prevent future catastrophe. The strong intertextual influence inherent in the mode also helps associate the given child specimen to the deviant child figures of previous cult texts, thus allowing easy categorisation. The gothic makes extensive use of dramatic irony, with the audience/reader

always knowing the 'nature' of the child while the characters do not, partly due to the (stock) framing of the child figure and partly due to the strong inter-textual currents in representation. A sure clue to spot the 'dangerous element' is the precocious but cute child. The reader/spectator is limited to a passive position in having to watch (pleasurably) as the rest of the characters slowly realise the truth regarding the 'innocent' child. This suspicion of appearance, of the cute and the charming, encourages a spirit of vigilantism, made more potent due to one's mute voyeuristic spectatorship to the events in the narrative.

5.2.1 The Expert and the Monster

The child in the gothic is described in a purposively skewed adult perspective, framed in isolation, separated from peers or family, and on screen, often filling the frame as the camera incessantly watches him/her. The child's status as a voiceless, dependent minority is the presumption under which the child who flouts the norm appears threatening to the system. Children are observed and judged, but we rarely hear them speak. Cathy in *East of Eden*, whose early childhood is elaborately described, is given lines to speak only at the age of fourteen (after her first 'indirect' murder). Father Time in *Jude the Obscure*, similarly, is the quintessential silent child of the gothic, whose eloquence precedes the double homicides and suicide he commits. Michael Myers, even in the brief episode of his first murder at age six, utters absolutely nothing. In Blatty's *The Exorcist* , the absent voice of the child, her missing point-of-view, and in Douglas's words, her "blocked-off consciousness" constitutes the very horror of the narrative (A. Douglas 298). Cathy, Rhoda, Ben, Regan, Harry (*The Good Son*), Anthony (*It's a Good Life*), or the *Midwich Children* lack an unmediated voice or space; they are neither in control of their own image nor aware of the image that is created of them.

The monster's function is to be visible, to be seen, both as a warning and as a lesson. This monstrative function of the monster underlies the monstrous representation of the child figure. The monster does not simply show itself or get exposed, but is actively constructed, put together part by part; it is made so as to be seen as monstrous. For instance, Steinbeck's narrator remarks at one point that Cathy Ames was always looked at because of some disturbing quality which she seemed to exude: "Even as a child she had some quality that made people look at her, then look away, then look back

at her, troubled at something foreign." (Steinbeck). Soon after, she is described as being looked at as a young girl of sixteen because of her beauty: "And she was so fresh and pretty that people walking turned and looked after her when she had passed" (Steinbeck). Yet, Cathy is described as a contradiction, a grown woman with the body of a child, of a boy. Her feet are compared to hoofs. Cathy, despite her secondary importance in the novel (as mentioned in 3.3.2), is devoted pages of painfully detailed physical description to construct her as a monster, unequivocally evil, and inhuman, in an otherwise realistic narrative.

The language used to construct the monster depends upon an extra-diegetic system of signification in order to work. When Harriet speaks of her five-month-old foetus as "the being *crouching* in her womb" or the "*savage* thing inside her" in *The Fifth Child*, the feral language evokes the discourse of degenerative primitivism (see 4.2.2) that sets the tone of the plot (emphasis added, Lessing, *The Fifth Child*).[9] Similarly, pathological vocabulary borrowed from contemporary medical science is liberally employed even by non-medical characters to aid the process of diagnosis. In her discussion of the genre–which she dubs "family horror"–Ann Douglas argues that the narratives are strongly Freudian in theme as well as structure: "Like Freud's case studies, they narrate a crisis, a moment of traumatic disturbance in the external and internal life of a single character or cluster of characters, member[s] of a nuclear or self-involved, self-constituted family" (A. Douglas 304). Pop psychology and psychoanalytic introspection indeed figure prominently in the texts with guardians intently watching their wards for signs of genius or pathology.

In the thoroughly medicalised families of these narratives, parents keenly inspect their children for the outward signs of mental health. In *Defending Jacob* (2012), the mother gives the psychiatrist a detailed account of her homicidal teen son's behaviour since he was a baby; his deviant acts include throwing, screaming, stealing, injuring peers since the age of two, making politically incorrect remarks including racist jokes and fat shaming, and reading torture porn. The psychiatrist puts them down to "a pattern of rule-breaking" and "inability to stay within the bounds of accepted behaviour", both psychopathic criteria (Landay). Chris in *The Exorcist* (Blatty) fears that her daughter

[9]Lessing stated in interviews that *The Fifth Child* was inspired by a real-life complaint by a mother who: "complained, in quasi-religious terms, of a fourth child who resembled the devil, an extra terrestrial, dangerous." (Lessing and de Montremy 197).

may be repressing her emotions about her parents' divorce and may erupt some day "in some harmful form" (Blatty). The mother, requesting a psychiatric referral for Regan, duly lists the symptoms: "Insomnia. Quarrelsome. Fits of temper. Kicked things. Threw things. Screamed. Wouldn't eat. In addition, her energy seemed abnormal. She was constantly moving, touching, turning; tapping; running and jumping about. Doing poorly with schoolwork. Fantasy playmate. Eccentric attention-getting tactics" (Blatty).[10]

In Wyndham's *The Midwich Cuckoos* (1957), an epidemic (of involuntary surrogate pregnancy) and a public catastrophe becomes a field day for the experts to showcase their knowledge and skills in an epic battle against alien invasion. The people controlling the channel of information and wielding power over the pregnant women, are the medical professionals, the vicar, and the educated upper class intellectuals. They decide in favour of "benign censorship", to withhold crucial information about the nature of the women's alien foetuses for fear that some women might go mad on knowing.[11] After the births, the doctor, in an echo of the child study movement and the school medical inspections of the early twentieth century, studies the bodies of the 61 alien babies—"31 males and 30 females" (Wyndham), identical save with respect to sex difference. The gold irises, blond hair, and good health are noted as clinical facts, followed by the comparative judgement that the head-body proportion and the lesser "degree of 'chubbiness'" are normally found in "a somewhat older child" (Wyndham). The text exhibits the spirit of scientific research, incorporating medical reports, esoteric discussions and decision-making by self-declared 'authorities', and informal accounts of personal interviews of patients.

In the film *The Brood* (1979), the corpse of the deformed child is laid out bare on the hospital bed; the slow long shot lingers on this scene as the doctor makes his 'observations'–the body has no navel, retina, genitals, or teeth, its tongue is too thick

[10]Noticeably, the symptoms of this new abnormal behaviour so uncharacteristic of Regan belong to the domain of indiscipline, of adolescent rebellion and aggression. In Regan's case, the medical diagnoses all turn out to be terribly inadequate; the transformation is nothing but a case of demonic possession that requires ritual sacrifice to restore the girl back to her childhood.

[11]The intellectual Zellaby makes a tortuous argument: "It is difficult to appreciate how a woman sees these matters: all that I can say is that if I were to be called upon, even in the most propitious circumstances, to bring forth life, the prospect would awe me considerably: had I any reason to suspect that it might be some unexpected form of life, I should probably go quite mad. Most women wouldn't, of course; they are mentally tougher, but some might, so a convincing dismissal of the possibility will be best" (Wyndham).

for speech, it has a cleft lip and hump like sac between its shoulder blades, full at birth and which, once empty, the creature dies.

However, as Russell D Covey has pointed out, the promise of medical cure lost its sheen in the later decades of the twentieth century (Covey 1416). In these texts, medical diagnosis, whenever referred to, serves merely to describe and validate difference, and implicitly or explicitly pronounce judgement; it does everything, except rehabilitate or cure the offender. As in *The Exorcist*, the gothic trope of inadequate medical expertise is the premise of *The Brood*. Science in general and newfangled mind sciences, in particular, are found to be over-reaching, in seeking to understand and cure the irrational, and their solutions are revealed to be fatally misdirected, causing the turn to the monstrous. The psychoanalytic view is often employed for ironic effect, to highlight the insufficiency of mind science to understand social evils let alone solve them. The fundamental argument of the gothic narrative is that the irrational can neither be understood nor controlled; if at all it could be suppressed, it is not for long.

5.2.2 The Returned Gaze

In Blatty's *The Exorcist*, the demon makes Regan exhibit herself as a sexual monstrosity, the embodiment of the loss of innocence and the loss of childhood, under the gaze of her mother and the psychiatric experts. Regan, or the demon, in fact, wants them to see and be horrified, and in this control over what is exhibited–or, monstrated–, there is a 'demonic' pleasure enjoyed by the 'monster'. The mother, unable to bear this travesty of her daughter, flees at the sight of the publicly masturbating Regan. In a later scene, Regan is described as

> the creature that was lying on its back in the bed, head propped against a pillow while eyes bulging wide in their hollow sockets shone with mad cunning and burning intelligence, with interest and with spite as they fixed upon his [Father Karras], as they watched him intently, seething in a face shaped into a skeletal, hideous mask of mind-bending malevolence. Karras shifted his gaze to the tangled, thickly matted hair; to the wasted arms and legs; the distended stomach jutting up so grotesquely; then back to the eyes: they were watching him ... pinning him ... (Blatty).

The creature that watches Karras as he sweeps his gaze over the emaciated body of

the child confined to her bed, is no longer a passive victim of adult gazes, but is an active spectator. In a subversion of generic stereotypes, the spectacle gazes back "with interest" at the spectator.

Similarly, Wyndham's narrator exclaims: "The way that boy looked at us! [...] The sensation was indescribable, but it was frightening for the moment it lasted" (Wyndham). Lennard argues that *Village of the Damned* (1960) popularised the cult of the staring child, wherein the stare of the child is used "to convey a mysterious and disarming refusal of adult power, something beyond the implausibility (or banality) of physical opposition" (Lennard, *Bad Seeds and Holy Terrors* 51). That the stare has the power to manipulate other's thoughts and behaviour and is thereby invested with the power to kill or 'let die' reveals "the paranoic, cultural intolerability of an active child subject, the lurking 'demon force' of the unmapped gaze" (66)[12]

The returned gaze is the very crux of the spectacle of the monstrous child, that the adult protagonist and the reader/spectator are invited to judge and become unsettled. The multiple adult gazes, for instance, in the initial psychiatric interview scene in *The Ring*, as Jessica Balanzategui brilliantly observes, circumscribes Samara within a layered mise-en-abyme of frames–the viewer's own gaze, Rachel's gaze as she watches the TV, the psychiatrist's gaze, the TV monitor on the doctor's desk, beyond which sits Samara fitted with electronic devices (Balanzategui, "'Round and round'" 277). Balanzategui points out that when at the end Rachel remembers the psychiatric session of Samara in a flashback, the earlier psychiatric scene is stripped of the framing of adult gazes, and the girl's helpless "It won't stop" now, in close up and with her direct gaze at the film camera (and the film's spectator), sounds like a threat (278). The power relations embedded in the act of looking and being looked at are problematised in such returned gazes. The inferior's stare challenges authority and implies rebellion. As Scahill observes of cinema, "surveillance relations" are central to the child-horror genre. Adults are "laid bare to invasive observation" by "eerily silent children" (Scahill 59). "[T]he power of looking, knowing, and pathologizing," argues Scahill, is stripped off "the dominion of adulthood" (59-60). The adults in the texts are limited in their powers of surveillance, and if at all they have any, the disciplinary power of surveillance is

[12]The child's unsettling stare is a gothic trope that could be traced back to Hardy's *Jude the Obsure* and perhaps farther back. Of Litle Jude, the narrator writes: "Him they found to be in the habit of sitting silent, his quaint and weird face set, and his eyes resting on things he did not see in the substantial world" (Hardy 343).

absent. Chris's earlier paternalistic gaze at her daughter Regan as she sleeps shifts to one of fear and mistrust later in the film. The returned gaze of the object in these narratives, which challenges a paternal/patriarchal order, is ultimately, however, the sign of the dehumanised other, a monster. Paula Amad's observation of the colonial subject's direct gaze in documentaries is insightful here; the returned gaze, while unsettling, is still controlled by the ordering discourse of the cinematic apparatus (Amad 55). The child's stare is mediated by the camera's or narator's normative, mediating, and objectifiying gaze through which we judge its propriety. According to the inner logic of the narrative, a child must not look that way, or look at all; like the cherubic Gage or the pre-possession Regan, they may only be looked at.

5.3 Expulsion: Sacrifice, Punishment, Homo Sacer

> *"The pity we feel for others is proportionate, not to the amount of the evil, but to the feelings we attribute to the sufferers."* (Rousseau, *Emile* 186)

Giorgio Agamben uses the metaphor of an archaic Roman juridical figure, the homo sacer, to argue that Western politics has been founded on the separation of animalistic bare life and the political bios in the individual. The homo sacer is guilty of a crime outside human or divine law – the crime of a kind which is not the transgression of a law, which can then be followed by the appropriate sanction, but of the nature of an exception, and which therefore warrants the lifting of all political rights and privileges heretofore enjoyed and condemn the criminal as an outlaw. Reduced to bare life, the sacred man, situated outside law, could neither be punished by law nor sacrificed to god. Anyone could kill the sacred man and no punishment would accrue on the former. The killing takes place within the state of exception, in which the law is temporarily suspended for the exception (Agamben).

This ancient Roman juridical practice is used by Agamben as a metaphor for how modern biopolitics, turned into thanatopolitics, works. The life of the sacred man is rendered sacred precisely when it is subject to the sovereign exception. Mere life, or zoe, is the prerequisite which guarantees entry into the bios–political life, the privileges of citizenship, and the privilege of adults–but this entry is at the cost of excluding bare life as an exception. Being passive citizens, devoid of political agency, children, along with the mentally ill, the prisoner, and the refugee, constitute bare life in its purest form,

which must be protected, preserved, and sacralised in its exclusion. The human and animal aspects of the child constitute a hybrid form, whose latter aspects must be wholly exorcised to enter the wholly human, the political, bios. The insufficiently socialised wild child with animalistic traits is a throwback to the pre-civilisational, the biological, the beastly, and, to adopt Agamben's usage, the realm of bare life. In the selected texts, the guardian holds the sovereign power to kill the homo sacer, the criminal 'infant,' whose offence is beyond the scope of human and divine law.

The life of the child is never as sacralised as at the moment of its sacrifice. Premature deaths of children in literature have conventionally been used to elevate the sacral value of the child. In the child gothic, the children murdered by the tyrannical 'non-child' symbolise the violation of a cultural taboo which simultaneously sacralises the lost children while demonising the 'non-child'. The false child has to be killed in turn to reinstate the sacred value of the Child. The law may be temporarily suspended in the state of exception to accommodate for exemplary punishment (Agamben). The sovereign violence exercised during this state is capable of lifting taboos, albeit temporarily, mimicking the offence or even resorting to a cruelty that may outweigh the original offence. As Réne Girard states in *Violence and the Sacred* (1972), "Evil and the violent measures taken to combat evil are essentially the same" (Girard 37). The ritual of the death imposed on the offender must necessarily mimic the violence which it seeks to subdue (as seen in 4.3.1). The text applies the law of talion in allowing adults to commit the same offence towards the child offender, namely, to (attempt to) take the life of the one who has wrongfully taken the life of another.

5.3.1 Death as Sacrifice

In the early twentieth-century eugenic film, *Are You Fit to Marry?*, deformity destines, with a paradoxical social constructivist logic, a life of crime and future deformed offspring. In a hospital room, an encephalic newborn is exposed, without a blanket, and left to die untreated for "the cause of humanity". Dr Horace L Dickey, the doctor (played by Dr. Harry J. Haiselden who in real life was notorious for practising the same), declares: "There are times when saving a life is a greater crime than taking one" (*Are You Fit to Marry?* 00:12:44). At the end of the film, the baby dies and an image of Jesus is superimposed on the frame, cradling the baby, now swaddled with a blanket; the doctor

justifies himself and consoles the grieving parents thus: "It is the will of God that this baby be born a defective, and without the meddling of surgery, it is the will of God that this child die. Shall I set myself up as wiser than the Almighty? God does not want this child to live" (*Are You Fit to Marry?* 00:12:45). This argument, as presumptuous and tortured as it appears, is sometimes employed in defense of medical euthanasia through recourse to a divine order that demands the sacrifice of the child.

Similarly, in *The Good Son*, the loose remake of *The Bad Seed* (1956), the boy's presumption that his mother would play up to the stereotype of the ever-protective mother who would rather die than kill her monstrous offspring, is subverted; the remorseless son is sacrificed to save the life of the innocent nephew.

Girard's mimetic theory of sacrifice offers fresh meaning to the nature of the violence exercised on the Other. Sacrifice, according to Girard, is society's way of channelling animosity and envy among its members by directing it towards an identifiable, vulnerable, 'enemy'–the scapegoat. This enemy

> is a substitute for all the members of the community, offered up by the members themselves. The sacrifice serves to protect the entire community from *its own* violence; it prompts the entire community to choose victims outside itself. The elements of dissension scattered throughout the community are drawn to the person of the sacrificial victim eliminated, at least temporarily by its sacrifice (emphasis in the original, 8).

Through sacrifice, the community regains harmony, although it gives way again and again to cyclical waves of spiralling violence that may then be extinguished with the death of a sacrificial victim.

The victim is someone either outside or on the fringes of socety, persons not enough integrated into society on account of their status, servility, or age (12). The foreign, the mad, the criminal, the addict, the idle, the sexually deviant, and, simply, the different, are rendered as fringe beings, whose political, social and legal rights may be diluted or denied, their full human status may be withdrawn, and as threats to society and state, their right to live revoked without ceremony.[13] They lack a "champion" who may seek

[13]Immanuel Kant stated that the child born out of wedlock can be put to death and it would not be murder. "It [...]has, as it were, stolen into the commonwealth [...], so that the commonwealth can ignore its existence (since it was not right that it should have come to exist this way), and can therefore also ignore its annihilation" (qtd. in Derrida, *Death Penalty, Vol I* 125)

vengeance for their murder, and therefore they may be "exposed to violence without fear of reprisal" (13). The ruthless killing of monsters, be it zombies, aliens, or simply villains, in narratives exemplify this sacrificial licence. For this to happen, however, the monster-victim must always be shown in black and white, contourless, without (potential or real) allies or supporters. A similar political reading of *Frankenstein* by Paul O'Flinn argues that, unlike in the novel, the creature in the 1931 film is trapped and killed by the villagers in response to the drowning of a child. In the specific political climate of the Depression, the Ku Klux Klan and the suppression of revolution, "the immediate response of the community in organizing itself to eliminate the savage culprit comes across as a kind of ritual cleansing of that community, the prompt removal of an inhuman threat to civilized life which is comfortably justifiable within routine populist politics" (O'Flinn 111-112).

The child's death, even in secular narratives, have a religious dimension even if only due to its implicit sacrificial significance. The protagonist and the narrative is caught in a dilemma; the killing is good because it implies the execution of the violator of peace and moral decorum and the restoration of harmony; the killing is also, however, simply that–a killing, punishable under ordinary, non-exceptional circumstances. "The sacrificial act," writes Girard, "assumes two opposing aspects, appearing at times as a sacred obligation to be neglected at grave peril, at other times as a sort of criminal activity entailing perils of equal gravity" (Girard 1). In such texts as Ira Levin's *The Boys from Brazil* and *Rosemary's Baby*, this dilemma faced by the guardian is more pronounced; the adult fears that killing the child would be unethical, a fascist act, a regression to the horrifying past. Letting the (possibly) murderous child live, on the other hand, would be race suicide, a disavowal of one's moral obligation to others, which would, in turn, result in the repetition of a regressive past. Caught between a taboo and a duty, the usual choice of the protagonist is the latter, although increasingly foiled by the genre convention of allowing the threatening other to outwit the child-savers and continue to menace (sometimes from the plot of a sequel).

The adult is a godlike figure, who can make decisons over the life and death of the ungodly child-being, with the power to expel the monster, for insubordination or transgression, from the sacred domain of childhood, abject him/her and repel the contaminated. However, the death of the sacrificial victim has to be arranged such that

"nobody, except perhaps the culprit himself, is directly responsible for his death" (27) because contact with the anathema, the abject entails contamination. This partly explains the peculiar bloodlessness of the child's death across the genre. The sacrifice of the child-monster for the sake of many is a bloodless sacrifice. Narratives adopt various strategies to accomplish the killing, taking care not to shed (or show) the child's blood: electrocution (and drowning in *The Bad Seed*), lethal poison (*Pet Sematary*), drugs (sleeping pills in *The Bad Seed*), and, rarely and unelaborated, explosion (*The Midwich Cuckoos* and adaptations, *Crooked House*). Even the two-year-old Gage in *Pet Sematary* (1989) who dies in a (stylistically depicted) truck accident returns from the dead looking merely like a stitched-up doll unlike another accident victim, the gory, broken-skulled twenty-year-old black youth who is readily shown on screen. In *The Omen*, Thorn is unable to stab Damien because, in a sense, the genre itself forbids it. The child's blood cannot flow. The fall, which causes or precipitates the deaths of many an evil child, such as in *The Good Son*, *The Ring*, *The Bad Seed*, *The Pit*, and *Crooked House*, involves no blood shedding. It further symbolises a fall from grace, from the sacred position of the child into the abyss unseen, disappearing without a trace. Like the blood of the child, the dead child's body is equally anathema to horror.

Interestingly, this bloodlessness and the aversion to the corpse of the child appear to somehow reduce the monstrosity of the act of sacrifice and elevate the monstrosity of the child victim. Derrida in one of his seminars on the philosophy of the death penalty, asks: "What happens when one puts to death without shedding blood? Is blood in fact a metaphor, is blood always shed, even when one moves to the electric chair or lethal injection, or does one escape this logic from the moment that one loses the visibility of literal blood, the visible literality of blood?" (Derrida, *Death Penalty, Vol II* 261). He argues that punishment of the criminal, which is by nature a public act, has only "appeared to disappear"; the blood that has disappeared from the scene of punishment is the first of its components to virtualise itself (220). Modern death techniques like the electic chair, lethal injection, and the gas chamber–all part of the "industrial modernity of the Shoah which exterminates without blood"–attempt to eliminate the mess, the guilt and the cruelty of the punishments of the past (221). The moral universe of the gothic behooves the death caused by the protagonist or the good characters to be quick, bloodless, and immediate. "Rhoda must not suffer," thinks her mother, "and she must

not be afraid; she must not even be aware of what awaited her" (March 246). Imposed death is fine as long as the modality of execution involves invisible violence and the offender is rendered insensible, anaesthetised. The principle itself of imposing death on another is not challenged (Derrida, *Death Penalty, Vol I* 50).

5.3.2 Death as Punishment

Law, in ancient times, meant the word of the father; breaking the law meant rebellion against the authority of the pater, who had power over the life and death of his offspring. The father had "the right to "dispose" of the life of his children and his slaves; just as he had given them life, so he could take it away" (Foucault, "Right of Death" 258). In monarchy, the power to kill or to let live was vested with the sovereign alone (Agamben). In the era of social law, in which the crime is a wound on the body politic, the social organism, punishment is the state's prerogative meted out in lieu of the common-law abiding public. Proportionate, retributive punishment both communicates censure as well as reinstates the moral standing of the community (Walen). Rousseau declared that "one has the right to condemn a citizen to death because he has become a public enemy; he has behaved as if he were an enemy of the social body or of the nation" (qtd. in Derrida, *Death Penalty, Vol II* 20).

By the nineteenth century, social defence and hygiene were the goals of the criminal justice system rather than "individual reform or deterrence"; the 'dangerousness' of the criminal was of paramount significance in sentencing (Pick 138). The positivist school of criminal anthropology attempted to "legitimate and improve the state's capacity to anticipate delinquency by revealing the true criminal in advance of any particular action and thus to extend the possibility of preventive detention" (128). As the *Midwich Children* declare, "The law punishes the criminal after he has been successful: it is no use to us, we intend to stay alive" (Wyndham).

The sovereign violence used against the child criminal espouses the deterministic rhetoric of preventive punishment. The guardians resort to the archaic violence against the rebel who must be repressed or killed in order to resolve the challenge to parental sovereign authority. The incorrigibility of the violator is the premise under which this narrative denouement is justified. In "The Small Assassin" the newborn (named Lucifer) indirectly kills his parents through various diversion tactics; he is responsible for

somehow strategically placing his doll so that his mother trips on it and falls down the stairs to her death; he then suffocates his father to death by leaving the gas valve on. Finally convinced of the true nature of the baby, the doctor (representing sovereign authority, the life-giver) who had brought him into the world decides to kill the child. The father as life-giver and doctor adopts a similar strategy nearly four decades later in *Pet Sematary* to kill his undead two-year-old toddler Gage.

The condemnation of death upon a heinous criminal is generally thought of as ethically right, even by a progressive reformer like Mill or a leftist thinker like Žižek. According to John Stuart Mill, the death penalty–the "plot[ting] out from the fellowship of mankind and from the catalogue of the living"–is warranted in cases where the criminal proves himself unworthy of life (qtd. in Barry 265-266). Žižek argues that it is arrogant of us to claim that we do not have the right to take the life of the "culprit":

> What is really arrogant and sinful is to assume the prerogative of mercy. Who among us, ordinary mortals, especially if we are not the culprit's immediate victims, has the right to erase another's crime, to treat it with leniency [....] Our duty is to act according to the logic of justice and punish crime: not to do so entails the true blasphemy of elevating oneself to the level of God, of acting with his authority. (Žižek, *Violence*)

The moral guilt of the party carries weight in a third-person's sentence of death. What is remarkable about the child gothic is the application of the same rule when dealing with child-sized moral offenders.

In his seminars on the death penalty, Derida takes up a staunch abolitionist stance and examines the philosophical arguments on both sides of the issue. He calls the death penalty the "barbarity of another era" (Derrida, *Death Penalty, Vol II* 74), and tries to expose the philosophical weakness in arguments in favour of the concept. "For there to be punishment," writes Derrida, "this punishment must supervene upon the punishable subject, and it must be finite, or at least commensurate with life.... By eliminating the subject of the punishment, you eliminate the punishment and the right to punish. Capital punishment is thus a non-right (33)." The subject of the punishment neither gets time to repent nor the possibility of self reform, it is a deprivation of the future of the subject, a cancelling out of the subject from life itself. There is no punishment, but merely, in Girard's sense, sacrificial violence. To condemn somebody to death (not 'condemned to

die') implies a calculating decision as decision of the other: you will die and you will die in such a way and you will die on this day, at this hour" (137). This calculating decision of the child monster in taking a life is replicated, in an implicit application of the law of the talion, by the adult guardian who calculates the death of the child and, often, her own. Josephine's elaborate game of arranging the events in others' lives, like a child god, is ultimately reversed in her grand-aunt's secret plotting of her death. The child's act of murder is situated outside law while the guardian's or adult's retaliatory act or attempt is conceived as justified and even lawful in the generic universe of the narrative. Thus Josephine's grand-aunt makes the decision to take hers and the child's life in an apparently altruistic spirit; in *The Omen*, Damien's foster father prepares to do a ritual sacrifice in order to save humanity from the Anti-Christ; Wyndham's Zellaby commits murder-suicide to save the human species from slavery and ultimate extinction. The guardian's noble, selfless motive to do the 'unthinkable' (killing of a child) is contrasted with the child's selfish and wicked motive to gain power, acknowledgement, or control.

5.3.3 The Monstrous Exception

The idea of the gothic monstrous child stays clear of the notion of original sin or general corruption; it is not then a medieval Christian throwback, but the product of a specific cultural and scientific ethos. Monstrosity results from an apparent regressiveness and incorrigibility of behaviour and psyche. He/she flouts science, natural laws, and human reason. The monster is banished from society on account of its unsociability: it cannot be tamed or taught to conform. Humanity is expressed in the possibility of discipline; one who is outside the technology of power is immune to discipline and is excluded from the bios as well as the category of the human. Foucault asks rhetorically: "As a being of a monstrous nature and the enemy of the whole society, should not society get rid of him without calling upon the might of the law? The monstrous criminal, the born criminal, has never actually subscribed to the social pact: Is he then a matter for the law? Should the laws be applied to him?" (Foucault, *Abnormal* 96).

Lennard writes that the ending of the film *The Ring* (2002) suggests that the career woman "is afflicted by some inherent and irreparable maternal fault" (Lennard, *Bad Seeds and Holy Terrors* 87) and that there is no redemption for her. But, to the contrary, the narrative in fact redeems motherhood from responsibility, faced with a child who is

inherently and irreparably at fault, for whom there is no returning to 'normal' because there never was. The distinction between childlike and childish in the vulnerabilities of both subject (victimiser-turned-victim) and object (victim-turned-victimiser) is key to understanding the link between childhood and horror. While the childlike victim is meant to inspire audience sympathy and identification, his/her childlikeness is, also, implicitly a promise of growth, of overcoming. The childish monster, on the other hand, is a regressive being; one who will not and, ironically, cannot learn or grow but can only remain static in its unquenchable (self)destructive impulse, doomed to wreck and destroy unless the knowing subject devises its nemesis. The presumption in these narratives is the impossibility of redemption for the child: there is no hope for the monster, no return to a pristine earlier state, either because such a state never existed or because there is no way to remove the trace and tendency of corruption (except for possession films which typically are hopeful of the restoration of purity). The (non)child is born wicked or monstrous, always already corrupt, abject; purity is absent even at the origin. Damien in *The Omen*, Anthony in "It's a Good Life" or Ben in *The Fifth Child* are cases in point. In texts such as *The Good Son* or *Crooked House*, once the turn to the dark side is made, a return is unfathomable; there is neither confession nor atonement; the destruction of the rotten fruit is the only solution so that the good may be saved. "As long as purity and impurity remain distinct," writes Girard, "even the worst pollution can be washed away; but once they are allowed to mingle, purification is no longer possible" (Girard 38).

Using an evolutionist perspective, Paul Thompson argues that evolutionary mechanisms will attempt to eliminate the "organism that contributes to population collapse rather than population survival" (P. Thompson 247). As self defence or public hygiene, the aberrant individual may be done away with. Unless the individual is re-imagined as the Other, this would violate the apparently natural law of intra-species altruism. Once classed as the evil other, the extermination is a necessary part of the purification of the social-domestic space.[14] In supernatural or unnatural origin stories, the child is posited as not being human. In the case of innately criminal aberrants, the child appears a child,

[14]In *East of Eden*, the narrator appears nostalgic about society's witch-burning past that would have averted future social disturbances: "There was a time when a girl like Cathy .... would have been exorcised to cast out the evil spirit, and if after many trials that did not work, she would have been burned as a witch for the good of the community. " (Steinbeck). In Wyndham's novel too, a nostalgia for times past during which deformed and monstrous children were exposed or annihilated soon after birth is seen.

but is actually an adult.

The changeling motif is generally used to provide the narratival justification for the violence meted out to the child figure. The changeling, a figure from medieval folklore, is a being, often malicious or demonic, that substitutes for the real, the true child; to all appearances, the being looks like a child, but is actually not so, neither physically nor psychically. "Changeling narratives", writes Renner, "provide the strongest reinforcement of The Child by demonstrating that those children who violate our expectations that children are innocent, unknowing, helpless, and vulnerable don't really belong in the category of The Child to begin with" (Renner 12). They exploit the popular ideology of childhood, "fake helplessness," manipulate parents and adults for nefarious ends, and most importantly, they are driven by no cause or motive; "[t]he changeling is simply what it is" (153-155). This argument echoes Lombroso, the nineteenth-century criminal anthropologist:

> Born criminals, *programmed to do harm*, are atavistic reproductions of not only savage men but also the most ferocious carnivores and rodents. This discovery should not make us more compassionate toward born criminals (as some claim), but rather should shield us from pity, for these beings are members of not our species but *the species of bloodthirsty beasts* (emphasis added, Lombroso 348).

The ideological justification for the final solution of extermination appears to rest on the child's passive, apolitical status. Political exclusion entails exclusion from human rights such that the individual forfeits his/her natural life (zoe) on being expelled from the polis, the bios (Agamben). The dangerous individual, in particular, represents bare life the most, the return to nature, instinct, and archaic violence, and becomes *lebensunwertes leben*, life that "ceases to be politically relevant" and may by killed without punishment (Agamben).

Agamben discusses the case of euthanasia[15] to show how in the state of exception, the killing of another does not constitute a crime, but is instead the necessary execution of the biopolitical decision to defend and preserve the social body which is little different from the sovereign power over life. Even after World War II, the movement

[15]The Greek term euthanasia, literally 'easy death', originally denoted the merciful killing of someone who is hopelessly ill or injured; later it came to mean the medical-cum-legal practice of speeding up death or the withdrawal or denial of life-sustaining treatment (Agamben).

for legislation for voluntary euthanasia was active in the UK and the USA, and public opinion was strongly in favour. However, as the historian Ian Dowbiggin points out, the argument advocating the right to die often merged with the right to kill (Dowbiggin 73); the cause of euthanasia was championed under "the notion that not only did people deserve the right to die; for some persons in some circumstances it was indeed 'right to die"' (83).

In the American eugenic propaganda film, *Are You Fit to Marry?* (1927), various "defective" children—including a microcephalic baby, children with mental retardation, and a crippled boy—are exhibited to prove the futility of the care and expensive treatment lavished on these incurables, while "many normal children have to live like rats in crowded filthy quarters" (*Are You Fit to Marry?* 00:12:13). The argument made by the film is that euthanasia for incurable defectives[16] is not only scientific but humane; "The cause of true medical science," declares the doctor-protagonist, "should be to *save* children from disease, deformity, unhappiness and crime" (emphasis in the original title card, *Are You Fit to Marry?* 00:12:24).

While the sovereign right to kill needed a spectacle of death in order to enforce its authority and power, in modern biopolitics, the killing of the offender cannot be a spectacle, its only ethical justification being protection of society. The death penalty in the western world, requires 'humane' ways to kill, away from the public gaze, with minimum individual responsibility, to ensure the quickest and least spectacular method of killing (as seen in 5.3.1). The decision to kill the child is taken as the extreme measure of social defense and/or paradoxically, child-saving. In Agatha Christie's *Crooked House* (1949), Aunt Edith carries out Josephine's murder in a gesture of 'sacrifice'; euthanasia here is intended in the benefit of the child, to save her from a life of social ostracism and misery:

> CHARLES: [...] she couldn't let her darling Josephine face a lifetime of institutions, being jeered at as a monster, laughed at as a freak, not to mention the public humiliation the house would have to endure (*Crooked House* 1:46:41-45)

[16]While the euthanisation of defective babies is not uncommon in actual medical practice, by the thirties the cause had garnered enough support to disseminate it as public discourse. For instance, a 1930s advertisement of the Royal Eye Hospital in the UK ran with the proposition that "infants with gross defects" could be taken to "the lethal chamber" to be euthanised, if the parents so wished (Dowbiggin 69).

The form of euthanasia, of involuntary mercy-killing, that is legitimised within these texts, is mediated across a nexus of otherness, sacrifice, motherly responsibility and love, and species survival. The sovereign, often medical violence, committed against the mind and body of the child in the cause of 'best interests' restores order and the middle-class ideals of happy childhood and family. In *The Bad Seed*, Christine calculates the options before her regarding her daughter; institutionalisation would mean publicity and the ruin of her husband's career and destroy his mother and unmarried sisters who had long disapproved of the marriage and would blame her for the child's "abnormality." She ponders, "Were they then to be forever on the run, to have no peace for themselves? Must they always be the victims of their child's avarice?" (March 169). Reform school would only corrupt Rhoda more. She comes to the conclusion that it was the parents' (primarily hers because of her inheritance) duty to protect the child "against the cruelty of the world" (175). Revealing Rhoda's crimes to the public appears to her as a form of betrayal: "What kind of monster would she be if she betrayed and destroyed her own child?" (176). Like her grandmother, Rhoda "too, would end up in a blare of publicity and sentiment: in the gaschamber, at the end of a rope, or lunging forward, as the current struck her, and hurtled through her blood" (244). Her final decision is to protect Rhoda from a "public" death (249).

Remarkably, the censors of the film adaptation of *The Bad Seed* were upset that Rhoda would fascinate impressionable young minds and therefore, tweaked the plot to a ridiculously prudish extent. However, Christine's effect on parents and the general audience with her attempt on the life of her daughter, was unremarked upon; the motive behind her actions, apparently, fit the 'best interests' rationale of euthanasia. Rhoda is 'protected' from a life of crime, capture and violent death by Christine who decides to drug her daughter to death.[17]

Ann Douglas remarks that there appears to be an "unwritten law that parents may be forced to kill their mutant 'hybrids' and 'changelings.' They can never openly admit they do not love or want them" (A. Douglas 312). The reason for the killing, however, has to be necessarily larger than personal motives; it is only in the interest of (a narrowly-defined) humanity, or, in Foucault's terms, "the elimination of the biological threat to and the improvement of the species or race" that killing may be acceptable

[17]The film, however, delivers on the foreshadowed promise: Rhoda is literally electrocuted by a stroke of lightning at the very place where she drowned Claude.

(Foucault, "Society Must be Defended" 75).

In *The Midwich Cuckoos*, the Children are construed as future oppressors, threatening the dissolution of human society and the arrival of a tyrannical new social order that will enslave and finally exterminate the human species. In order to preserve humanity, it is reasoned, the Children should not be allowed to reach adulthood or the humans will lose their only advantage–power–over them. Although exhibiting cold war anxieties, the text explicitly endorses a new form of racism, in which the 'normal' population, apparently threatened with 'race suicide', conspires and takes arms against the Other. In biopolitical decisions, "nothing less than the species itself, the species as a living entity, is 'at play' or 'at stake'" (Campbell and Sitze 11). The life of "a certain self-identified 'race' of human beings" is ensured only by "excluding another 'race' from life itself" (18). The logic of the new biopolitical racism, according to Foucault, uses the language of biology and evolution to justify itself: "The fact that the other dies does not mean simply that I live in the sense that his death guarantees my safety; the death of the other, the death of the bad race, of the inferior race (or the degenerate, or the abnormal) is something that will make life in general healthier: healthier and purer." (Foucault, "Society Must be Defended" 75). It is only in the name of this biological racism is it permissible to kill, only if the killing results "in the elimination of the biological threat to and the improvement of the species or race" (75).

The "death that was based on the right of the sovereign," writes Foucault, "is now manifested as simply the reverse of the right of the social body to ensure, maintain, or develop its life" ("Right of Death" 259). In this new kind of racism, those unfit to live lead lives of inauthenticity, corrupting the gene pool, pulling humanity in the opposite direction of progress, and after having identified as such, they ought to be eliminated for the sake of life.

As Foucault observes, "capital punishment could not be maintained except by invoking less the enormity of the crime itself than the monstrosity of the criminal, his incorrigibility, and the safeguard of society. One had the right to kill those who represented a kind of biological danger to others" (260-261). This conceptual reasoning in which there is an essential transformation of the parties involved into victim and predator, human and animal, civilized and savage, one and the other, in order to validate the taking of life is increasingly necessary in an era of avowed biopolitical aims.