Chapter 6

Conclusion

> *"There are several ways of treating anomalies. Negatively we can ignore, just not percieve them, or perceiving we can condemn. Positively we can deliberately confront the anomaly and try to create a new pattern of reality in which it has a place."* (M. Douglas)

The presence of the child has become a staple ingredient in the gothic mode. While earlier children had a limited repertoire of roles as the juvenile victim, orphan, or martyr, towards the mid-twentieth century, they have ubiquitously become capable of metamorphosing into the incurable delinquent, villain, and murderer. Along the course of the century, childhood has been a source of concern first, and towards the latter half, it has become a source of anxiety and moral panic. The very allusion to childhood and its associations (toys, dolls, portraits, children's paintings, giggles and chuckles) are now capable of triggering a sense of dread and anxiety.

How cultural discourses translate to the ways in which childhood is approached in popular fiction in the gothic mode has been the underlying point of focus of this thesis. This Foucauldian enterprise attempted to unveil the links between esoteric, historical and scientific knowledge and its popular counterpart. The topic of deviant representations of childhood has been bridged inductively to a larger system; the knowledge systems and power nexuses at work in producing and echoing representations of monstrosity have been my focus. This thesis has been an inquiry into the complex and culturally-specific construction and representations of the concepts of evil, crime, and the monstrous, exclusively with reference to the new 'child' monster of the twentieth century. I have set out my research enterprise in the Introduction and have elaborated specific aspects in the subsequent chapters. In Chapter 2 I have laid out the concep-

tual framework that I have used to study the category of the monstrous child. Chapters 3 and 4 deal with the child in relation to evil and crime and they lead to Chapter 4 where I have examined in detail representations of the monstrous child in novels, short stories and films to lay out its historical contexts, conceptual formations and cultural implications. Some of the key texts that I have analysed are John Wyndham's *The Midwich Cuckoos* (1957), William Blatty's *The Exorcist* (1956), William March's and Mervyn LeRoy's *The Bad Seed* (1954, 1956), Mary Lambert's *Pet Sematary* (1989), Doris Lessing's *The Fifth Child* (1988), "The Turn of the Screw" (1919), John Carpenter's *Halloween* (1978), Arthur Clarke's *Childhood's End* (1954), Agatha Christie's *Crooked House* (1949), and Ray Bradbury's "The Small Assassin" (1946).

6.1 Findings

The concept and history of childhood, particularly with regard to the twentieth century, has been examined in 'Chapter 2: Concept, History and Genre', where I have put together an historical and conceptual account of the nature of childhood as it may be dominantly understood. I have argued that there are three formulations of the child-adult combination that determine cultural representations. Of these, the third formulation, the child with agency but without reason, has been found to be the usual monstrous manifestation of the child. I have also defended the view that representations and their reality are mutually constitutive. The chapter further establishes the vantage point of the thesis, precisely, the exception to the paradigm of ideal childhood, the morally deviant child.

In 'Chapter 3: The Axis of Evil', I have focused on the central problem of sacred turned profane with respect to horror/thriller narratives. Texts that call upon the discourses of puritan morality, religious dogma or superstition, and scientific-cum-supernatural belief systems have been examined. The idea of evil espoused by the narratives is monistic and negative. Rather than the privation theory of evil, I have shown how the notion of grand and pure evil appears to be more common across the genre. The child who commits evil acts is represented as a two-dimensional figure, opaque and incomprehensible. This has been found to be necessary in order to attribute evil to the child. Ultimately, however, I argue that the juxtaposition of evil and child is anathema for the narrative, and therefore, the narrative simply unveils the mask of the

child to reveal the non-child underneath, exonerating the child and extricating childhood from the domain of evil.

In 'Chapter 4: The Axis of Crime', I have examined how the degeneration discourse of the nineteenth century perseveres in twentieth-century understanding of crime. Apparently outdated and infamous scientific theories like eugenics, Lamarckian evolution, and criminal atavism implicitly determine representations in popular culture. I have focused on how the criminal child in these texts has been perceived and judged by the narrative through a medical, pseudo-scientific lens, and has fit into contemporary epistemes regarding psychopathy and evolution. Counter to the narratival perspective, I have argued that a power struggle between child and adult is at the heart of the plot; adult envy of the child, suppression of child rebellion and the fear of political disorganisation lie behind the intolerance and violence meted out to the child. The self-justified conclusions of the texts have been discovered to flounder in the light of this reading.

The main chapter of this thesis, 'Chapter 5: The Monstrous' is built upon the conclusions of the previous two chapters on evil and crime, respectively. I have argued that the deviant child offends the law at multiple levels–the divine/moral, the socio-legal, and the natural/biological. The child monster, I argue, is a liminal being, transgressing haloed borders, an example for forbidden intermixing. The active construction of the monster as unequivocally monstrous through the text's point-of-view, choice of vocabulary and film syntax has been dealt with in some detail. The narrative style is argued to be cautionary, encouraging in the spectator/reader a spirit of vigilantism and diagnosis of deviance. I have then examined the specific nature of death or exclusion imposed on the child monster. Sacrifice, extra-judicial death penalty, and euthanasiac release were found to be the dominant modes of death. I have argued that the characteristic bloodlessness of the deaths serve to emphasise the child's monstrosity and the guardian killer's virtue. The child's expulsion from life is treated by narratives as a form of child-saving, of involuntary euthanasia in the best interests of the child and childhood.

The monstrous child, offending a Judeo-Christian moral order, evolutionary progress and human 'nature', is indubitably required to be annihilated. However, the biopolitical aims of Western society allow it to kill only in the name of life. Therefore, the child as Other is demonised and actively constructed as the monster who can then be killed without impunity. A xenophobic ideology appears to be at work in these narratives. The

figure of the child is exorcised of all associations with normative childhood and radically cast as usurper, spy and alien. Emphasising the dictum that nature trumps over nurture, the figure of the child is rendered incorrigible, often non-human, making the condemnation of death or expulsion palatable and even, altruistic.

The set of characteristics that constitute the representative formula of the monstrous child are found to be the following:

1. The centrality of the child figure in the narrative
2. The establishment of the child's innately 'monstrous' nature
3. The monstrosity arising from category violation, the intermixing of what must remain separate
4. The denial of hope of correction or ideal futurity
5. The necessity of exterminating the child or/and ending childhood
6. The child's expulsion as sacrifice to restore a divine/natural order, as punishment for crimes, or simply, as eugenic mercy-killing for public safety

The spectator/reader and the representation are tied together in a mutually constitutive manner. Genres are "systems of expectation and hypothesis" that spectators bring and that interact with films during viewing, involves knowledge of the "regimes of verisimilitude" (Neale 158). In order for the narrative to work, representations have to be regularised, made to conform to what is familiar. As Neale observes, the popularity of a genre involves "market availablity, consumer choice, consumer preference, and broader social and cultural values and beliefs" (173). The phenomenon of the child-as-monster, thus, cannot be normalised and perpetuated across narratives without the implicit and explicit desires of readers/audiences. I have followed Jalava et al. who have argued, "Each monster is a receptacle of culturally determined fears" (Jalava et al. 104-105).

The transgressing child as a vehicle of horror signals a sense of the regress of civilisation and future indeterminacy. The threat posed by the child is no longer circumscribed within the household, but is shown to have social, national, even evolutionary significance; the scope of the threat transcends the nuclear family and acquires power

to challenge the democratic order, the human race/species and futurity. The narrative exploits the cultural ambiguity towards the source of the threat–the child–in order to challenge traditional, comforting notions regarding childhood.

The unequivocal and unidimensional representation of the child as monster in cross-generic gothic narratives is contextually rooted no longer in the domain of Puritan religious dogma but that of popular science and medicine. The moral instinct is assumed to be innate and universal but not due to divine likeness, but, evolution. The benevolent, wise, 'nature' of romanticism, after Darwin, became mute, ruthless, and apathetic to human progress, an evolutionary see-saw, that could incline either way without purpose. Instead of the nostalgia of growing away from nature, there is a sense that there is no possible growth away from nature, becoming is always already being and instead of free, unbridled development, the individual is a fixed entity in nature, limited by genetic inheritance, hereditary dispositions, and pathological symptoms.

Notwithstanding the perseverance of the concept, I have shown that childhood innocence no longer implied an unproblematic purity arising from ignorance and inexperience; evolutionary theory had closed ranks between the primitive and the childish in a manner that coloured childhood innocence as a dangerous immaturity and amorality that had to be brought into line.

Significant for the theme of monstrosity and expulsion, historical and political references and allusions to the Cold War, Communism, Nazism, fascism, and the Holocaust, have been found to often form the backdrop of narratives. This reflects the contemporary socio-political anxieties that lie behind the premise of the monstrous child. In Arthur Clarke's sci-fi novel *Childhood's End* (1953), written at the height of the Cold War, trains crowded with children "[pull] slowly out of the threatened cities, leaving behind the parents that so many of them would never see again" (Clarke), an explicit analogy to the second world war; however, the difference between both images is stark, the children here are "no longer children" (Clarke), not even human, but the first members of a super race which will take over the world. Similarly, the same year, in "It's a Good Life" (1953), Peaksville is reduced to an autocratic socialist dystopia, without electricity, mass produced commodities, but only worker made, indigenous, recycled, and reused everyday objects; even birthday presents are handed down from person to person. Similarly, *The Exorcist* (1971) by Blatty comprised a minor plot involving an

ex-SS officer.

It has been argued that the discourse of euthanasia and eugenics is also implicit in most narratives. A rare instance in which both physical monstrosity and euthanasia are discussed in a post-modern text, is Doris Lessing's short story "The Eye of God in Paradise" (1980) set in post-war Germany. A British medical couple is shown around a German psychiatric facility where they find, to their shock, glaring five-year-olds in strait-jackets and children with all kinds of physical deformities, "He[the doctor] pulled back the coverings one after another, showing a dozen children aged between a year and six years–armless children, limbless children, children with enormous misshapen heads, children with tiny heads and monstrous bodies" (Lessing, "The Eye of God in Paradise").[1] The German doctor remarks, "Modern drugs are a terrible thing. Now these horrors are kept alive. Before, they died of pneumonia" ("The Eye of God in Paradise"). He continues: "[T]here are things we cannot say in public, but we may agree in private that there are many people in this hospital who would be no worse for a quick and painless death" ("The Eye of God in Paradise"). As the couple desperately try to mentally exonerate the handsome and apparently famous doctor, he makes the ultimate comment that, on "questions of social hygiene", "the gentlemen of the Nazi regime had sensible ideas" ("The Eye of God in Paradise").

I endorse Renner who argues, iterative narrative patterns are dangerous because they endorse a monolithic perspective, and once they become familiar, they "act like modern-day parables, presenting seemingly self-evident truths that can shape our perceptions and, in turn, our practices, our institutions, our public policies" (Renner 13). I derive the significance of my work from the huge impact that pop culture has on public opinion and thereby other domains where personal bias could have dire consequences in judgment and decision-making. Further, following Covey, I have argued that popular culture is largely the source of unfamiliar and esoteric topics with which the public encounter infrequently; media representation remains the primary informational source pertaining to institutions such as the criminal justice system and medicine, and discourses of madness, criminality, and childhood deviance (Covey 1378-1381). In effect, the premise which underpins my thesis as a whole is that what happens in these nar-

[1]The starkly powerful image in the short story of "a small boy, naked save for a straitjacket and tied to bars like an animal," who grinds his teeth and glares at the adults ("The Eye of God in Paradise"), recurs in the episode of the questionable institution for unmanageable and unwanted children, where Ben was left to die, in Lessing's *The Fifth Child*.

ratives produced and exported by influential culture industries is reiterated and made discursive across the globe; stories told and sold, to adapt Derrida's remark regarding the death penalty, have "singular repercussions throughout the world" (Derrida, *Death Penalty, Vol I* 56).

6.2 Limitations

The selection of primary sources in this thesis has been largely based on the work's popularity, availability and commercial success. Various other narrative forms such as plays, book series, animated film, comics, anime, advertisements, news stories, web series and digital narratives have been excluded from the scope of this study. The thesis has engaged in close reading of the texts while necessarily excluding various contextual and background possibilities of study including production history, publication history, conditions of industry, author/director biography, para/epitextual elements, like advertising, blurbs, studio policy, publishing house, promotions, reviews, etc. The thesis has focused on Anglo-American narratives, and has thus excluded the possibility of setting up comparative or multi-cultural frameworks of analysis.

6.3 Further Research Possibilities

The focus of my study has been strictly on childhood as represented in fictional narratives. Future research may look into the representation of mothers and maternal figures, particularly, with regard to the theme of sacrifice. Of equal interest is the relative absence or ineffectuality of father figures in most of these texts. Another area of study is the traditional possession narrative in which an adult occupies the body of a child, usually that of a girl. Related to this is the importance given to confession and atonement as correctives. The religious, psychological, and sexual significance of this premise appears to be a promising. Further research may also deal with a comparative study of adaptations of narratives across cultures and historical time. The impact of exported childhood constructs on non-Western cultures with respect to cultural artefacts may also be studied. Moreover, it would be illuminating for social science disciplines to study the impact and influence of the narrative representation of criminal childhoods on public policy, schooling, and scientifico-legal discourse.