

## ABSTRACT

The primary interest of the thesis lies in discovering the ways in which fictional narratives of the twentieth century construct childhoods that are monstrous, and how this discursive trend is historical, linked to shifting conceptions of childhood, criminality, humanity, and the future. The primary sources for research included British and American literary works and films: novels, novellas, short stories, feature films, and TV episodes. A magpie approach to theory has been adopted, making use of a critical framework that incorporates Michel Foucault, Giorgio Agamben, Václav Havel, Mary Douglas, and René Girard.

I have argued that the presence of the child has become a staple ingredient in the gothic mode in the twentieth century. These narratives exploit the cultural ambiguity towards the child in order to challenge traditional, comforting notions regarding childhood. 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 represented as having 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 plurality of negative representations of deviant childhoods has been mapped across texts and dissected along the three axes of evil, crime, and the monstrous corresponding to whether the transgression is against the three orders, the divine/religious, social and natural, respectively. The narratives, it is argued, build themselves within an ideological framework that advances a moralistic, degenerationist and retributive stance towards childhood 'perversity'. The child monster, I argue, is a liminal being, transgressing haloed borders, an example for forbidden intermixing which cannot be reversed.

The narrative style is argued to be cautionary, encouraging in the spectator/reader a spirit of vigilantism and diagnosis of deviance. A key narrative strategy is the othering of the child as anti-human or even, inhuman in order to create a narrative situation in which violence against the child is justified and ethical. The cautionary discourse within these narratives has been discovered to demand the purging of the monstrous (which may or may not succeed) from the sacred terrain of childhood. The significance of my work derives from the fact that pop culture has a tremendous impact on public

opinion and thereby other domains where personal bias could have dire consequences in judgment and decision-making.

Counter to the narrativial 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. I have further examined the specific nature of death or exclusion imposed on the child monster. Sacrifice, extra-judicial death penalty, and euthanasiaic 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.

In the introduction, I have provided an overview into the history of childhood and the gothic genre of the twentieth century with respect to the representation of childhood deviance. While earlier children had a limited repertoire of roles as the juvenile victim, orphan, or martyr, towards the mid-twentieth century, they have become capable of metamorphosing into the incurable delinquent, villain, and murderer. Becoming a source of anxiety and moral panic, childhood is now capable of triggering a sense of dread and anxiety.

The concept and history of childhood, particularly with regard to the twentieth century, has been examined in Chapter 2. 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. In the third chapter, I have focused on the central problem of sacred turned profane with respect to horror/thriller narratives. I have shown that rather than the privation theory of evil, the notion of grand and pure evil appears to be more common across the genre. I have studied the way outdated scientific theories like eugenics, Lamarckian evolution, and criminal atavism have implicitly determined representations of the criminal child.

In the central and penultimate chapter, 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 who transgresses haloed borders. I have

examined the specific nature of death or exclusion imposed on the child monster. Sacrifice, extra-judicial death penalty, and euthanasiaic release were found to be the dominant modes of death. I have argued that the characteristic bloodlessness of the deaths serves to emphasise the child's monstrosity and the guardian killer's virtue.

In the conclusion, I list out the set of characteristics I have found to constitute the narrative formula of the representations of the monstrous child:

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

I conclude that the monstrous child, offending a Judeo-Christian moral order, evolutionary progress and human 'nature', is required to be annihilated so as to restore social order. However, the biopolitical aims of Western society allows it to kill only in the name of life. Therefore, I have argued, the child as Other is demonised and actively constructed as the monster who can then be killed without impunity.

Keywords: *monster, childhood, crime, deviance, evil, gothic, eugenics, euthanasia, sacrifice, punishment*