Chapter 2

Concept, History, and Genre: Representations of Childhood

> *"Nature has made children helpless and in need of affection; did she make*
> *them to be obeyed and feared? Has she given them an imposing manner,*
> *a stern eye, a loud and threatening voice with which to make themselves*
> *feared?"* (Rousseau, *Emile* 52)

> *"How impossible not to wish the child dead if he is radically defective?"*
> (on the parental ambivalence in *Pet Sematary*, A. Douglas 341)

2.1 The Nature of Childhood

The term child is inevitably constituted in relation to the adult; the adult/child binary presupposes not necessarily privilege or hegemony, but inherent difference. The historically predominant developmental approach locates childhood as a state of becoming, and hence, of instability, but progressing towards adulthood as the final destination, the zone of being, of stability. A child, in the simplest sense, is thought of as "a person who in some fundamental way is not yet developed, but who is in the process of developing" (Schapiro 716). Nonetheless, the process of growth may be tinged with nostalgia for a happier, freer existence that one is leaving behind, or it could be otherwise, as the liberation from weakness, wretchedness, and lack of dignity. Sarah Hannan, in "Why Childhood is Bad for Children", weighing the merit of the positive and the negative views, argues that the former supports the prolongation of childhood as an ideal state, while the latter 'predicament' view of childhood advocates a quick release from the negative state of existence as a child (Hannan 1).

Both approaches, nevertheless, based as they are on developmentality, start off from childhood's inevitable dependence on wiser, far more capable adults for subsistence

and survival. Kant, an adherent to the pre-Romantic predicament view, discusses the state of immaturity, or as he terms it, "nonage", as "the inability to use one's own understanding without another's guidance" (Kant). The child's dependence, the effect of several characteristic 'bads' of childhood, is a nonideal condition that obstructs moral choice, dignity of life, and principled identity and perspective (Schapiro 735). Similarly, in the Romantic heritage that continues well into the twenty-first century, the positive, idealised conception of childhood, precisely due to its stress on rejuvenating purity and unbridled potential, recognises the extreme susceptibility of childhood to external influences. This naturally requires the vigilant protection of children by guardians.

Childhood dependence stems from its fundamental state of immaturity—physical, emotional and intellectual—or, to use Piaget's term, "logical competence" (Prout and A. James 11). The transition to adulthood coincides with the acquisition of social, political, and economic independence. When no longer dependent, one could leave childhood (Ariès 26). Rousseau believed that it was childhood dependence that was at the root of mischievous behaviour and it is an adult moral prerogative to ameliorate the weakness of character in the child arising due to its dependent status: "All wickedness comes from weakness. The child is only naughty because he is weak; make him strong and he will be good; if we could do everything we should never do wrong" (Rousseau, *Emile* 33). This condition of nonage or minority and its implied lack of agency results in several other derivative qualities that go to conceive of a 'nature of childhood'.

First, as a direct consequence of immaturity, the child's rational capability is impaired. Second, a child, owing to his/her incompleteness, potential rather than actuality, becoming rather than being, lacks a stable practical identity. The child lacks a coherent sense of self and has conflicting and vicarious aims (Hannan 9). As the child is not yet a complete person, every right and privilege of adults does not accrue on the child. Through play, children don many roles and identities in order so that they may become themselves (Schapiro 732).

Third is innocence—etymologically, 'harmless' —which has two semantic implications. Innocence, in its modern meaning, as guilelessness or asexual 'purity' is simultaneously considered as one of the 'goods' of childhood as well as one of its 'bads'; evidently, the adorable naïveté or sexual innocence of the child merely adds to his/her vulnerability (Hannan 5). In its etymological signification, the child is innocent pre-

cisely because he/she lacks the moral capacity and the knowledge to exert harm. However, it is pertinent here to differentiate between harmful persons and harmful actions. Although a child may very well be able to commit all kinds of harmful actions, even those with grave consequences, he/she is technically incapable of harming someone, for that presupposes a knowledge of what entails harm and the capacity to act upon that knowledge. For the selfsame reason that socio-political independence is denied the child on account of his/her incapacity to act independently, the child's every action is free of accountability or, to use the juridical term, intention. Every act by the child, on account of this lack of complete agency, is "play-action" which means that "it has a provisional status, the status of a rehearsal or an experiment (even if it is not undertaken for 'fun')" (Schapiro 733).

The fourth characteristic is asociality or amorality. Rousseau in his treatise on education states that the child lacks conscience, and is, therefore, amoral and does things without judging the moral status of actions (except in other's actions towards him/her) (*Emile* 34). As the new mother in Ray Bradbury's short story "The Small Assassin" remarks, "a baby is so new, so amoral, so conscience-free" (Bradbury). The child's status as an outsider to the cultural and moral code is as threatening as it is promising. While natural to the child and, in certain times and accounts, celebrated for being so, amorality is inappropriate in adulthood. Maturity is essential for becoming sufficiently social, part of society and its ideology so that through the individual, the society continues to thrive, to be reproduced. Thus, towards this end, various socialising agents, including the family and the school, model the child into a socially conforming, socially acceptable adult. The assumption underlying such conditioning is the belief in the teachability of the child (explained further in 2.2.2).

2.1.1 Adult-child Relations

As seen in 2.1, the features of childhood—dependence, impaired reasoning capacity, lack of established identity and playfulness, innocence as ignorance and harmlessness, and asociality—may be perceived as either the 'goods' or the 'bads' of childhood (Hannan 6). This valuation is further related to whether the perceiving adult caters to the principle of similarity or difference in conceptualising the relation between childhood and adulthood. The "sapling view" holds that the child and adult are "the same sort of

creature", with the same qualities in varying degrees and, therefore, by implication, the conditions of life that are undesirable in adulthood are equally bad in childhood (Tomlin 7). The principle of difference, the "caterpillar view", believes in the utter difference between the natures of both (12). The latter view can be seen in the developmental approach to childhood that defines the child and the adult as "two different instances of the species, representing the two ends of the developmental hierarchy" (Prout and A. James 13). The adult/child binary, in conventional usage, concentrates power and prestige at one end of the relation. Thus the 'caterpillar view' entails the valuation of childhood either as pure, ideal and happy in contrast to the corruption of adulthood or, conversely, as sinful, instinctual, and insensitive in contrast to the civilisation of adulthood.

Bernard Shaw wrote at the beginning of the twentieth century about the incompatibility between the natures of children and adults, for whom children, with their unruliness, cruelty, and selfishness, are nothing but bad company (20-22). Setting the child up as hierarchically superior in the binary relation, the influential Italian educator Maria Montessori wrote in 1936 about the impossibility of mutual understanding between child and adult because "there are two different personalities in the child and the adult. It is not a case of a minimum growing gradually to a maximum" (73). She argues that the child undergoes a personality change in order to transform into an adult; this is "evident" from the difference in perceptions during both stages of life—the child is sensitive to sensory details and the environment, while adults perceive erroneously or inadequately, projecting their "mental syntheses" into things seen (73). The lack of trust and communicability of ideas goes both ways: "Assuredly if they could express themselves, they would reveal that in the depths of their mental world they have no confidence in us, just as we have no confidence in the child, who is alien to our mode of conceiving things" (8). Similarly, Büssing observes that, in the family narratives in horror, children and adults are like "different species who are unable to communicate with each other" (137). Henry James's Miles makes the same point when he asks the over-eager governess, "If I tell you why, will you understand?" (H. James 110). In Arthur Clarke's *Childhood's End*, the futuristic evolutionary metamorphosis of the mind affects children aged ten and less while the adults are unaffected because "their minds are already set in an unalterable mould" (Clarke).

Regardless of the separatist or unified view or the positive or negative valuation,

but perhaps essential to the separatist negative valuation, the child's fundamental state of dependence is perceived as a barrier to civilisational values and democratic political organization. In Agamben's terms, the integration of zoe into bios, from 'bare' natural life to political identity is necessary for the unity of the state (Agamben). Such integration necessitates paternalistic treatment, guidance, and obligatory protectionism from adults, who in turn are thought to be justified in expecting gratitude, affection, and obedience from the child. "Age-patriarchy", as Harry Hendrick calls it, is this "imbalance of power, control, and resources manifesting themselves through adult control—expressed as a demand for obedience—over children's space, bodies and time" (56). The child's vulnerability to external influence, the quality which emphasises the crucial need for the right kind of education, is thought to warrant paternalism, protectionism and proper management. Rousseau, famously in *Emile*, restricts his ward from freely mixing with both adults as well as peers, forbids reading, accustoms him to the sound of cannon fire and gunshots to make him brave, and at the end of a prolonged twenty-one-years of childhood, finds the 'ideal' bride for him.

Ashis Nandy, in his discussion on the colonised-as-children analogy, points out the split conceived in the nature of childhood into the childlike and the childish: the 'childlike' are the qualities in the colonised that are desirable because governable—innocence, ignorance, corrigibility, loyalty, gratefulness, and teachablity—while the 'childish' attributes—ignorance without inclination to learn, ungratefulness, sinfulness, savagery, unpredictable violence or impulsivity, disloyalty, and incorrigibility—are undesirable because unmanageable (16). The childlike attributes may be carried on into adulthood—after Freud, it would be impossible not to think so—but the childishness of youth is to be avoided and if already acquired, is to be discarded as early as possible. Thus, Erich Fromm, in his characterisation of the authoritarian personality, personified quintessentially by Hitler, argues that it is immaturity and childish dependence on others for self-validation and the inability to endure freedom that makes one into a tyrant (Fromm, *The Authoritarian Personality*). Similarly, Adorno's authoritarian personality and perhaps, even Arendt's notion of banality, in its stress on irrationality as the flaw of the adult, indirectly refers to this vestige of childishness in the adult character.

Vice versa, adult-likeness in the child may be conceived of as the presence of (adult) reason and/or agential power. There are three formulations in this conception. The child

with reason and agency, though representationally rare in a positive light, is a figure tantamount to adults, and is thought to merit adult treatment. This view of the 'knowing' child with physical or social agency is manifest in the figure of the street child and juveniles who commit serious crimes. The second formulation, the child with reason but without power, or the wise child, is felt to be uncanny, particularly in the twentieth century.[1] The third formulation, the combination of irrationality and power, is the deadliest in childhood as well as adulthood, as seen in the case of Fromm's authoritarian personality. If the childishness of children makes them less dependable, manageable, and simply burdensome, the child with a voice, with power disproportionate to his/her level of maturity, is even more so and dangerous. The psychologist Paul Bloom writes that the age of two is the peak of physical violence compared to the rest of the human lifespan (Bloom). He adds that families survive the age "because toddlers aren't strong enough to kill with their hands and aren't capable of using lethal weapons. A two-year-old with the physical capacities of an adult would be terrifying" (Bloom).

Cultural representations of children in this last formulation are pervasive; the child *acts* out of fear, misunderstanding, impulsive jealousy, stubbornness, and general mischief, causing tragedy, havoc, social disruption or even, cosmic damage—instances include Little Father Time in *Jude the Obscure* (1894), Emily in *A High Wind in Jamaica*(1929), Mary Tilford in *The Children's Hour* (1961), and the killer infant in *It's Alive* (1974). The powerful child-god archetype who reacts impulsively to offences, regardless of the degree of offensiveness, who cannot gauge his/her own abilities nor control his/her powers, manifests a socio-political anxiety about power being concentrated in the hands of 'childish' individuals.[2]A twentieth-century horror reworking of the child-god myth, Jerome Bixby's "It's a Good Life" (1953) depicts three-year-old Anthony who, angry at being born, wishes the world away, leaving only the place of his birth intact. Capable of wishing things on a whim to or away from existence and read minds, the child god is an apocalyptic catastrophe.

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[1]More on this in 2.2.3.

[2]The idea of a child-god, however, is not radically new. In the medieval apocrypha, the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*, the infant Jesus strikes terror in the hearts of adults and children alike with his power over life and death; after incessant complaints from the villagers, Joseph advises Mary, "Do not let him out the door because the people who anger him will die" (Kirby).

2.2   Childhood in the Twentieth Century

In the course of four centuries of Western history, the idea of childhood has had a tumultuous career, ranging variously from being discovered, manufactured, sacralised, studied, normalised, and by the end of the twentieth century, to being declared dead. Meanwhile, the figure of the child in the discourse of constructing childhood has variously stood in for ideas of purity, innocence, divinity and at the other end of the spectrum, of original sin, savagery, corruption and the demonic. According to the account of Philippe Ariès, it was only in the thirteenth century that "the discovery of childhood began" in Western society, and by the seventeenth century, the concept had achieved pervasive significance (Ariès 47). Before the 'discovery', childhood was hardly considered remarkable and was seen as a phase soon outgrown and forgotten. In medieval iconography, however, artists began to pay attention to the physical 'childlikeness' of the child instead of portraying them as miniature adults. By the seventeenth century, innocence came to be implicit in any evocation of childhood, and 'childlikeness' came to be in polar opposition to 'adultness'. Victorian childhood became the desired target of 'savers' and children were restricted from privileges erstwhile enjoyed (especially by working class children) and that increasingly became the sole prerogatives of adults. The twentieth century stepped up Victorian protectiveness and seclusion of children and became "a century of anxiety about the child and about parents' own adequacy" (Stearns). The child was extremely vulnerable, "requiring careful handling" and, once broken, was forever lost (Stearns). In the 1953 sci-fi novel, *Childhood's End*, despite its evolutionist optimism in depicting the metamorphosis of the human mind in the post-2020s, the narrator remarks: "It was the end of civilization, the end of all that man had striven for since the beginning of time. In the space of a few days, humanity had lost its future, for the heart of any race is destroyed, and its will to survive is utterly broken, when its children are taken from it" (Clarke 156).

2.2.1   The Sacralisation of Childhood

Life is made sacred, writes Agamben, by separating it from its "profane context" (Agamben). Childhood is made sacred by dissociating it from all its negative associations and attributes. Necessarily, the split in the nature of the child discussed in 2.1.1 into the

childlike and the childish is an absolute split; childhood cannot be anything but innocent; the lack of innocence then, and not the state of becoming independent, will mark the expulsion from the paradise of childhood. In popular discourse, children who are embroiled in poverty or war, ravaged, abused—sexually, physically or emotionally—or caught up in crime, are lamented as children without childhood. The right to childhood—which initially referred to a white, middle-class ideal—is understood to be a fundamental right we, as adults, owe to children.

The process of investing the child with sentimental or religious meaning—"sacralization," as Viviana Zelizer terms it (11)—has its immediate historical roots in the widespread expansion of the bourgeois 'domestic ideal' in the nineteenth century. The nuclear family consisting of parents and children came to be constituted as a 'happy' world unto itself—self-sufficient, withdrawn, and isolated from society (Hendrick 33). The cult of domesticity put the child at the centre of the family, whose responsibility it was to ensure a protected and healthy childhood and more importantly, to socialise the child for society. Children were the raison d'etre of the domestic space; parents, in particular mothers, were to pay attention to the nutrition, hygiene and socio-moral development of the child by following 'expert' guidelines on child-rearing.

Moreover, children and childhood were the subjects of scientific attention as part of the child study movement in England and America (Bradley). The rise of various fields of expertise concerning physico-mental illness, sexual health, and stage-appropriate development in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is invariably related to the highly influential late-nineteenth-century discourse of degeneration. Children's health and education were seen as key to national and genetic vitality and progress. The interference of the state in the family, in the governance and care of children, was the result of this degenerationist anxiety, which, in turn, is related to the increasing biopolitical powers of government. Legislation for child welfare and compulsory education, regular medico-scientific inspections of children's bodies and intellectual capacity at schools, and the criminalisation of child neglect were the effects of this pervasive concern in the late nineteenth century (Gavin, "Unadulterated" 165).

The anti-child labour campaigners sought to propagate the middle-class ideal of a well-bred childhood across all sections and classes of society; they wished to make children valuable in themselves, in terms of their emotional value rather than their eco-

nomical role as earning members of the family. The children of the working-class poor, the children of the street, and wage-earning children, were seen to be deprived of the "safe, happy and protected childhood" that all children were entitled to (Boyden 189). The American photographer Lewis Hine was instrumental in bringing the poignancy of the child labour situation to middle-class audiences. Photographs of wide-eyed children in filthy, hazardous, or unsupervised surroundings, and among them of young boys smoking, struck at "the tension between innocence and degeneracy" that resonates in nineteenth-century portrayals of childhood, most famously perhaps, in the novels of Charles Dickens (Thiel 132). The campaign against child labour was long and hard-fought and although by the mid-nineteenth century, England had banned children under fourteen from employment, it was only later in the USA, in 1938, that child labour was banned by legislation ("The American Era").[3] By the 1930s, as a result of the ban and the enforcement of compulsory schooling, children of all classes had entered the "non-productive world of childhood, a world in which the sanctity and emotional value of a child made child labour taboo" (Zelizer 6). Child labour was seen as a paradox in the new paradigm of childhood; one simply stopped being a child when one engaged in productive, economically valuable work (55).

Social reformers, or 'child savers' as they called themselves, were also instrumental in redeeming the child in crime. The category of the 'juvenile delinquent' was introduced so as to distinguish the child—by definition, innocent, vulnerable, and with the right sort of environment and training, malleable into the well-socialised child—from the adult offender. Although reformatories for young offenders had existed in England and America since the mid-nineteenth century, the juvenile courts that came to be established since the fin-de-siècle solidified the split between young and adult offenders; informal in constitution and procedure, the court had the chief motive of rehabilitation rather than punishment of its wards (Bradley). The children were sent to borstal homes or given probation instead of imprisonment (Gavin, "Unadulterated" 165).

By the twentieth century, children formed a high profile social demographic (A.

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[3]Among the many reasons behind the ban, industrial capitalism was primarily responsible according to Zelizer for removing children from the labour force and pushing for children's education, because new technology had made unskilled labour redundant and cheap labour was supplied more effectively by immigrant workers (62). Thomas Leonard connects the ban on child labour and emphasis on compulsory education with the eugenic discourse of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; the move fitted eugenic goals because the degenerate poor, unable to economically benefit from children any longer, would have fewer children (218).

James and Prout, "Introduction" 1). Dubbed 'the century of the child', the end of the millennium was characterised by growing anxiety and concern over childhood. At the centre of every social issue, including poverty, crime, family dysfunction, unhealthy urban living conditions and the perceived decline in moral standards, was the child who was both the problem and the solution. The rehabilitative potential of the child that could be tapped in order to "rescue" childhood and thereby preserve social well-being inspired middle class and upper-class women to campaign for the child's cause (Sekula 14). The regularisation of childhood, which is meant to mean the accessibility of children of all classes to a prescribed manner of childhood, could be achieved through a discourse that spanned politics, law, sociology, and new medical specialisations concerning the child. The problem of the "preservation of child life" became a national agenda, inevitable in political rhetoric (Zelizer 28). Surveys and experimental research became part of the pedagogic practice and child guidance clinics, working alongside juvenile courts, took nervous, maladjusted, and delinquent children and treated them, producing as they did a new perspective on childhood which now had "its own repertoire of diseases" (Hendrick 45, 51).

The optimism at the beginning of the century is evident in the figuration of the child not merely in terms of purity or happiness but infinite potential, divinity, or prestige. Childhood, for Ambrose Bierce in 1906, is the "period of human life intermediate between the idiocy of infancy and the folly of youth—two removes from the sin of manhood and three from the remorse of age" (Bierce); flanked by undesirable developmental stages, it is a period without attribute, empty of labels, the best of the whole lot. The 'messianic' child of Montessori, similarly, is full of promise, but who unfortunately gets pigeon-holed into narrow identities due to the unwise interference of adults (110).

For Bernard Shaw, the child is "an experiment" by the life force towards the perfectibility of the species: "A fresh attempt to produce the just man made perfect: that is, to make humanity divine" (7). Shaw further, in the context of eugenicist discourse, professes the child's unconditional right to live: "all the conclusive arguments that prove that it would be better dead, that it is a child of wrath, that the population is already excessive, that the pains of life are greater than its pleasures, that its sacrifice in a hospital or laboratory experiment might save millions of lives," are out of the question because the child's existence is "necessary and sacred" (44). Contradicting himself, he later

revokes the individual's absolute right to live stating that the right is not unconditional, but dependent on behaviour (60).[4] He illustrates this with the analogy of a tiger attacking a nursery; the tiger's right to live must be suspended in this case for the safety and well-being of society (60). That the sacredness of human life becomes a matter of choice dramatically with relation to the violence committed on sacred child lives is of crucial importance. The value of the life of a child is presumably more than the life of an adult.

Children's deaths, although quite common in the early years of the century due to labour conditions, malnutrition and disease, and road accidents, became a rare event by mid-century; reports of child deaths therefore were socially sensitive and highly sensational (Zelizer 54). As the death rate of children dramatically decreased, the century is characterised by an "unprecedented unacceptability of death or serious illness among children" (Stearns). The "deepening moral offensiveness of killing children", accidentally or otherwise, came about partly as a result of better and safer living conditions and partly due to the sentimental construction of the emotionally priceless child (Zelizer 43).[5] Stricter rules, hefty fines and compensations in road accidents and the campaign for compulsory schooling and designated play areas reduced both the number of road deaths as well as the number of children on the streets (52).

After the world wars, it was realised that children constitute a particularly vulnerable group, one that was, in a world without traditional 'securities' of the family, made more vulnerable due to their lack of socio-politico-legal rights (Fass 23). Several national laws on the rights of children were enacted to protect children from exploitation, physical and sexual abuse, and moral corruption. The childhood ideal was globally exported and came to be enshrined in the UN Declaration of the Rights of the Child (1959) and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). The right to a romantic ideal of childhood is enshrined in Article 31 of the 1989 UN CRC which recognises "the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts" ("Convention").

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[4]Supporter of eugenic theory and euthanasia, Shaw, in a 1934 case in which a woman killed her thirty year old mentally challenged son by drugging him and putting a gas tube in his mouth, argued for legalising involuntary euthanasia; in his view, the state should have enabled to do what the unfortunate mother had been forced to do herself (Dowbiggin 70).

[5]The sacralisation was not absolute, however, as seen in the juridical notion of "wrongful birth", wherein the sacred status was withdrawn in cases of unplanned pregnancy or unwanted children and the birth was declared "a civil wrong" (Zelizer 167).

Conversely, the lack of play and adequate leisure came to be considered as symptomatic of a deficient or deviant childhood (A. James and A. James 91-92). Likewise, in the texts taken for study, child's play, or the absence of it, is rendered pathological or dangerous, indicating psychological, social, and personality issues.

Freed from all productive work, the child's social life was largely limited to the family and the school. The wish of the child savers had bore fruition by the sixties; children had found their proper place in a "domesticated, nonproductive world of lessons, games, and token money" (Zelizer 11). Under a school system that filled the lion's share of the child's days and evenings in the form of fixed study and play hours, compulsory attendance and homework, the child was fully occupied in getting educated for the future and needed not to venture out of the house for leisure or work. Designated play areas were constructed in public as well as in the home so that the child—whose sign was innocence—is shielded from the undesirable elements of society, and is under the constant watch of 'authorized' adults.

In 1954, William March locates the Penmark home in an apartment of "Victorian elegance", "well back from the street", "banked with shrubs", "flanked" by a lawn and therefore safe for children (15). The place also has an enclosed private playground for children with a high brick wall (16). Doris Lessing's newly-weds Harriet and David move to the suburbs and buy "a large Victorian house in an overgrown garden [....] Full of space for children" (*The Fifth Child* 7). The child needed protection from all psychologically, emotionally or physically painful occurrences; "fear-provoking situations" like violence, death, war, or disease were to be avoided in order to ensure the child's development into a healthy adult (Stearns). In *The Bad Seed*, the mother Christine thinks it inappropriate that knowledge of "inevitableness of death" be suddenly and "without a proper preparation" be sprung up on children (59). She fears that it "could make an impression" on the child's fragile mind. She tells Rhoda who has reportedly witnessed a classmate's death: "You must try to get these pictures [of death] out of your mind. I don't want you to be frightened or bothered at all. These things happen, and we accept them" (60).

2.2.2 Child Rearing Approaches

In the eighteenth century, the privileging of the child and the 'medicalisation' of the family occurred against the historical background of an emphasis on hygiene and medicine as techniques of social control and better governmentalisation (Foucault, "Right of Death" 279-282). The "correct management" of childhood necessitated the transformation of the family from a kinship system to "a dense, saturated, permanent, continuous, physical environment which envelops, maintains, and develops the child's body" (279-282). This Rousseauian model of upbringing requires strenuous effort, constant supervision, relentless "child-watching", and goal-oriented education (Kincaid 8). The (boy) child must not be free to mingle with other children, low company or ladies, social groupings that are unpredictable and capricious in its workings, nor hear or see anything inappropriate for his age and moral growth. A moment's oversight can ruin the entire education of the child and ergo, his character. Corrupt, morally unsound adult company fatally impacts the child's development: "If once he[the child] thinks there are grown-up people with no more sense than children the authority of age is destroyed and his education is ruined" (Rousseau, *Emile* 25). The street child who freely mingles with adults of all kinds and lives "huddled together like sheep," would in this view be doomed from the start (26). The 'well-bred child' was "preserved from the roughness and immorality which would become the special characteristics of the lower classes" (Ariès 328). Centred on the making of this child, the family isolated itself in a "steadily increasing zone of private life" (398), avoiding any mixing of the classes, ages, or hierarchies of power. The school, with its age-wise grouping of individuals and age appropriate content, replaced the street (Boyden 192).

Allowing the child to develop 'naturally', according to his/her own disposition and capacity, in play and praxis rather than bookish and corporal discipline, as Rousseau envisaged it in the eighteenth century, was a radical and idiosyncratic approach. It was formulated in response to the traditional technique of child rearing that combined strict discipline and education of morals from an early age. John Locke's influential concept of tabula rasa—that the newborn child's mind is devoid of 'ideas'—had given prime importance to nurture; the child could be moulded, educated as desired and should be reasoned with rather than coddled.[6]

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[6]The permissive and the disciplinary approaches, however, are in effect, not as different from each

The belief that the child could be moulded suffered a backlash in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries due to the spread of positivism, ideas of genetic inheritance and biological determinism; nature was, more or less, the final word in child rearing. Parenting or child rearing was a struggle against nature; the family had the responsibility of suppressing the negative, undesirable aspects of the child's personality and shape behaviour so as to create conforming, well-adapted members of society. In the 1890s, G Stanley Hall's pioneering study on children's psychological health raised the bar for parental involvement in each distinctive stage of their children's growth. Furthermore, Freudian theories of infantile sexuality and emphasis on childhood as the bedrock of the adult personality and mental health placed the formation of "personality squarely in the family" which needed to be extra-sensitive and nuanced to the needs and progress of the child (Inglis 89). Child-rearing demanded "special parental skills... to cope with this newly discovered psychic complexity" of the child (Zelizer 28).

The mood changed in the 1930s; behaviourism was perceived as a kind of child manipulation that resulted in automatons who are well-disciplined and well-adjusted but lacking in individuality (Cunningham 184). The early twentieth-century belief in positivist ideals of rational progress and scientific solutions had started to decline by the thirties, the time of the great depression, when people began to lose faith in scientific management, the discourse of efficiency and discipline (Sammond 156). During the inter-war period and after WWII, the dread of Communist conformism and the Fascist regimes of discipline and efficiency that manufactured automatons drew attention to the similar patterns of child rearing in the homeland. The panic over conformism manifested widely in the postwar years; in the critique of schools—by Ariès, Althusser, Foucault—as disciplining institutions that inculcate the values of obedience or deference (A. James and A. James 113); in the fear of 'mob-mentality', or, in the words of Aldous Huxley in the 1950s, the "disgusting vice of herd-intoxication—of downward self-transcendence into subhumanity by the process of getting together in a mob" (365).[7] Breaking away from the Victorian-era catechistic style of education, and the

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other as they appear to be; they differed in the method rather than the end goals. Permissiveness is meant to give the illusion of freedom to the child, who in actuality, is subtly manipulated and conditioned by the guardian.

[7]The sci-fi/ child-horror fiction of the 1950s, *Lord of the Flies*(1953, Golding), *Childhood's End* (1953, Clarke) and *The Midwich Cuckoos* (1957, Wyndham), as well as post-seventies horror films either metaphorically or literally depict children with 'hive minds'; lacking all psychological individuality, the children behave as a collective, in utter conformity and adherence to the group. This is evidently part of a

behavioural management techniques which had been steadily gaining popularity in the US and Europe, reforms encouraged individualism, the child's "spontaneous" growth towards self-discovery, and "neo-Freudian 'permissiveness'" (Sammond 151). Montessori (1936), for example, decried the view of the child as empty, inert and incapable and who must be guided in every step, as arising from the egocentrism of adults who try to understand the child in terms of adult values, and thereby misunderstand the child (12). She felt that this leads to the "cancel[lation] of the child's personality" (12). Her solution was the "normalization" of childhood, by which she meant, in an unproblematic pre-Foucauldian sense, the realisation of its "original and normal nature" (171). "The Helping Mode," as Lloyd deMause calls the permissive approach to child rearing that originated in the mid-twentieth century, "results in a child who is gentle, sincere, never depressed, never imitative or group-oriented, strong-willed and unintimidated by authority," a claim based on his own son (DeMause 54).

The helpful or permissive approach, despite its stress on the child's freedom, fully intends to achieve the end product of ideal childhood although through alternative methods. In the 1950s, Erich Fromm observed that in modern industrial capitalist society, traditional "overt" authority had given way to "anonymous" authority, by which individuals are managed and manipulated without overt violence or threat of punishment; instead of a scolding or beating, the parent's sad face achieves more in terms of emotional influence and control over the child (Fromm, "Foreword"). As a result, the individual behaves under the illusion that he/she is behaving well on his/her own will. Under such authority, individuals are standardised, their needs anticipated and met.

2.2.3 The Problem of Precocity

The earlier notion of childhood as a brief, best forgotten period of life from which one has to escape as quickly as possible, was overtaken by the Romantic and modern idea of childhood as constituting consecutive stages of development lasting almost into one's twenties whose 'natural' progress ought not to be hurried or interfered with. Knowledge should be given or made available to the child appropriate to his/her stage of development (O'Shea 666). Rousseau refuted Locke's presumption of the 'reasonable child' by asserting that "of all man's faculties, reason... is the last and choicest growth" (*Emile*

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larger cultural discourse around communism, the Hitler Jugend, child soldiers of the USSR and Vietnam, and media-fuelled stories of contemporary youth gangs (Renner 137).

53). However, even though the child may be actually capable of reason, it is against the natural order to reason with him as though he were an adult, lest: "we shall produce a forced fruit immature and flavourless, fruit which will be rotten before it is ripe" (54). According to Rousseau, it is only after the fifteenth year that the child is fit for moral comprehension and reasoning (175). The foundation of the Rousseauian principle of education is that the child should remain in complete ignorance of ideas beyond his/her grasp; knowledge should be imparted in stages, selectively, particularly, according to each child's' unique nature and disposition (141). Nevertheless, he tentatively allows for the possibility of a 'reasonable' child, who may also be capable of 'intending' harm. In the former case, although the child may be reasonable, adults should desist from encouraging reasoning in their approach towards the child as it would be an inversion of a 'natural' progression: "we shall produce a forced fruit immature and flavourless, fruit which will be rotten before it is ripe" (54). In the latter case, the education of the child will be ruined if he/she learns to act upon harmful intentions and the child will be "*almost* hopelessly bad" (emphasis added, 57).

By the mid-nineteenth century the ideas of shielded childhood were so pervasive that Henry Mayhew in his classic work of journalism *London Labour and the London Poor* reports of an eight-year-old watercress girl "who had entirely lost all childish ways, and was, indeed, in thoughts and manner, a woman" (Mayhew 151):

> There was something cruelly pathetic in hearing this infant, so young that her features had scarcely formed themselves, talking of the bitterest struggles of life, with the calm earnestness of one who had endured them all. I did not know how to talk with her.... Her little face, pale and thin with privation, was wrinkled where the dimples ought to have been, and she would sigh frequently. (Mayhew 151)

Adult authority over the child, as Rousseau had warned, is at stake here. It is unclear whether it is the thought that the girl behaves and thinks quite unlike a child, or rather the sad deprivation of her circumstances which alarms the adult Mayhew (who is in his late thirties) more.

Thomas Hardy, in his novel *Jude the Obscure* (1894), presciently predicted the emergence of a new type of child with adult knowledge (the 'adultlike child' discussed in 2.1.1); "It was in his [Little Jude's] nature to do it," declares Jude after the infamous

episode of the multiple infanticide and child suicide (326). The doctor reportedly says that "there are such boys springing up amongst us—boys of a sort unknown in the last generation—the outcome of new views of life. They seem to see all its terrors before they are old enough to have staying power to resist them" (326). Such premature knowledge, then, is dangerous precisely because the child is not yet ready for it; unable to live with the terror of knowing too much of life, the child Jude is 'naturally' led to take his own life as well as the lives of his half-siblings. In Henry James's "The Turn of the Screw" (1898), the governess's "absolute conviction" of ten-year-old Miles's "secret precocity" or "the poison of an influence that I dared but half to phrase" makes him appear older, "almost as an intelligent equal" (H. James).

In the early years of the twentieth century, precocity and the right pedagogical approach to education were matters of well-publicised contestation. With parents competitively trying to gain the edge in teaching toddlers to master multiple languages, converse adroitly with adults on literature and history, or solve intricate arithmetic problems, intellectually precocious children came into the limelight. Reports of precocity in the media assured the concerned adult reader, however, "that the precocious children had not been robbed of their childhood, but that they spoke and conducted themselves as children, even though they thought as adults, and even beyond most grown persons" (O'Shea 667-668). Evidently, the fact that children possess adult 'rationality' but still 'appear' like children does not have the cultural unease the notion generates in the latter half of the twentieth century and beyond.

Nevertheless, experts and intellectuals still derided the cultural hype generated around so-called child geniuses, arguing that forced prematuration did not necessarily mean 'complete' maturity and was even detrimental to the child in the long term.[8] In an 1860 article in *The British Journal of Psychiatry*, a leading Scottish psychiatrist of the late nineteenth century, J Crichton Browne, declared that childhood precocity was "expressive of disease" and afflicted children "almost invariably die young"(Browne 299). Advocates of "prolonged infancy", such as the American psychologist, Lewis M Terman, claimed evolutionary advantages and health benefits for the young who get ample time to develop mechanisms to cope with a complex environment, compared to pre-

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[8]An interesting case in point is the controversy surrounding the 'child prodigy', Winifred Stoner, Jr. The nine-year-old child's genius was heavily ridiculed in a 1912 study, arguing that Stoner gave the impression of being "a very much spoiled, disagreeable and vain little girl and not a *Wunderkind* at all" (Dolbear 466).

cocious children who soon dissipate away (149): "With the lengthening of the period of infancy there is a concomitant increase of brain surface....The prolonged plasticity means simply prolonged teachableness; and this means that as training counts for more, heredity counts for less" (151-152). Furthermore, the contemporary educational methods and competitive parenting which force prematuration, Terman, like Browne, warns, will result in chronic fatigue, suicide, criminality, and early death or disease in children (151, 157). Katherine E Dolbear wrote in 1912 that the "fatal mistake" of encouraging intellectual precocity rather than developing "character" and physical health, "is like converting little folks into grotesque shapes such as Japanese ornament trees, by clipping here and checking there and permitting the poor dwarfs to grow only in the direction the fancier chooses" (Dolbear 489, 486).

Besides the therapeutic benefits of a preserved, protected childhood, socio-moral benefits have been claimed too. Delaying knowledge is a way to protect society from the child as well as the child from itself. The knowledgeable child is seen as precocious precisely because he or she is felt not to have the corresponding emotional maturity to comprehend and evaluate that knowledge. Knowledge, in this view, makes the child doubly vulnerable to the ill-effects of childhood. Ignorance is encouraged and advocated, to quote Bernard Shaw, as "a safeguard against precocity" (Shaw 39). Thus, the narrator of Arthur Clarke's *Childhood's End* declares of its central seven-year-old child character: "Jeff was a perfectly ordinary boy" who was "in no danger of becoming a genius" (Clarke 144-145).

The reasonable child endowed with agency, the first formulation of the 'adultlike child' discussed in 2.1.1, is a class apart. Rather than simply possessing knowledge, the child is 'reasonable' and has the power to put that knowledge into action. While rare in positive portrayals, such a child is a figure of menace in twentieth-century fiction. The child's actions are no longer play-action; the saving grace that the child lacks intention however great a harm is done is taken away. Besides, the rationality of the child is also perceived as a sign of prematurity, induced or natural, and hence, there is a sense that the childishness of the child is not yet overcome, that the child is not yet adequately grown to be capable of the reasoning faculty. Moreover, since the mid-twentieth century, reason lost much of the prestige it had heretofore enjoyed in western thought. Reason was found to be wholly insufficient to produce maturity, or even, complete personhood;

the keyword instead was 'empathy', the ability to feel and reciprocate emotions of a suffering (human) being.

Consequently, in postwar representations in popular culture, social maturity is suspect in a child. Mid-twentieth century representations saw the rise of an intellectually precocious child who was emotionally and morally immature but with agency; the rational, agential children in such texts as William March's *The Bad Seed* (1954) and William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* (1954), are threatening in their childish lack of moral responsibility. In the British sci-fi novel, John Wyndham's *The Midwich Cuckoos* (1957), the alien 'Children'—"the most practical, sensible, self-contained babies anyone ever saw" constitute a threat to the dignity, moral and political well-being of the entire human species (Wyndham). Of Rhoda, her school teacher remarks, "The little girl, even at ten, seems able to stand alone, and that is certainly not common at any age" (35). She is a "self-sufficient little girl", "so completely all-of-one-piece!" (34). In response, Rhoda's mother remarks, "Sometimes I wish she were more dependent on others. Sometimes I wish she were less practical and more affectionate" (34). She was reportedly "something of a riddle" to her parents "almost from babyhood": "It was a thing difficult to isolate, or identify, but there was a strangely mature quality in the child's character which they found disturbing" (33). The private, expensive Fern school was selected in order "eliminate, or at least modify, some of the upsetting factors of her temperament" (33), in fact, to turn her into more of a child.

In later decades, film adaptations and original screenplays using the 'rational child' trope as horror proliferated; the uncanny fear that rules these representations is that children are childish but not childlike, amoral yet rational, immature although precocious. The child who behaves with perfect composure and grace in society instead of behaving childishly is either seen as masquerading or as justifying adult treatment. On the *Child's Play* (1988) actor, Alex Vincent, who plays the eight-year-old protagonist Andy Barclay, the 'foster-mother' co-star Jenny Agutter remarked, "Obviously, spending a great deal of time around adults has made Alex very precocious. He's very mature in the way that he approaches what he's doing. It's a bit scary when you consider that he's only eight years old.... There's a mixture of little boy and professional adult" (qtd. in Counts 14). This, ironically, is the very anxiety the franchise plays upon: the theme of the imminent possession of an immaculately innocent little boy by the soul of a ribald

serial-killing adult man.

2.2.4 'Disappearing' Childhood

In the 'century of the child', it gradually came to be taken for granted that childhood is the birthright of all children irrespective of class or race and adults morally owed it to children to guarantee their enjoyment of that right. State intervention and legislation safeguarding the lives and 'interests' of children intensified. Although on many accounts children are still passive citizens, they wield privileges qua child, and, to an increasing extent, the power to influence decisions made by adults on their behalf. They are also a new consumer demographic circulating around whom entire 'culture industries' operate.

The mapping out of the child's formal rights, the increase in children's autonomy, state policies that weakened parental authority and the seemingly unfathomable effects of globalisation in the latter half of the twentieth century raised moral panic over the changing balance of power relations between the ages (Aitken 122). With the emergence of the 'welfare child' and legislative rights the child had become more of a public responsibility than a parental one (Hendrick 51). Nevertheless, in cases where the child shows deviance from the norm, parents, especially the mother, are incriminated and penalized; children 'loitering' in public spaces, absenting from school or the home, or at work "all signify family or personal dysfunctioning" (Boyden 209). The causes for child misbehaviour are often traced to the family environment; broken or abusive families, working mothers, single mothers, and the absence of male role models are cliched backstories of 'abnormal' childhoods. What is perceived as the excessive permissiveness of child rearing strategies since the inter-war period and state intervention in the family are attributed as leading to declining parental authority and child discipline. In the face of changing conditions of childhood and its perceived manifestations of actual child behaviour, childhood was treated "like a rare animal threatened with extinction" (Kitzinger 171). By the last decades of the century, childhood was claimed to have 'disappeared,' and eventually 'died'.

While domestic and public spaces were being made safer for children in terms of rights and security, there was increasing concern over the violation of those rights, the breakdown of trust within the family, and the persistence of supposedly eradicated

forms of violence against children. Child battering, the various medicalised maternal attitudes toward childbirth and children, teenage pregnancy, the trauma of war, child abuse, and infanticide, pressing issues even in the early twenty-first century, dominated public discourse on childhood vulnerability. Such violence against children and all un-happy or unfortunate events during childhood were thought to permanently scar them and even end childhood for them altogether. For instance, in *Midwich Cuckoos* (1957), a 'xenogenetic epidemic' affects "all women of childbearing age" (Wyndham), including pubescent children. Interestingly, the central character Zellaby juvenilises and pities both a seventeen-year-old who commits suicide due to the shame of being 'miracu-lously' pregnant, ("Poor *little* Rose Platch was only seventeen" (Wyndham) and a child mother, "scarcely more than a schoolgirl", who was "robbed" of her childhood—"the age of true poetry"—and "swept suddenly [...] into womanhood" (Wyndham). Apart from the fact that being a woman is equated with being a mother, it is remarkable that it is the abrupt 'loss' of childhood rather than the social, psychological, and physiological effects of childbirth on a young girl's body and future that is of concern.

During the interwar years, especially after the 1920s, Freudian ideas of infantile sex-uality–the revival of "'original sin' in a libidinal form" (A. James and Jenks 319)–was becoming popular knowledge. Innocence as pre- or asexuality had to be debunked; the child was inevitably sexualised, subject to libidinal desires from birth. However, what was also under attack was a centuries-old idea of childhood that stipulated innocence and ignorance in a child who then can be saved, trained, and transformed into a fully socialised, independent adult. The Freudian emphasis on childhood and child sexuality invited substantial interest and pervasive surveillance in the development of the child.

The 'economically worthless' child of the twentieth century, but without the emo-tional dividends promised by the sacralised concept of childhood, are either luxuries or parasitic free-riders in a utilitarian social order. Zelizer notes that by the 1960s, in deal-ing with accidental child death cases, American courts attempted to determine, through photographs and souvenirs, "the subjective emotional value of a *particular* child" to grant compensation to the parents (emphasis in the original, 158); a judgment stated, for instance, "It all depends on all the circumstances important in the lives of a partic-ular parent and a particular child...the ability of the child to offer companionship and society and the ability of the parent to enjoy it" (qtd. in 158-9). The child's value for

law and the popular media, thus, in this estimation, (although Zelizer does not pursue its implications for children lacking emotional value), is directly proportional to the sociable and desirable attributes of the child.

The ready access to knowledge in the age of globalization has become a challenge to the strategy of delayed access to adult (sexual) knowledge. Despite or, perhaps, because of the debunking of traditional notions of childhood, the 'knowing' child is constructed in media representations and public discourse as an anomaly, hazardous to the 'natural order', a 'forced fruit' that will rot rather than ripen. This becomes a grave problem in the case of popular responses to child sexual abuse, as Jenny Kitzinger notes: "If the violation of innocence is the criterion against which the act of sexual abuse is judged then violating a 'knowing' child becomes a lesser offence than violating an 'innocent' child" (Kitzinger 164).

The idea that childhood was under threat from a globalised, rapidly changing, media-saturated environment that considerably shortened childhood or corrupted it came to be represented by the phrase, 'disappearance of childhood'. Neil Postman in the early 1980s wrote of the three stages of human life in what he called "the television age": "At one end, infancy; at the other, senility. In between there is what we might call the adult-child" (99). Postman connected a plethora of socio-economic problems including the rise in juvenile crime, drug abuse, teenage pregnancy, divorce rate, and old age homes with the drastic disappearance of "the special status, image, and aura of the child" (136). Postman's core argument is that, due to the media providing premature access to knowledge of all kinds, children have become "in social orientation, language, and interests no different from adults" (124-5).

In the postwar period, children were both a vulnerable minority group and a demographic threat. The baby-boom in late-1940s England and 1950s America resulted in a demographic shift and the rise of a highly differentiated juvenile culture. The increasing socio-political competencies enjoyed by children as well as their distinct 'culture' led to a "generational consciousness" (Hebdige 443). By the 70s, while concerns about children victimised by adult abuses continued to be pervasive, the panic surrounding the 'degenerate' teen and youth subcultures (punk, teds, and beatniks) generated fears that children are "semi-feral victimizers who make the streets unsafe for adults and signal society's disintegration" (Gavin, "An Introduction" 9). In a socio-political climate

marked by the decline of the welfare state, weak economy, rising unemployment and xenophobia, children could be thought of as aliens, visitors, migrants, parasites and nihilistic conspirators threatening the destruction of civilisation from within.

In the 1980s, the journalist-activist Letty Pogrebin wrote of "the epidemic of pe-dophobia" gripping America (qtd. in Dudley-Marling et al. 749). The problem of juvenile delinquency was the subject of moral panics in England as well (A. James and A. James 116). The case of Mary Bell[9] and the Bulger case[10] in the UK and the American school shootings, all committed by children aged ten to eighteen, received dramatic public attention and extensive coverage from the media and were portrayed as events with adverse implications for the concept of childhood as well as the future. Although child-committed serious crimes are not phenomena singular to the twentieth century—as James and Jenks remark, "We must assume and acknowledge that some children have always killed other children" (A. James and Jenks 320)—the moral panic generated around them is singularly a postmodern phenomenon.

In the nineties, the term "superpredator" encapsulated the fear of teenage crimi-nals, particularly children belonging to lower-class racial minority groups (Renner 12). Protecting childhood, since the late twentieth century, involve a greater imperative to protect it from other children as well as adults; greater "child watching" or surveillance (Kincaid 8), truancy watch, public policing, 'get tough on kids' and 'zero tolerance' policies in schools, and harsher punishment are advocated to prevent and tackle delin-quent tendencies in children (Dudley-Marling et al. 753).

2.3   The Construction of Exceptional Childhoods in Fiction

As seen in 2.2, childhood is constructed, dismantled and recreated—in short, repre-sented—according to the ideological demands of perceived and real socio-political anxieties. Agamben's concepts of the example and the exception is useful here. In a paradigm, the single, ideal instance is the example par excellence which determines and constructs all other 'normal' instances. Being exemplary, the ideal instance does not belong to the class, but stands outside it, included in a sort of non-belonging, in Agamben's term, in an "exclusive inclusion" (Agamben). In the paradigm of child-

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[9]In 1989, Mary Bell, aged eleven, was convicted for the murder of two younger boys.
[10]Two ten-year-olds murdered the two-year-old James Bulger in 1993.

hood, an ideal, desirable, true childhood is the example which is included by being excluded and yet is the reference point of all other instances in the paradigm. The exception, however, to paradigmatic childhood is deviance. This exceptional childhood is excluded from the paradigm, using the very terms that qualify membership in the set. The exception, in an "inclusive exclusion", belongs to the paradigm from which it is expelled (Agamben). Exceptional childhood, like exemplary childhood, is a constructed ideal; real instances such as the 1993 case of the ten-year-olds who bludgeoned a two year old to death (Bulger case, UK) are "mediated by systems of representation" that pervade the socio-political imaginary (Frow 19). In this section, the construction of the exception to paradigmatic childhood in popular fiction will be introduced.

The mass media help define our experiences through the formation of categories of classification; journalistic accounts, television, film, and literary productions actively create ready-made categories by which our "experience is organized, interpreted and made to *cohere in contradiction* as it were" (emphasis in original, Hebdige 448). It is, crucially, in the globalised world, the means by which an 'us versus them' dichotomous world-image may be forged, and, in Stuart Hall's words, "the basis on which groups and classes construct an image of the lives, meanings, practices and values of *other* groups and classes" (emphasis in the original, qtd. in 448).

The constructionist argument as seen above does not however imply the nonexistence of a 'reality' that precedes the 'construction'. Put differently, the problem is not that the representation is untruthful to reality, that monstrous children are impossible fictions or exaggerations of real delinquents. The constructedness of reality posits that the very meaning-making moulds, with which all reality may be perceived, is constructed. Thereby, any representation, by default, constructs its own reality. When representations become paradigmatic, sustained and repeated across genres, it becomes a discourse capable of producing systems of knowledge; besides contributing a shared language and shared concepts that lend expression and meaning to phenomena, it also constructs its own objects of knowledge. Discourses, writes John Frow, "are *formative* of objects in the very act of speaking of them, not in the sense that they create objects out of nothing but in so far as they build a weight of meaning around the categories of the world" (emphasis in the original, 18). Discursive formations normalise knowledge, appear to be true by present scientific, cultural standards, and are corroborated

by popular science, psychology, crime reporting, or common sense. In the discourse of childhood deviance, for instance, along with the rhetoric of popular science, the root-edness of the (fictional or journalistic) narrative in familiar milieus such as the liberal middle class or (virtually) single mother families lend truth-value to the representation. The power of the knowledge produced by the discourse to make itself true is illustrated by Stuart Hall using a particularly pertinent example:

> it may or may not be true that single parenting inevitably leads to delin-quency and crime. But if everyone believes it to be so, and punishes single parents accordingly, this will have real consequences for both parents and children and will become 'true' in terms of its real effects, even if in some absolute sense it has never been conclusively proven (Hall 49).

As Renner argues in her study of the post-1960s 'evil child' narrative tradition, the potency of repeated narrative patterns is that: "they become familiar [...] These narrative patterns then 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).

The above arguments may suggest a uniformity of meanings produced in a single representational paradigm; this is obviously reductive because the 'shared conceptual maps' that help one to make meaning, when inaccessible or subverted, make possible a plurality of interpretations. This thesis is also informed by such a radical position, one which takes as its vantage point, the very limit of the paradigm (of childhood as well as its representation), the point where childhood becomes the exception and represen-tation can no longer hold up to its representational task. This reading, however, even in those texts in which monstrosity is framed by an unreliable adult point-of-view, unless remarked otherwise, is based on the assumption that the texts concerned 'intend' the notion of childhood deviance as a signifier of horror, unease, abjection and menace.

Chiefly two levels of representation can be discerned in the case of literary narra-tives—one in which the child (mediated through the narrative) is performing, 'repre-senting' a certain typology of child and the other in which the action and the child is 're-presented' in a secondary significatory system, as part of a mythology, with a new meaning generated through narrative perspective, tradition, and implications. In the case of a filmic narrative, multiple levels of representation operate: the actor playing

a certain child character (level of acting), the child within the frame (mise-en-scene), the child as seen by the multiple gazes (point-of-view)—of the camera, the protagonist, the adults, the audience—and the level of ideological import, the meaning reached. Its afterlife as remakes and sequels, or merchandise, (in the case of literary texts, as adaptations) and the extra-diegetic world of interviews, reports, reviews, posters, trailers, etc., complicate the representational matrix.

The representation of the negative aspect of childhood, the childishness which repels guidance, as discussed in 2.1.1, is pervasive in the twentieth century. However, the dominant image of childhood innocence is not discarded either. The special vulnerability of children and their susceptibility to environmental influences, including supernatural forces remain a constant motif. What is particular to twentieth-century representations is the new centrality that the child achieved, as active agent of violence rather than as its passive victim, as wielding power over adults and most pertinently, over the socio-political fabric. The child characters in the selected narratives are found to act in tangent, in collusion with the popular paradigm of childhood monstrosity, echoing each other, repeating formulaic traits. As instances of a representational paradigm, the delineation of the child figures exhibit homogeneity and conformity with the nature of the ideal exception. The evil children of popular culture seem to share a uniform code of behaviour; they implicitly call upon each other, compete among themselves for shock value, and depend on the consolidated effect of their conformity to strike terror or unease.

Although the generic markers of the selected texts are heterogeneous, a gothic mode is found to be the common strand connecting them all. If not the gothic evocation of atmosphere, the centrality of the child and the moral ambiguity of gothic fiction perseveres in an intensified form in twentieth-century representations of monstrous children. In traditional gothic fiction, the child was significant as a symbol of becoming, as the future hero or villain (Georgieva 89). While Frankenstein's adult-child creature and the child villains of post-fifties' narratives are conceptually similar in their lack of normative and/or biological childhood, Frankenstein's creature is yet capable of emotional and social development, although he is denied the capacity for physical growth (Beer). The child villains, on the other hand, are shown to have normal physical growth, but lack the ability to have any kind of normative cultural development; the child is always already

a grown-up. The deviant child of the gothic mode is usually corrupted in essence, from birth, and therefore, cannot be other than what he/she is. This moral deterministic view of the child's nature proscribes the possibility of salvation or socio-moral integration. The static child of the modern gothic mode is perpetually frozen in a state of exception. The narrative develops around this staticity of the child, revealing the markers of deviance, and thereby stripping the mask of childhood to reveal the non-child—abjection, primitivity or a frightening futurity in the body of the child.

The narratives progress through actively demarcating, 're-marking' acceptable and unacceptable codes of behaviour, and setting apart both the child from the adult and the bad (evil in its broad sense) child from the good child. The underlying assumption in such demarcation is the conception of uncontaminated, homogeneous categories of the 'good child' and the 'bad child'. The child villain's ejection, in its most extreme representations, is not merely from the sacred space of childhood, but from the category of the human.

2.3.1 The Gothic Mode

The gothic features of excess, transgression, and diffusion are handy for representing historically specific anxieties about conceptual limits (Botting 6). The themes of the gothic deal with cultural taboos whose explicit evocation excites a morally ambiguous pleasure. In the gothic, writes Fred Botting, "Illegitimate power and violence is not only put on display but threatens to consume the world of civilized and domestic values" (4-5). Traditionally, the subversion or transgression of socio-religious norms, particularly in and by the monstrous antagonist, is, eventually, punished and the status quo restored. According to Botting's study of the gothic, the genre works as a "cautionary strategy, warning of dangers of social and moral transgression by presenting them in their darkest and most threatening form" (7).

In the modern offshoot of the gothic–horror–the monster embodies some form of threat to social harmony, concepts, political fabric, or religious dogma whose containment and exclusion is legitimated. This "ultra-conservative" nature of horror, or in general, gothic myths (Twitchell 64), makes it intolerant of differences, deviation or rule-breaking even in the most subtlest forms. The object of menace is cathartically expelled in the narrative which is symbolic of a universe of shared values that is even-

tually redeemed without blemish. However, this expulsion is not always transparent, but ridden with ambivalence, because the narrative of transgression both "restores and contests boundaries" (Botting 9); it redraws the borderlines between the sacred and the profane only after having shown that the borderlines are at best fragile and at worst, imaginary.

The tendency toward moral ambivalence in the gothic and modern horror is structurally supported by the use of "obscurity", atmospheric, architectural, and psychological haziness wthin the narrative (Groom). Long, meandering corridors, hidden objects, winding staircases, labyrinthine structures, dim atmosphere, shadows, mirages and reflections are traditional gothic props and settings, while the 'dreamworlds' of the imaginative, traumatised or haunted subject provide for psychological obscurity (Groom). Such deliberate obscurity encourages the reader or spectator to expect and actively look for the truth, a hidden reality, behind the shadows. In such a narrative where meaning-making depends on "superstitious interpretation", appearances are deceptive, things and persons are not what they seem, and the discovery of the truth is the highest imperative (Botting 170). While the linguistic red herrings and multi-layered narrative framing of such a work as *The Turn of the Screw* (1989) can (with other elements of ambiguity) obscure 'the truth' in literary narratives, the cinematographic apparatus can conceal, deform and unsettle an objective morally-correct perspective by highlighting, as in the classic opening sequence in *Halloween* (1978) in which we share the unmediated point-of-view of the killer, the "disparity between seeing and being" (Telotte 142).

In the gothic universe, this paranoia extends to traditional meaning making institutions as well. In twentieth-century fiction in the gothic mode, and more emphatically in the "paranoid horror" of the seventies (Tudor 52), science, religion and patriarchal authority often fail in tackling or even recognising the monster. A rational point-of-view is shown to be inadequate and out of touch with the mythical reality of the story universe. Even as far back as Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), scientific rationality and the discoveries of science are highly gothicised; science is represented as a kind of meddling with a divine order, as the over-reaching ambition of man to become god (Groom). *The Bad Seed* (1954) satirises the abuse and misuse of psychonalytic jargon and cure. The doctors in *The Exorcist* (Blatty, 1971), *The Fifth Child* (1988), and *Rosemary's Baby* (Polanski, 1968) are blind to all irrational phenomena, while those in *Pet Sematary*

(King, 1983), "The Small Assassin" (Bradbury, 1946), and *Halloween* (1978), must adopt irrational and medically unethical methods to tackle the irrational and the abnormal (child). In postwar twentieth-century fiction, the text avoids any kind of closure, ending on a paranoid note, the threat still at large. Besides probable industrial justifications for open endings (sequels, remakes, merchandise), a cultural disillusionment with progress, rationality and the idea of an ever-evolving civilisation assumably makes it impossibly tame for the narrative to end with a restoration of order and harmony (Botting 157).

The elements of the gothic that persevere in twentieth- century representations include the protectionist impulse toward the innocent, vulnerable child, the bourgeois domestic space, intrigue or suggestions of illicit or incestuous sexuality, particularly pedophilia, moral corruption, excess, madness and pathology, and transgression followed by partial or complete redemption. The gothic theme of the sins of ancestors visiting upon offspring (129), a vestige of degenerationist discourse, form the backstory of many a monstrous childhood, as for instance, *The Crooked House* (1988), *The Bad Seed*, *Ariel* (1980), *The Omen* (1976), and *Rosemary's Baby*. The theme also morphs into the more common theme of the perseverance of traumatic pasts that haunt the present (through) childhood. The children who die premature deaths due to neglect, infanticide, medical oversight or torture relentlessly haunt the present and the foreseeable future without appeasement.

The film critic Robin Wood succinctly states the plot outline of the general horror story: "normality is threatened by the Monster" (R. Wood 31). In twentieth century child-centred gothic texts, the Monster is the exceptional child who disrupts normality and 'natural' age hierarchy. The conventional victim symbolism attributed to the infant is reversed in modern horror cinema (Twitchell 297); the victim now is the "menaced protagonist" (Dix 121) —the parent, guardian, and baby-sitter—whose good intentions and innocence are superseded by the malice of the juvenile assailant. Modern horror plots are about "the child systematically brutalizing the loving parent" (Twitchell 300). The adult's helplessness in the face of the child is highlighted as resulting from the debility of the protectionist ethic. Parallelly, the child's overwhelming power springs from the vulnerability of the parent/adult trapped in this debilitating conceptual paradigm and the immunity granted to the child by that paradigm. The exploitation of this immunity

through a duplicitous performance of the cute child while behaving in radically 'un-childlike' ways is the specific form of horror deigned from such narratives.

What is of interest to this thesis is the normalisation of this theme, which can only be understood in relation with a larger socio-cultural context. The narrative's thought must be thinkable in a particular historical context for a particular society to conceive of it, find credibility in it and relate to it, which is to say that the unthinkable is irrepresentable; the specific risk of the gothic to take as its subject the threshold, the liminal spaces between the norm and the taboo, becomes successful only if the right balance is found. If what is represented is 'before its time' or the unthinkable for a specific historic-cultural milieu, the work risks censorship or at worse, incomprehensibility. "The question should not be why horror?" argues Tudor, opposing the dominant psychoanalytic approach to horror, but "why do *these* people like *this* horror in *this* place at *this* particular time?" (emphasis in the original, Tudor 54).

2.3.2   A Brief History of the Child-Gothic Mode

Childhood is, on the one hand, a beacon of hope, possessing unblemished virtue and innocence, and on the other, having been corrupted by experience and bad company, is a lost cause, a forgone conclusion. The "inherently childlike, naive boy protagonists" of nineteenth-century novels and their counterparts, the "experienced, criminal, men-children", as found in Dickens's *Oliver Twist* (1838), is a foundational dichotomy in nearly all popular representations of childhood (Thiel 138). The leader of the boys, Jack Dawkins, or the Artful Dodger, although an ordinary-looking boy, "had about him all the airs and manners of a man" (qtd. in 138). He is caught and presumably sent to a penal colony in Australia while Oliver is timely rescued and adopted by a middle-class family.

However, the dominant understanding of childhood in nineteenth century gothic is its weakness and vulnerability. In Bram Stoker's 1897 classic, Dracula is described as having a 'child-brain', the mind of a child, and therefore, pits him as weaker and defeatable (Pick 171). Even the late nineteenth-century representations of terrible child figures, Miles and Flora (*The Turn of the Screw*), or Father Time (*Jude the Obscure*) elicit sympathy rather than horror.

In his discussion of sci-fi novels of the Edwardian period, George M Johnson argues

that the child prodigy is used as a means to satirise the decadence and moral impoverishment of adults; adults are satirised as being "childish, being threatened by what they do not understand and projecting their fear and anxiety onto the exceptional children, 'othering' them and labeling them evil" (40). The child who cannot be "coddled or made to conform" is perceived by adult characters as a challenge to convention and adult ego (40). In the late fifties' novels, *Childhood's End* (Clarke, 1956) and *The Midwich Cuckoos* (1957), the precociously intelligent or 'wise child' implies the regenerative potential of the species, the possibility of evolution to a higher evolved being, and the perfectibility of the human race; narrow-minded political and social oppression of such prodigious childhoods is critiqued (but obliquely endorsed) in these texts.

If the child prodigy occupies one end of the spectrum of threatening child representations, the other end is occupied by the emotionally and economically unproductive child–the disabled, the 'feeble-minded', and the criminal, the last of which forms the focus of this thesis.

In between the two extremes of representation is the narrative that portrays child and adult natures as inherently dissimilar wherein lies the threat. By the thirties, in texts such as *A High Wind in Jamaica* (Richard Hughes, 1929) and the 1936 film adaptation of the eponymous play, *These Three*, the child was established as utterly different from the adult, and in this awareness of difference, as Johnson argues, was the fear of a threat (29). The childish aspect of the nature of childhood makes children fundamentally unreliable, untrustworthy and disloyal; the child characters are devoid of moral scruples and can lead sympathetic adults to the gallows (to suicide, in the latter text) out of callous disregard for the fate of others or out of sheer spite.

During the second world war and the post-war period, a new paradigm in representations of childhood deviance took over. The image of the child as dictator, or on the way to become one, as terrorizing family and society, is seen as early as in H G Wells's *The Holy Terror* (1939), a fictional biography of a dictator, and Ray Bradbury's short story, "The Small Assassin" (1946) about an infant with the physical and mental competence of adults. The totalitarian, privileged child is further developed in the fifties, solidified from a side character to the central figure, the antagonist of full-length novelistic and filmic treatments. The child uses the safeguards installed by a benevolent society and turns them against society, in effect uprooting core bourgeois, democratic

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family values. The child treats people as means toward his/her own selfish interests, and may also turn them into automatons through his/her childlike wiles or paranormal powers. The presence of the child, in a curious historical reversal, corrupts adults and peers alike. The American cult classic of 1953 that inspired a number of TV and film adaptations, Jerome Bixby's short story "It's a Good life" portrays a three year old tyrant, who, using his mental powers, tyrannises not just the family but the entire village. His childish mischief and caprice have both political and cosmic consequences. Anthony's supernatural omniscience and tele-morphic ability is fatal for everyone around him for he lacks the experiential maturity to handle the knowledge or govern his impulses. In another novel of the fifties, *The Midwich Cuckoos*, the xenogenetic births of the alien children from human mother hosts is described as "a form of confidence trick", "the callous exploitation of a natural proclivity", that is, maternal affection (Wyndham).

Such bold narratives were not caught on by cinema as easily. Censorship rules and social sensibilities probably were the reasons for the reluctance of motion pictures to show tyrannical monstrous childhoods. Even when they managed to do so, such as through the release of the American film adaptation of *The Bad Seed*, the effect is sought to be diluted with a conservative plot twist, a theatrical curtain call and a mock ending. The actor who plays the central eight-year-old homicide who terrorises her mother enters the frame and is spanked with healthy, cheerful jollity by the actor playing the mother; this serves to de-villainise the child actor Patty McCormack as well as comfort audiences that the traditional, balanced child-rearing approach is sufficient for disciplining the average child.

Despite the attempt by the film to curb the effect of its cultural impact, *The Bad Seed* triggered a veritable revolution in the horror genre. It made it generically possible to use a child as its chief horror device and show the undoing of the monster as the traditional archetypal battle between good and evil. The "monster problem", as Zinoman calls the problem of meeting the hyped expectations of the audience with an adequately shocking appearance of the monster, is effectively sidetracked (Zinoman); instead of repulsive, deformed, terrifying monsters created thorough state-of-the-art special effects and make-up, the sweet-looking child is projected as the monster. The child Rhoda, true to generic convention, is constructed initially as lovable, passive and natural; as Monica Breedlove the neighbour declares about Rhoda, "A child's mind is so wonder-

fully innocent. So lacking in guile or deceit" (March 32). The school vouches for her other prasieworthy qualities–"qualities remarkable in a child" (35)–such as her "unusual" courage, her lack of fear: "She'll stand up calmly to things that frighten the average child and make them cry, or run away" (35).[11] When this 'desirable' child turns out to be a cold-blooded murderer, the emotional and cognitive shock of the category violation is the specific form of horror pleasure this set of narratives offers. The shock is sometimes of a more visceral kind (as in reproductive horror) as it unsettles a network of concepts linked to the child including civilisational values, human nature, futurity of the nation and the species.

With the revoking of the Hollywood Production Code in 1968, the sixties' gothic thriller film finally caught up with fiction and began making extensive use of the theme of monstrous childhoods in original screenplays as well as adaptations of the child-horror narratives of the first half of the century (Twitchell 259), (A. Douglas 302-303). The "child-as-spy-and-enemy" theme became central in literary gothic narratives too in the sixties and beyond (334). There was also a significant rise in a new horror subgenre, the monstrous infant film, in the period, possibly related to the popular media discourse of reproductive technology and its social consequences (Hantke 110).

The iconography of childhood by the seventies had become routine horror convention, irrespective of whether a child was involved in the narrative. Nursery rhymes, children's laughter, toys and dolls connoted deep gothic fears. The auteur-driven respectable 'New Horror' of the seventies, which include John Carpenter's *Halloween*, George Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) and Polanski's *Rosemary's Baby*, feature an atmosphere of constant menace due to the hidden and ubiquitous presence of the usually unrecognisable child monster.

The threat is usually from within and abrupt; the traditionally safe institutions of the family and the middle-class home turn out to be harbouring the worst forms of moral corruption. The notion of internal threat does not, however, entail in an explicit sense, culpability for the sacralised institution of the family or white, bourgeois values themselves. Although the monster attacks from within the womb, the family, or the home, the origin of that threat is almost always attributed to sources extraneous to these places. The environment or 'nurture' is blameless. Significantly, the ideal of childhood

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[11]She is also remarkably for the stereotype "no tattle-tale" because she refuses to heed the school's hypocritical exhortations to rat out a fellow student (35).

itself is salvaged from the chaos by portraying the figure of the deviant child as an anomaly, a freak of nature, a victim of possession or genetic taint. If there is blame, it rests on and only on this aberration and must be responsible for its destruction. If the monster is a victim of its inevitable monstrosity, a degenerate produced by nature itself, the social body is morally justified in removing it for the sake of public safety and well-being. The degeneration discourse and its offshoot of eugenic ideology can be seen to persevere in this problem and its convenient conclusion.

Twitchell in his 1985 book, *Dreadful Pleasures*, writes about the pedophobiac tendencies[12] in modern horror and presciently theorises: "a new image of horror that might become archetypical if it ever finds a stable narrative: the central image is a slithey embryonic creature who gets into the family by invading the female reproductive system and then by reappearing as the demonic, devouring child" (Twitchell 301). Twitchell reasons that the "downsizing" of the monster, to depict children and "childlike forms" as vehicles of horror could be to cater to the new demographic of young consumers of horror (259, 296). The teenage consumer of horror, he argues, would find it pleasurable to watch the spectacle of 'wicked' children subverting the traditional dynamic of power. There is some truth to Twitchell's argument as the monster on screen does not simply and unequivocally inspire revulsion in the audience. Robin Wood points out that the Monster being the "emotional center" of the film, elicits ambivalent reactions in the audience (R. Wood 32). For instance, audiences of *The Omen* would feel secretly pleased that the devil's progress undermines rich capitalist structures (32). The monster, he argues, is a "fulfillment of our nightmare wish to smash the norms that oppress us and which our moral conditioning teaches us to revere" (32). As Scahill also observes, the "revolting" child represents queer rebellion against heteronormative and -sexual norms. Rather than evoke horror, there is an exultation at the spectacle of a young child breaking conventions, rebelling against parental and societal expectations, and engaging in violence against people and institutions conventionally much stronger and powerful than him/her (26).

This ambivalence is, however, not a new phenomenon; the gothic villain or the monster is inherently an object of envy as well as fear. What is remarkable is that the place of this enviable yet threatening object is occupied by the traditional innocent, the preteen

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[12]Lessing's protagonist of *The Fifth Child* considers birth a "challenge[] to destiny" owing to the frightening uncertainty of what or whom one is giving birth to (*The Fifth Child* 29).

child. The ambivalence here is extremely problematic; the threat is a monster as well as a child. The emotional double bind created here involves the problem of expelling the monster and the powerful taboo against killing a child. The ambivalence is ingeniously diverted to the paraphernalia of consumerist childhood in the late eighties. The highly successful *Child's Play* (1988-2019) franchise revolves around a doll possessed by the soul of a foul-speaking murderer who attempts to take possession of the six-year-old owner of the doll. The doll as monster removes any moral qualms that a real child or child actor might cause; the child-sized doll could then be abused to no end without second thought. The growing concern over child abuse in the media in the eighties may have contributed to doll-horror and. since the fin-de-siecle, the unkillability of human child monsters (A. James and Prout, "Introduction" 2).

A victim of his/her nature, the child monster is as much an object of pity as he/she is horrifying. The popular 'cycle of abuse' theory posits that violence tends to get passed down generations, that the victim of abuse will go on to become the victimiser (Renner 10). The notorious school shootings in America, particularly Columbine (1990), confirmed the thesis in popular media accounts because it was usually the bullied who became perpetrators of meaningless violence. In gothic contexts, the theory intensified the immutability of natural predispositions; the trauma of the child is ruthlessly and without end mirrored in the victims of the child's rage. The "Caring 1990s", as Botting refers to the horror productions of the period, adopted a "humane approach" to monsters (Botting 179). The violence of the killing of the monster was not glorious or celebratory, it was an act of mercy. The violence is downplayed, the justification of the killing is posited as euthanasiac, or done out of mercy rather than revenge or self-righteousness.

In subsequent chapters, the representations of childhood deviance are closely examined for three distinct aspects–evil, crime, and the monstrous–and their implications and conclusions are problematised.