Chapter 3

The Axis of Evil

3.1 Introduction

The term *evil*, broad as it is in its definition and application, covers the mythico-religious, fictional, and historical in its sweep. Given its secular and religious associations, the word has something ominous about it, especially when used in conjunction with childhood, as it evokes histories of Satanic possession, child-witchery, sacrifice, and futuristic projections of decline of the human race, of civilization and morality. I attempt in this chapter to isolate the evil aspect of the child's nature and behaviour as represented in the narrative. It becomes evident that multiple layers of signification are attributed to what is at most a legal or social offence or at the least a violation of middle-class moral decorum. Giving a religio-moral dimension to acts usually as commonplace as uttering untruths (*Crooked House*, *The Bad Seed*), overhearing adult conversation (*The Children's Hour*), or self-survival or envy (*The Good Son*) is a particular characteristic of the new representational paradigm of deviant childhood. An amount of opaqueness in representation is crucial for this feature to work. The child's voice, if at all permitted to be heard, requires mediation, distortion and misrepresentation so that even ordinary utterances become disquieting.

I examine a cross-section of Anglo-American narratives of the horror-thriller genre which has the figure of the 'evil child' at its centre. The term 'evil-child narrative' is used here to denote those texts in which there are explicit references to the 'evil' of the child figure voiced by authority figures or the protagonist or the 'victims'; the narrative point-of-view supports the accusation; or the child figure exhibits all the characteristics of malice, intention, and rationality that qualify the popular conception of evil. In the first part of the paper, I attempt to clarify the concept of evil and the significance of

moral status and agency in the attribution of evil to an individual; this is followed by three sections that examine how the three definitive aspects of evil are manifested in representations of evil children in fictional narratives.

3.1.1 Defining Evil

The problem of evil has vexed philosophers since Socrates and has invited theodicies (in the broad sense, as philosophical attempts to make sense of evil) by Kant, Rousseau, Nietzsche, and Hegel, and with an anti-climactic force, re-emerging in the post-Auschwitz world, in Arendt's "banality of evil." In the course of all this philosophising and the arrival of modernity, the religious articulation of evil has been superseded with the secular; God has been exorcised and replaced with the human being. The pre-Enlightenment distinction between natural, moral, and metaphysical evils was reduced, post-Lisbon[1], to a single category called moral evil, the domain of humankind alone.

There are two basic views of evil: the monistic and the pluralistic (M. Douglas). In the popular monistic view of evil, what is wicked is impure and must be cut off from us. In the less popular pluralist view, evil is an essential part of us and beneficial to humankind. According to Baudrillard, for instance, evil can be useful as a check against the unifying, totalising drive in modernity. In *The Intelligence of Evil* (2004), he defines evil as "all that rests on duality, on the dissociation of things, on negativity, on death" (11). It is "an original power and, in no sense, a dysfuntion, vestige or mere obstacle standing in the way of good" (107). Baudrillard's perspective echoes Nietzsche who argued that moral appreciation and opprobium are historical developments, products of the 'moral age'. According to the Darwinian moral code that Nietzsche appears to follow, there is, fundamentally, "only a question of strong and weak wills" (Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil* 51); it is the strongest that survive in a battle of the wills, and the weak virtues preached by Christianity deny natural impulses (selfishness) and override a 'natural' and sensible 'warrior' morality. In this view, conventional morality is a repressive ideological mechanism and evil is a necessary, and even natural, quality that can cure social ills, rather than one that needs cure. The monistic view is implicitly endorsed in popular narratives, and hence this chapter deals only with representations

[1]The Lisbon earthquake of 1755 (All Saint's Day) provoked a seismic philosophical response in the Age of Enlightenment, particularly from Voltaire, Roussueau and Kant, and promoted a spirit of scientific or rational enquiry into natural phenomena supplanting erstwhile supernatural and theodical explanations.

that construe evil as impure or deserving opprobrium.

Regarding the origin of evil, there are two major approaches: evil is either a social phenomenon, that is, a product of society, or is innate to the individual. Rousseau, arguing for the social origins of evil, states: "God makes all things good; man meddles with them and they become evil" (Rousseau, *Emile* 5). His "incontrovertible rule" is that "there is no original sin in the human heart, the how and why of the entrance of every vice can be traced" (56). Furthermore, the apparently evil virtues of self love and selfishness are but natural impulses, necessary for survival (56).

The innateness theory, on the other hand, is applied in the notion of universal original sin as well as individual pathology. The pathological model of evil traces moral wickedness to the individual's nature. For instance, psychopaths, popularly the worst embodiment of evil, are wildly held to have moral insanity encoded in their genes. A consequence of this latter approach is the higher chance of controlling or eliminating evil from the world by identifying individuals or specific genes; while in the case of the former approach– evils as socially produced–large-scale social and ideological restructuring is required to remedy them. As Baudrillard remarks, "Evil, which was once a metaphysical or moral principle, is today pursued materially right down into the genes [....] It has become an objective reality and hence objectively eliminable" (Baudrillard 22).

This medical or biological re-figuration of evil uses scientific terms like virus, parasites, cancer, and infection, to describe evil. The biological model has roots in the nineteenth century when moral evil came to be seen as a problem of social public hygiene, an important aspect in the discourse of degeneration (See **??**). To illustrate her view of evil, Hannah Arendt, for instance, uses the analogy of fungi that spreads without forming deep roots. "Evil," writes Arendt, "possesses neither depth nor any demonic dimension. It can overgrow and lay waste the whole world precisely because it spreads like a fungus on the surface" (qtd. in Neiman 301).

Arendt, here, subscribes to the Platonic conception of evil as negative, as privation. Arendt's 'banality of evil', for instance, strips evil of grandeur and autonomy and instead attributes a lack of deep motivation or active thought in doers of evil. Similarly, Žižek argues counter-intuitively that evil persons are not egotists, those who only care about their own interests, but that evil rather arises in "the death drive, involves self-

sabotage. It makes us act against our own interests" (Žižek, *Violence*) and that "[T]he primary vice of a bad person is precisely that he is more preoccupied with others than with himself" (*Violence*).

As seen above, evil has historically been regarded as either a positive or negative attribute, originating either in one's nature or due to external influence. However, the term evil is a loaded one and its more contemporary usage in particular requires explication. Evidently, defining evil is not a simple task, with the many discourses—religious, philosophical, and popular—surrounding the term. The term 'evil' as applied to persons and actions had the special sense "morally bad" (as distinct from 'bad') since the Middle English period; by the eighteenth century, it came to have the specific modern sense of "extreme moral wickedness" ("Evil"). The religious connotation of evil as demonic, grand, and pure–in the sense that it is devoid of recognisable motive–is largely limited to supernatural and/or possession narratives. The term is more often applied to describe actions and persons that have no superhuman or supernatural associations. The term, in its secular sense, is the worst moral opprobium for a person; it is the highest degree of moral wickedness. Rhoda Pembroke of *The Bad Seed*, for instance, is described by a critic as an "indubitably evil child" (Balanzategui, "Introduction" 11) although there is neither supernatural association to Rhoda's actions nor a lack of motive; in fact, Rhoda's behaviour falls within the domain of criminality.

Evil, therefore, has come to mean unjustifiable extreme wrongs. In Susan Neiman's words, evil is "absolute wrongdoing that leaves no room for account or expiation" (Neiman 3). A simpler but reductive view is that evil denotes wrongs committed intentionally. Stephen King adheres to a further reductive view in describing evil as "the conscious will to do harm" (Perakos 14). That is, evil can be merely malicious intention and need not be put into action.

Claudia Card provides a more succinct definition: "[E]vils are reasonably foreseeable intolerable harms produced by inexcusable wrongs" (qtd. in Calder). This definition condenses a number of essential criteria that qualify an act as evil. Firstly, the act does not have any moral justification: whatever motives or influences there may be for the evildoer, the act itself lacks "reasonable" motive; there is no ethically sensible cause propelling the act; the act is without reason. Secondly, the consequences of the act are predictable by the agent before the act is committed. This predictability arises out of

experience and reason. The evildoer has to be an individual with sufficient experience of life and capable of reason, which implies that the individual in question is purposive, has the intention to commit the acts, knowing fully the certain aftermath of such acts. Thirdly, the suffering caused by the evil has to be out-of-the-ordinary, beyond the pale of "normal" or acceptable wickedness, and even unnatural. For an act to be evil, it must cross the threshold of acceptable and reasonable wrongdoing. It is wickedness par excellence, so to speak. In short, evil is a heinous act of formidable consequences committed for no cause or "reason" by rational persons.

The term "evil child" then appears to be oxymoronic, particularly because the words 'evil' and 'child' denote mutually exclusive concepts. A child is one who is not yet an adult, in the process of becoming, one who is in a limbo between potential and actuality. Being such, a child may be bad, wicked or malicious; but to qualify as evil, the child must not be a child. The evil-child conjunction in twentieth-century gothic narratives depends on the juxtaposition of these seemingly disparate concepts to create unease, fear, and horror in the audience. As Renner argues, the evil child is an impossible construction which can exist only as fantasy; narratives then are efforts to exculpate the child from the category of evil and preserve childhood innocence (Renner 7-8). The evil child is reasonable, but cannot be reasoned with; is already adult-like and hence cannot be trained to 'become' an adult; is the embodiment of pure evil, lacking both cause and motive. The instability of categories caused by such juxtaposition, however, is resolved with the explanatory subtext of the narrative that restabilises the categories by radically separating the one from the other. The fascination with evil is engaged up to the point where understanding fails completely and the evil person becomes the embodiment of the Other, the nonhuman, and can be safely exterminated, leaving the category of child untainted as before.

3.1.2 Human Nature

The secular sense of evil can only be attributed to moral agents, that is, individuals who have moral personhood. A lion attacking another animal for no palpable reason may not be described as being evil, but a person who fires bullets at a group of peaceful marketgoers will possibly merit the adjective. Traditionally, the child is said to lack moral personhood on account of his/her lack of fixed identity and undeveloped faculty

of reason that allows moral deliberation and reciprocity (See 2.1).

Rousseau denied the existence of any such thing as an innate conscience and therefore before the age of reason the child is amoral, doing things without judging the moral status of actions, except in other's actions towards him/her (Rousseau, *Emile* 34).[2] If the child strangles birds, destroys, smashes, and breaks things it is only because destroying is more easily gratifying than creating. Moral beinghood is acquired when one acquires a sense of self (41). According to the sociologist Émile Durkheim, during the first four years of one's life, "the individual, in both the physical and moral sense, does not yet exist" (Durkheim 147). Overcoming this deprivation involves "a veritable metamorphosis" by which one acquires "self-control, the power to contain, regulate and overcome oneself" (149).

Moral status is tied to individuality, and in turn, the right or lack thereof of human dignity and treatment. Denying someone (moral) personhood has serious consequences to the person's quality of life, worth, and safety, as Eva Feder Kittay argues, because "personhood marks the moral threshold above which equal respect for the intrinsic value of an individual's life is required and the requirements of justice are operative and below which only relative interest has moral weight" (Kittay 139). Kittay contends that, rather than the capacity to reason or any other intrinsic property, it is social identities that grant moral status. Despite her rejection of intrinsic properties as the criteria for moral personhood, Kittay[3] merely emphasises emotional capacities over the rational:

> Philosphers have made much of the importance of rational capacities for the exercise of moral judgments and moral actions but... have understated the critical role other capacities play in our modern life, capacities that we would want to encourage in the members of a moral community, such as giving care, empathy, and fellow feeling; a sense of what is harmonious and loving; and a capacity for kindness and an appreciation for those who are kind (151)

According to Jaworska and Tannenbaum, rather than one's sense of justice or moral

[2] "Conscience makes one prefer good and despise evil" writes Rousseau, "but this is preceded by the faculty of reason, no innate conscience. If the child thinks of people as tools or means, the problem is with the upbringing" (*Emile* 34).

[3] She gives the example (based on her own daughter) of an individual with congenitally severe mental retardation, whose "infectious love of life enriches the lives of others and who has never acted maliciously or tried to harm anyone" (Kittay 151).

reciprocity, moral status has to do with multiple factors like one's cognitive ability, (unrealised) potential, membership in a cognitively sophisticated species, and so on. The highest possible degree, that of full moral status implies three privileges: the individual has every right to be free of any interference, to get aid, and to be treated fairly. In modernity, the child is undoubtedly worthy of full moral status. However, these privileges involved in moral status need not be universally binding; the interdiction on interference may be overridden in certain contexts, for instance, if other lives are at stake. But even in such special cases, "a moral residue remains, so that, for example, there is still reason to strongly regret the circumstances that called for such action" (Jaworska and Tannenbaum).

The idea of moral personhood has strong implications for the child figure in the evil-child narrative because the extra-judicial deaths imposed on the sacrilegious child point to an ambivalence in the attribution of moral status. The criminality or the extra-species origin of the offending child signifies a politico-moral liminality that denies the child full moral status. The child's life loses in moral worth and his/her death is justified. The 'moral residue' of such denial remains, however, and is perhaps attempted to be resolved through the suicide (self-sacrifice) of the guardian (who attempts to kill or had killed the child). Alyson Miller argues that it is the culpability that mothers and maternal figures share with their evil offspring, as "sources of corruption and sin", that lead narratives to persecute the former (6). Nevertheless, the suicidal or sacrificial gesture of the guardian is a recurrent motif, one that applies equally well to paternal figures (who are however fewer in number)as well. It is the case that the guardian–one who has the greatest responsibility (and love) for the child, or is closest, or is the most trusted by the child–suffers death alongside the child (whenever the plan succeeds) in an act of selfless devotion. This death is not vilified or retributive, but rather is tragic and necessary, an essential sacrifice so that the cycle of violence can come to an end. In late-twentieth-century narratives, however, violence is an endless loop, the child's evil cannot cease, and sacrifice is either impossible or futile.

Despite the general tabula rasa assumption in the belief that the child can be moulded in the process of socialisation, there is a contradictory but strong faith in 'innate ideas' in the Western way of thinking. The Enlightenment project believed in a universal human nature, which was essentially moralistic and good. John Locke's 'natural theory

of sentiments' argues for the inherent potential of all human beings for sympathy. A lack of sympathy is a sign of irrationality, of hardened "habits of insensibility," the inability to see the general in the particular, the universal in the individual (Chakrabarty 122). Rousseau, refuting Hobbes's argument of the natural wickedness of man, claims that the two seemingly contrary but natural impulses common to humankind are self-preservation and compassion (Rousseau, *Emile*). Children, although essentially good, but who may be irrationally unsympathetic to the plight of others, may therefore be brought out of their apathy by the inculcation of higher cognitive capacities.

It appears to be taken for granted that a universal, inherent but dormant altrustic inclination exist in human beings which may be cultivated through proper education and social co-existence. Kant, for instance, claims that "every human being, as a moral being, has a conscience within him originally" (qtd. in Giubilini). Rousseau, for example, who denies anything such as an innate conscience (Rousseau, *Emile* 34), is, interestingly, a believer in "natural compassion", the innate capacity of human beings to feel pain at the suffering of "sensible" beings, particularly of one's own species ("Discourse on Inequality"). There is, he writes, "at the bottom of our hearts an innate principle of justice and virtue, by which, in spite of our maxims, we judge our own actions or those of others to be good or evil; and it is this principle that I call conscience" (qtd. in Giubilini). The biological basis for empathy, mirror neurons, were discovered in the early 1990s. It confirmed, in popular representations, the thesis that empathy was not a social, morally relative construct, but rather is hardwired into human biology. Cruelty towards one's fellow beings is then abnormal, a sign of pathology. The pychologist Paul Bloom develops this notion and argues for an evolutionary basis of morality (while, strangely, making an exception for the 'psychopath' who is by definition without the innate moral foundations that 'normal' people are born with); he claims that "babies are moral animals equipped by evolution with empathy and compassion, the capacity to judge the actions of others, and even some rudimentary understanding of justice and fairness" (Bloom).

As in all universalising theories, the problem with attributing innate goodness is that the member of the set that does not conform, or falsifies the theory is, by virtue of the circularity of the hypothesis, excluded from the set. The "goodness of the child", writes the Frankfurt School theorist Erich Fromm, is the belief that the "average child

is not born a cripple, coward, or soulless automaton but has full potentialities to love life and to be interested in life" (Fromm, "Foreword"). That a child may be born a "soulless automaton" with no altruistic potentiality is a possibility that is entertained only to exclude it from normal, good childhoods. According to this deeply-trenched way of thinking, socialisation is only possible through the already-present, 'natural' and universal raw material that affords integration into civilisation. In the Enlightenment and Romantic optimistic belief in essential human goodness and perfectibility, there appears to be a lesser-known special clause for "exceptionally evil" persons. For some individuals, it appears, evil is innate and ineradicable; the later Kant described "original Evil" as "inscribed into the atemporal character of a person" (Žižek, "Which Subject" 187, 188). In this light, evil is "something which is irrevocably given; the person in question can never change it, outgrow it via his ultimate moral development" (187).

The contradiction in the Kantian theory of evil choices, as Žižek points out, is that evil is both an innate disposition as well as a choice made by the individual: Kant conceives "the choice of Evil, the decision of Evil, as an atemporal, a priori, transcendental act: as an act which never took place in temporal reality but none the less constitutes the very frame of the subject's development, of his practical activity" (188). Schelling explicates this idea of free choice that was never made, by introducing the unconscious: "the atemporal choice by means of which the subject chooses himself as 'good' or 'evil' is an unconscious choice" (188).

The evil individual is thus exonerated for his/her wickedness as it was acquired apriori to his/her temporal existence, and, simultaneously, blamed for having made the choice through the exercise of free will. He/she cannot help being what he/she is, but must be punished for it. Being incurable, the evil person exists as a perpetual threat to society and its values. Hence the controversial question of whether the 'incorrigibles'—the incurably ill, the mad, the intellectually challenged, or habitual criminals—deserve full moral personhood, with all the fundamental and social rights and privileges that the adult 'active citizen' may enjoy. The "failure to be harmoniously socialised into society's functioning", writes Allison James and Alan Prout, implied, therefore, "in effect, a failure to be human" (14). In contemporary popular responses to the high-profile James Bulger case of 1993 in England, the epithets, "evil freaks," "the spawn of Satan," "little devils," and "adult-brain[ed]" were attributed to the ten-year-

old child offenders (A. James and Jenks 323). The socialisation and developmental approach to childhood, although widely and historically popular, becomes a double-edged sword with serious, real effects on social groups, classes, and races, particularly in the twentieth century.

In the rest of this chapter, I examine how the three definitive aspects of evil –incomprehensibility, extreme harm, and malicious intention –are manifested in representations of evil children in fictional narratives.

3.2 For No Cause or Reason: The Pure Conception of Evil

William Friedkin, the director of *The Exorcist*, reportedly stated that demonic possession was the reason behind Hitler (Zinoman). This is to say that Hitlerian evil is something that cannot be explained or made sense of outside a religio-metaphysical context. The unintelligibility of actions is a major criteria for calling them evil (Barry 263). The New Horror of the 1970s captures this notion that evil not only exists but is unavoidable and inexplicable (Zinoman). Carpenter's *Halloween* (1978), a cult classic, may have inaugurated the 'evil without reason' theme in the genre; Michael Myers notoriously lacks a backstory that explains his monstrosity. He also remains under a mask throughout the film, except for the brief glimpses the camera allows of the six year old at the beginning and the adult at the finale.[4] The mask stands in for the absence of inner reality; there is only appearance, no identity beneath it, that could be made sense of, fitted into some conceptual category. "All you are dealing with is something that's pure evil," stated Carpenter acknowledging the influence of Samuel Beckett, "We strip everything down to a purity. He's not wearing anything distinguishable. It's an outfit at a gasoline station. But it could be anything. He's a blank. We stripped away the particulars, the details" (qtd. in Zinoman).

According to the privation theory of evil seen in 3.1.1, "Evil is the absence of good—a property or quality—that normally would or should be present in a thing" (Kane 43). The negative idea of evil as privation of goodness, of moral sense, compassion, etc., posits that in certain cases, evil is innate, inbuilt, and ineradicable through

[4]Mentioned as The Shape in the film credits, many actors played the role in the same film. In the 2017 remake of *Halloween*, Michael is given an elaborate and traumatic childhood story, a dysfunctional family environment to boot. This, however, destroys the mysterious, folk-demonic aspect of the Halloween monster.

education, inculcation of moral values, environmental influence, or maturity. The evil-doer often has always already made a choice (3.1.1). The Arendtian notion of evil as born out of banality–our lack of deep thought–allows the application of the epithet to acts that involve largescale harm due to the callousness or indifference of individuals. In a 2019 podcast entitled "The Fascination with Evil" (2019), the philosopher Susan Neiman discusses climate change and genocide as examples of evil, while she excuses pedophilia as simply wrong (Eagleton et al.). Terry Eagleton in the same discussion argues against the presumption that evil must necessarily be more harmful than wickedness. According to him, an absence of reasonable motive characterises evil, and therefore neither genocide nor pedophilia (let alone climate change) would deserve to be called evil as there are instrumental reasons to be given in explanation or justification of them (Eagleton et al.). Acts committed by human beings are generally with motive, however weak they might be, and therefore can scarcely be called evil. According to Eagleton, evil is a term which by definition has a limited scope of application; he subscribes to the Faustian-Miltonian concept of evil as demonic, dignified and pure. Contrary to the "impure evil" attributed to inferior beings of less rationality, is the conception of pure evil, reserved for distinguished persons, such as the supernatural Satan, demons, and monsters, for whom evil is the necessary expression of their being, and therefore, is uncaused, incurable, and motiveless. "The demonic is that which is anti-creation, which is dedicated to reducing creation back to chaos," he stated,

> It scoffs at human meaning and value.... It desires nothing more than to debunk and dishonour and deflate the petty pretensions of humankind.... It wants, moreover, precisely, to do that purely as an end in itself, not for any instrumental reason, but to use the theological term, 'just for the hell of it'....That's one reason why evil is extraordinarily rare, because most wickedness is instrumental. (Eagleton et al.)

Along with the Christian notion of evil as privation, this popular Manichaean conception predominates cultural representations of evil, one that posits evil as a "First Principle," that competes with its equal, goodness (Huxley 200-201). Phillip Cole posits a monstrous conception of evil that depicts evil persons as "monsters in human shape"; they "freely and rationally" choose to cause suffering to others for the sake of doing evil itself, and thus forego their human status: "[T]hese monsters constitute a distinct class,

different from the rest of humanity, with a different nature" (qtd. in Russell 46). As the governess in James's novella claims, the reason for the ghosts of Jessel and Quint hounding the children is: "For the love of all the evil that, in those dreadful days, the pair put into them. And to ply them with that evil still, to keep up the work of demons, is what brings the others back" (H. James).

Similarly, in *Case 39* as in other evil-child films, Lily lacks clear, reasonable motives, but exists solely to wage war against all that is good:

> EDWARD: Kindness. Decency. That's what she feeds on. Bleeds ya dry, moves onto the next (*Case 39* 1:02:02-07).

This is the case also for narratives that do not engage with any explicit religious associations; the secular idea of evil rooted in the religion of science–eugenics, evolution, Social Darwinism, or genetics–rather than a temptation of the devil or a challenge to god, simply replace demonic origins with inexplicable genetic aberration (usually traced matrilineally).

The child's evil is posited to be arbitrary and unforeseeable, wholly lacking any origin or motive whatsoever. Renner, however, argues that evil in the horror narrative is "an effect, not a cause, a response to an influence rather than an essence" citing as evidence the need in filmic narratives to attribute heredity, Satanic intercourse, psychopathy, etc as the cause of the child's evil nature (Renner 8). Renner, therefore, considers the evil child narrative as "essentially humanistic" because evil is proposed to have a source and a remedy which is traceable to childhood (8).[5]

Indeed, the narratives revolving around evil children predominantly rest on either of these two origin-assumptions: demonic origin or genetically transmitted criminality. In either case, however, the influence of nurture is zilch and all the evil caused by the child springs from his/her very own nature. Since the child is unmotivated, there is no question of justification or redemption. The inherent nature of evil absolves parents of responsibility and apparently nullifies effects of education or punishment[6] (Miller

[5]Similarly, Eric Ziokolwsky argues that the use of such Biblical phrases as *son of the devil*, *devil's seed*, etc implies the belief that "wicked persons must descend from a wicked source" (182). He claims the belief is not altogether without basis, in the light of modern genetic studies (182).

[6]In more realistic texts like *We Need to Talk about Kevin* (2003) or *Defending Jacob* (2012), parents of the murdering child are both pitied and despised; they are guilty to the extent that the child is, ironically, their responsibility. For instance, in Landay's *Defending Jacob*, the parents are implicated in their son's crime "as both victims and perpetrators. We were pitied, since we had done nothing wrong. We had just

4). There is no remedy other than the extermination of the child. Thus when Christine reviews "the basis of [Rhoda's] strange, unsocial conduct" (March 101) she decides that her child was "never neglected," "never spoiled," and "never unjustly treated" (102). She concludes that Rhoda's "mind or her character" cannot be understood, it was "something deeper than" environmental causes (March).

However, the "causes" Renner mentions are innate and essential, although predetermined. These influences cannot be avoided in the first place, the child is what it is, it is the embodiment of evil. The child can choose to be or pretend to be good and innocent for ulterior motives, but the choice of evil is always already made. Most horror children are born with wicked predispositions, or manifest its signs in early childhood itself. An adopted child is most likely to be wicked or have latent wickedness, as seen in *The Omen*, *Orphan*, *The Ring*, *The Bad Seed*, and *Village of the Damned*. In *Case 39*, Lily's father remarks about her:

> EDWARD: Whatever evil she is, it didn't come from us. It was already there. From the moment she came into being she brought something with her. Something old, destructive, the soul of a demon (*Case 39* 1:02:36-51).

Implying incurability, authority figures like doctors, psychiatrists, and child welfare officials too explicitly refer to the "evil" in the child. Thus Dr Loomis, the psychiatrist in *Halloween* is able to say of the six-year-old Michael:

> DR LOOMIS: I was told there was nothing left, no reason, no conscience, no understanding, in even the most rudimentary sense, of life or death, of good or evil, right or wrong. I met this six-year-old child with this blank, pale emotionless face and the blackest eyes, the devil's eyes. I spent eight years trying to reach him and then another seven trying to keep him locked up because I realized that what was living behind that boy's eyes was purely and simply evil" (emphasis added, *Halloween* 0:38:46-39:26).

3.3 Intolerable Harms: Unacceptable Wickedness, Extraordinary Evil

The American playwright Arthur Miller wrote in 1947 that:

been unlucky, lost the pregnancy lottery, and been stuck with a rogue child. Sperm + egg = murderer – something like that. Can't be helped" (Landay). They were also "despised" because "*somebody* had to be responsible for Jacob, and we had created the boy and raised him – we must have done *something* wrong" (Landay).

> we conceive the Devil as a necessary part of a respectable cosmology. Ours is a divided empire in which certain ideas and emotions and actions are of God, and their opposites are of Lucifer. [....] Since 1692 [the Salem witch trials] a great but superficial change has wiped out God's beard and the Devil's horns, but the world is still gripped between two diametrically opposed absolutes (qtd. in Bigsby).[7]

In the narratives examined, the attribute evil usually adheres in association with acts that are sinful–acts that break a socio-religious taboo (for instance, matricide or fratricide). Evil is also used in the sense of events that are unpredictable and incongruent with expectations. In evil acts or persons, it is as though some natural principle, a bona fide contract, has been grossly violated, justice thwarted, and the victim of violence appears to feel gravely and irreparably wronged. This metaphysical notion of evil (as opposed to a purely moral evil) raises unsettling questions about human nature and futurity.

In *The Ring*, Samara's ability to imprint visions telepathically so that she is capable of controlling and influencing anyone who comes in contact with her, is the specific form of threat she poses. *Case 39*'s Lily is able to make people do things by the power of suggestion; moreover she proceeds to parasitically cling to people and use them for her own well-being. Since the age of five, Euros from *Sherlock* (2017), is capable of "reprogramming" the people around her, making them do and say things that she puts into their heads, and thus enslaving them. The child as autocrat, as parasite, as virus, as draining the powers of the parents (and other adults) so that adult authority is reversed and the stability of the 'well-governed' family destroyed is a familiar figuration of evil in horror cinema.

3.3.1 The Good–Bad Dichotomy

The exemplary and the exceptional instances complement each other in a mutually constitutive relation. "Things evil," writes Charles Dole, "generally present themselves, as evil only in relation to a standard of good" (6). The narrative emphasises the effect of

[7] Valerie Wee, in her discussion of horror cinema and its American adaptations, emphasises the opposition of good and evil absolutes in the latter, tracing it to their Judeo-Christian perspective. The relationship between good and evil in American horror (as well as British horror) is one of opposition and conflict ('good versus evil') while the Eastern/Buddhist view in Asian horror observes the relationship to be complementary, even inevitable ('good and evil') (Wee).

the evil child using a 'desirable' child who acts as the former's foil. The good and the bad child delimit the contours of each other. In *The Bad Seed* (LeRoy, 1956), Claude Daigle is a posthumous character who is repeatedly alluded to as the embodiment of ideal childhood which Rhoda violates. Claude is the quintessential dead child of Romantic and Victorian heritage who gains the symbolic and sacred status of pure innocent in afterlife. There are no other child characters to compare Rhoda with, except for the dead Claude whose professions of love for his mother as recalled by the latter, appear sweet, tragic, and genuine. According to Claude's grieving mother, he "obeyed [her] completely" and they were "so close to each other... He said I was his sweetheart, and he would put his little arms about my neck and tell me every thought he had" (68-69). Although Claude's parenting is depicted as overly sentimental and overprotective, the character delineation of Claude stands in stark opposition to that of Rhoda who comes across as "eerily artificial and performative" (Scahill 61).

In the loose remake, *The Good Son* (1993), Henry is depicted as the quintessential good son, fusing boyish mischievousness and social charms to appeal to adults. He is revealed to be an irredeemable child killer, in both senses. His younger sister whom he kills and his cousin Mark serve as the innocents who are fatally harmed by Henry's evil influence. The significance of the title of the film is brought home in the final scene in which the lives of the two children–Mark and Henry–hang in the balance; Henry's mother lets him die and saves–or, makes live–the actual 'good son', her nephew Mark.

Lessing's *The Fifth Child*, being a more self-conscious text examines the dichotomies it creates and subverts them to create the novel's characteristic sense of menace and evolutionary horror. Harriet and David Lowatt's four children all have "wispy fair hair and blue eyes and pink cheeks" (Lessing, *The Fifth Child*) and are stereotypically cherubs in behaviour as well. At one point early in the novel, Harriet smugly describes a relative's Down syndrome daughter as a "mongol child" and "[a] baby Genghis Khan with her squashed little face and her slitty eyes" (*The Fifth Child*). Later, the eponymous Ben is born to the Lowatts who they suspect is a proto-human throwback because of his ugly appearance and lack of socio-emotive skills. Meanwhile, the larger context of the novel, 1970s Britain, where the later events take place, is depicted as a harrowing age in which "it seemed that two peoples lived in England, not one – enemies, hating each other, who could not hear what the other said" (*The Fifth Child*); "gangs of youths"

menace public spaces and indulge in meaningless violence while the Lowatts live in their sheltered Victorian complacence (*The Fifth Child*). Ben upsets the order of things because he is literally one of the 'gang', a brute, and soon leads a coterie of hoodlums into the house who make it their home.

In *Child's Play* (1988), the protagonist Andy is a cute, obedient, and model child while Chucky, the plastic conduit of a serial murderer, is the foil to Andy. Chucky the doll is the grave combination of the mind of an immoral adult and a child-sized body, a convenient "stand-in towards whom parental hatred and anxiety may be uncontroversially directed" (Lennard, "All fun and games" 139). The gravest physical abuse is able to be directed at him without moral qualms; in the course of the first film of the franchise, Chucky is "shot, set alight, shot again, decapitated and dismembered" (140). Nevertheless, a thin line differentiates Andy from Chucky; Dominic Lennard points out that the film actively encourages comparison between the two, in terms of their physical appearance–relative body sizes and clothes—as well as their political status as voiceless, impossible witnesses. Remarkably, the moral ambiguity in the binary opposition of the good and bad child is emphasised strategically in a final scene in which Andy, for a brief moment, stares immobile as his mother cries for his help. We fear that Andy might have been possessed after all from the botched possession scene from earlier. The moment dissolves, however, as the look of impassivity turns out to be shock and Andy gathers his wits and loyalty and steps forward to save his mother from Chucky.

Similarly, in the 1989 *Pet Sematary*, the toddler Gage is the quintessential cherubim, a bundle of joy and sunshine for the parents, and the cinematography elaborately paints him with warm and bright colours. In the first half of the film, shots of Gage is entirely in diffused warm lighting, a straight-on camera angle, often high to highlight his smallness and vulnerability, and dressed in warm pale shades of blue, green, and yellow. After his fatal accident, however, the Gage that emerges from the grave is not a cherubim but a changeling. He is in formal black funereal wear making him appear like a miniature adult; he is bloodthirsty, cannibalistic, and maliciously playful. The soundtrack recycles the previous babble and laughter of the child to create an atmosphere of menace. Low-angle shots, under lit, against a dark background, the toddler with his neatly parted hair, dark suit, pale skin, and blank expression transform the earlier cute

figure into a figure of dread.[8]

Such radically opposed representations are mutually constitutive; the conceptualisation of the mean child necessarily determines the contours of that of the innocent child whose stark antithesis is the former. Samara (*The Ring*, 2002) or Neil (*The Other*) or Ben (*The Fifth Child*) is threatening and disruptive not merely because of the danger she/he poses but because she/he invalidates the consoling life-affirmativeness exhibited by a happy mentally challenged child (the psychiatrist's son) or an adorable Miles or a Down-syndrome Amy, respectively. Interestingly, in *The Ring*, the protagonist's son Aiden, disturbed and adultlike in demeanour, is uncannily linked to the homicidal Samara. The protagonist Rachel tries to redeem Samara and end her curse if only because of the guilt she feels towards her uncared-for son, and wronged children in general. The film, however, underscores, most startlingly, the distinction between Samara and Aiden in the finale in which the curse instead of ending forever becomes stronger. Aiden is revealed to have a past, through flashback shots, of living a happy life in the countryside with his grandfather. The child has a past and a future with the potential of happiness and growth, even only if the environment allows it. Samara, however, lacks both an affirmative stance towards life and emotional growth. While Aiden deserves our sympathy for the sad life he is caught in, Samara, being corrupt by nature, appears to deserve her terrible murder and, if possible, her future extermination.

3.3.2 Authenticity versus Performativity

The devil's minions frequently take on the guise of the good, the banal, and the beautiful. Even precocity and independence which were once (and still are in most of the non-Western world) valued qualities in children of a less differentiated society are now evidence of the diabolic and the pathological. Evil children are rarely physically 'brutish' or 'monstrous' which would make them identifiable at first sight (like Frankenstein's creature) but are pretty and quaint, dainty and harmless, "present[ing] a more convincing picture of virtue than normal folk" (*The Bad Seed* 1:08:08-09). A suspicion of appearances, of what-is-seen, underscores the gothic framework of these narratives;

[8]The film generated controversy in the MPAA, the American censorship authority, concerning the depiction of a two-year old as the villain. The film's director, Mary Lambert, responded in an interview that there is no villain in the film, and "no horrible supernatural creature. The villain is basically fear—your own fear that will come back in its most awful form and destroy you unless you destroy it first" (qtd. in Szebin, "Review of *Pet Sematary*" 21).

anything that calls attention to itself, either to its ordinariness or exceptionality, is by default convention, suspect. There are perhaps deep-rooted historical reasons for this post-war paranoia; the authoritarian or the fascist personality is mythified as concealing his/her diabolic intentions with a charismatic and seemingly good-hearted appearance. Erich Fromm, in 1973, stated that

> the main fallacy which prevents people from recognizing potential Hitlers before they have shown their true faces .... lies in the belief that a thoroughly destructive and evil man must be a devil—and look his part; that he must be devoid of any positive quality.... Much more often the intensely destructive person will show a front of kindliness (qtd. in Midgley 4).

Jalava et al. points out that authenticity has traditionally been a central focus in Western thought. Performance, imitation, duplicity and even slick perfection are counter to "the religio-moral concept of authenticity" that posits the idea of an authentic self–imperfect, awkward, precious, and readable (185-186). Psychopathic individuals represent a disturbing form of evil because they are quintessentially 'inauthentic'. Psychopaths present an "appearance-reality puzzle" (133); they are "congenital 'moral idiots'" who *look* like "normal," healthy individuals (Fromm, qtd. in Midgley 4). Among the symptoms of the psychopath are superficial charm and glibness, signs of inauthenticity (Jalava et al. 185). According to popular belief, psychopaths are detectable by certain observable tendencies in early childhood itself. The notion has undergone a mythologisation such that the signs of evil remain invisible to the ordinary eye; only the scientific expert can read the symptoms and make the detection.

This discrepancy in representations of evil between outside and inside, appearance and reality plays on audience/reader expectations, and having become formulaic, any depiction of childhood innocence or vulnerability has become immediately suspect in the gothic mode. All association of idealised childhood—giggles, games, chuckles, voices, smiles, toys—has become a device of horror. In Truman Capote's 1945 short story "Miriam", a little girl of unspecified age with long silver-white hair whose large eyes lacked "any childlike quality whatsoever" builds an atmosphere of increasing menace (Capote, "Miriam"). She is visible only to the protagonist, a lonely widow in her sixties, who gradually loses grip of reality and her own identity. The child is at first a welcome companion but as the narrative progresses, her very presence has a stalking,

threatening effect. Despite the fact that she neither engages in nor influences acts of evil, she is, in Capote's words, a "demon child" a projection of the woman's suppressed evil ("Dear Reader").

The gothic suspicion of appearances is intensified in post-modernist gothic; interestingly, the narrative is able to make the actual object empty of signification such that beneath the appearance there is nothing but appearance. The child never stops performing; there is no authentic core to the child, nor does the appearance of the child (or child actor) signify an actual child. "[T]hings are not only what they seem," writes Botting, "what they seem are what they are, not a unity of word or image and thing, but words and images without things or as things themselves, effects of narrative form and nothing else" (171). The narrative constructs the mask of the child, and pulls it away to reveal something other than the child behind it; the image of the child (as well as the child actor) is meant to be seen as a façade of something sinister, inhuman. The unity between the image and reality is lost. The one who looks like a child is the non-child.

In John Steinbeck's 1952 novel, *East of Eden*, the child Cathy Ames, who one may describe anachronistically as a flegling psychopath, is depicted in starkly superstitious language; Cathy's deceptive appearance is fleshed out with great detail despite her not being a central character of the novel. She is marked out to be different, predatorial, from the very beginning—at the age of ten, she is already what she is to become: "As though nature concealed a trap, Cathy had from the first a face of innocence" (Steinbeck). The description of her face is precise like a Lombrosian physiognomic case study looking for clues to inner evil in the structure of the face:

> Her hair was gold and lovely; wide-set hazel eyes with upper lids that *drooped* made her look *mysteriously* sleepy. Her nose was delicate and thin, and her cheekbones high and wide, sweeping down to a small chin so that her face was heart-shaped. Her mouth was well shaped and well lipped but *abnormally* small—what used to be called a rosebud. Her ears were *very little*, *without lobes*, and they pressed so close to her head that even with her hair combed up they made no silhouette. They were thin flaps *sealed against* her head." (emphasis added, Steinbeck)

The language used to build her character invite conspiratorial reading. Although the townspeople or her parents do not suspect the child of anything, the narrator makes all

the untoward events—even hinting at unspoken ones—the handiwork of Cathy.

The quintessential figure of the adultlike child, Rhoda Penmark in William March's *The Bad Seed* (1954), which is set in the same year as Steinbeck's novel, is also marked out as different from the other children.[9] The difference is nothing but perfection; she has perfectly genteel manners, dresses and carries herself immaculately, and is meticulous in her chores. She combines the desirable qualities of child and adult without any of the childish indiscipline or emotional dependance of her peers (notably her foil, Claude Daigle, the classmate she kills). The narrative reveals how her appearance of childlike desirability had merely been just that–all appearance, a sham, to manipulate the adults. She is introduced as a child whose

> face[is] fixed in an expression of solemn innocence; then she smiled at some secret thought of her own, and at once there was a shallow dimple in her left cheek. She lowered her chin and raised it thoughtfully; she smiled again, but very softly, an odd, hesitating smile that parted her lips this time and showed the small, natural gap between her front teeth. (11)

The eponymous title and the knowledge in hindsight regarding the "secret thought" she had been smiling about –(probably about bullying Claude into submission and getting the penmanship medal she thought she deserved) –reflect negatively on this almost obsessive detailing of her facial expression. At a later point, Rhoda declares fervently to her mother, "Every word I tell you is true" despite overwhelming narratival evidence and her mother's own witnessing to the contrary (106).

In the film adaptation, owing to the mediating cinematic apparatus, Rhoda is not given a moment in which she is not performing, or for that matter, a moment in which she is alone and unobserved. In the theatrical curtain call, all the other actors sport straight, serious faces as they nod at the camera and walk off, while Patty McCormack (Rhoda), being "an actress playing a role who is playing a role" (Scahill 75), curtseys in a less perfect way than she had done erstwhile in the film and drops the rigidity of body that had characterised Rhoda in order to appear genuine. However, as Scahill remarks, "[to] lift the veil of 'role' and reveal the natural cute little girl underneath is in fact unsettling since the narrative itself has deemed this very formation artificial" (75-76).

[9] According to Roy S Simmonds, both authors, Steinbeck and March were influenced by their experience and knowledge of Nazi atrocities in fashioning these strangely alike female child monsters of the early fifties (99-100).

In *Pet Sematary*, the horror revolves around the premise of a murderous, conniving, dexterous two-year-old; the premise works only through a radical conceptual separation between the body of the child and the supernatural possessor animating the body–what one sees and what is inferred from the logic of the story world. The producer of the film Richard Rubinstein stated in an interview how the film is meant to work: "By the end of the story... it is no longer the child Gage; it is possessed; it is something else. I think if you build to that scene, the audience will accept a two-year-old doing what he does when Gage comes back. However, you can't emotionally leave behind what it [sic] was when the kid was alive." (qtd. in Szebin, "Review of *Pet Sematary*" 6).

The same principle of separating the identity of the child from its body is at work across the mode. In *Home Movie* (2008), Clare says of her terrifying, psychopathic ten-year-old children, "I feel like I don't know these people . . . There are strangers in my house" (*Home Movie* 0:38:43-53) and later to them, "You are not our children. I don't know what you are" (*Home Movie* 01:09:04-10). Similarly, in *Case 39*, Margaret and Edward deny that 10-year old Lily is their daughter and to the social worker's question, "What is she?" Edward answers:

> EDWARD: Can tell you what she's not. She's not a daughter of mine. She's not a ten-year old having trouble in school. She's not some innocent victim whose door you busted down and life you saved. And she's not going no place, lady, till she's good and done with you (*Case 39* 01:01:29-44).

The horror in this film arises from the fact that the terrified-looking child victim of physical and emotional abuse is actually none of those adjectives; she is an ancient male demon who parasitically clings, for unspecified reasons, to parental love and child's privileges. Remarkably, the 'old demon's' manifested evil is uncomfortably close to childish tantrums, obstinacy and needs.

As seen previously, the child character undergoes intense scrutiny extensively in the child-monster gothic mode (Hantke 111); the adult (protagonist and/or narrator) devotes a large portion of their time and effort to look into the appearance and identify the child for what he/she really is –precisely this, the appearance of a child. A benign example is in "The Turn of the Screw", in which the governess listens at Miles's door at night due to her self-avowed "endless obsession" in order to listen for "some betrayal of his not being at rest": "I was like a gaoler with an eye to possible surprises and escapes"

(H. James). In *The Omen*, the recognition of Damien as the Anti-Christ[10] involves the American ambassador and Presidential hopeful to resort to stealthy close inspection of the child's body for the physical markers of the demonic. Marks of the devil or an evil past have much narrative value particularly in horror. The scars from the straitjacket and collar revealed under Esther's neck scarf and wristbands in *Orphan* (2009) acts as the evidence of her damning past, of madness. Similarly, the boy's wounds in *Joshua* (2007) as well as the bite marks on the children's arms in *Home Movie* are telltale signs of child abuse (which later turn out to be self-inflicted). Such persistent surveillance is the heritage of the medicalised family since the nineteenth century for which the close monitoring of the impulses, instincts, actions, and sexuality of children was parental responsibility towards the state's future citizenry. Parents were entrusted to "watch over their children, spy on them, creep up on them, peer beneath their blankets, and sleep beside them" (Foucault, *Abnormal* 250). In the second half of the twentieth century, such physical examination and search for symptoms unsettlingly draws in the sensitive angle of child abuse. The parental figure's anxious search for damning clues to demonic activity or affiliation would appear ambiguous in this respect. Such plot events project, briefly, the child as victim, appearing more wronged than wicked.

This transfer of sympathies from the harried parents to the abused child is subverted for more compelling effect, when the child emerges the manipulative, psychopathic killer who had been feeding on the cultural sympathies for the idea of the helpless child. This subversion of cultural expectations and attitudes towards children is the theme in most evil-child horror narratives and the fact that the child knows and exploits what adults imagine of the child adds as evidence to the child's villainy. Horror narratives, Dominic Lennard writes, "court our adoration of, and sympathy for, the innocent child, only to shockingly betray it. In the innocent's place, we get the ingrate brute, the sacred terror, the evil-innocent; and our reverence for the immaculate child is never more powerful than when the one before us rudely decomposes" (Lennard, *Bad Seeds and Holy Terrors* 1). The unease produced in these texts originate, on the one hand, from the contemporary panic over the the increasing socio-legal privileges and independence of children and on the other, the 'cycle of violence,' victimised children, dysfunctional families, child battering, etc which are shown in the narratives to have another side to

[10] According to the entry on 'Anti-Christ' in *Encyclopedia of Demons*, "the child that will be born will look human in all ways and will rise to power as a major political leader who preaches peace" (Bane 42).

them. The argument is to emphasise that the 'innocent' are not so innocent.

3.4 Intention: Knowledge of Evil, Precocity and Forbidden Secrets

Full knowledge is detrimental for the child; innocence is its prerogative and rightful privilege (see 2.2.3). The modern distress at any deprivation of ideal childhood–in cases of such varying severity as child (sexual) abuse, war trauma and trafficking, forced labour, access to foul language or media violence, or lack of mass-produced toys–is symptomatic of the belief in preserving childlike ignorance and innocence as a matter of necessity. The 'knowing' child is a threat to the traditional scheme of things, to adult (patriarchal) authority, and is a corrupting influence on other children and society as a whole. Sexual knowledge is the greatest of the corruptions of childhood in popular representations. Regan's transformation into a vulgar, publicly masturbating adolescent (*The Exorcist*), Esther's[11] interference in her foster-parents' sex life and the pornographic paintings on her bedroom walls (*Orphan*), Michael's voyeuristic gaze (*Halloween*), and Miles and Flora's corruption by the lack of prudent governance (*The Innocents*) are instances. In "The Turn of the Screw", the governess initially praises Miles's "indescribable little air of knowing nothing in the world but love" (H. James) and that he seems like "he has had [...] no history [...] beginning anew each day. He had never for a second suffered" (H. James). This pristine ten-year-old figure without past, experience, or vice –metaphorically, without 'trace' –rudely shatters when the governess later imagines the children as 'knowing' from past experiences: "They KNOW – it's too monstrous: they know, they know!" (emphasis in the original, H. James). In answer to Mrs Grose, she says "Why, all that WE know – and heaven knows what else besides!" (emphasis in the original, H. James). She fears that Miles and Flora "saw MORE –things terrible and unguessable and that sprang from dreadful passages of intercourse in the past" (emphasis in the original, H. James).

As mentioned in 2.2.3, precocity, or the ability to reason and be reasoned with, the prerogative of adults, is terrifying when it appears in children. Their brand of reason is devoid of 'lived' experience and thereby lacking in the moral sense that must accompany it. In Agatha Christie's *Crooked House*, the ten-year-old villain Josephine

[11] The pseudonymous Esther proves to be a pseudo-child owing to a physiological condition, besides being a European immigrant and a murdering madwoman to boot. However, the character is played by a child actor and the anxiety created in the film arises in the unsettling strangeness of 'the child' Esther.

overhears at doors, spies on others' private lives, shows an intellectual acumen far surpassing that of the adults around her, and knows a great deal too much. In the TV episode, *Sherlock*, Euros is Holmes's younger sister who is quarantined from childhood in an "institution" for "uncontainables" away from human society; she is "described as an era-defining genius, beyond Newton" with "incandescent" intellect, who "knew things she should never have known, as if she was somehow aware of truths beyond the normal scope" (*Sherlock* 00:15:10, 10:24-28, 10:15, 10:49-56). Among the Holmes siblings, she surpasses the smart Sherlock and remarkable Mycroft in intelligence; her precocity (devoid of an emotional counterpart) also makes her unmanageable. Similarly, in *Whisper* (2007), the kidnapped boy terrifies the kidnappers with his powers, especially his supernatural access to forbidden knowledge, which is, most horrifically, the inner thoughts of adults.

The child's ability to know and understand adult feelings and emotions is appreciated so long as the child is 'being clever' or being respectfully observant, as in the beach scene from *Case 39* where Emily and Lily share an adult-child bonding point with the latter asking perspicacious questions about Emily's life. However, the moment the child reverses the power equation, and displays a condescending cleverness, the child becomes menacing, as in the significant scene of Lily and the psychiatrist, in which Lily is no longer the meek girl scared to speak, but instead, sees through the façade of rote adult-child talk and transfers the patient's role to the doctor.

In attributing evil to the child, the difficulty posed by the second criteria of the "reasonable or rational" evildoer (3.1.1) is exacerbated by the fact that, traditionally, a child is not a rational being. Lacking reason to foresee the extent or consequences of the act, the child is left entirely without intention to do evil, or, for that matter, good. Evil intention in the classical view is constituted by "malice and forethought" (Neiman). Children may act maliciously or be capable of malicious acts, but it is debatable whether children can premeditate acts of evil with full knowledge of their significances and consequences. Establishing evil in the child figure, therefore, demands powerful evidence and significant spectator engagement :

> The attribution of elemental evil obliges viewers to proceed warily. When dealing with the handiwork of a seemingly evil child, the viewer must ascertain the competence of the culprit [. . .] [T]he audience must weigh mat-

> ters of responsibility, situational awareness, and moral education in light of a desire to assign guilt (Wandless 136).

A "superabundance of signs" that prove villainy reassure the spectator and facilitate the easy categorisation of the offending child as evil (136). The vilification of the child takes place alongside the exculpation of the environment (family, society, state, etc) from blame. The environment is rendered defenceless against the ravages of a tyrannical child, in a mythical good versus evil struggle.

Evil, if understood, can no longer be evil, in the monistic, Manichaean tradition; it has to be essentially haloed, detached, 'looked at awry,' to be 'classified' as evil. The uncanny effect produced by *Halloween*'s (Carpenter, 1978) opening sequence is partly due to the subversion of the normative gaze; the sequence is shot in the point of view of six-year-old Michael who stalks his elder sister and stabs her to death apparently in an act of sexual vigilantism. The spectator shares the pornographic, direct gaze of the murderer unwarily. As Žižek writes of the cinematic gaze, "There is something extremely unpleasant and obscene in this experience of our gaze as already the gaze of the other. Why? The Lacanian answer is that such a coincidence of gazes defines the position of the pervert" (Žižek, "Looking Awry" 37). Once the gaze coincides there cannot be judgement, only discomfort and unease; any action could be rationalised and reasoned away. It is only when the mask is removed to reveal the six-year-old and the perspective shifts to those of his parents and the detached observer, the act gains in magnitude and becomes incomprehensible—an act of evil.

3.4.1 Possession Narratives

In possession narratives, the loss of innocence is generally the underlying theme. The child is corrupted by external, adult, and malicious forces to such a degree that the child's body becomes the abode of a predatory, unchildlike self. The director of *The Innocents*, the 1961 film adaptation of Henry James's novella, Jack Clayton admittedly never showed the child actors (both 11 year olds) playing Miles and Flora the script of the film adaptation.[12] They learnt the next day's lines the night before: "I was ner-

[12]If the original novella by Henry James is intentionally obscure about the verity of the governess's account of events, Clayton's adaptation, owing to the peculiarity of the medium, further obscures it. The question of whether the children are actually possessed or not remains open to conjecture in both texts. However, the loss of innocence forms the theme of the film's narrative as well; the disturbing images of

vous," Clayton said in an interview, "that they might come to psychological harm from reading the story and so, both children played their roles through mimicry" (qtd. in Rebello 53). This adult concern about the preservation of the innocence of the child actor who is supposed to perform lost innocence is remarkably paradoxical. In the director's logic, without the knowledge of the ultimate meaning of what one does, there is hypothetically neither corruption nor harm to the doer. A damning portrayal of childhood is accomplished then through a form of puppetry, where the child-signifiers are merely appearances, with no control over the signified, the semantic value of the imitation. This is a double tiered structure specific to cinematic imitation; besides the level of actor performance, the level of character performance is also marked by puppetry. In possession, the child loses his/her self to a higher, external power, who wields absolute control over the child's body. The loss of control over oneself and passive signification without neither knowledge nor agency, similar to the plight of the child actors above, characterises the state of possession. "Rather than a pact sealed by an action," writes Foucault, "there is an invasion; the devil's insidious and invincible penetration of the body. The possessed is not bound to the devil by a contract; rather, the link is of the order of a habitat, residence, and impregnation" (Foucault, *Abnormal* 208).

Establishing the authenticity of the possession is crucial in popular horror fiction, and this is usually accomplished by foregrounding the radical difference between the two states: the 'before' and the 'after' states of possession. The pre- and post- possession representation of the child is key to the narrative; the child who is possessed is understood as being really not herself (Renner 96).

Regan in *The Exorcist*, for instance, succeeds in the four tests of true demonic possession: the test of clairvoyance, test of levitation, test of preternatural physical strength, and the language test, which is the ability to "understand, or better still, speak a language of which, in his normal state, he is completely ignorant" (Huxley 203). Interestingly, in the case of the fourth test, the test of language, Regan shockingly speaks an adult, abusive and vulgar language which is as alien to the sweet-speaking child who she had been before possession as it is to the upper-class 'cultured' family environment she grows up in. The radically out-of-place language and voice (as heard through Re-

the broken vase and petals, beetles creeping out of a stone cupid, or the bedtime kiss between Miles and the governess that seems too passionate, hint at this corruption (Rebello 52). Moreover, an intertextual supernatural quality adheres to the figure of Miles, who is played by the same child actor who played the the leader of the alien Children in *Village of the Damned*.

gan's mouth) originates from no Miltonic, dignified, or noble evil force, but a furtive, malicious, and uncouth demonic entity.

In Blatty's novel, the eleven-year old Regan before possession is described in her mother's narrative point-of-view as an "angel", shy, loving, and pretty with a "sweet, clear voice", engaging in particularly 'desirable' behaviour like leaving freshly picked flowers at her mother's desk (Blatty). Significantly, she is introduced asleep by her mother opening the door to her bedroom and looking in at her: "asleep, cuddled tight to a large stuffed round-eyed panda. Pookey. Faded from years of smothering; years of smacking, warm-wet kisses" (Blatty). The body of the girl and the space she occupies immobile and unaware of being watched foreshadow the transformation of both body and space as the narrative progresses. The warmth of the girl's bedroom cuddled next to the toy panda metamorphoses into the cold putrid confinement room where she is strapped tight to the bed posts. The body of the docile, content, girlishness of Regan who evokes a sense of sacred purity through her innocence becomes the aggressive, puke-covered, tortured body of the possessed girl pleading for help. Both are objects of voyeurism, the spectacle providing pleasure of different orders; one being the evocation of prepubescent (a)sexuality symbolised by the toy faded from all the kisses and cuddles, and the other that of horror at the wild androgynity[13] and 'abnormal' sexuality of the possessed girl.

The adult possession of the child's body involves dangerous precocity, an unrestricted access to sexual knowledge in particular. A 1976 article in the psychoanalytic journal *American Imago* argued with respect to Blatty's *The Exorcist* that the demon is nothing but sexual awareness that the child must be protected from. The narrative, argues the article, is a reinstatement of the Victorian "theme of saving children from sexual evil" (Beit-Hallahmi 301, 297). At the end, Regan, having "regained predolescence", returns to the "same state of happy innocence", clutching stuffed animals, with no memory of what has passed (299). The priests lose their lives in the battle with the demonic, in the mission to rescue Regan, but, nonetheless, Regan is brought back to her former self. Blatty's Christian narrative emphasises the power of selfless sacrifice to redeem lost souls from sin. It, necessarily therefore, ends with a message of hope; despite the ravages of evil forces, innocence and goodness can be restored. The theme

[13]The demon's voice was dubbed by a woman, Mercedes McCambridge. It was made to seem androgynous. Blatty's novel is reportedly based on the 1949 Maryland possession case of a boy (Zinoman).

ties in with the text's parallel references to increasing violence, declining faith and the guilt of the Holocaust in the contemporary age.[14]

Confession and atonement figure in possession narratives as significant tools to exonerate the child from blame and damnation. The governess's incessant attempts to elicit confessions from Flora and Miles (*The Turn of the Screw*), Christine's attempts to force Rhoda to speak the truth about what she had done (*The Bad Seed*), and Charles's questioning of Josephine(*Crooked House*) are done in this redemptive interest. The confession, if made, would mean atonement (ideally, but scarcely) and redeem the children under a moral code that the narrative presumes the audience/reader shares. The pure child Regan in *The Exorcist* is shown to resist the onslaught of the demonic force, Though there is a mixing of identities, of bodies, a splitting of the soul, so to speak, in possession, the child resists desecration in her willingness to be rescued and the very act of pleading for help. Regan screams, "Oh, Mother, make him stop.... Stop him. He's trying to kill me! Stop him...!" (Blatty). To firmly distinguish between the possessor and the possessed, the narrative switches registers in the delineation of each. Soon after the plea for help, the demonic force speaks in an "oddly guttural voice", contorts Regan's' face "with a hideous rage": "'The sow is mine!' she bellowed in a coarse and powerful voice. ... A yelping laugh gushed up from her throat, and then she fell on her back as if someone had pushed her. She pulled up her nightgown, exposing her genitals. 'Fuck me! Fuck me!' she screamed at the doctors, and with both her hands began masturbating frantically" (Blatty).

The confession of the child reinstates adult authority as well; power over the knowledge concealed by the child is handed over to the adult, and in this transfer, there is also a transfer of power over the child, the child's soul. In *The Innocents*, the governess speaks in the opening scene, "All I want to do is save the children, not destroy them. More than anything, I love the children. They need affection, love. Someone who will belong to them and to whom they belong" (*The Innocents* 00:03:03-35). Stephen Rebello observes that the repetition of the word "belong", in its avowal of possessive love,

[14]In the film adaptation by Friedkin, the religious note is downplayed, and religion is shown to be a futile as science in battling against pure evil. According to Zinoman, Friedkin, an agnostic Jew, cut the explanatory note in favour of moral ambiguity; without the context of Karras's religious doubt, the demon is simply a reminder of human vulnerability in the face of Manichaean darkness. While the demonic is overcome through the supreme act of self-sacrifice in the novel, the film ends with the sense that, Satan might have won after all, Karras having been the devil's ultimate aim; in Zinoman's words, it is "a nihilistic tragedy with an apocalyptic shock" (Zinoman).

establishes the theme of possession (Rebello 55); it is the adult who seeks to possess the body of the child, a fantasy that is repeated across narratives–the adult in a child's body.

Despite the overwhelming narrative evidence in support of possession, there are moments of lacuna that throw the narrative premise into disarray. Regan, for instance, reacts violently to tap water as though it was holy water. The child's status as an adolescent rebel merely venting repressed emotions comes to the fore, if only for a brief moment, because it becomes evident that the demon in her pretends to not know the difference between tap water and holy water in order to sow doubt in the priest regarding the veracity of the possession and prevent exorcism. Such moments of aporia are strategic in child-horror, a stock convention that temporarily threatens to dismantle the supernatural narrative and foreground the scene of child abuse without the demonic context. The frightening potential of the events of the narrative to signify the opposite, essentially an orchestrated attack of demented adults against a child, is entertained briefly before unambiguously confirming the truth about existence of pure evil (in the child). The raw facts of the scene, for instance, Thorn thrusting the dagger into Damien's body in *The Omen* is quickly dissipated as the narrative reveals the genuineness of evil and brutality is justified.