Nomadic Intertextuality and Postmillennial Children's Gothic Fiction

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Abstract

Since the turn of the twenty first century, Gothic has emerged as one of the most popular forms in which to write for children. Although children's literature critics and educational professionals were once dubious about the value of scary stories for children, postmillennial Gothic has begun to receive critical praise as well as mass market popularity. This thesis explores an emergent critical discourse that champions children's Gothic alongside a variety of examples of the form. I argue that postmillennial children's fiction employs metafictional reflexivity and explicit intertextuality, opening out into an expansive Gothic landscape. Unhoming its protagonists, readers and critics, postmillennial children's Gothic challenges existing paradigms in both children's literature criticism and Gothic Studies. Foremost, this fiction disrupts accounts of children's literature that assign the form a pedagogical function, and that construct the child reader according to linear narratives of maturation offered by psychoanalysis and ego-relational psychology. In place of the 'psychoanalytic child', postmillennial children's Gothic imagines a nomadic subject, constructing child protagonists and readers across a multiplicity of subject location and identities. There is not one child, but multiple figurations. The transgressive and liberating energies of Gothic play a part in this rejection of traditional figurations of the child. However, postmillennial children's fiction also challenges critical commonplaces in Gothic Studies. The nomadic project of children's Gothic runs counter to the melancholic figuration of subjectivity offered by a deconstructive psychoanalytic discourse that informs some analysis of Gothic literature. Unlike the tragic subjectivity of the Gothic wanderer, the nomad offers an affirmative figuration of being. The nomad is transformed through interrelationships with others, likewise transforming the locations through which it travels, suggesting new ways of reading Gothic. Taking its cue from Rosi Braidotti's theory of nomadic subjectivity, this thesis engages productively with a variety of children's texts published since 2000, reading them against existing criticism. I offer my analysis of these texts as part of a creative process that imagines non-unitary, non-binary figurations of subjectivity, and seeks to reformulate notions of reading and becoming.

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Introduction

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The Bad Beginning of Postmillennial Children's Gothic

Postmillennial children's Gothic fiction begins with a violent act of *un-homing* in which three children lose their parents and their home and are set adrift to wander an expansive, but treacherous, Gothic landscape on a journey spanning seven years and thirteen books. The un-homing of the Baudelaire children in *Lemony Snicket's A Series of Unfortunate Events: The Bad Beginning* (1999) inaugurates a theme of homelessness reconfigured as nomadism that I trace through a range of Gothic fictions published for children between 2000 and 2015. The book opens with three children alone on a 'grey' and 'misty' shore. A dark figure approaches, the family's lawyer, Mr Poe, and informs the children that their parents have 'perished' in a fire that has 'engulfed' and 'destroyed the entire house' (Snicket 2007, 4, 9). With typical sparse directness, Snicket renders the children – Violet, Klaus and Sunny – homeless.

The Bad Beginning figures homelessness as catastrophic loss *and* a call to adventure. The Baudelaire mansion fire is a catalyst for a host of exciting encounters and personal transformations for the children. As Violet observes, Mr Poe is both executor and executioner: he had 'simply walked down to the beach and changed their lives forever' (Snicket 2007, 10). Poe leads the Baudelaires 'away from the

beach and from their previous lives' (Snicket 2007, 10). Though acknowledging loss, this moment also looks forward to a prolonged state of nomadism that allows the children to inhabit a multiplicity of locations and identities. The fire causes the death of their parents and passes to the children a Gothic inheritance that prompts the disintegration of home, family and identity. For Chris Baldick, disintegration is the quintessential Gothic effect (1992, xix). However, in *A Series of Unfortunate Events,* Gothic disintegration does not lead to despair, nor to the aporia of subjectivity as it is imagined by deconstructive psychoanalytic theories. Out of the ashes of their home, the Baudelaires construct a new, nomadic existence as they are relocated from one town to another, pursued by the Gothic tyrant, Count Olaf. This positive reconfiguration of Gothic exile does not result in the cosy restitution normally associated with children's literature. The mystery of the fire remains resistant to a hermeneutic quest; neither the Baudelaires nor the readers are given any final answers about the mysterious deaths that precipitate the adventure. *A Series of Unfortunate Events* is a landmark text because it inaugurates a new form of Gothic writing for children in the postmillennial period that challenges assumptions about Gothic and Children's literature alike. *A Series of Unfortunate Events* exemplifies the way this new form of writing reconfigures homelessness as nomadism. Moreover, as the names 'Baudelaire' and 'Poe' suggest, the series typifies the explicitly intertextual character of this new mode of Gothic writing, a mode that asks its readers to follow its narrative threads outwards, sending them on a journey to locations beyond the bounds of the individual book.

Within postmillennial children's Gothic fiction homelessness as nomadism functions thematically and structurally to resolve contradictions at the heart of the project of writing for children. Dominant critical discourses of children's literature

anchor their readings of texts in the idea of a real child, who is identified through the fiction, but exists outside of it. On behalf of this child, critics seek to draw out a unifying meaning from the text so that its effects (pedagogical and maturational) can be accounted for and its value assessed. In its rejection of home, the nomadism of postmillennial children's Gothic fiction eschews notions of a stable, singular self or a contained, unifying meaning. Instead, it proffers a multiplicity of subject positions and locations within and beyond the text, offering constructions of the child not yet accounted for in children's literature criticism.

Furthermore, nomadism offers an alternative ethical vision to that provided by the dominant pedagogical focus of children's literature criticism. Postmillennial children's Gothic inherits two hundred years of debate about what children's books are for and what they should do. On the one hand, liberal humanism and left wing politics in the academy regard children's literature as a pedagogical project aimed at producing a critically engaged reader. On the other hand, the reader constructed in this pedagogy is typically passive, an implicitly normative, teachable child. Gothic has a paradoxical allure for this project. It has been consistently identified as radical, subversive, and excessive by critics invested in a broadly modernist aesthetic for art and literature, which situates Gothic on the margins of hegemonic culture. For example, Clive Bloom describes Gothic as a 'refusal of bourgeois consciousness'; Susanne Becker claims its principal strategy is one of excess; and Fred Botting claims that Gothic's engagement with 'darker issues' and 'disturbing energies' marks it as a genre fascinated with transgression, limits and taboo (Bloom 1996, 14; Becker 1999, 1; Botting 2008a, 14). At the same time, Gothic has also been read as a conservative genre, reproducing bourgeois ideologies and social structures. Thus, Jacqueline Howard argues, that 'we find strong, mutually exclusive political claims

being made for the Gothic. For one theorist it is a subversive genre while for another it is conservative' (Howard 1994, 4). Accordingly, in its transgressive figuration, Gothic might be used to inculcate a questioning and rebellious subjectivity; whilst in a conservative figuration, which has its roots in bourgeois fictions of the eighteenth century, Gothic aims at the same model of normative subjectivity traditionally constructed in children's literature. Postmillennial children's Gothic thus inherits a contradiction between the pedagogical function of children's literature as it has been traditionally conceived on the one hand and the supposedly transgressive nature of Gothic on the other hand. An emergent critical discourse championing the value of children's Gothic in the postmillennial period has maintained this paradoxical opposition, failing to examine the process whereby it is constructed. My thesis addresses this contradiction, suggesting that the works themselves forge from this conflict a productive dialogue between Gothic and children's literature, and locate a model of subjectivity for the reading child that lies beyond the humanist-inflected conservative pedagogy of children's literature, but that does not disappear into the aporia of fragmented and disintegrated selfhood offered by modernist-inflected Gothic criticism. In other words, children's Gothic imagines nomadic subjects.

Postmillennial children's fiction poses a challenge to Gothic criticism too. Foremost, it counters the claim that Gothic has become pervasive and diffuse in contemporary culture such that it is no longer able to offer radical challenges to social and cultural norms as it once did. Particularly invested in Gothic's 'darker' and 'disturbing' figuration, Fred Botting asks, 'with its darkness dragged into the light, how does the genre stand up to scrutiny?' (Botting 2008a, 14). The question suggests a rather gloomy view of postmillennial Gothic. Botting argues that contemporary 'Gothic times' have produced a Gothic form emptied of its affective

power, 'shedding the allure of darkness, danger and mystery', 'incapable of shocking anew' (Botting 2008b, 37, 40; 2002, 298). For Botting, this is because Gothic has become a norm of cultural production and consumption, rather than remaining at the cultural 'margins' where it was able to act as an agent of 'provocation and disturbance' (2008b, 37). Botting is most concerned with the fact that Gothic has become a staple of consumer culture: 'Clothes, puppets, masks, lifestyles, dolls, sweets, locate Gothic images in a thoroughly commodified context in which horror is rendered familiar' (2008b, 9). In this description of 'thoroughly commodified' Gothic, many of the offending objects are those typically associated with children, pejoratively denoted as 'dolls' and 'sweets'. Here, the suggestion is both that consumer culture is infantile and that the diffusion of Gothic into cultural objects associated with children is a clear indicator of the dire situation of Gothic in the postmillennial period. Botting's view of postmillennial Gothic has been influential in Gothic criticism, prompting other critics to shore up Gothic against cultural diffusion by defining its limits. For example, Maria Beville claims that Gothic still retains its power to disturb and terrify, but only if its definition is limited to certain kinds of texts. For Beville, the problem of postmillennial Gothic is solved by ensuring that its borders are more vigorously policed. Under this regime, *American Psycho* is designated Gothic, but *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is not (Beville 2009, 9). Beville's argument discounts mass market Gothic, particularly those texts aimed at children rather than adults.

This discourse within Gothic Studies dismisses mainstream cultural production works according to the logic of subcultural capital. The arguments of Botting and Beville echo the way subcultures mourn the 'gushing up' of their aesthetics and practices to mainstream audiences (Thornton 1995, 5). Botting's

insistence that Gothic belongs on the margins rather than in the mainstream contains the same 'veiled elitism and separatism' that Sarah Thornton identifies in subcultural identity practices (Botting 2008b, 37, 9; Thornton 1995, 5). For Thornton, the narratives that shore up subcultural identity 'reaffirm binary oppositions such as the alternative and the straight, the diverse and the homogenous, the radical and the conformist, the distinguished and the common' (1995, 5). For example, Botting's comparison of the literary fiction of Kazuo Ishiguro with mass-market vampire novels explicitly values the radical over the conformist and the distinguished over the common (Botting 2014, 504–506).

Countering these elitist evaluations, postmillennial children's Gothic reminds critics that the form has its roots in the popular, and has always been constructed from counterfeit and inauthentic material. Moreover, it uses these 'inauthentic' elements alongside the form's excessive energies to challenge traditional pedagogical structures in children's literature and in so doing announces Gothic's continued power to unsettle totalising narratives offered on the left and the right of politics. Using Gothic techniques to unsettle limiting pedagogical structures of children's literature furthermore challenges readings of the Gothic that allot the form a symbolic function as a barometer of social and cultural anxieties. This reading of Gothic is particularly apparent in the academic study of zombies, as I shall explore in chapter 2, but may be found throughout postmillennial Gothic criticism, particularly since 2001. This social anxiety reading of Gothic is evidenced in claims such as Johan Höglund's that the predominant genre post 9/11 is the imperial Gothic, which casts the 'other' as a Gothic and monstrous creature (Höglund 2014, 85). The nomadism of postmillennial children's Gothic alternatively offers an affirmative account of subjectivity that undoes the othering often initiated by a discourse that

reads Gothic monstrosity through the lens of social and cultural anxiety. Nomadic children's Gothic affirms a positive function for Gothic, whilst at the same time acknowledging oppressive discourses and uneven power relations. Whether they are uncanny children, grotesque zombies, romance heroines, horror nerds, or troubled teens battling Lovecraftian monsters, the child protagonists constructed by postmillennial children's Gothic offer a variety of affirmative, multiple and open subject positions.

From the Gothic Wanderer to Nomadic Subjects: The Child in Postmillennial Children's Gothic

A *Series of Unfortunate Events* recontextualises the figure of the Gothic wanderer, typified in Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) and Maturin's *Melmoth* (1820). Gothic readings of the wanderer tend to the tragic and draw on a model of subjectivity that is pathologised, othered or riven. For example, Marie Mulvey-Roberts describes the wanderer as 'the ultimate embodiment of the other … always on the edge and at the edge, a monster of the in-between and as such, the supreme outsider' (Tichelaar and Mulvey-Roberts 2012, vii). Likewise, Kate Ferguson Ellis posits the wanderer as central to a 'masculine' Gothic tradition, in which the protagonist becomes exiled from the refuge of the home (1989, xiii). This image of the wanderer draws on a model of subjectivity that is structured around loss, positing a self always in exile from an imagined wholeness seemingly offered in the idealised fantasy of the home.

Lemony Snicket offers an alternative figuration of the wanderer, and thus of subjectivity, by placing Gothic in dialogue with other modes of writing, notably the

picaresque. In this tradition the *picaro* is nomadic, remaking themselves over and over in different encounters and different locations. This form of mobility is affirmatory and oftentimes empowering for figures such as Defoe's *Moll Flanders* (1772). Moreover, unlike the Gothic wanderer, which is associated with a 'Male' or 'masculine' Gothic, the *picaro* has from its inception been a position inhabited by female as well as male subjects. Snicket's dastardly antagonist, Count Olaf, is equal parts Gothic villain and roguish *picaro*, remaking himself anew in each encounter with the Baudelaire orphans. Initially, the loss of their home places the Baudelaire orphans in flight from Olaf, but increasingly the children remake themselves in his image. Like Olaf, the children never rest in one home, but mobilise and adapt themselves to face the challenges of an irredeemably corrupt world. Through Olaf and the orphans, Snicket offers multiple images of adaptable nomadism, reworking Gothic's concern with exile from the home as an opportunity for self-fashioning. Reducing the Gothic castle to ashes, Snicket imagines nomadism not as a desperate flight from the world, but as an empowering mobility.

The final book of the series, *The End* (2006), concludes with an image of nomadism as a hopeful engagement with the world, rather than a rejection of it. The orphans are living as castaways on an island far from the rest of the world. At first they imagine staying so as to escape the corruption they have everywhere else encountered. However, the children find a note from their parents (who once also sheltered on the island), which declares: 'We cannot truly shelter our children, here or anywhere else, so it might be best for us . . . to immerse ourselves in the world' (Snicket 2012, 1–2).[1] Violet takes this note as a sign that the children must move on

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[1] In *A Series of Unfortunate Events: The End* page numbering begins again at the end of the book in a section titled, 'Book the Last: Chapter Fourteen'. Here pp. 1-2 refers to this last section of the book. That the work begins again after having seemingly ended signals its playfulness regarding narrative structure. The

and when Klaus asks where they will go, she simply replies, 'anywhere' (Snicket 2012, 3). The children repair their tiny sailboat, aptly named 'Count Olaf', and make ready to depart. Here, the series concludes, leaving the children drifting out onto 'the open sea' (Snicket 2012, 12). Deliberately frustrating closure, *The End* reconfigures homelessness as a hopeful subject position that offers active engagement with the world. Many of the mysteries inaugurated by the house fire in *The Bad Beginning* remain unsolved, and a secure home is not restored. Mystery and loss are reconstituted as possibility and transformation.

The narrative of the Baudelaire children offers one figuration of what Rosi Braidotti formulates as 'nomadic subjectivity'.[2] The nomadic subject is a self in process, a multiple and dynamic being, embodied in concrete power and social relations, but occupying an affirmatory rather than a fragmented or oppressed position. Nomadic subjectivity is Braidotti's 'project of redesigning subjectivity as a process of becoming nomad. The figuration of the nomad renders an image of the subject in terms of a non-unitary and multi-layered vision, as a dynamic and changing entity' (Braidotti 2011a, 5). This non-unitary model of subjectivity incorporates post-modern and post-structuralist notions of the subject, but rejects a tragic reading of the split or fragmented subject of post-Kantian linguistic and deconstructive theories. Furthermore, it resists the exploitative model of fluidity and fragmentation offered by late capitalism's 'commodified form of pluralism' (Braidotti 2011a, 6). Nomadism is not a metaphor but a 'figuration' that accounts for the 'present condition of mobility' in a contradictory, complex global context

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second ending is also a beginning, and acts as an exhortation to readers to keep the reading process open rather than seeking closure and restitution in the final pages of a novel, another manifestation of its nomadism.

[2] 'Nomadic subjectivity' is articulated at length in the first edition of *Nomadic Subjects* published in 1994. All quotations following are taken from a revised and expanded formulation of the concept found in the second edition, published in 2011.

(Braidotti 2011a, 4). It is a method for mapping subject positions and for creatively imagining alternative spaces of becoming from which to challenge and 'destabilize dogmatic, hegemonic, exclusionary power at the very heart of the identity structures of the dominant subject' (Braidotti 2011a, 3, 7, 9). Nomadic subjectivity is thus not simply a utopian fantasy, but a way of accounting for and actively engaging with power differentials and countering the way that 'difference' continues to be 'caught in an oppositional logic of negativity' (Braidotti 2011a, 4, 6). Braidotti recognises that the 'bodies of women, youth, and others who are racialized or marked off by age, gender, sexuality and income, reduced to marginality, come to be inscribed with a particular violence', but offers nomadism as a tool to refigure these experiences of 'enforced eviction' (2011a, 6). Nomadism is thus a way to figure productive, positive and affirmative selves, entities 'fully immersed in processes of becoming, in productive relations of power, knowledge and desire . . . a positive vision of the subject as an affective, productive and dynamic structure' (Braidotti 2011a, 17).

I find Braidotti's account of nomadic subjectivity compelling politically and ethically since it provides a model of subjectivity that is inclusive and multiple. I also find it useful as a methodology that engages in critique and interrogation of cultural products, imaginative texts and critical discourse, without dismissing certain types of texts or leading to the aporia of deconstruction. Thus, I deploy nomadism in this thesis both as a figuration of subjectivity and as a methodological strategy. It is a concept particularly suited to the reading of contemporary children's Gothic fiction, and contemporary children's Gothic fiction in turn provides an exemplary creative space in which nomadism can be imagined.

First, nomadism offers an alternative to dominant discourse of 'the child' extant in children's literature criticism. Two main approaches dominate in children's

literature criticism and their disagreement over how to read children's texts and the 'child' produces critical stasis. Typically, in children's literature criticism, critics essentialise the child reader, producing totalising readings of literature based in a particular model of psychoanalysis. The implications of this psychoanalytic strategy for Gothic children's fiction is particularly problematic because the child and the Gothic come to be subordinated to a 'master' discourse of psychoanalysis against which they are constructed as symptoms. The totalising tendency of psychoanalytic readings of the child tends to suppress other readings available in a text and, moreover, pathologize 'the child' they seek to elucidate. One response to the essentialism of children's literature criticism has been to declare the child 'does not exist', and, through deconstruction, reveal the paradoxical desire of the adult critic seeking the child in the book. This 'constructivist' reading of children's literature is helpful since it allows for a critique of psychoanalysis and dispenses with the idea that children's literature must have a pedagogical function. However, it can lead into the aporia of deconstruction, evident in the method's founding statement: 'the child does not exist'.[3] Though this is a useful refrain in reminding me that the child - the one residing inside the book and the one produced in critical writing - is always a construction, it is in danger of becoming a dogmatic mantra that might prevent critics from saying anything productive about how we write about - and what we write for - children.

Nomadism as a figuration of subjectivity and a critical methodology recognises the dangers of such aporia in (de)constructivist criticism, and provides

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[3] Key texts elaborating on the 'constructivist', including those from the disciplines of history, cultural studies and sociology as well as children's literature criticism include Philippe Ariès's *Centuries of Childhood* (1973); Jacqueline Rose's *The case of Peter Pan: or, the impossibility of children's fiction* (1984); Karín Lesnik-Oberstein's *Children's Literature: Criticism and the Fictional Child* (1994); James Kincaid's *Child-Loving: The Erotic Child and Victorian Literature* (1994); Prout and James's *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood: Contemporary Issues in the Sociological Study of Childhood* (1997). The phrase, 'the child does not exist' is articulated by Karín Lesnik-Oberstein in *Children's Literature: Criticism and the Fictional Child* (1994, p. 9).

some routes beyond it. As Braidotti claims (of the linguistic turn in post-structuralist thought more generally), a 'social constructivist grid leaves little room for negotiation and instils loss and melancholia at the heart of the subject' (2011b, 5). Following Kant, through the linguistic theories of Lacan and Derrida, the 'linguistic turn' produces 'a negative form of social constructivism' in which 'matter is conceived of being formatted and regulated by a master code' (Braidotti, 2011b, 3). In contrast, nomadic subjectivity offers an intertextual construction of subjectivity that leads not to the aporia of deconstruction, which formulates the 'I' as an empty, floating signifier, but to 'an opening out toward an empowering connection to others' (Braidotti, 2011b, 3). Although the child constructed within the text and by the critic is fictional, a discursive and textual figuration, it provides a creative space for an exploration of the ways subjectivity is constructed, narrated and experienced. Reading such constructions – or figurations – intertextually, by placing them in dialogue with other texts and critical discourses, allows me to read the child of Gothic literature as dynamic, productive and multiple, offering a myriad of alternative visions that work to counter hegemonic and limiting narratives of the child and of childhood.

Nomadic subjectivity offers an image of the child not caught in the ethical dilemma that plagues children's literature criticism, which paradoxically constructs children as passive even as it seeks to read them as active. Critics' limiting focus on the pedagogical function of the text and its effect upon a reading child produces a paradox whereby the 'good' book is one that will produce an active reader, but it can only do this work because the reader has been constructed *a priori* as passive. The child must submit to the pedagogy of the text in order to *be produced as* active. Echoes of this paradox appear in Gothic criticism, particularly in discussions that

dismiss 'trashy' Gothic texts, such as *Twilight,* because of the negative messages they will transmit to a child reader who is imagined as gullible and naïve (and, female). In contrast, nomadism suggests that the subject positions constructed within texts, discourses and cultures may be passive, or restricted in some way, but that space exists nonetheless within such locations for agency and empowerment. Indeed, in many of the texts I consider authors make claims about the kinds of readers they wish to produce, but the texts throw up instead a number of alternative subject position counter to this intent. In other words, the texts imagine 'lines of flight' from potentially limiting or repressive figurations of subjectivity (Braidotti 2011a, 7). In all the texts in this thesis such 'lines of flight' emerge through the theme of homelessness as child protagonists in exile from their home learn to become adaptable, confident, fluid subjects. This becoming-subject is motivated by a vital and dynamic 'desire to become' which further counters the dominant psychoanalytic construction of the child in children's literature criticism (Braidotti, 2011a, 18). The psychoanalytic narrative of psychic development is a melancholy mode of subjectivity, conceiving of the self as driven by 'repression and the negative definition of desire as lack' (Braidotti 2011b, 2). In contrast, nomadic subjectivity expresses transformation, affirmation, what Braidotti terms the 'potentia' we inhabit, a hopeful and future directed concept of subjectivity particularly suited to reading children's literature (2011a, 12).

Post-structuralist literary criticism, particularly as it manifests in some readings of Gothic fiction, tends to cynicism and melancholy even as it asserts the literary value of Gothic fiction as a critique or disruption of political hegemony and cultural norms. Braidotti specifically conceives of nomadic thought as a counter to this 'dominant cynicism and melancholy' in order to stress the 'affirmative force of a

political imagination that is not tied to the present in an oppositional mode of negation' (2011a, 13). In other words, criticism must offer something more than a critique of hegemony. As Braidotti contends, 'more theoretical effort is needed to bring about the conceptual leap across inertia, nostalgia, aporia and other forms of critical stasis' (2011a, 13). This inertia is present in Gothic Studies' assessment of children's literature, which has been little considered despite its long-standing relationship with the wider Gothic form. Most often, children's literature is mentioned by critics only as an example of the contemporary pervasion of the form. Otherwise, it is seen as fundamentally nostalgic, a form of gentle pastiche. These evaluations of children's Gothic appear in the work of Botting and Beville, discussed above, but also in critical works ostensibly exploring the cultural value of children's texts. This is evidenced in Jeffrey Weinstock's analysis of Tim Burton's *Frankenweenie,* which constructs an evaluative difference between inauthentic and 'authentic' forms of Gothic. Weinstock considers Burton's children's film as fundamentally inauthentic (Weinstock 2013, 26). This evaluation of postmillennial Gothic sees the form as emptying out into commodification and simulacra, unable to provide real transgression or meaning as an 'authentic' Gothic once did. Exploring the nomadic themes and structures of Gothic children's fiction allows me to challenge these value judgments extant in Gothic criticism by revealing the intertextual and productive relationship between Gothic and children's literature in which one is not a meaningless pastiche of the other. Nomadism also allows me to explore the oppositional spaces forged within children's texts, and thus to read them as productive figurations of subjectivity rather than empty simulacra.

Nomadism operates in this thesis, then, as a reading strategy that can account for the conflictual nature of postmillennial children's Gothic fiction and explore

what that conflict produces. Mine is a meta-critical analysis that goes beyond a critique of existing readings in Gothic and children's literature criticism. Just as post-millennial children's Gothic un-homes its protagonists, it unhouses its critics from the sheltered edifices and certainties of established critical narratives. Postmillennial children's Gothic asks readers to explore pathways leading away from dominant formulations of literary form and of subjectivity. In turn, I employ nomadic thought as an alternative to critical methods that seek to subordinate the creative work to a totalising or unifying critical reading, or that reject meaning altogether for the seductive aporia of deconstruction.

Nomadism and Intertextuality

A Series of Unfortunate Events seems to invite a deconstructive reading in the way it frustrates hermeneutic resolution and rejects final and fixed meaning. However, although its central mysteries remain unsolved, and its Gothic home in ashes, *A Series* refutes the aporia of deconstruction by opening out into a positive intertextuality, represented by the ocean that frames the beginning and ending of the series. The opening of *The End* seems at first nihilistic, offering the onion as a metaphor for the text. As the reader peels away each thin, papery layer, they simply reveal yet 'another thin, papery layer', and their final 'reward' is only the revelation of one misfortune 'after another, and another' (Snicket, 2012, 1,2). This seeming rejection of meanings and endings plays out in the final pages as Snicket leaves the Baudelaire children adrift on the ocean. However, though his investigation 'is over', he allows for the continued mobilisation of story and meaning when he asserts that even though we have reached the last chapter of the story, 'the Baudelaires had not'

(Snicket, 2012, 10). Reading the name plate of the boat, the new baby, adopted by the Baudelaires during their stay on the secluded island, inaugurates a new secret. This is 'baby's first secret, joining the secrets the Baudelaires were keeping from the baby, and all the other secrets immersed in the world' (Snicket, 2012, 12). Stories are secrets, and the open sea acts as a metaphor for their continuing and productive circulation. Here Snicket draws on the central metaphor of Rushdie's children's novel, *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* (1990), in which an ocean of stories is composed of multiple coloured strands, of 'all the stories that had ever been told and many that were in the process of being invented could be found here' (Rushdie 1990, 72). In Rushdie's novel, the Sea of Stories constantly changes as its stories are recombined into new tales. Snicket inaugurates contemporary children's Gothic by making a similar gesture, offering intertextuality as a creative and mobilising force that keeps stories and meanings fluid and vital. As Lynne Pearce contends, the intertextual deferral of meaning is not akin to deconstruction's perpetual alienation. Rather, intertextuality produces the perpetual relation of meaning through dialogue. Although there is no grand narrative or unifying, final meaning, meaning and sense can still be made, though in provisional and dynamic ways. As Pearce summarises, 'my voice can mean, but only with others' (Pearce 1994, 15). An intertextual reading of the referential and metafictional nature of postmillennial children's Gothic thus counters a gloomy vision of postmodern metafiction as empty pastiche.

Snicket's use of references and metafictional play in *A Series of Unfortunate Events* calls attention to the fact that postmillennial children's Gothic incorporates a long Gothic tradition of self-awareness and intertextuality. The first Gothic tales stitched together medieval and historical romance, with the novel of manners and supernatural and sensationalist tales from chapbooks and ballad sheets. Eighteenth

century Gothic was a new literary vogue, but it was also something reconstituted from past forms and old stories. Since the eighteenth century, Gothic novels have continued to constitute themselves out of multiple narratives, incorporating different types of texts and references to older works. For example, canonical Gothic works from *Frankenstein* to *Dracula* anticipate postmodern metafictional play in their use of textual fragments and multiple narrative structures. Fred Botting notes that *Frankenstein* is 'fragmented, dis-unified, assembled from bits and pieces; the novel is like the monster itself' (1996, 94). Likewise figuring intertextuality through Gothic tropes, Catherine Spooner notes that whilst many forms of literature might be said to be intertextual and self-reflexive, 'Gothic has a greater degree of self-consciousness about its nature, cannibalistically consuming the dead body of its own tradition' (2006, 10). *A Series of Unfortunate Events* continues this tradition in the way it draws on characters, tropes and threads from earlier Gothic works, and calls its reader's attention to this process with repeated authorial interventions reflecting upon the structure of the story.

Jacqueline Howard gives this aspect of Gothic sustained attention in her explicitly Bakhtinian approach to the form. Howard argues that plural and contradictory interpretations of Gothic are generated not only at the time of publication, but also that interpretations of Gothic change over time with readers' changing perceptions and contexts (1994, 4). In this way, Gothic cannot be accounted for through one critical reading, nor does it serve one political narrative. Rather, Howard contends that Gothic is a 'plural form' that 'draws on and recontextualizes or transforms prior discursive structures'; the Gothic novel 'is a type in which the propensity for multiple discourse is highly developed and that it is dialogic because of its indeterminacy or its open structure' (1994, 16). Postmillennial

children's Gothic is likewise multiple, open and inherently (as well as often explicitly) dialogic and intertextual. Moreover, as I have outlined, it inherits particularly contradictory and paradoxical critical discourses because of the particular combination of the tradition of children's literature on the one hand and Gothic on the other. An intertextual reading accounts for these contradictions and paradoxes, whilst leaving the texts open for further readings.

Contemporary children's Gothic fiction exemplifies Barthes' assertion that 'the metaphor of the Text is that of the network; if the text extends itself, it is as a result of a combinatory systematic' (1977, 161). Drawing on Bakhtin, Barthes rejects the idea of the text as a closed, monumental object emanating from one source (such as the author, a particular society, a moment in history). 'The Death of the Author' describes the text as 'not a line of words releasing a single "theological" meaning . . . but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash […] a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture' (Barthes 1977, 146). Accordingly, I posit the field of contemporary children's Gothic, as well as those individual texts within this field, as a network within which exist multiple links, echoes, citations, responses and retorts. There is no one particular 'originary' or foundational text, nor a central idea or meaning, at the centre of this network, and I avoid suggesting where its limits or borders may lie. Each text in the network refers in part to each other text, whether this be a literary fiction, a cultural idea, a critical narrative, and even where texts are not explicitly referential or metafictional (though many are), their various threads lead out of themselves to other textual locations. The metaphor of text as network has the added advantage of promoting an inclusive rather than exclusive approach to reading, working against entrenched (and often unarticulated) notions of value in literary

criticism that would hold some types of texts as more important and worthy than others.

Intertextuality as a critical methodology prompts a reading of the literary work that travels outwards to other texts and locations, not inwards to a central meaning. Authorial intent is not taken as the final word or solution to any paradoxes or contradictions that the text may generate. Though I include the commentary of some of the authors included in the thesis, and give those voices fair hearing, I do not allot the author a primary role in giving meaning. Barthes' assertion that the writer's 'only power is to mix writings, to counter the ones with the others, in such a ways as never to rest on any one of them' runs throughout this thesis as it leaves room for multiple and often competing interpretations of texts to emerge (Barthes 1977, 146). Barthes argues that writing is always rewriting, offering an image of a text with porous borders and of reading as 'ventures' beyond these borders (1974, 4, 5, 8, 20). Here intertextuality accords with nomadic thought. As Braidotti contends

> "in"-sights and nonconnections are not to be thought of as plunging us inward toward a mythical "inner" reservoir of truth. On the contrary, they are better thought of as propelling us outward along the multiple directions of extratextual collective connections and experiences. (2011a, 19)

Thus, my readings follow the multiple threads and connections offered by the texts herein. Following Barthes' direction that 'everything is to be disentangled, but nothing deciphered, structure can be followed, "threaded" . . . in all its reprises, all its stages, but there is no end to it, no bottom', I do not attempt to articulate a final or totalising meaning for any of the texts I explore (Barthes 1989, 53–54). Rather, I follow the multiple threads of the works even as they work against one another,

producing meanings that disrupt the narrative or that lead into intertextual fields outside the story.

In concert with the explicit and inherent intertextuality of postmillennial children's Gothic fiction and its nomadic reader, I examine fictional texts alongside critical interpretations, from Gothic Studies and children's literature criticism, and commentary from popular culture - including authorial commentaries, book reviews and other forms of commentary. I place these various texts in dialogue with one another and trace links between popular commentary and critical discourse, examine where the texts themselves invite or anticipate particular critical interpretations, and consider in what ways the fictional texts are a response to discourses circulating in criticism and popular culture. This methodology produces a dialogue that resists the monologizing tendency of modes of literary criticism that seek to put the book in the service of one reading, or assign it one social function. I intend to promote a conversation in which multiple voices are expressed, suggesting that it is possible to find meaning through literary criticism, but that this meaning is always relational, multiple and open to further dialogue.

Though I read critical discourses as well as their literary object, I will not attempt to establish a meta-theory to account for or unify what I identify as a heterogeneous body of work. 'Meta-theory' implies that the critic has formulated an approach that will solve the problems they have identified in existing criticism, account for its blind spots and totalise the field. The film critic, Steven Jay Schneider offers a valuable articulation of why such a formulation should not be attempted. This lofty aim is impossible to achieve since 'there is no such neutral space outside, much less "above" the fray' of criticism (Schneider 2004, 1). In the place of an impossible neutral space above and outside existing criticism, Schneider offers a

practical 'critical dialogue' between competing interpretations and approaches. For Schneider, this is not only 'more practical than meta-theorization', it is 'also a great deal more valuable' since it offers 'self-conscious theorizing . . . committed to dialogue, progress and conceptual openness' (2004, 5). Barthes' notion of text calls into question the very possibility of a metalanguage since 'the Text is that *social* space which leaves no language safe, outside, nor any subject of the enunciation in position as judge, master, analyst, confessor, decoder' (1977, 164). Accordingly, I offer my criticism as a rejoinder in an ongoing dialogue through which the 'text' of postmillennial children's Gothic is produced and given meaning(s). I employ theories of intertextuality originating in the work of Barthes and Bakhtin to examine fictions and critical commentary. As the thesis progresses, I consider other theories alongside texts in order that their dialogism and multiplicity might be brought out into the field of literary criticism. I draw variously on theories of the grotesque, on Spinoza's formulation of desire, on theories of parody, on de Certeau's formulation of the reader as poacher, and on the philosophical writings of speculative realism as I consider each different manifestation of children's Gothic and its nomadism. None of these theories are presented as offering a unifying or overarching solution to the problems I identify in current literary criticism of children's literature and Gothic. Rather they serve, in particular locations, to elucidate the multiple points of connections, resonances and possible meanings generated by children's Gothic fiction that criticism has thus far ignored.

The works discussed in this thesis form an intertextual network that incorporates the intertwined histories of Gothic fiction and children's literature, as well as a history of debate about the function and value of these two forms. Principally, both Gothic fiction and children's literature coalesced as popular forms

of fiction in the same historical moment, coinciding historically with the development of psychoanalysis. Just as Gothic narratives inform psychoanalytic theories, psychoanalysis fundamentally shapes the way children's literature is produced and interpreted. Thus, I read the three discourses (psychoanalysis, Gothic and children's literature) as constituting a particularly fraught intertextual relationship in which one form cannot assert interpretive authority over any other.

Travels between Gothic and Children's Literature: An Intertextual History

Gothic and children's literature comprise a mutually constitutive intertextual network, their histories connected since their inception. Gothic and children's literature emerge as distinct forms of writing at the same historical moment and in the same literary and social context: Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* and John Newbery's *The History of Little Goody Two-Shoes* were both published in 1764. Both Gothic and children's literature, inaugurated by these two books, are the result of a development in print culture in the eighteenth century, which saw the increased production of moderately priced print fiction for a middle-class audience. Indeed, the development, readership, reception and criticism of both Gothic and children's literature evolve in tandem and in relation to similar cultural and social discourses. Though there has been a marked proliferation of explicitly Gothic fiction written for children since 2000, the Gothic has always been present as a strand within children's literature. Likewise, children's literature has always been a significant location for the development of Gothic. Accordingly, the postmillennial proliferation of Gothic works for children represents a significant moment in the shared histories of the two

modes of writing. What has shifted since 2000 is the status of children's Gothic fiction in both popular culture and academic criticism. Increasingly, critics and commentators value Gothic for the perceived pedagogical and maturational function it provides within children's literature: Gothic helps children grow up.

When I embarked upon this thesis in 2011, it seemed that Gothic dominated children's publishing across a number of genres. Since the success of J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* (first published in 1997) and Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* (first published in 1995), children's fantasy fiction has favoured the gothically inflected modes of "dark" and "urban" fantasy. Recent examples include Joseph Delaney's *The Spook's Apprentice* series (2004 – 2014), which has recently been made into a film by Universal; Derek Landy's *Skulduggery Pleasant* series (2007 – 2014); F.E. Higgins' *Tales from the Sinister City* (2007 – 2010) and Philip Reeves' *Mortal Engines* quartet (2001 – 2006). Paranormal Romance has also proliferated since the *Twilight* phenomenon, prompted by the publication of Meyer's novel in 2004. A number of novels employing romance narratives and supernatural beings have since been marketed at teens in the UK and the US, including P.C. Cast's *House of Night* series (2007 – 2014), *The Wolves of Mercy Falls* series by Maggie Stiefvater (2009 – 2014), Cassandra Clare's *The Mortal Instruments* series (2007 – 2014), Becca Fitzpatrick's *Hush, Hush* (2009 – 2012) and Paula Morris' *Ruined* series (2009 – 2013). Beyond this, a number of books have been published since 2000 that overtly engage with a literary Gothic tradition, rewriting classic and canonical Gothic works of the 18th and 19th centuries. Notable examples include novels and short story collections by Chris Priestley, such as the *Tales of Terror* series published between 2007 and 2007, the *Goth Girl* series by Chris Riddell (2013 – 2015), various novels by Marcus Sedgwick, including *My Swordhand is Singing*

(2006) and *Midwinterblood* (2011), and ghost stories by Anne Fine, *The Devil Walks* (2012), and Jonathan Stroud, *Lockwood and Co* (2014). Overtly 'psychological' Gothic fiction has also emerged in this period, offering Gothicised narratives of trauma. These include the now canonical *Coraline* by Neil Gaiman (2002) and *A Monster Calls* by Patrick Ness (2011), both of which gained multiple awards. Pulp horror also remains popular, exemplified by the gory zombie serials by Darren Shan (*Zom-B,* published between 2012 and 2016) and Charlie Higson (*The Enemy,* published between 2009 and 2015). As in adult pulp horror, these works attempt to exceed previous limits of acceptability in terms of gross-out aesthetics and violent content. Finally, 'Weird' fiction inspired by the Cthulhu mythos of H. P. Lovecraft has also begun to appear in children's books, notably in Anthony Horowitz's *Power of Five* series (2005 – 2012) and Celia Rees's novel, *The Stone Testament* (2007).

It is tempting to see this proliferation of Gothic in children's fiction as evidence that the recent millennium constitutes a watershed moment in children's publishing, but such a claim belies the complexity of the relationship between Gothic and children's literature. Though a drastic change in children's publishing has occurred since the 'Golden Age' of children's literature in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and traditional fantasy 'back-list' favourites have been swept aside for new Gothic works, a Gothic history is visible throughout children's literature. Although the significance of Gothic in any given period is open to debate, it is always present: In the eighteenth century, Gothic circulates in the chapbooks, read by adults and children alike, and appears in the first children's book, published by John Newbery in 1764; in the nineteenth century, Gothic themes are threaded in 'Golden Age' texts produced for the middle-classes, and abound in the popular penny dreadfuls read by the working classes; Fin-de-Siècle Gothic produces the

Romance and Adventure novels of Haggard and Stevenson, whose 'empire' fiction in turn influences writing for boys well into the twentieth century; from here, Gothic finds its way into children's fiction of the interwar period and on into the late twentieth century. In the eighteenth and nineteenth century, Maria Edgeworth, Mary Wollstonecraft, William Godwin, John Harris and Charles Dickens draw on the Gothic in their works for children. In the early and mid-twentieth century, Frances Hodgson Burnett, Philippa Pearce, John Masefield, Susan Cooper, Alan Garner and Roald Dahl continue a Gothic tradition, and many of their books remain in print to the present day. Later in the twentieth century, Gillian Cross, Robert Swindells and Christopher Pike are just a few of the writers for children explicitly working in a Gothic mode. Thus, even a cursory glance over the history of children's literature demonstrates a continued presence of Gothic. Indeed, Matthew Grenby argues that even during periods of children's literature history in which writers explicitly stated their intentions to expel the Gothic, it continued to persist (2014, 243). Though Grenby cautions against placing too much significance on the coincidental date of 1764, he shows that the two forms communicate throughout their respective histories (2014, 252).

Given their shared material and social contexts, it is not surprising that borrowings and echoes travel between the Gothic and children's literature. However, current critical commentary on children's Gothic insists that the relationship is a result of a marked sympathy between the two forms and that Gothic is ideally suited to child readers in particular. In their introduction to *The Gothic in Children's Literature* (2008), Anna Jackson, Karen Coats and Roderick McGillis argue that the postmillennial proliferation of Gothic works for children is the reinstatement of a vital and natural relationship that dates back to *beyond* 1764. In their analysis, this

date marks a regrettable break in the elemental synchronicity between Gothic and child readers:

> Children today would be more likely to enjoy the chapbook romances children used to read *before* a literature *specifically created* for children was developed, stories such as "Jack the Giant Killer", "Robin Hood", "Children in the Wood", or "Whuppity Storie". Indeed it is the stories that Enlightenment philosophers warned children against reading, such as the stories of Raw Head and Bloody Bones, that are likely to be the ones that children today would pick up first . . . Children, it seems, *have always had a predilection for* what we now categorize as the Gothic, for ghosts and goblins, hauntings and horrors, fear and the pretence of fear . . . Perhaps the really strange development of the eighteenth century was the transformation of the Gothic narrative into an adult genre, when it had *really belonged to children's literature all along* (A. Jackson *et al* 2008, 2; emphasis mine).

In this history of Gothic and children's literature, Gothic is expunged from children's literature in the eighteenth-century, to make a triumphant return in the twenty-first century, when children need it most. Concerned with establishing the authenticity of the current popularity of Gothic, Jackson *et al* back-date children's Gothic to *before* the beginning of an established history of children's literature, to a period *before* the establishment of Romantic and Victorian ideas of childhood that informed that literature. This is an attempt to locate children's Gothic outside material histories of childhood, in a past location existing outside of cultural constructions and social institutions. Thus, Jackson *et al* claim children's Gothic is natural and essential. This naturalising of Gothic as intrinsically *belonging* to childhood is then linked to the appetites and desires of a child who is also constructed here to exist outside of

discourse and history. This essential child's delight in Gothic, which has been historically denied and only now being recognised, further legitimises the texts Jackson *et al* wish to explore through a model of children's literature that evaluates texts based on their ethical and pedagogical effects upon a real child reader.

Jackson *et al*'s claim that children's Gothic has a renewed significance since the millennium is coupled to a narrative of resurgence common in histories of Gothic. For Jackson *et al*, postmillennial Gothic is significant precisely because it is a resurgence, a reappearance of a form previously suppressed into the 'byways' of children's literature, particularly during the 'Golden Age' of children's literature in the nineteenth century (2008, 3). They argue that after a long period of suppression, 'by the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, the books children are reading are . . . haunted once again (A. Jackson *et al* 2008, 4). This narrative of demise and resurgence is something of a critical commonplace in histories of the Gothic. Spooner explains that Gothic 'has throughout its history taken the form of a series of revivals', continually reconstituting itself even as elsewhere its demise is announced (2006, 10). Likewise, Alexandra Warwick warns that the 'obiturally-minded critic' should be wary of announcing the death of Gothic since it can always be shown to have returned or been resuscitated (2007, 5).

Moreover, this particularly Gothic narrative of death and resurgence has been articulated a number of times in relation to the history of Gothic children's fiction, though which periods are marked as revivals, and which as periods of suppression vary from critic to critic and depend on point of view. Neil Gaiman, whose psychological Gothic tale *Coraline* (2002) has been given a special significance by children's critics, echoes Jackson *et al*, positing the millennium as the watershed moment. Gaiman claims that publishers declined *Coraline* when he approached them

in 1990, in favour of realistic novels 'about a kid in a tower block whose brother has heroin problems' (Gaiman in Ouzounian 2009). Gaiman here references the success of various realist novels in the 1990s, such as Melvin Burgess' *Junk* (1996), which won the Carnegie Medal and the Guardian Children's Fiction Award. However, Gaiman's complaint that he could not get a publisher for *Coraline* until after 2000 seems disingenuous considering that throughout the 1990s Scholastic's horror labels, *Point Horror* and *Goosebumps*, dominated the popular fiction market in both the UK and the US. In fact, in a survey of horror fiction for children published in 2001, Kimberley Reynolds identifies 'the last two decades' as a period of proliferation for Gothic, claiming that books 'marketed with the promise of providing a frightening experience. . . have spectacularly dominated children's publishing' (Reynolds 2001, 1). Reynolds' assessment contradicts Gaiman's claim of a dearth of Gothic fiction in the 1990s, dating the boom in horror fiction for children back to the 1980s.

As well as being dependent on point of view, narratives of death and resurgence inevitably fail to be comprehensive and do not account for the complex interactions between Gothic and children's literature which have been in equal parts complementary and antagonistic. Indeed, I contend that children's Gothic is not a mode marked by sympathy or synchronicity, but by contestation and conflict. Depending on the point of view of the critic weighing in on the debate, contradictory claims have been made about the function and effect of Gothic in children's literature. There is no evidence of a particular suppression, nor of a particular affinity between Gothic and children's literature that can be definitely proved in relation to any particular period. Instead, critics offer different assessments of the relationship, often during the same historical moment. Accordingly, Grenby is sceptical of a 'straightforward account of a steadily growing acceptance of Gothic in children's

culture' for, even as he finds evidence of Gothic in children's fiction throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, he finds an equal number of critics and writers continuing to decry the mode as unsuitable. This back-and-forth leads Grenby to argue that the relationship between the two forms is 'uneasy' (2014, 251). Dale Townshend likewise relates a continual critical back-and-forth about the ethics, effects and value of including Gothic in children's literature throughout this period (2008). Thus, Jackson *et al* echo claims that repeatedly resurface in a long-standing debate about Gothic and children's literature. As I have argued elsewhere, a linear narrative of children's literature and Gothic offers too much of a temptation to retroactive 'Gothicise' texts from the history of children's literature, backwardly projecting contemporary concepts of the Gothic onto texts that would have been read very differently in their original context (Buckley 2013, 257).

A conflictual relationship between Gothic and children's literature is evident from the eighteenth-century to the present. On one side of the debate, critics bemoan the sad decline of Gothic affect in the face of what they decry as the didactic and sanitising effects of literature produced for children, whilst, on the other side, critics rail against the continuing pernicious influence of Gothic and gory tales on child readers. Early children's literature set itself the task of instilling bourgeois values such as 'integrity, reliability, and level-headedness', countering a working-class oral tradition that included gory, Gothic tales (Grenby 2014, 245, 246). At the same time, Romantic writers praised Gothic affect as a vital component of childhood experience. In 1805, Wordsworth nostalgically calls for the gory chapbook tales of his youth: 'Oh! Give us once again the wishing cap … Jack the Giant Killer, Robin Hood and Sabra in the forest with George' (Wordsworth quoted in Townshend 2008, 29). Whereas, in 1829, the society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge promoted

the didactic fiction of Barbauld and Edgeworth as a much needed antidote to the tales of terror that were still 'so constantly taught' (Townshend 2008, 33). These contradictory positions about Gothic affect and child readers continue to circulate through the nineteenth century. For example, Dickens's 'Frauds on the Fairies', an attack on Cruikshank's bowdlerised versions of fairy tales for children, warns that 'we must soon become disgusted with the old stories into which modern personages so obtruded themselves, and the stories themselves must soon be lost' (Dickens 1853). Paradoxically, though Dickens disliked censorship in retellings of fairy tales, his own foray into Gothic writing for children allotted the ghosts a firmly 'moralizing' role, rather than indulging in terror for terror's sake (Grenby 2014, 251). So, just as children's literature was never wholly didactic to the exclusion of Gothic, nor did it ever fully embrace an easy and sympathetic relationship with Gothic affect and the sublime pleasures of terror. Contrary views suggest a long-standing conflict over the function of children's Gothic, and over the ethical dimensions of its affectivity. Romantic nostalgia for a 'haunted boyhood', informed by an image of childhood influenced by Rousseau, is echoed in current writing about Gothic fiction (Townshend 2008, 30). Jackson *et al*'s return to some of the very same chapbook titles included in Wordsworth's 'Prelude' to make their authentication of Gothic as a children's mode (A. Jackson *et al* 2008, 2). At the same time, concerns about the negative effects of Gothic fictions on young readers, seen for example in the moral panic of the 1870s surrounding juvenile delinquency and the 'penny dreadful' (see Springhall 1994), continue to be voiced in relation to video nasties in the UK in the 1980s and, more recently, in concerns about the effects of teenage girls reading *Twilight* in the 2000s. That conflictual discussions of this nature continue to circulate in popular and critical discourses suggests that

competing and often paradoxical desires for, and anxieties about, childhood remain
unresolved. This ambivalence lies at the heart of contemporary children's Gothic and
the critical response to it.

In light of the conflictual history of Gothic in children's literature, I treat all
diachronic histories of the form with suspicion. My interrogation of these histories is
intended as the spring board for a critique of narratives emerging in the post
millennial moment about Gothic and its child reader. I agree with Jackson *et al* that
there has been a significant proliferation of Gothic fiction for children since 2000,
but I question their reading of this significance. Instead of basing my analysis on a
child reader who uses Gothic fiction to 'court their dark side and own it as an aspect
of the self', I argue that it is in adult-produced discourse and criticism that Gothic for
children finds unprecedented acceptance in the postmillennial moment (A. Jackson
et al 2008, 8). Even though a history of the Gothic can be traced through children's
literature, children's Gothic fiction has gained unprecedented status in economic,
pop-cultural *and* literary terms since 2000. The factors contributing to this status are
multiple and include economically motivated interests on the part of publishing
companies, who have promoted Gothic fiction for children, particular in series form.
At the same time, critical interest and mass popularity have converged in an unusual
way, particularly given that children's literature criticism has long been suspicious of
mass-market forms of fiction. As recently as 2001, for example, Jack Zipes
implicates mass-market publishing for children in the 'cultural homogenization' of
American children and there is, generally, throughout children's literature, a focus on
the 'literary' book to the detriment of popular forms of fiction (2002, 3). As in
Gothic, a modernist aesthetic often surfaces in children's literature criticism, valuing
subversive art over mainstream culture, in an attempt to defend the field against its

many detractors by arguing for the literary value of its objects of study. This suspicion of mass culture also originates in children's literature criticism's liberal humanist assumptions about the value of art. The discipline 'keeps faith with the fundamental assumption that literature (as opposed to books as a whole) will affect and therefore influence – and, with a bit of luck influence in desirable ways' (Lesnik-Oberstein 1994, 126). Nonetheless, since the publication of *The Gothic in Children's Literature: Haunting the Borders* (2008), children's literature critics are beginning to embrace contemporary children's Gothic, much of which could be characterised as mass-market popular fiction, homogenous products of the culture industry.

Postmillennial children's Gothic ranges from the literary to pop-cultural commodities such as films, character merchandise and toys. As Victoria Carrington argues in her study of popular forms of Gothic for children, 'toys are also a reminder of the very strong ties that the Gothic has always had with popular culture and mass consumption (with young children increasingly positioned as a large market)' (Carrington 2012, 301). Increasingly, such products of mass-consumption are critically evaluated as literary objects, or, in the case of Carrington's study, as valuable objects in literacy education. Such readings suggest a marked critical shift in line with a proliferation of Gothic in popular and literary culture since 2000 that has occurred more generally, beyond the boundaries of children's fiction. This critical shift constitutes a decided swing away from a critical back and forth about Gothic affectivity and its positive or pernicious effects, towards a wider acceptance of the Gothic as an exemplary mode for children.

Eat up, Children: Pedagogies of the Gothic

Though concerns about the effects of frightening fiction are raised as recently as the 1990s, a noticeable shift has since occurred in academic and popular discourse toward the idea that Gothic is not only suitable for children but, moreover, is actually good for them. Writing in 2001, looking back over the past decade, Reynolds notes that critical responses to horror in children's literature are still decidedly 'mixed', with anxieties frequently voiced 'about the potentially harmful effects on young people of getting the horror habit' (Reynolds 2001, 1,2). Reynolds surveys newspaper articles and material released by educational groups in which books such as those in the *Point Horror* series are branded 'vile and truly pernicious'. Reynolds likens the concerns raised over the *Point Horror* books to the moral panic in the US in the 1950s over horror comics, though they are most likely the consequence of the British 'video nasty' moral panic, intensified by the killing of James Bulger in 1993 by two children supposedly influenced by *Child's Play 3*. However, this damning commentary is abating by 2001, a shift due in part to the *Harry Potter* phenomenon (though Reynolds is not able to take this into account). J. K. Rowling's work rapidly gains popularity from the beginning of the millennium, and this popularity both signals and contributes to a transformation in the way children's fiction is valued. Nick Hunter notes that by the time all seven of Rowling's *Harry Potter* titles had been published in 2008, the series had sold more than 375 million copies in 63 languages. In response, the *New York Times* introduced a children's bestsellers list in 2001 after *Harry Potter* titles had filled the first three spots on their regular bestseller list for over a year (Hunter 2013, 46). Though arguably not Gothic, *Harry Potter's* use of 'dark' fantasy appealed to adult readers and critics. Its popularity with the gatekeepers of children's fiction led to the fantastic becoming more culturally

valuable. In particular, darkly fantastical fictions crafted for children soon began to be hailed by critics as a valuable means of promoting reading and encouraging literacy, particularly amongst boys (D. Smith 2005).

The shift in critical opinion after 2000 can be seen in newspaper reviews, indicators of taste and value in children's literature where popular consumption and critical opinion converge. For example, *The Telegraph,* which brands *Point Horror* 'vile and truly pernicious' during the 1990s, features many Gothic titles in their article on 'Adventures to Enchanting Worlds' in 2009. The piece contains recommendations by contemporary writers and critics, including a series of novels set in the 'dark, dark fairy tale world of the Brothers Grimm', *The Hunger Games*, Philip Reeve's *Mortal Engines*, China Mieville's Weird novel, *Un Lun Dun*, Marcus Sedgwick's *Blood Red Snow White*, and Chris Priestley's *Tales of Terror* collection, this latter described as 'wonderfully macabre and beautifully crafted horror stories' (*The Telegraph* 2009). Later, *The Telegraph* favourably reviews Darren Shan's pulp horror series, *Zom-B*, calling it 'a clever mix of horror, fantasy and realism' (Chilton 2012). Reviewers across the news media praise children's Gothic as 'deliciously scary', 'deliciously dark and satisfying', 'deliciously spine-tingling', 'chilling, creepy and utterly compelling' and 'marvellously strange and scary' (Merritt 2008; *Stirling Observer* 2010; Seymenliyska 2011; Lewis 2012; Pullman 2002).

Children's book award shortlists also demonstrate Gothic's newfound status. *Coraline* gained a series of accolades in the UK and the US, including the Hugo Award for Best Novella, the SFWA Nebula Award for Best Novella, the Locus Award for Best Work for Young Readers, a Bram Stoker Award for Best Work for Young Readers, an ALA Notable Children's Book award, a *Publishers Weekly* Best Book award, the *School Library Journal* Best Book award, a *Book Magazine* Best

Book award, and a *Guardian* Best of 2002 selection, among others. In the UK, *A Monster Calls* won both the prestigious Carnegie Medal and the Kate Greenaway medal in 2012. Critics have also recognised less 'serious' texts, and Chris Riddell's pastiche *Goth Girl and the Ghost of a Mouse* won the Costa Children's Book Award in 2013. *Goth Girl* is an unlikely winner; in previous years the award was given to markedly more serious works. The triumph of *Goth Girl* is indicative of a change in perceptions of literary value, and shows a willingness in critical circles to value pastiche and parody alongside 'serious' psychological Gothic novels, like *Coraline.* Recently, Frances Hardinge's children's Gothic novel, *The Lie Tree* (2015) was awarded the title of Costa Book of the Year. The range of Gothic fictions now being recognised is not simply an indication of the mass popularity of the form, but shows that this popularity is accompanied by a positive critical reception.

A shift in critical discourse can be seen in the different academic evaluations of children's Gothic made by Reynolds in 2001 and by Jackson *et al* in 2008. In the introduction to *Frightening Fiction*, Reynolds dismisses many texts labelled 'horror' (2001, 1). For Reynolds, most 'horror' texts marketed at children in that period do not deserve the descriptor: 'Overall, horror fiction directed at young teenage readers backs away from the uncertain endings or all-pervasive sense of fear and ghastly transgression which characterises true horror' (2001, 3). For Reynolds, 'true horror' must be transgressive, a feature sadly lacking in mainstream commercial fictions. Her evaluative comments echo a point of view in Gothic studies that requires horror and Gothic texts to be radical and subversive as opposed to conservative and mainstream. A concern with authenticity is seen here in Reynolds's use of quotation marks around 'horror', and also in her comment that many of the texts the volume

surveys merely 'masquerade' as horror, when they in fact constitute a commercial genre that 'makes use of none of the traditional features of horror fiction' (2001 3,4).

In contrast, Jackson *et al* dispense with genre boundary policing and do not question the authenticity of the texts under consideration. The shift from the label 'horror' to the term Gothic is also significant since it brings the study within a recognizable *literary* field and links the texts to a historical literary period that suggests that contemporary texts have a legitimate heritage. Their evaluative language is markedly more positive and does not make a distinction between commercial or mass-market fiction and 'authentic' Gothic literature. The editors are keen to

> assess children's Gothic *on its own terms*, as a *pure* form destined for a profoundly knowing audience, who hears its parody and excess as a call to know more about what *really* haunts us (A. Jackson *et al* 2008, 9; emphasis mine).

Jackson *et al* stress the form's legitimacy and authenticity in the context of wider Gothic literature, valued here as a form of excess. For Jackson *et al*, this 'pure irruption of the Gothic in children's literature' has a 'cultural and personal importance for contemporary child readers' (9). Here, children's Gothic is assimilated into a long Gothic tradition of a literature of excess. Thus, it is valuable in itself as an object of academic study as opposed to Reynolds's assessment which posits children's horror fiction as largely suspect in itself, but interesting in terms of the uses child readers might make of it.

Critics and reviewers of children's Gothic since 2000 embrace the form as authentic, often legitimising it through a language of desire and appetite. This

language can be seen in many of the reviews above, which describe the books as 'deliciously' scary. The word connotes a gleeful delight in Gothic for its own sake, but also suggests that the books satisfy a deep desire in the child reader. The construction of the child reader as possessing a rapacious appetite for Gothic is repeated in academic and popular discourse. One newspaper reviewer claims that 'there is nothing most kids like more in their literary diet than a good helping of gruesome', whilst Jackson *et al* refer to the child reader's 'appetite' for and delight in 'the more piquant pleasures of a good shiver' (*Stirling Observer* 2010; A. Jackson *et al* 2008, 2). In statements such as these, critics assume that Gothic fiction satisfies an innate desire, which originates in the child itself.

This language of appetite is linked to notions of diet, and, specifically, what a healthy reading diet for children consists of. Thus, even as they imagine and construct a child reader with active desires and Gothic tastes, critics position themselves as arbiters of what is *good* and *nourishing* for children. The logic at work here is pedagogical at root, and a pedagogical framework is being established in which Gothic fiction is increasingly valued for its role in maturation and identity formation. Thus, an uneasy conflict emerges between the idea of Gothic originating in the child's unconscious desires, and the idea that Gothic must serve a pedagogical function. The conflict is neatly demonstrated in the success of Neil Gaiman's *Coraline*. Though claiming to write on behalf of a child whose dark desires unlock the doorway to an uncanny Gothic space, critics invariably read *Coraline* and its eponymous character as a fable of maturation, a moral tale with the message: be careful what you wish for.

This conflict between imagining children's Gothic as satisfying deep pleasures and needing it to serve a pedagogical function is not new. Neil Gaiman's

claim that he wrote *Coraline* for his daughter because there was a dearth of Gothic stories for children in the 1990s neatly echoes the claims of nineteenth-century writer, Heinrich Hoffmann. In 1848, the self-styled 'kinderlieb' or lover of children published the now infamous *Struwwelpeter: Merry Stories and Funny Pictures* in English. In this gruesome volume, naughty children are violently punished for various misdeeds. Now widely regarded as moral didacticism at its most severe, Hoffmann claimed that *Struwwelpeter* was intended as humorous entertainment for the child reader, whose appetites and tastes were not catered for by writers of the time. Similarly, Neil Gaiman claims that his daughter Holly loved scary stories but 'couldn't find any . . . on the shelves, so I thought I'd write one for her' (Gaiman, quoted in Ouzounian 2009). Gaiman and Hoffmann make recourse to the appetites of their own children to escape accusations that they write to instruct. Other contemporary writers make similar claims. Charlie Higson claims to write for his son, Stanley, and explains that each instalment in his gory zombie series represents an attempt to provoke a response in his horror-loving son (Flood 2014). Likewise, Chris Priestley claims he writes for the boy he once was, a boy who loved watching late night horror films (Priestley 2012). In extra-textual commentaries, writers construct a personalised child, whose appetites their work satisfies, in ways that traditionally pedagogical children's literature does not. Nonetheless, these writers cannot escape the pedagogical logic of children's literature criticism. As Lesnik-Oberstein points out

> Children's books are written by adults for children. The subsequent criticism of this fiction is then produced by adults on behalf of children who are supposed to be reading the books. There are thus multiple layers of adults writing, and then selecting and analysing, children's fiction. (2000, 222–223)

As Zipes further argues, Hoffmann's book 'was never really conceived or created for children . . . *Struwwelpeter* had to appeal to the tastes and values of adults' (2002, 153). So, just as Hoffmann's book became an incredibly popular instructional text, found on nursery shelves throughout Europe and the United States, so *Coraline* has come to be lauded as an important Gothic tale of maturation that parents ought to share with their children.

The pedagogical logic behind the new praise for Gothic is exemplified by Sam Leith in his *Guardian* article, which aptly invokes Hoffmann's infamous book: 'Do you know what today's kids need? Thumb amputation, that's what'. Leith proclaims that 'art for children should be scary. It needs to be scary' (2009). The use of the words 'need' and 'should' are also used by Higson in his assertion that horror is 'good for kids': 'Kids should have nightmares, they should be scared of things'. For Higson, nightmares help children learn 'how to cope with things' (Higson quoted in Flood 2014). Public praise for horror as vital in children's social and psychological maturation is increasingly common. More recently, in a blog titled 'Why Horror is Good for You (And Even Better for Your Kids)', Greg Ruth states that now more than ever is the time to 'scare the hell out of kids and teach them to love it'. For Ruth, horror 'teaches' children to 'cope' and helps them 'grow' (Ruth 2014). Thus, the 'appetites' imagined to originate in the child authorise an adult discourse about what how the child should be guided, through its reading, to grow and mature. It seems that there is no escaping children's literature's association with instruction and education.

For critics now turning their attention to Gothic children's literature, the form aids social maturation, psychological growth and encourages vital literacy skills. For Reynolds, frightening fiction is attractive to child readers since it promises 'agency

[and] the acquisition of power that will enable them to make decisions and operate effectively in the world' (2001, 8). Though the texts themselves are not necessarily 'true' horror, their 'illicit' status helps to provide young readers with 'alternative, oppositional positions from which to assess past and present generations . . . a necessary part of the work of growing up' (Reynolds 2001, 9). Even though Reynolds does not find the fiction valuable in itself, it is worthy of critical study because of its pedagogical function. Likewise, Jackson *et al* suggest that postmillennial children's Gothic not only 'stretches children's literary competencies' but it provides a space in which strong, active identities can be forged (2008, 4). Jackson *et al* claim that Gothic produces a child reader who is responsible and empowered: '[they] acknowledge [their] responsibility for bringing the evil into the world and assert [their] agency in the face of it' (2008, 8). Postmillennial children's Gothic is read as serving the child reader's needs as a growing and developing subject: it takes 'the hauntedness of our lives as an opportunity for strength – the strength to dream strong dreams, to capture the energy of the Gothic villain and put it to positive use' (A. Jackson *et al* 2008, 13). Reading Gothic is here constructed as therapy in which the child's identity is shaped and matured through the positive interventions of the text.

The agency of the child reader continues to be a focus in Victoria Carrington's work, which identifies a new and radically subversive literacy available in Gothic toys. Unlike Coats and Reynolds, Carrington is less squeamish about explicitly labelling Gothic as 'pedagogic' and so illuminates clearly the pedagogical logic at work behind the critical claims that Gothic is good for children (Carrington

2012, 304).[4] Carrington argues that Gothic provides vital resources in the process of identity construction: 'skill sets and attitudes that allow the young to construct coherent resilient bespoke identities' (2012, 304, 305). A postmillennial Gothic resurgence demands and promotes literacy skills that

> will ensure that young citizens are equipped with the critical skills to analyse, unpack, repackage and redeploy texts […] Children learning to be literate in Gothic times must have opportunities to become aware of the rights and responsibilities that go with citizenship and engagement in communities . . . To this end, their practices with text creation and deployment should always be authentic and in the world and sometimes subversive so that they learn the power of text in relation to civic engagement. This, in turn, works to construct resilient positive identities. (Carrington 2012, 305-306)

Carrington's claim that contemporary Gothic can produce a new form of literacy ideally suited to the contemporary moment echoes discourses in children's literature criticism which read texts in light of their role in producing active, questioning, critical and literate child subjects (see for example Nikolajeva 2010; Stephens 1992). This pedagogy is increasingly linked to Gothic texts, with writers themselves echoing critical discourse to claim that their works aid in producing a critical literacy broadly aligned with liberal humanist politics.

The emergent critical narrative of children's Gothic is thus both pedagogical and politically left-wing, identifying with a subversive and critical child reader. This active pedagogy constitutes a shift from previous understandings of the function and

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[4] The difference here is disciplinary. Children's literature criticism has long been engaged in a project to distance itself from educational didacticism. Particularly since the 1980s, the dominant assumption in children's literature criticism has been that the best books are those that are not ideological, and that allow children agency and freedom.

value of scary stories for children, a shift that can be expressed in a move from being eat*en* to eat*ing*. In their analysis of a children's poem, 'The Ghoul', Jackson *et al* express this shift:

> The Gothic releases forces usually repressed . . . Our enjoyment is visceral: the cracking of bones and the snapping of backs. Parts of the body are delicious morsels, tasty tarts and candy snacks. (2008, 11)

Typically, the ghoul is a cannibalistic nursery bogey who poses a threat to the child, rather than offering a site of identification. In her study of fairy tale, myth and children's stories, Marina Warner argues that cannibal giants are typical nursery bogey-men throughout history (2000, 33). Cannibal bogeys represent a physical threat expressed through their desire to consume the child: 'they are ravenous, and ravenous for the wrong food' (Warner 2000, 36). In modern times, Warner argues, the threat the cannibal bogey represents may no longer be physical, but stand in for sexual threats, such as the abuser or paedophile (Warner 2000, 38). Warner's study focuses on the appetite of the bogeyman and what anxieties this appetite represents - in particular adult anxieties about childhood. In contrast, the emergent critical discourse of contemporary children's Gothic focuses on the appetite of the *reader*, and posits this appetite as the source of the Gothic irruption. Jackson *et al* note contemporary Gothic's link to the 'cautionary tale', but argue that contemporary writers have made a knowing and ethical progression forward from these older tales, arguing that the text is a therapeutic space for identity formation (2008, 12). Whereas in Warner's analysis, it is the staging of the defeat of the bogeyman that provides this function, in Jackson *et al*, it is in the act of identifying with the bogey and its appetites that the child's identity is formed (Warner 2000, 46, 329; A. Jackson *et al* 2008, 11, 13).

This evaluation of children's Gothic premised upon the child's appetite is deeply paradoxical. The child reader is both the source of the Gothic and the object upon which it acts, in a pedagogical model that aims at an active, empowered reader, but nonetheless requires that reader to be passive so it can do its work. As Lesnik-Oberstein argues, children's literature criticism is still rooted in didacticism even as it tells a story of moving away from didacticism:

> The narratives adults attempt to convey to children are controlled and formed, implicitly and explicitly, by the didactic impulse . . . the roots of allocating books (that is, criticism) to, and producing them for, children, lie in the effort to *educate*. This is in contrast to the generally accepted view that children's fiction is a category defined by, and originating from, a *move away* from didacticism, instruction, or education. (Lesnik-Oberstein 1994, 38)

This deeply paradoxical pedagogy is exposed when it intersects with Gothic. Gothic has come to be valued for its subversive and transgressive nature, ideally suited for this ethical progression of children's literature away from didacticism and instruction. Paradoxically, Gothic is put to work to serve a pedagogy that claims to create freedom for children, but continues to rely on 'an all-knowing, all-controlling adult' (Lesnik-Oberstein 1994, 63).

The exhortation for the child to be exposed to Gothic is also informed by a construction of childhood as itself inherently Gothic. The picture book author Maurice Sendak has been widely praised for acknowledging 'the terrors of childhood' and refusing to 'cater to the bullshit of innocence' (Brockes 2011). Drawing on Sendak as inspiration, Greg Ruth claims that Gothic is good because it accurately reflects the fact that 'childhood is scary'. Describing childhood as a

'terrifying ordeal' that the Gothic author can 'help children survive', Ruth argues that Gothic is pertinent to the post-millennial moment, with its economic crises, terrorist threats and ecological disasters: 'It's a spooky time to be a kid […] let's give them some tools to cope with it' (Ruth 2014). The idea that childhood is traumatic sits uneasily with the claim that Gothic emerges in response to children's innate appetites and so empowers them. Moreover, Ruth's explanations of why Gothic is good cannot do without the idea of 'guardians and guides' helping children through the trauma (Ruth 2014). Jackson *et al* are also unable to resolve this tension, arguing that Gothic for children 'warns of dangers . . . close to even the most familiar of places. It reminds us that the world is not safe. It challenges the pastoral myths of childhood, replacing these with myths of darkness drawing down' (2008, 12). Likewise, for all Carrington's appraisal of Gothic as producing subversive literacy, she also claims that 'the contemporary Gothic revival is a marker of anxiety around identity, trust, authenticity, and, to some extent, childhood itself' (2012, 298). Thus, as well as a conflict between activity and passivity within the underlying pedagogy of children's Gothic, Gothicised narratives of childhood sit in uneasy tension with an image of an empowered and delighted reading child.

To summarise, the pedagogical logic of the emergent critical discourse praising children's Gothic originates in the fundamental and paradoxical assumptions of children's literature criticism. The valuation of Gothic as transgressive and subversive adds a further tension to this paradoxical pedagogy, since Gothic is ultimately valued for its pedagogical effects upon a passive child reader. Another conflict has also emerged here in the construction of postmillennial childhood itself as Gothic, a site of trauma, but also the privileged space of imaginative engagement with the liberating energies of the Gothic.

Multiple Locations: A Note on the Chapters

The following chapters offer my response to the problems in the current analysis and evaluation of children's Gothic fiction. Having identified conflicts and paradoxes within the fiction and its criticism, I want to move forward by suggesting that such conflicts are ultimately productive when read outside the critical paradigms currently dominating children's literature. Acknowledging the lessons of constructivist challenges to notions of the child reader, I reject an analysis of Gothic reliant on a real child existing beyond narrative and discourse. However, I wish to avoid the aporia and critical impasse tempted by the mantra, 'the child does not exist'. Instead, I propose to explore the multiple locations in children's Gothic fiction across which subjectivity is constructed. Following Braidotti, I seek to reveal a 'diversity of possible subject positions' that children's Gothic offers (2011a, 16). Engaging productively with texts, I contribute my analysis to processes initiated within the fiction that express a variety of non-unitary identities and offer modes of reading that keep meaning mobile and open. In my thesis both the child reader and the critic are reconfigured as nomadic subjects, un-homed from familiar and enclosed locations, and so able to explore an expansive intertextual terrain and engage in productive dialogue.

I draw on a broad definition of Gothic that aims at revealing the multiplicity of postmillennial children's fiction. I take Chris Baldick's assertion that the Gothic effect is attained through a combination of 'a fearful sense of inheritance in time with a claustrophobic sense of enclosure in space, these two dimensions reinforcing one another to produce an impression of sickening descent into disintegration' (1992, xix). This definition allows me to include a broad array of fiction, whilst also differentiating Gothic to some extent from the related mode, horror. That said, I

include texts which draw on both horror and Gothic, and I see the two traditions as interrelated. For me, the Gothic denotes any text that uses recognizably Gothic tropes or characters, or that draws and makes reference to a history of Gothic in its multiple forms. Moreover, I include works that draw on and explore popular and cultural ideas about the Gothic or that provide a pastiche or parody of past works. The texts I examine are part of a varied body of work that remains very much open and in process, and I have no interest in policing its borders or marking out firm boundaries. Overall, I am most interested in those texts critical discourse has marked as Gothic within children's literature, and those it has not. Unpacking the implicit valuations in these demarcations allows me to reveal blind spots within existing criticism.

Likewise, my definition of children's literature is deliberately broad and includes teen or adolescent fiction, as well as works suggested for readers as young as eight or nine. Works written for and marketed at children aged between 8 and 16 is sometimes labelled 'Young Adult' or 'Teen' fiction. I contend that this category is not helpful since it denotes publishers' marketing strategies, rather than suggesting anything about real readers. Indeed, different bookshops shelve works differently, and one publisher might suggest a work is for Young Adult readers, whilst a comparable work from another publisher (in terms of theme, length and content) might be suggested as a "9+" work. For example, on its *Booktalk* website, Scholastic suggests its romance range, *Point*, for readers aged 12-18. However, elsewhere on Scholastic's website, individual titles in the *Point* series are suggested for readers in Grade 5 and Grade 6 (ages 10-12). Elsewhere, an academic study of 'teen' romance suggests its readers are aged between 10 and 15 (Kutzer 1986, 94). The children's Gothic novel, *Coram Boy*, is included in the UK curriculum for Key Stage 3 (ages 11

– 13), even though the book includes typically 'Young Adult' content, such as sex and violence. Categorisations within children's literature publishing are thus too loose to provide any evidence that the texts are written for, or read by, a specifically 'adolescent' child rather than just a 'child'. In any case, the potential readership for these works ranges from younger child readers with the required literacy competence all the way through to adults, like myself. Accordingly, the texts included in this thesis are categorised variously as being suitable for readers aged between 8 and 12 years, and for readers aged 12+, or Young Adults.

In chapter one, 'Un-homing Psychoanalysis: The 'Uncanny' Gothic of Neil Gaiman's *Coraline*', I explore the recent canonization of *Coraline,* one of the most discussed works of postmillennial children's Gothic. Popular commentary and academic criticism present *Coraline* as exemplary in its field and thus attempt to fix children's Gothic as a unified, self-enclosed genre. Moreover, *Coraline* and its criticism represents the culmination of a trend in children's literature to subordinate creative fiction, particularly Gothic, to the master narrative of psychoanalysis. The novel seems to invite a psychoanalytic reading, drawing explicitly on Freud's 'The uncanny'. Anticipating and reworking a psychoanalytic depth reading into its surface motifs, however, *Coraline* undercuts the truth claims psychoanalytic criticism makes about the Gothic and the child, revealing such criticism as just another creative narrative. The action of the novel is set entirely in Coraline's home, suggesting the claustrophobia of Freud's essay in which he returns again and again to the same spot. The home is also doubled according to the schema set out in Freud's essay, with Coraline's other house appearing within the novel as an unsettling mirror image. This other home, which invokes Carroll's *Alice*, functions as an intertextual hub, leading the critic not to the centre of the text and its hidden meaning, but outwards to

other textual locations and, so, to other readings than that offered by psychoanalysis. Rather than explicating the psyche of the child, as its critics have suggested, *Coraline* reveals that the psychoanalytic child is an illusion and offers in its stead an intertextual child, conjured out of the mutually constitutive dialogue of Gothic, psychoanalysis and children's literature. Un-homing psychoanalysis, *Coraline* thus gestures towards an image of the child as nomadic subject composed out of 'sets of relations and assemblages' (Braidotti 2011b, 6).

In chapter two, 'Fleeing Identification: The Grotesquerie of Darren Shan's *Zom-B*', I continue to challenge critical paradigms in children's literature criticism in a re-evaluation of theories of 'identification'. I place existing formulations of identification in dialogue with Darren Shan's pulp horror series, *Zom-B,* to reveal a paradoxical pedagogy at the heart of children's literature. I suggest that *Zom-B* offers up a grotesque subject in response to the one imagined in a pedagogical reading. Concerned with getting a reluctant boy to read, Darren Shan deploys the zombie as both an object lesson and a gross-out lure. However, the gross-out elements of horror undercut the author's pedagogical project. Moreover, the grotesque identification offered by the zombie characters returns to the text gendered and classed identities it wishes to disavow. Tracing a line of flight, Shan's zombie embodies a grotesque nomadism that rejects Classical being and a dominant construction of the child as male, middle-class, and teachable. Thus, Shan's zombie offers an 'alternative space of becoming' (Braidotti 2011b, 7). This alternative configuration of the zombie further prompts me to consider critical readings of the zombie in Gothic studies, and I suggest that a critical commonplace whereby the zombie is said to serve a negative social-symbolic function is challenged by its travels into the realm of children's literature, where it takes on an affirmative form of embodied subjectivity.

In chapter three, 'Exiled Lovers: Gothic Romance in Jamila Gavin's *Coram Boy* and Paula Morris's *Ruined*', I switch my focus from an imagined male reading child to Gothic's long maligned female reader in a consideration of how postmillennial children's Gothic reconfigures Gothic Romance. Building on my critique of a dismissive tendency in Gothic studies towards popular, mainstream works, I challenge the backlash against Romance's most recent incarnation, 'Paranormal Romance', by looking at the complexity of the interrelation between romance and Gothic in two very different manifestations of the form. Furthermore, I address the disparity between the formulation of male and female readers of children's Gothic by challenging the way that audiences for works labelled 'feminine' have been constructed as passive dupes. In children's Gothic Romance both heroes and heroines are exiled from the domestic home, which is caught up in a classic Gothic dichotomy as both a claustrophobic prison and an idealised space of security. Exiled, the protagonists reconfigure their identities as nomadic. The Romance mode in its much maligned popular manifestation also plays an important part in this reconfiguration of identity since it provides romantic love and desire as affirmative processes. Through the vital force of desire, lovers forge productive interrelationships with others. Rejecting a negative formulation of desire as lack, children's Gothic Romance locates the exile within a Spinozan model of subjectivity as an agent whose passions reveal a persistent and active *conatus,* or affirmative will to be (Spinoza 1996, 98, 104).

In chapter four, 'Dismantling home-made authenticity: Gothic Parody in *Frankenweenie* and *Paranorman*', I continue to problematise the modernist aesthetic privileged in Gothic studies through a reading of two animated children's films. The parodic strategies of *Frankenweenie* and *Paranorman* (both released in 2012) work

to dismantle the notion of 'authenticity' that supports Botting's claims about Gothic's post-millennial diffusion, as well as other Gothic critics' attempts to locate Gothic on the 'margins' of cultural production. The films' thematic and aesthetic concern with the 'home-made' is expressed through the double-voicedness of parody, which reveals that the home-made in fact marks the absence of 'authenticity'. However, this absence does not result in the emptying out of meaning and affect. I suggest that cynical formulations of parody, which construct and rely upon a knowing reader, do not account for the way parody functions in children's Gothic. In contrast, *Frankenweenie* and *Paranorman* provide a space within the text for readers to gain the competencies needed to decode the text as they go. Thus, the films' parodic repetition of cliché does not result in Gothic becoming less affective. Rather, the positing of a naïve reader ensures that Gothic retains its potential to horrify. Moreover, the home is reconfigured as a site of belonging for the films' child protagonists, both of whom are represented as outsiders and misfits. Spaces that were experienced as uncomfortable or repressive are reconfigured as welcoming, as the nomadic subject brings about a mutual transformation of the 'margins' and the 'mainstream', connecting these two locations.

Finally, in chapter five, 'The 'Great Outdoors': Anthony Horowitz's *Power of Five* and Derek Landy's *Skulduggery Pleasant*', I explore the way children's Gothic appropriates elements of the Weird tradition. A deeply contradictory mode of writing, Weird fiction has inspired radical challenges to Western philosophy *and* a proliferation of pop cultural manifestations. Both of these forms of the Weird appear in Derek Landy's *Skulduggery Pleasant* and Anthony Horowitz's *Power of Five*, which deploy the Weird to destabilise narratives of maturation typical in 'Young Adult' fiction. Not only are the protagonists un-homed in these fantasy adventures,

their entire ontology is swept away by an encounter with a Weird universe. Thus, rather than creating safe, bounded fantasy spaces for the exploration of maturation, Weird children's fiction opens out into a horrifying encounter with what Lovecraft calls 'cosmicism'. At the same time, however, the child continues to be constructed as an agent capable of pleasure and empowerment as protagonists battle with indescribable creatures and partake in subversive, metafictional games. Children's Weird fiction is thus characterised by double gestures and contradictory impulses, creating a fissured text that allows for multiple readings. These texts do not simply re-create the 'haute' Weird of the early twentieth century: they remake it, countering traditional narratives of maturation and mastery popular elsewhere in children's fiction. Drawing on speculative realist philosophy, I suggest that the Weird offers an encounter with the strange objects of material reality, propelling the nomadic subject beyond the confines of the humanist conception of the 'I'.

Surveying a range of postmillennial children's Gothic fictions, this thesis follows the nomadic subject through very different landscapes and spaces. This journey will trace a productive, transformative figuration of subjectivity that counters both the pedagogical interpretation of the 'psychoanalytic child', which dominates children's literature criticism, and the image of a tragic, or riven, subject offered by deconstructive psychoanalysis. Nomadic subjectivity instead offers an affirmative image of being as becoming. Inspired by the agility of the nomadic subject, I occupy a number of different theoretical positions to account for the myriad ways that these children's fictions reconfigure both children's and Gothic literature. The transformative potential of these works offers new ways of reading and evaluating children's literature and postmillennial Gothic. I also want to stress

the openness of the body of work I map herein: postmillennial children's Gothic is a

text in process and I hope to open up its landscapes to further academic exploration.

Chapter 1

Un-homing Psychoanalysis:

The 'Uncanny' Gothic of Neil Gaiman's *Coraline*

<u>Introduction: From a Gothicised *Alice* to the Canonization of *Coraline*</u>

Coraline (2002) is one of the first novels to be analysed and praised in the emergent academic discourse championing children's Gothic. Ostensibly a re-writing of Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass* (1865), *Coraline* has been warmly received by children's literature critics who have seized upon its depiction of an uncanny childhood encounter as particularly apt for the modern child reader. Counter to a dominant reading of the novel as exemplary of the uncanny nature of childhood, I contend that *Coraline* is an explicit exploration of the intertextual and mututally constitutive relationship between Gothic, psychoanalysis and children's literature. In place of the psychoanalytic child, *Coraline* suggests a nomadic alternative, prompting its reader to explore relations and connections beyond a limiting psychoanalytic framework.

In Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) the Cheshire Cat accuses Alice of madness, a diagnosis that foreshadows a long tradition of psychoanalytic interpretations of one of the most famous children's books. Kenneth Kidd argues that a history of psychoanalytic case writing on *Alice* significantly influences children's literature criticism and contributes to popular attitudes about childhood (2011, xxiv). Moreover, psychoanalytic *Alice* forms the basis for an explicitly Gothicised *Alice* in the late twentieth century. Numerous examples of Gothic *Alice* abound in literary and popular culture, epitomised by the computer

game, *American McGee's Alice* (2000) and Alan Moore and Melinda Gebbie's graphic novel, *Lost Girls* (published between 1991 and 2006). The former is set in an asylum, its aesthetic indebted both to Jan Svankmajer's surrealist film, *Alice* (1988) and a late twentieth century penchant for the neo-Victorian Gothic, whilst Gebbie and Moore's graphic novel draws on the popular interpretation of *Alice* (influenced by psychoanalytic case writing on the novel) as containing evidence of a sexualised relationship between Dodgson and his muse. As well as implicating Dodgson in paedophilic desire, Gebbie and Moore depict Alice herself as perverse, admitting, 'I did spend a number of years in a sanatorium' (Moore and Gebbie 2006, 1:8). Though these two texts are adult fictions, they represent a shift in representations of *Alice* that paves the way for the post-millennial proliferation of children's Gothic.

Following these adult psychoanalytic Gothic versions, children's literature critics are keen to rebrand *Alice* as 'one of the great uncanny classics' of children's literature (West and Rollins 1999, 36). The post-millennial proliferation of Gothic fiction for children and an attendant critical discourse championing this fiction, are built on the foundation of a psychoanalysed, gothicised *Alice*. Jackson, Coats and McGillis read Carroll's Wonderland as a 'world which seems to invite exactly the same kind of psychoanalytic reading that the gothic genre as a whole insistently calls for' and claim that *Alice* is the starting point for the over-turning of a didactic tradition of children's fiction, paving the way for the re-emergence of Gothic for children in the twenty-first century (2008, 3, 2). Likewise, David Rudd places *Coraline* in a long 'tradition of exploring the darker side of life', which he locates in fairy tales, nursery rhymes and 'in some of our most celebrated children's books, like *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Peter Pan*' (2008, 160). These assessments of *Alice* as Gothic, uncanny and 'dark' are seemingly confirmed in

Coraline, which rewrites Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There* (1871) alongside Freud's essay, 'The uncanny' (1919). Kidd notes that *Alice* has long been 'used for psychoanalytic explorations of identity and agency, often in "looking-glass" worlds in which identity is suspect and unstable' (2001, 76-77). Thus, *Coraline* should be understood within an intertextual history of *Alice,* Gothic and psychoanalysis. However, for Jackson *et al*, Rudd, and others, *Coraline* confirms an *essential* sympathy between Gothic and children's literature, and *proves* a psychoanalytic narrative of the child's subjectivity.

Coraline tells the story of Coraline Jones, a girl aged around nine years old, who moves to a new apartment in a crumbling Gothic house. Left to her own devices, Coraline explores the corridors of the new apartment. She finds a small, locked door in the corner of the dining room, which, initially, when unlocked, reveals only the bare bricks of the partition wall of the neighbouring apartment. However, when Coraline returns to the doorway one night, she discovers a portal that takes her into another world. The other apartment beyond turns out to be an uncanny mirror image of her own, home to alternative parents who have buttons instead of eyes. The attentions of Coraline's 'other' mother and father soon become disturbing when Coraline's other mother captures her real parents and threatens to trap Coraline in the other apartment forever, replacing her eyes with buttons too. In the course of her explorations, Coraline finds the remnants of children previously trapped by the 'other mother'. They are nothing more than ghostly wisps who cannot remember their names. To escape this fate, which is read by critics as the uncanny resurgence of an infantile desire to return to a pre-Oedipal, pre-linguistic dyadic state, Coraline must outwit the 'other mother'. With the help of a neighbourhood cat, who interlocutes for Coraline much as the Cheshire Cat does for Alice, Coraline

successfully tricks the 'other mother', and is able to return home. She locks the door to the other apartment and throws the key down a well. Aside from *Alice, Coraline* overtly references both 'The uncanny' and 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle' by Freud, as well as E. T. A. Hoffman's *Sandman*, some snippets of Lacanian theory, and a little-known Victorian fairy tale by Lucy Clifford, 'The New Mother' (1882), a disturbing moral tale in which two young girls are punished for disobedience when their mother disappears and a new mother, with glass eyes and a wooden tail, appears to take her place. *Coraline* is overtly Gothic, invoking the claustrophobia of the classic Gothic castle; it is overtly psychoanalytic, depicting an animistic realm, populated by symbols readily interpreted as repressed psychological material; and it also signals itself as a fairy tale, referring to a tradition in which fairy tales have long been used for the moral and social instruction of children.

Since *Coraline* so neatly incorporates 'The uncanny' into its Gothic aesthetic and, moreover, invokes a particularly gothicised version of *Alice,* critics are keen to champion the text as a paradigm of post-millennial children's Gothic. Since the late twentieth century it has become a critical commonplace to declare 'the uncanny' as one of the most apt tools for understanding children's fiction, and, by extension, the child. A 2001 special issue on 'the uncanny in children's literature' of *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* attests to this tendency in children's literature studies. In the introduction to the issue, Roberta Seelinger Trites urges readers to recognise 'the primacy of the *unheimliche*, the uncanny, in determining the form and content of much children's literature' (2001, 162). Rollins and West go further in their assertion that childhood in itself is uncanny, claiming that children's classics like *Alice* depict 'direct links to our uncivilised selves – to the uncanny that represents true childhood' (1999, 36). Evaluations of *Coraline* follow this trend.

Karen Coats gives Gaiman's novel a prime position in post millennial children's fiction, arguing that his 'well-made' Gothic nourishes children, 'giving concrete expression to abstract psychic processes' (Coats 2008, 91). David Rudd claims *Coraline* is a 'rich and powerful work', a modern Gothic fairy tale (2008, 160–161). Likewise, critic and psychologist, Nick Midgely, urges adults to *thank* Gaiman for providing the child with exactly the kind of scary fiction they need on their journey through life (2008, 140). In addition to a wealth of academic praise, *Coraline* has won a plethora of mainstream awards and accolades.

Though critics have made an investment in *Coraline*, the novel is hardly representative of postmillennial children's Gothic. Gaiman is well known as a writer of adult fiction but has written relatively few works for children. Revealing how much children's works have to appeal to adult gatekeepers, the canonization of *Coraline* demonstrates that it is Gaiman's credentials as a writer of adult fiction that recommend him. Richard Gooding's 2008 essay on *Coraline* heralds Gaiman as 'a major writer for children', and yet Gooding admits that when *Coraline* was published, Gaiman had only written one other children's book, *The Day I Swapped my Dad for two Goldfish*. To prove Gaiman's competency as 'a major writer' of children's Gothic, Gooding offers the writer's adult graphic novel series, *Sandman,* as evidence of previous form (Gooding 2008, 391). Gaiman has since published a number of picture books, and three other children's novels in various genres, but his output in terms of children's Gothic is minor given the position he continues to be afforded by critics. In contrast, more prolific writers of children's Gothic, who write exclusively for children, are largely ignored. The mass market fiction of Derek Landy, Joseph Delaney, Darren Shan, Cassandra Clare, Anthony Horowitz, Philip Reeve and Charlie Higson, to name a few, is arguably more representative of the

wider field of postmillennial children's Gothic than *Coraline. Coraline,* a stand-alone novel, contrasts with the mass market serial fiction that elsewhere dominates children's Gothic. *Coraline* is now also over ten years old and so the position it has been accorded as a monumental and paradigmatic Gothic text for children belies the fact that the field of children's gothic fiction is dynamic and continues to grow.

Critical readings of *Coraline* in part seek to remove the novel from the commercial context of children's literature publishing. Indeed, in contrast to Neil Gaiman, writers such as Derek Landy, Darren Shan, and others discussed in this thesis, are not afforded much academic attention because children's literature critics are wary of mass market fiction. Revealing this prejudice, Jack Zipes regards series fiction as one of the main forms of cultural violence done to children, turning their reading habits into 'nothing more than acts of consumerism' (2002, 59). Following Zipes, the essays on *Coraline* by Karen Coats, David Rudd, Richard Gooding (2008) and Nick Midgely (2007) argue for the novel's importance in a literary canon of uncanny children's fiction. These readings seek to produce the novel as what Bakhtin describes as a 'monumental' work, that is, self-evident and self-enclosed (Vološinov and Bakhtin 1986, 72). Furthermore, these readings of *Coraline* are part of a monologizing discourse at work in children's Gothic, one that privileges a psychoanalytic narrative of childhood and seeks to shut down the play of meaning at work in the form.[5] I include *Coraline* in this thesis as just one of the manifestations of postmillennial children's Gothic, rather than as exemplary of it. Moreover, I argue that its use of Freudian and Gothic tropes is self-conscious and playful, suggesting that the novel's 'uncanny' representation of the child anticipates the critical readings performed of it. *Coraline* situates itself in dialogue with Freud and Gothic, asking to

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[5] I take the word 'monologize' from Bakhtin's *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, in which Bakhtin criticises early commentators on Dostoevsky who try to 'monologize' his work (1984b, 8).

be read as a 'text' in the terms suggested by theories of intertextuality, rather than a monumental work. *Coraline* produces a 'methodological field', 'a multidimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash' (Barthes 1981, 39; 1977, 146). Through its intertextual connections, *Coraline* recontextualises Freud's essay via a Gothic concern with surfaces to counter psychoanalytic depth readings of children's Gothic and the child, offering a nomadic figuration of the child in its place.

I ask *Coraline* to speak back to the readings performed of it, a methodology I derive in part from Shoshana Felman's reading of *The Turn of The Screw,* and from Virginia Blum's study of the child in psychoanalysis. Felman argues that 'literature is a subject, not an object; it is therefore not simply a body of language to interpret, nor is psychoanalysis simply a body of knowledge with which to interpret' (Felman 1977, 6). Felman thus suggests that the literary critic should 'initiate a real exchange . . . a real dialogue between literature and psychoanalysis' (6). Despite Felman's persuasive call 'to consider the relationship between psychoanalysis and literature from the literary point of view', similar frustrations about psychoanalytic criticism continue to be articulated (6). Virginia Blum argues that the truth claims of psychoanalysis dominate literary criticism, particularly in relation to readings of the child. Blum follows Felman by employing a methodology that 'invite[s] the imaginative text to "read" psychoanalytic theory in much the same way that to date psychoanalysis has erected a truth claim against which imaginative literature plays out its frail symptoms' (1995, 12). Literature has, in its irony and imaginative space, the capability for addressing the absences and gaps psychoanalysis does not (Blum 1995, 12, 8).

In Felman's terms, *Coraline* might, 'by virtue of its ironic force', be used to 'fundamentally deconstruct the fantasy of authority' wielded by psychoanalysis (1982, 8). In its disruption of psychoanalytic mastery, *Coraline* returns its reader to the encounter between Alice and the Cheshire cat and to Alice's indignant question, 'How do you know I am mad?' Though the cat reasons that Wonderland is full of mad people, ergo Alice must be mad to have come, Alice remains unconvinced: He has not 'proved it at all' and she has no desire to 'go among mad people' (Carroll 1982, 58). Alice is one of the few people to remain unconvinced by her diagnosis in a tradition of psychoanalyzing children's literature that has largely ignored her resistance. This resistance returns in the character of Coraline, who proves an equally unwilling analysand. *Coraline* reveals that the child is an intertextual construction, produced through the interconnections between psychoanalytic writing and Gothic literature. Through its representation of a doubled, Gothic house and an uncanny childhood encounter, *Coraline* works to un-home staid psychoanalytical critical narratives, offering routes beyond them to other readings of the child. Finally, the novel does not submit to narrative of childhood development that resolves with mastery of the self. In so doing, *Coraline* offers one of the first figurations of the nomadic child in postmillennial children's Gothic. Coraline is a nomad located in an intertextual network that challenges dominant conceptions of subjectivity and instead offers a figuration of identity as an open-ended process.

'How do you know I am mad?' Constructing the psychoanalytic Gothic child

As I suggest in my introduction, current criticism of children's Gothic fiction rests upon the idea of a real child whose subjectivity can be found by the critic through their analysis of the book. At the same time, the critic knows the child *a priori*, drawing on a narrative of maturation and development adapted from psychoanalysis. As Lesnik-Oberstein argues, the task children's literature has set itself, 'to find the good book for the child', ascribes a developmental function to the book that takes the 'extra-textual child as ultimate goal and reference point' (1994, 3, 131). Emerging criticism of postmillennial children's Gothic thus values *Coraline* because its themes, tropes and trappings accord with a psychoanalytic narrative of the child. Moreover, the novel seems to provide a pedagogical and therapeutic function. The psychoanalytic child whose existence is confirmed (tautologically) by a psychoanalytic reading of children's Gothic and is the subject upon whom Gothic exerts its therapeutic effects is most often produced in critical analysis of Coraline as an essential, real child. However, this child is the product of a complex textual interrelation between children's literature and psychoanalysis that requires more interrogation than it has hitherto been given in discussions of children's Gothic.

Though the relationship between psychoanalysis and children's literature is mutually constitutive, critics construct a master-slave dialectic in which the truth claims of psychoanalysis are applied to children's books. The particular dominance of psychoanalysis within children's literature criticism is not surprising given that, as Blum explains, 'psychoanalysis is the preeminent twentieth-century discourse about childhood' and so inevitably informs discourses of childhood and children (1995, 8). In her exploration of the child in psychoanalytic discourse, Michelle Massé adds 'we

are all Freudians now: the "psychoanalytic" in "psychoanalytic child" almost seems a redundancy, so thoroughly have its concepts been naturalized' (2003, 162). Current criticism of children's Gothic echoes a tendency extant elsewhere in children's literature criticism, which claims psychic insight into the lives of children even when critics do not necessarily see themselves as adopting a psychoanalytic, or even overtly psychological outlook (Kidd 2011, xx).

The influence of psychoanalysis on children's literature tends to produce monologizing accounts of the child reader and the function of texts. This is because critics

> assume that child psychoanalysis is a body of expert knowledge that has discovered the truth about children and that therefore psychoanalysis can help both to locate truthful depictions of children in fiction (which book gets the child right?) and to predict with some degree of accuracy the way children will read a book (how they will understand it or experience it, and therefore what it will do to them). (Lesnik-Oberstein 2000, 225)

Psychoanalysis seemingly provides a route to a knowable child beyond unstable textuality. However, when critics uphold the psychoanalytic view they often do so 'in contradistinction to all other evidences of false consciousness' (Blum 1995, 6). Upholding the psychoanalytic child as universal, critics ignore the constructedness of the child and, so, other possible constructions. Kidd explains that 'the teleology of psychoanalysis seems especially totalising in the case of children's literature', so that even where critics begin to acknowledge the dialogue between literature and psychoanalysis, they seem only to repeat what Felman criticises as a 'unilateral monologue of psychoanalysis about literature' (Kidd 2011, ix; Felman 1982, 6).

Psychoanalysis and children's literature share an intertwined history that undercuts the master-slave relationship constructed in children's literature criticism. Kidd notes that 'while Freud and the first analysts did not think of themselves as engaging with "children's literature," their work helped advance and reshape that literature' in such a way that children's literature has since firmly 'appropriated psychoanalysis' (Kidd 2011, vii). Kidd charts a dialogue between psychoanalysis and children's literature, claiming that the two forms 'have been mutually constitutive across the twentieth century and into our current moment' (Kidd 2011, 204). *Alice* is an important text in this dialogue. Along with other classic children's books, such as *Peter Pan* (1911)*, Alice* coexists with psychoanalysis, sharing its themes and concerns, influencing its theories. Thus, Kidd argues that texts such as *Alice* and *Peter Pan* 'might be said to be literary analogues' of psychoanalysis (2011, 69).[6] One of the most important texts in this relationship is Bruno Bettelheim's *The Uses of Enchantment* (1976), which argues that the fairy tales help the child to master the problems of their unconscious. Accordingly, a number of the existing readings of *Coraline* draw explicitly on Bettelheim's ideas. For example, Rudd appeals to Bettelheim's argument that children 'need' to explore dark, psychological themes in his evaluation of *Coraline* as a 'rich and powerful work' (2008, 160). Rudd's appeal to Bettelheim demonstrates Lesnik-Oberstein's argument that *The Uses of Enchantment* proves key in cementing the psychoanalytical assumptions of children's literature criticism (Lesnik-Oberstein 2000, 225). Exploring Bettelheim's influence, Kidd explains that 'the psychoanalytic literature on the fairy tale gradually began to intersect with the widespread belief that the fairy tale is "for" children, so

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[6] A similar relationship can be traced between Gothic and Psychoanalysis, as I shall suggest below. This places children's Gothic literature on the intersection of three mutually constitutive narratives of identity in modernity.

that by mid-century, the fairy tale was broadly received both as a psychological genre and as a cornerstone for children's literature' (Kidd 2011, xxiii).

The Uses of Enchantment sets out a pedagogical paradigm for psychoanalytic accounts of children's literature. *Coraline* locates itself in this tradition, making a link between its psychoanalytic themes and the fairy tale form through an epigraph, quoting G. K. Chesterton's assertion: 'Fairy tales are more than true: not because they tell us that dragons exist, but because they tell us that dragons can be beaten' (Gaiman 2002, 1). This epigraph invokes a particular concept of the fairy tale as part of a child's emotional and psychological education. As Kidd explains, 'fairy tales were made authoritative in our own time through a rhetoric of children's psychological, emotional, imaginative needs' (2011, 24). Kidd argues that, through Bettelheim's influence, fairy tales have become synonymous with childhood development and even regarded as a form of therapy (2011, 118).[7]

The psychological appeal of the fairy tale has a particular pedagogical function. Richard Gooding articulates this pedagogy when he argues that *Coraline* 'provides the kind of preparation for adult life that Bruno Bettelheim once imagined for the fairy tale genre' (2008, 405). Likewise, Rudd concludes that *Coraline* is a fairy tale about finding one's place in the world (2008, 167). Reading *Coraline* as a psychological fairy tale, Gooding and Rudd reveal that their use of the text is aimed at educating children emotionally but also, by implication, socially. The claim for the universal appeal of fairy tales inevitably positions the adult critic as knowing what is

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[7] Critics who previously rejected a psychological reading of fairy tales have recently returned to such accounts. Maria Tatar's *Off With Their Heads!: Fairy Tales and the Culture of Childhood* (Princeton University Press, 1992) offers a cultural materialist reading of fairy tales compared to her later study, *Enchanted Hunters: The Power of Stories in Childhood* (Norton, 2009). Likewise, Jack Zipes' recent work, *Why Fairy Tales Stick: The Evolution and Relevance of a Genre* (Routledge, 2006) eschews the contextual account he provides in *Breaking the Magic Spell: Radical Theories of Folk and Fairy Tales* (1979) and *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion: The Classical Genre for Children and the Process of Civilization* (1985), which argue that fairy tales performs a 'civilizing' function particular to their social and political context.

good for the child, who needs the fairy tale in order to become mature. As Zipes once argued

> the fairy tales we have come to revere … are not ageless, universal, and beautiful… and they are not the best therapy in the world for children. They are historical prescriptions internalized, potent explosive, and we acknowledge the power they hold over our lives by mystifying them. (1983, 11)

Though analyses of the fairy tale in children's literature criticism might employ terms such as amusement, play and fantasy, they make recourse to the 'language of child development, not displacing didacticism or rationality, but giving them a makeover' (Kidd 2011, 24).

The pedagogical framework offered by Bettelheim's analysis of fairy tales originates in ego-relational psychology and a sequential narrative of psychological development that now dominate children's literature criticism. Kidd shows that throughout Bettelheim's analysis 'a traditionally Freudian outlook meets the utopian perspective of ego psychology' and that '*The Uses of Enchantment* is not only a book of interpretation but also a child-rearing primer, its readings designed for practical use' (2011, 19). Following Bettelheim, children's literature and its criticism typically favours stories structured around a teleological narrative of progressive development and eventual mastery. In other words, the 'good' book is 'frequently described in terms of resolution (or mastery) or emotional problems or conflict' (Lesnik-Oberstein 2000, 227). Moreover, children's literature criticism puts psychoanalytic criticism in service to its ideological ends, using Lacan and Freud to

produce a psychoanalysis of 'resolution and stages – not multiplicity and inherent division' (Lesnik-Oberstein 2000, 227). Children's literature and its criticism has

> been reading the wrong Freud to children . . . The unconscious is not an object, something to be laid hold of and retrieved. It is the term Freud used to describe the complex ways in which our very idea of ourselves as children is produced […] Childhood persists as something which we endlessly rework in our attempt to build an image of our own history. (Rose 1984, 12)

In an interpretive model of psychoanalysis, childhood and the unconscious are not real, stable objects, but texts produced through the narrative of psychoanalytic interpretation. Drawing on psychoanalysis to produce a uniform and stable meaning thus misappropriates the fundamentally interpretive methods of Freudian psychoanalysis. Influenced by Bettelheim, children's literature reworks Freudian interpretive methods to construct a child through a 'myth of developmental progress' (Blum 1995, 147). Rose asserts that 'in most discussions of children's fiction which make their appeal to Freud, childhood is part of a strict developmental sequence at the end of which stands the cohered and rational consciousness of the adult mind' (Rose 1984, 13). Despite the challenges brought to children's literature criticism by Rose and Lesnik-Oberstein, whose theoretical work problematises a particularly teleological application of psychoanalysis, narratives of development ending in mastery continue to be expressed in children's literature criticism.

A narrative of maturation as mastery is evident in analysis of *Coraline*. Nick Midgely's analysis of *Coraline* argues that experiencing fear helps children grow, stating that 'Freud's work makes clear the way in which confronting the terrifying and the horrible is an important aspect of emotional development' (2007, 131).

Likewise, Coats describes *Coraline* as 'psychically effective' because it 'facilitates psychic integration' and thus aids maturation (Coats 2008, 79, 78, 77). Both Coats and Midgely read *Coraline* as offering a representation of a regressive desire to return to a sense of unity imagined in pre-linguistic infancy. The novel's animistic realm, presided over by a predatory other mother, reveals the way childhood subjectivity passes through stages that threaten to return the child to the chaotic mire of undifferentiated subjectivity. For Midgely, the novel provides a confrontation with this fearful desire; for Coats it offers a scheme whereby the child can negotiate the desire, passing through to a stage of integration and stability. This psycho-symbolic function for Gothic fiction insists that it offers a true depiction of a universalised psychic reality and plays a vital function in the child's development. These critics reframe psychoanalytic theories within a staged, developmental narrative of childhood, charting the child's growth out of infantile neurosis and dependence on its parents into a healthy acceptance of its own desires as an independent and mature subject.

An insistence on the pedagogical psycho-symbolic function of children's Gothic produces a binary between dependence and independence that ultimately disavows the child. The privileged term, independence, is associated with the adult and a secure sense of selfhood; the subjugated term, dependence, relates to the child's dangerous existence in a realm of regressive desires. This binary is evident in readings of *Coraline*. Nick Midgely explains that at the beginning of the novel Coraline does not have a 'clearly defined' identity: 'she is dependent and emotionally attached to her… parents' (2007, 136). Gooding also concludes that *Coraline* narrates the successful negotiation of the dangers inherent in childhood subjectivity: 'Traces of infection by the fantasy world retreat into the background.

Coraline seems a little older, a little more mature… she is not 'nervous and apprehensive' before starting a new school year, and she seems to have *definitively emerged* from the world of animism' (2008, 405, my emphasis). The inclusion of the detail that Coraline is starting a new school year further connects Gooding's analysis to a pedagogy invested in progressive maturation within a social and educational framework.

The readings of Coraline as a universal subject naturalise a narrative of maturation as mastery; this is problematic in gender terms since psychoanalytic developmental theories tend to assume a masculine bias. Rachel Blau DuPlessis argues that Freud's account of the oedipal conflict and its phases 'has a linear and cumulative movement' (1985, 36). Anne Cranny-Francis adds that 'this linear and cumulative movement is sometimes read as the psychoanalytic narrative of "human" growth and development, a narrative which characteristically encodes a male gender bias and linear causal fallacy' (1990, 16). DuPlessis and Cranny-Francis draw on a body of critique, developed by Cixous, Irigaray and others, that reveals how psychoanalytic theories disavow the feminine, constructing it as passive, or even monstrous. This disavowal of the feminine is notable in Rudd's assertion that *Coraline* highlights the necessity of leaving the mother behind in the world of animism. Rudd argues that Coraline's defeat of the other mother demonstrates the importance of setting aside the maternal 'in order for a person to take up their place in the world' (2008, 166). Midgely also characterises the other mother as 'an anti-developmental object, who offers gratification at the expense of individual identity' (2007, 136). For Rudd, Coraline only gains the confidence necessary to defeat the other mother when she identifies with her father, acknowledging 'the significance of her father in her', drawing on his bravery when he was stung by wasps (2008, 165).

Rudd's insistence on the disavowal of the mother shores up a social patriarchal figuration of the family and contributes to a discourse that makes motherhood monstrous. He insists that 'henceforth [Coraline's] mother must always stand slightly apart' (2008, 165). In this Rudd echoes a 'patriarchal fantasy devised in the service of solidifying and perpetuating a gender system in which the woman is marked as lacking the very thing she has most clearly – the child' (Blum 1995, 9). Rudd's exposition of *Coraline* reveals a discourse in which 'while the woman's relationship to the child is metonymic, a relation of proximity and physical connection, the man's metaphoric relationship is forged out of a combination of social law (legitimacy) and psychological necessity' (Blum 1995, 9). Rudd explains that 'the other mother's offer to reinstate this earlier state of oneness, to remove any gap between word and thing, is alluring but it is also repulsive', concluding with the assertion that 'Coraline has internalised the voice of her father, of the Symbolic' (2008, 165). Rudd does not interrogate the gendered positions implied here and misappropriates Barbara Creed's notion of the 'monstrous feminine' in support of his reading. In Rudd's analysis the maternal body must by necessity be represented as monstrous because it 'incarnates all that we need to set aside in order to live' (2008, 166). This in no way accounts for how the 'monstrous feminine' 'speaks to us about male fears,' or might encourage a critical interrogation of key aspects of Freudian theory' (Creed 1993, 7).

As well as constructing the feminine as monstrous, this developmental narrative of psychoanalysis pathologizes the child, even as it constructs childhood as a privileged space outside of language and textuality. The child becomes a repository of negation: 'it functions as an exponent of the "non-adult" and "non-reason"' (Lesnik-Oberstein 1994, 26). In conflict with the developmental teleology

underpinning the pedagogical logic of children's literature criticism, there lies a 'primitivization of infancy', a portrayal of the child as 'imperfect in relation to the accomplishment of adult' (Blum 1995, 30). Here, children's Gothic fiction intersects with an adult Gothic also influenced by psychoanalytic ideas. Particularly in horror films of the twentieth century, the child appears as abject and horrifying, representing a repellent image of regression and dependency (Paul 1994, 297, 311). In these adult horror narratives, notably *The Exorcist* (1973), the child is demonised and punished for its helplessness, which figures as an alien intrusion into the existence of the family (Paul 1994, 328, 324). Influenced by this image, criticism of children's Gothic filtered through a popular appropriation of psychoanalysis invested in maturation and independence, constructs the child itself as uncanny and abject. Moreover, childhood is made uncanny or abject because the anxieties of adulthood are 'thrown off' onto it. James Kincaid argues that

> Freud exposes the ways in which we take the variety of children's play, open to any interpretation, and construct a single restrictive story: the child plays at one thing and for one reason; and that is how you must see it. Why should we see it that way? Freud says it will 'help in the child's upbringing.' Telling the story in this way allows us to use the child's own activities to get what we want, namely for the child not to be an adult, merely an adult in training. (1994, 278)

Current analysis of *Coraline* follows Freud's reasoning since it accords with the pedagogical aim attributed to children's literature. Coats, Rudd, Gooding and Midgely read *Coraline* as a therapeutic intervention, a form of psychoanalytic treatment. Coats suggests that *Coraline,* 'may help children cope' with the traumas of maturation, positing Gothic both as a symptom of and cure for a pathologized

childhood (2008, 77). This assessment implies that childhood is that which one survives, rather than enjoys, and characterises the child at best as a work in progress, or, at worst, as a symptom of psychological ill-health (Blum 1995, 30, 37).[8] Accordingly, Midgely describes Coraline's escape from the other apartment as 'overcoming the persecutory split between idealisation and denigration' (2007, 136). Similarly, Gooding notes that 'traces of infection' of the fantasy world retreat at the close of the novel, echoing the pathologizing language of psychoanalytic accounts of the child (2008, 405).

Current psychoanalytic readings of children's Gothic through *Coraline* call into being a child who can be inculcated into a staged journey of maturation, ending in mastery and a stable sense of self. At the same time, the child as an image of dependence and regression is abjected in favour of a coherent adult subjectivity. The totalising tendency of psychoanalytic narratives of the child produces a blind spot in literary criticism, in which the heterogeneity of children is not accounted for, and the text's intertextuality is glossed over. The assumption of psychoanalysis as a truth claim about the child does not allow space for exploring the complexity of children's literature, nor of exploring difficult issues 'such as the relationship between fiction and truth, the status of the author with regard to the meaning of the text, the multiple and various interpretations of texts, or the manifest unpredictability of any (adult or child) reader's emotional responses to a text' (Lesnik-Oberstein 2000, 226). Children's Gothic fiction read exclusively through psychoanalysis is thus replete with textual aporia. Rather than confirming these totalising psychoanalytic readings

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[8] Blum explores how even in the child centred psychoanalytic practise of Melanie Klein and Margaret Mahler, the language of adult mental illness is used to describe states of childhood, citing Emmanuel Peterfreund's critique of Klein and Mahler's 'adultomorphization of infancy' (Peterfreund, 1978). Mahler characterises early infancy as 'normal autism' (1968) and Melanie Klein's names stages of infancy as 'paranoid-schizoid' and 'depressive' (1932, 1921) (Blum 1995, 30).

of the child, I contend that *Coraline* opens up these aporia and reveals a Gothic concern with surfaces that subverts depth readings of the text.

A 'flow of fictions': Psychoanalyzing Gothic Surfaces

Gothic is popular with children's literature critics because, like children's literature, it has often been read through psychoanalysis. Describing a relationship similar to that between children's literature criticism and psychoanalysis, William Patrick Day argues that Freud's ideas remain persuasive in readings of the Gothic because they offer a way of reading the text as a literally true depiction of psychic reality (1985, 188). The assumption that Gothic is inherently psychological informs current criticism of children's Gothic, and of *Coraline* in particular. In their overview of the field, Jackson *et al* allegorise Gothic as the child's unconscious:

> As a child grows, more and more experiences good and bad, displace into memory, forming the intricate passages where bits of his or her past gets lost, only to re-emerge at unexpected times. The child's mind thus becomes a crowded, sometimes frustratingly inaccessible place at the same time as his or her body morphs in uncomfortable ways. (2008, 4)

Gothic is posited as the best expression of infantile cathexes and the means by which these can be worked through. Constructing childhood as a series of developmental stages, Jackson *et al* argue that Gothic is 'particularly apt for the metaphorical exploration of the vicissitudes of adolescent identity' (2008, 4). Their assertion that 'Gothic landscapes and conventions remain familiar to us because they are, to some extent, inside us' essentialises Gothic as the child's unconscious rather than

acknowledging the mutually constitutive intertextual relationship between psychoanalysis and gothic narratives (2008, 4).

This psychological depth reading of Gothic fails to recognise the multiple and dialogic nature of Gothic. Jackson *et al* attempt to totalise Gothic in their assertion that 'part of the reason for the persistence of the Gothic across centuries of children's literature must be due to the ease with which the typical Gothic chronotope can be allegorized as the mind… a place, very often a house, haunted by the past that remains present' (2008, 4). Jackson *et al* imply a straightforward relationship between psychoanalysis and Gothic: the concepts of the former are used to explain and evaluate the symbols of the latter. Jackson *et al* argue that Gothic depicts universal unconscious depths, invoking the idea of a 'Gothic chronotope' without engaging with the dialogic implications of the term. For Bakhtin, chronotopes are mutually inclusive and are able to co-exist within a text; 'they may be interwoven with, replace or oppose one another, contradict one another or find themselves in ever more complex interrelationships' (1981, 252). Whereas I argue that *Coraline* engages in a dialogic interplay of multiple chronotopes, current criticism of the novel fixes upon one: the Gothic chronotope of the unconscious. Karen Coats' analysis of *Coraline*, for example, argues that the Gothic gives expression to 'cultural symptom' of the trauma of childhood and maturation (2008 77). David Rudd argues that Coraline's house, 'with its cellar and attic, its dark corridors', is the perfect topography of the child's unconscious (2008, 161). Richard Gooding argues that Gaiman's uncanny gothic landscape is the perfect space for children to play out the fantasies of their Id (2008, 393).

Like psychoanalysis and children's literature, psychoanalysis and Gothic are mutually constitutive, developing through the same historical period, with Gothic

narratives informing psychoanalytic theories. Day argues that Gothic and psychoanalysis are 'cousins', responses to the same problems of selfhood and identity, which materialised in the nineteenth century and developed into the twentieth (1985, 178-179). Conceiving of the two forms as a set of responses to a specific socio-historic moment problematises a psychoanalytic reading of Gothic. For Day, Gothic fiction was revised and redirected into Freudianism, and he questions the way in which Freudian readings of Gothic turn what had been a 'culturally produced anxiety' into a description of 'reality outside time... nature and civilisation' (1985, 184). Robert J.C. Young is less tentative in his assessment of the relationship in his reading of *The Interpretation of Dreams* as a work of fiction, arguing that its structure, themes and metaphors trace back to Gothic literature (1999). Elsewhere, Young argues that 'Freud is as much literary as psychoanalytic, which makes a psychoanalysis of literature somewhat tautological' (2013). Steven Marcus likewise concurs that 'Freud is as much a novelist as he is an analyst' (1984, 67). The danger of a psychoanalytical reading of Gothic is that it may become what David Punter calls 'a flow of fictions' (1989, 6). This is particularly true of contemporary texts which are themselves shaped by, or may even reference, as *Coraline* so evidently does, specific psychoanalytic ideas. Writing about psychoanalysis and horror film, Richard Allen admonishes 'the psychoanalytic critic posing as a theorist [who] erroneously claims for himself the insight that rightly belongs to the text itself' (2004, 142). Psychoanalytic readings of *Coraline* are open to this same criticism, particularly given that the text is so overt in its reference to specific motifs from Freud's writing.

Psychoanalytic readings of Gothic also ignore recent critiques within Gothic Studies of the critical tendency to privilege 'depth' readings and so dismiss the

'trappings' of Gothic fiction. Drawing on the work of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Catherine Spooner argues that Gothic denies depths and insists upon its surfaces, 'on the mask rather than the face, the veil rather than what lies beneath, the disguise rather than what is disguised' (Spooner 2006, 27). However, Gothic Studies has tended to dismiss these surfaces. Sedgwick argues that critics

> intent on grasping the essence of the Gothic novel whole have also been … impatient with its surfaces … but their plunge to the thematics of depth has left unexplored the most characteristic and daring areas of Gothic convention, those that point the reader's attention back to surfaces. (1981, 255)

Sedgwick's arguments are pertinent for children's literature criticism, which is keen to posit the uncanny as the depth and truth of children's Gothic. Moreover, Sedgwick's insistence on surfaces accords with Day's assessment of gothic, which, he claims, refuses answers where Freud seeks them (1985, 187). If the uncanny is not the 'depths' of a text, but a part of its textual surface, it cannot provide the final meaning for the text, only a list of signifiers, another set of tropes. The 'inside' depths of Coraline's Gothic house is not the locus of the child's subjectivity. Rather, *Coraline* transforms psychic depths into surface trappings. One example of Sedgwick's redirection to surface and convention is her analysis of the doubling of dreams. In her analysis, the psychological import of the dreams is less important than the fact of its doubling. Indeed, the content of the dream is a side issue in comparison to the fact of its doubled nature, and the dreams she analyses are experienced with the same terror by the characters regardless of whether they are innocuous or disturbing in content (1986, 30-34). The same might be said of the use of 'the uncanny' in *Coraline.* It is in the doubling and repetition of Freud's essay that its significance lies.

The depth readings of *Coraline* performed by Coats, Gooding and Rudd repeat the surface motifs of the text and are so caught in the very gesture of repetition that the novel parodies. Coats explains that the novel's 'multiple womb images' communicate 'the dubious pleasure of regressing into an infantile state of undifferentiation . . . marking it as a death drive' (2008, 88). Coats's psychoanalytic reading makes a series of unacknowledged references to Freud, catching in *Coraline's* playful mobilization of the uncanny 'compulsion to repeat' (Freud 1955, 238). Coats's reading of the other mother's severed hand, described by Gaiman as akin to a spider, makes no mention of Freud's inclusion of 'dismembered limbs … a hand cut off at the wrist' in his list of uncanny images (Freud 1955, 244). Instead, Coats notes that hands and spiders are 'traditionally' linked to mothers in the 'child's psycho-symbolic world': 'it is no small leap to think that a breastfed child, especially, might bear a residual image of her mother as a breast with arms, i.e., a spider' (2008, 89). With a startling assumption of obviousness, Coats's reading of the uncanny nature of the other mother's body repeats Freud without acknowledgment. Not only does Coats not interrogate *Coraline's* reference to Freud *as a reference*, she offers her own repetition of the motif as evidence of the novel's psychic depths.

Though Gooding suspects Gaiman 'has been reading Freud', he too fails to explore the intertextual connection this suggests and posits the uncanny as a critical tool best able to 'offer clues to the psychological cost of Coraline's renegotiation of her relationship with her parents' (2008, 391, 392). Like Coats, Gooding (re)repeats motifs *Coraline* repeats from Freud, calling Coraline's house 'a near-literal manifestation of the *unheimlich* … an instance of what "ought to have remained hidden and secret, and yet comes to light"' (2008, 393). Gooding lists the motifs,

echoing the patterning of Freud's essay: 'There are doubles, the dead, talking animals, toys coming to life, the constant threat of blindness and mutilation … the apparent reading of Coraline's mind, immediate wish fulfilment, and so on' (2008, 393). Gooding reiterates Freud's list of uncanny images without reflecting on the process of its doubling. Instead, he insists that the narrative is 'a test of Coraline's capacity to surmount an infantile desire for permanent (re)union with the mother' (2008, 398). If Gaiman's imagery is perhaps 'heavy-handed' it is because he has to express 'the too forceful return of repressed return of repressed drives' (2008, 402).

Of the three critics, Rudd articulates the most awareness of *Coraline's* intertextual relationship with 'The uncanny', though his reading continues to posit the essay as the source of the novel's meaning. Rudd argues that *Coraline* produces 'an overt fictional representation of the Freudian uncanny – not by merely invoking the motifs that Freud enumerates in his essay, but by animating the very etymology of the German term *das unheimlich*' (2008, 161). For Rudd it is 'noteworthy that Gaiman first became famous as a writer of graphic novels featuring a sandman character' (2008, 162). He suggests that Gaiman's previous engagement with Freudian themes authenticates an exposition of the novel as performing a psychological function. For example, Rudd notes how the spool of cotton the other mother brandishes when threatening to sew buttons onto Coraline's eyes 'brings to mind' the *fort-da* game described in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. In Freud's analysis of the game, the boy uses the spool to come to terms with becoming an independent being; for Coraline, the spool represents the temptation to reintegrate with the mother (Rudd 2008, 163). Following Coats and Gooding, Rudd does not explore the intertextual connection any further than reading the references to Freud as confirmation of his depth reading.

In contrast to these depth readings of *Coraline,* I read the novel as an intertext in a network that includes Freud, but also other works, and which recontextualises these works through a double-voiced parody. Following Barthes, I suggest that the anterior texts to *Coraline,* namely Freud's essay, should not be 'confused with some origin' (Barthes 1977, 160). Had Rudd explored the connection to *Sandman* further, he would note that this intertext undermines Freud as an authenticator of symbolic meaning. In *Sandman #15,* 'Into the Night', one character tells the protagonist, Dream, what Freud theorises about dreams of flying: 'it means you're really dreaming about sex'. Dream responds, sardonically, 'Indeed? Tell me, then, what does it mean when you dream about having sex?' (Gaiman 1990). The exchange between Rose and Dream in *Sandman* recontextualises psychoanalysis in 'an arena of battle between two voices', and through Dream's scorn, Freud is subject to ridicule (Bakhtin 1984b, 193). Continuing this open dialogue with Freud, *Coraline* appropriates motifs from 'The uncanny' in a 'doubly-voiced discourse' at odds with Freud's 'original' (Bakhtin 1984b, 19).

The novel more than echoes the thematic material of 'The uncanny'; its references to Freud are so numerous as to be parodic. On meeting the other mother, Coraline emphasises her bird-like appearance, noting the 'too long' fingers, with nails that are 'curved and sharp' (Gaiman 2002, 38). Later, the other mother crunches on a bag of insects, smiling at Coraline with 'a mouth full of black beetles' (Gaiman 2002, 93). These references to the other mother as bird-like evoke Freud's recollection of the Sandman's children, whose 'hooked' beak-like mouths 'peck-up' the eyes of naughty children (Freud 1955, 228). The text's tendency to paraphrase Freud becomes more marked as the story progresses. Freud relates the uncanny experience of wandering 'about in a dark, strange room', colliding time after time

with the same piece of furniture (1955, 237). Similarly, Coraline finds herself lost in a darkened, but ultimately familiar, room when she emerges from the portal between houses: 'She closed her eyes against the dark. Eventually she bumped into something… an armchair in her drawing room' (Gaiman 2002, 59). Though the situation evoked in *Coraline* is not quite the one Freud describes, it is familiar. Like Freud, Coraline finds herself back where she started: the drawing room of the apartment she has just left.

This repetition of another of Freud's examples, finding oneself back at the same spot, appears again in *Coraline,* this time recalling the passage in which Freud imagines himself 'caught in a mist perhaps … every attempt to find the marked or familiar path may bring one back again and again to one and the same spot' (1955, 237). Coraline is also caught in a mist when she attempts to escape the other house by walking away from it:

> And then it took shape in the mist: a dark house which loomed at them out of the formless whiteness. 'But that's - ' said Coraline.
>
> 'The house you just left.' (Gaiman 2002, 89)

The 'milky whiteness' of the mist forms a series of images that links the other apartment to the maternal body. Freud famously asserts that when one states that 'this place is familiar to me, I've been here before, we may interpret this place as being his mother's genitals or her body' (1955, 245). Images of the mother's body are overtly appropriated in the climactic scene of *Coraline* which dramatises the heroine's escape from the other mother's clutches through a narrow passage between the worlds: 'The wall she was touching seemed warm and yielding now… It moved, as if it were taking a breath… This time what she touched felt hot and wet, as if she

had put her hand in somebody's mouth' (Gaiman 2002, 156). Parsons, Sawer and McInally criticise the way in which *Coraline* uses bodily imagery such as this to represent the mother, noting that the 'repulsive' sexualised imagery of the maternal body and the phallus evoked throughout the novel is either 'a psychoanalytic tour de force, or, indeed, a smutty farce of comic proportions' (2008, 381). I agree that *Coraline's* representation of the child's relationship with the mother reproduces the gender biases of Freudian psychoanalysis, but I think the element of 'farce' Parsons *et al* detect goes some way to undermining this sexist discourse. The references to Freud that recur throughout the novel draw attention to their status as repetition. As in Sedgwick's reading of the dream, it is the repetition that is significant, rather than what is repeated. Producing a double voicedness through repetition, *Coraline* casts a 'shadow of objectification' over psychoanalytic discourse (Bakhtin 1984b, 19). Stylising and parodying Freud in this way, the novel suggests it is alert to well-rehearsed psychoanalytic readings of Gothic tropes.

By including so many of the signifiers of 'the uncanny' from Freud's long list, *Coraline* points to the fact that Freud's text is simply that: a list of signifiers. Indeed, Freud's list of signifiers only constitute a definition, a meaning for 'the uncanny', by pointing to texts outside the essay, which, in turn, provide only more examples and signifiers. As Cixous argues, Freud's investigations are circular: the dictionary is called upon to corroborate his definitions, but the one has no more reality than the other, because Freud merely confirms his interpretations by another interpretation. He remains within a hermeneutic circle, unable to distinguish between the literal and the metaphorical, between denotation and connotation (Cixous 1976, 528). Repeating signifiers from Freud's 'definition', *Coraline* becomes another instance in a chain of deferral. Thus the novel itself points to the fact that Freud's

essay cannot provide its meaning, or an answer, for 'all such answers to the initial question merely provide other signifieds which themselves become signifiers' (G. Allen 2002, 32). *Coraline* points not to one meaning, then, but to its plurality as 'text' by allowing for 'the infinite deferment of the signified' (Barthes 1977, 158). Rudd, Coats, and Gooding cannot progress through the signifiers in *Coraline* to the depths of the text, or the child's unconscious. This is not 'a hermeneutic course of deepening investigation, but … a serial movement of disconnections, overlappings, variations' (Barthes 1977, 158). For example, the word 'mist', repeated many times in *Coraline*, not only recalls Freud's essay, but also the 'formless mist' of Heinlein's science fiction story, *The Unpleasant Profession of Jonathan Hoag,* which itself is quoted by Slavoj Zizek as an apt signifier of the Lacanian Real, Lacan's (re)theorisation of Freud's ideas of pre-Oedipal subjectivity (1992, 14). 'Mist' also signifies the Sandman volume, *Season of Mist,* itself a quotation from Keats. Thus, the signifier 'mist' points outside of the text, not to some original or authentic meaning, but to a plethora of texts, which themselves continue the process of deferral.

From Dora to Coraline: The elusive analysand

Signalling its intertextuality, *Coraline* reveals that psychoanalysis constructs a myth about the child. The story psychoanalysis tells about the child is particularly persuasive for children's literature criticism, which purports to speak for the child in the child's demonstrable absence. Rose accuses children's literature criticism of hypocrisy since it 'sets up the child as an outsider to its own process, and then aims, unashamedly, to take the child in' (1984, 2). A children's book is one of the forms

through which the child is discursively constructed and yet critics write 'as if the "child" were in the book' (Lesnik-Oberstein 1999, 16). Coats and Rudd claim that *Coraline* successfully reveals the child's psyche. Coats argues that the novel is a response to a 'demand' originating in the child; it feeds their 'appetite' for images of childhood as they actually experience it (2008, 78). For Coats, the opening of the novel in particular allows the child to recognise and express her own desire in an adult world which largely overlooks her (2008, 87). On a shopping trip with her mother, Coraline asks for Day-Glo green gloves, but is instead bought 'an embarrassingly large pullover' she will grow into (Gaiman 2002, 11). Coraline's mother carries on a conversation with her daughter oblivious to the girl's sullen silence, later not even realising that Coraline has wandered off when she discusses the pullover with a shop assistant. Coats and Rudd read this scene as staging the child's need to be recognised in her own right (Coats 2008, 87; Rudd 2008, 160). However, by speaking on behalf of the silent Coraline, the critics repeat the behaviour of Coraline's mother. They insist that the book, like the pullover, is good because it imagines the child's growth. Opening with a scene in which the child, ignored by the adults speaking on her behalf, wanders off, *Coraline* does not so much reveal the interior psyche of the child as the process of psychoanalytic children's literature criticism.

Coraline foregrounds the problematic nature of its own authority as a text about a real child, and so undermines any reading that speaks on behalf of that child, positing the child as an outsider to proceedings. *Coraline's* critics conflate character with child in their psychological depth readings of the novel, which quickly become psychoanalytic case studies. However, the title of the novel undermines this methodological leap by drawing attention to the titular character as a narrative:

Coraline is *Coraline,* and so not representative of a child outside the book. The novel also repeatedly shows adults misidentifying Coraline by getting her name wrong. Coraline corrects them: '"It's Coraline. Not Caroline. Coraline," said Coraline' (Gaiman 2002, 12). The repetition of two similar names is deliberately confusing. Whereas Rudd cites the mispronunciation of Coraline's name as evidence for her 'frustration of feeling neglected' and need to assert her identity, I contend that the confusion reveals that 'Coraline', the 'child' in the book, is a particularly elusive construct (Rudd 2008, 164). The name Coraline is deliberately wrong-sounding, off-kilter, slightly unreal, the name of a character, the title of a book. Read in this light, 'Coraline' is a reminder that 'character' is no more than a collection of semes, lent the illusion of real existence by a proper name. As Barthes indicates: 'As soon as a name exists … to flow toward and fasten onto, the semes become predicates, inductors of truth, and the Name becomes a subject' (1974, 191). The quirkiness of 'Coraline' undermines the illusion that a name indicates a fixed subjectivity.

Whilst Coats, Gooding and Rudd offer their readings of the novel on behalf of the misunderstood Coraline, their treatment of her as an analysand repeats the gesture of misidentification carried out by Coraline's neighbours who continue to call her Caroline. Gooding misidentifies Coraline when he argues that the neighbourhood cat is a 'physical manifestation of the emotions Coraline now recognizes' but was previously unable to accept (2008, 399). As a reference to Carroll's Cheshire Cat, *Coraline*'s cat recalls the moment where Alice refuses diagnosis. Rather than Coraline's interlocutor, then, the cat is the voice of the insistent therapist. Indeed, Gooding insists he knows Coraline despite her unresponsiveness. Noting that the narrative of *Coraline* is consistently opaque when it comes to revealing Coraline's feelings, Gooding states that 'Coraline's muted

responses … delicately identify the limits of Coraline's self-awareness' (2008, 395). He claims the lack of emotional content in the narrative as evidence of the 'unuttered feelings' of the child (Gooding 2008, 395). Gooding's knowledge of Coraline is based on the absence of her response. He notes that the text makes Coraline's emotions difficult to establish. Most usually they are articulated by the narrator in a very general way, through the nonspecific word, 'feel' (Gooding 2008, 395-396). Developing his interpretation, Gooding takes Coraline's 'opacity' as evidence that she is undergoing repression.   He suggests that Coraline's decision to enter the uncanny 'other' apartment is triggered by her father leaving town and by a quarrel with her mother, which he characterises as a 'defeat by a rival' in specifically oedipal terms (2008, 401). Accepting the oedipal complex as explanatory principle, Gooding identifies the 'primal scene' of *Coraline* as the moment Coraline passes her parents' bedroom door: the closed door presents Coraline with 'evidence of her parents' sexuality' that proves 'challenging' for her to accept (2008, 401). For Gooding, Coraline's refusal to consider a sexual act taking place beyond the door reveals her repression. Displaying no emotion, Coraline wonders what the other mother and father may be doing behind the door, concluding that 'it was an empty room and it would remain empty until she opened the door' (Gaiman 2002, 80). Gooding reads this as Coraline's retreat from confronting her understanding of her parents' sexual activity: Coraline has 'entered the territory of repression that Freud marks as the second source of uncanniness' (Gooding 2008, 401). Coraline's opacity legitimises Gooding's assertion of the uncanny as explanatory principle.

Positioning himself as analyst, Gooding initially claims to follow the child's lead. However, credit for discovering what the child does not know about herself is given ultimately to the analyst. Throughout Gooding's analysis the emphasis is that

the child's anxieties are 'constructed upon a foundation she is unwilling to recognize' (2008, 402). Gooding's insistence on Coraline's ignorance of her emotions reveals how child's 'nonknowing' is a key to the construction of the 'psychoanalytic child'. Massé argues that 'the injunction to the child is "Thou Shalt Not Be Aware"', and that 'his state of nonknowing means that the analyst can … speak for the child's awareness in a way that they can't for any other (nonpsychotic) group' (2003, 153). Coraline's silence seems to allow the critic to take the privileged position of the analyst, and speak directly to the child for its own good. 'She has to accept,' says Rudd, 'that she cannot be all to her parents, who have each other' (2008, 164). Going beyond evaluating whether the book is 'good' for the child, Rudd imagines that the adult can intervene directly in the psychic life of the child.

As she is constructed by the critics, Coraline has much in common with Dora, Freud's famously difficult patient. Indeed, as well as her opacity, Coraline's name seems to partially echo Dora's. Freud's case study, 'Fragments of a Case of Hysteria', charts the analyst's desire to get to a truth about Dora – her repression - in the face of her obvious resistance to his analysis. Freud's frustration with Dora leads to a hubristic, absolutist tone similar to that in Rudd and Gooding's 'diagnoses of Coraline. Indeed, Gooding's 'treatment' of Coraline recalls Freud's of Dora insofar as both analysts admit that the 'material' making up their diagnosis 'required supplementing' in the face of the analysand's refusal to cooperate (Freud, quoted in Marcus 1984, 55). Freud's case study also presents us with a narrative in which the analyst is increasingly unaware of his own role in the story he is telling. Steven Marcus argues that 'Fragments of a Case of Hysteria' constitutes the least self-aware narration found in any of Freud's writing: 'It becomes increasingly clear that Freud and not Dora has become the central character in the action' (Marcus 1984, 69, 76).

Similarly, when Coats asserts that 'hands and spiders are traditionally linked to mothers in a child's psycho-symbolic world', she cannot produce any evidence from the narration to support it. Instead, she produces 'a personal anecdote by way of example', invoking her youngest daughter's recurring dream of being chased by a spider, asserting 'I most certainly was in that dream' (2008, 89). The passage reveals more of Coats' conception of herself as a mother than it does of the psycho-symbolic world of the child.

Coraline's analysts find their analogue in the novel in the 'other mother', who wants to confine the girl to her uncanny realm forever. The button eyes that the other mother wishes to sew onto Coraline are interpreted by the analysts according to Freud's oedipal narrative and as the loss of individuation threatened by the regression to a dyadic union with the mother (Rudd 2008, 162-163; Gooding 2008, 394; Coats 2008, 90). I contend that the image of the buttons are overdetermined by critics repeating the uncanny reading offered within the novel, and in fact serve better as a sign of the blankness Coraline must enact when critics speak on her behalf. Like Dora's grudging silence in the face of Freud's analysis, Coraline does not dignify her mother within the text, nor the critic external to the text, with a response. Thus, they are able to make their observations without her participation. Therefore the novel reveals the child as a hollow category filled with the desires of the adult writing. As James Kincaid argues, 'a child is not, in itself, anything. Any image, body, or being we can hollow out, purify, exalt, abuse, and locate sneakily in a field of desire will do for us as a "child"' (1994, 5). Coraline's plan to defeat the other mother reveals and relies on this desire when she puts on the 'protective coloration' of behaving as an innocent girl at play, having a tea party with her dolls (Gaiman 2002, 180). Convinced she is seeing an innocent child at play, the other

mother sends her severed hand to steal the key to the other apartment back from Coraline, but she is tricked and tumbles into a deep well where she remains buried, unable to prey on any more children. The trap works because Coraline plays an artificial role that the other mother fills with her desire.

C*oraline* echoes the image of the child offered by *Alice,* who is, for Kincaid, the quintessential fantasy child. For Kincaid, *Alice* fantasises that inside the magical world perhaps the child 'can be *held*, kept as a child' (1994, 279). However, Alice always eludes the writer's grasp, never more than the adult's dream of a child, 'always on the edge of disappearing' (Kincaid 1994, 296). *Coraline* recalls this disappearing act both through Coraline's opacity, and in the children the other mother has previously captured in her web. These children are wisps, bearing only traces of once having been a child. Trapped behind a mirror, these are 'shapes of children… nothing more than afterimages, like the glow left by a bright light in your eyes after the lights go out' (Gaiman 2002, 102). The psychoanalytic depth reading attempting to fix Coraline as a real child insists that these children are warnings as to what will happen to Coraline if she is tempted by the offer made by the other mother (Rudd 2008, 163; Gooding 2008, 398). Yet, these 'hollow, hollow, hollow' children stand in for the child constructed by this psychoanalytic discourse (Gaiman 2002, 102). Like Alice, Coraline and the ghost children are only as real as 'a photograph we can set in the past and tell stories about… a child who never was' (Kincaid 1994, 289). Elusive, revealing the hollowness of the child constructed by psychoanalysis, Coraline becomes a mobile, nomadic figure located in the intertextual relations of a long-standing dialogue about the (psychoanalytic) child. Encompassing Freud's writings, the *Alice* texts and its subsequent psychoanalytic criticism*,* as well as numerous re-writings, Coraline is a playfully resistant analysand. Indeed, she sits

within a trend of rewriting Alice as an analysand who speaks back to psychoanalysis: Moore and Gebbie's Alice gently mocks that 'notable professor of the mind practising … in Vienna' whilst Bruce Bauman's short story, 'Lilith in Wunderland', imagines Alice's older sister, Lorina, rejecting the process of psychoanalysis – just as Dora does – when Freud attempts to speak for her (Moore and Gebbie 2006, 1:8; Bauman 2006).

Conclusions: Beyond the 'I'

Towards the opening of *Coraline*, a short passage occurs that has become the crux of psychoanalytic readings of the novel:

> Coraline tried drawing the mist. After ten minutes of drawing she still had a white sheet of paper with
>
> M   ST
>
>   I
>
> Written on it in one corner, in slightly wiggly letters. (Gaiman 2002, 26-27)

In a psychoanalytic reading, the 'I' in Mist becomes particularly significant. Coats, Gooding and Rudd retell *Coraline* as a story about attaining secure subjectivity: The 'I' seems unstable at the beginning of the novel, floating away from the other letters in 'mist', but the child claims it back at the end, where it becomes a fixed point of meaning. However, in my intertextual reading, the subject position indicated by 'I' is always floating, never fixed. The critics insist that Coraline is finally given her proper name at the close of the novel, attaining a secure position in the Symbolic order, recognising her own individual desires. By insisting on the 'I' as confirmation

of a psychoanalytical depth reading of children's Gothic, critics value the text under the terms of a strictly pedagogical discourse: Gothic is good because it helps the child to grow up. This reading glosses over the fact that Coraline continues to correct adults addressing her as 'Caroline' right up to the closing pages, and that the child continues to be an elusive figure. For Barthes, 'I is nothing more than the instance saying I … a 'subject', not a 'person' … empty outside the very enunciation which defines it' (Barthes 1977, 145). Whilst a psychoanalytic reading wishes to fix the I, and the meaning of the text, *Coraline* constructs a subject that eludes the totalising grasp of monologizing criticism. In my intertextual reading, then, the 'I' is a red herring. It is the word 'Mist' that attests to the continued instability of meaning in *Coraline*, meaning beyond the grasp of one interpretation. Mist indicates that – in Bakhtin's terms –'the word in language is half someone else's', referring as it does to many texts outside of *Coraline* and so resisting appropriation by one discourse (Bakhtin 1981, 293). Mist offers what Kristeva calls an 'intersection of textual surfaces rather than a fixed point of meaning' (1980, 65). Insisting on its intertextual surfaces, C*oraline* keeps meaning open and mobile.

Although *Coraline* and children's Gothic have been appropriated for therapeutic ends, neither has to be understood in these terms. It is possible to move beyond a therapeutic, humanist application of psychoanalysis in children's literature criticism, and *Coraline* offers itself as a model for this shift. As in Braidotti's theorisation of nomadic subjectivity, the 'fictional unity of a grammatical I' offered in the image of Coraline as character indicates not a fixed self, nor an absence, but a subject in the process assembling a 'fictional choreography of many levels into one socially operational self' (Braidotti 2011a, 18). An intertextual construction, Coraline is a nomadic subject located across textual and temporal locations. Elusive,

often opaque to adult analysis, Coraline 'sustains a critique of dominant visions of the subject' (Braidotti 2011a, 7). That is to say, her 'uncanny' adventures in her other, Gothic, house, estrange the critic from staid, monologizing accounts of Gothic and of the child. The text's insistence on a Gothic of surfaces, however, does not lead to an emptying out of meaning, but rather mobilises a reading of the text that offers a multiplicity of contingent and relational meanings.

The psychoanalytic child is paradoxical: it is imagined to contain depths, but turns out to be hollow; it is determined and abjected by adult discourse, contained and limited by a developmental narrative of maturation that aims at its expulsion. In contrast, the nomadic child is 'self-organised and relational' offering the opportunities for an 'opening out toward an empowering connection with others' (Braidotti 2011b, 3). In his praise of the novel, writer Phillip Pullman asks readers to applaud *Coraline* as 'the real thing', invoking a discourse in which there is such a thing as the good book for the real child and suggesting that critics need look no further (2002). Academic criticism has followed Pullman, valuing *Coraline* as exemplary in the field of children's Gothic and thus limiting their conception of the form to a narrow psychoanalytic pedagogy. *Coraline* is the real thing, perhaps, but only because its intertextuality opens out to a plethora of texts and possible subject positions available to children's Gothic. Leaving us, in Barthes' words, 'at a loose end', *Coraline* reconfigures the home as an uncanny Gothic mansion, before opening out to other readings and possibilities (1977, 159).

Chapter 2

Fleeing Identification:

The Grotesquerie of Darren Shan's *Zom-B*

<u>Introduction: The zombie apocalypse and 'lines of flight'</u>

From *Coraline's* 'uncanny' house I want to follow the nomadic subject of children's Gothic into very different territory: the urban cityscape of the zombie apocalypse and the mass market horror fiction of Darren Shan. From this location, Gothic further challenges the pedagogical assumptions of children's literature criticism by destabilising the processes of identification that critics imagine exist between the child reader and the protagonist of the book. Moreover, the migration of the zombie from adult texts into the territory of children's fiction reconfigures the zombie and offers a different reading to that currently dominant in Gothic Studies. Current criticism tends to position zombies as negative cultural metaphors or symbols of socio-political anxieties, reading them as lessons for late capitalist, neo-liberal society. In its figuration of the zombie as hero-protagonist, *Zom-B* thus challenges pedagogical uses of the zombie in both children's literature and Gothic criticism.

Drawing on the grotesque, *Zom-B* offers the child zombie as an image of nomadic subjectivity that positively embodies gendered and classed identities typically disavowed in pedagogies of children's literature. I offer an account of this grotesque subjectivity through the spatial metaphors of Deleuze and Guattari, reading the continually mobile zombie of Shan's fiction as a nomad, who mobilises a trajectory of escape from repressive and restrictive power relations (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 402). Shan reimagines becoming a zombie as a line of flight directed

towards subjectivity as a process of becoming, an affirmative embodiment unrestricted by pedagogical lessons and developmental narratives of maturation. Matt Fournier argues that a line of flight designates the possibility of escape in a moment of change, 'when a threshold between two paradigms is crossed' (Fournier 2014, 121). Shan's zombie marks a line of flight in the intersection between zombie fiction and children's literature, imagining the zombie as a mode of being embodying possibility.

The mass market, high-action, plot-driven series *Zom-B* (2012) is markedly different to *Coraline,* but it demonstrates the way that postmillennial children's fiction offers multiple manifestations of the Gothic, drawing on and influencing the proliferation of Gothic in adult culture. Consisting of thirteen novels in total, published at three-monthly intervals, *Zom-B* follows Shan's previously successful horror series, *The Saga of Darren Shan* (2000-2004) and *The Demonata* (2005 – 2009), which were released in 30 different languages world-wide. Shan's novels are inspired by splatter horror and gross-out cinema aesthetics and their content and style is shaped by the demands of a rapid publication schedule. Their success indicates a pattern: as elements of Gothic become popular in adult culture, they migrate into children's works. The success of *Zom-B* is due in part to the resurgence that the zombie has enjoyed in print, film and television over the past decade in adult culture. This resurgence is evident across narrative forms and media, from the success of the US television series, *The Walking Dead* (2010 – current), based on the graphic novel series of the same name, the BBC series, *In the Flesh* (2013-2014), and the organization of zombie walks and flash mobs involving participants across the globe since 2001 (Flint 2009, 224). More recently, the format of the live-action zombie survival game has also been televised by BBC3 as the game-show, *I Survived a*

Zombie Apocalypse (2015). An increase in the variety of zombie fictions, as well as the zombie's increasing mainstream visibility, has opened up a space within children's literature for the zombie to occupy. Children's literature is the next space within popular culture into which zombie can migrate. Shan's work is in dialogue with these adult texts, but also constitutes a *re*configuration of familiar tropes and suggests a new way of reading zombie fiction.

The success of *Zom-B* in critical as well as popular terms further demonstrates the increasing status of postmillennial children's Gothic, even when it draws on the tropes and aesthetics of pulp horror, a form not usually associated with 'good' children's literature. *Zom-B* has received favourable reviews in broadsheet literary supplements and a number of accolades, including being shortlisted for the Children's Book of the Year in Ireland. Though the awards it has gained are minor compared to the acclaim garnered by *Coraline, Zom-B* indicates that a pulp form of horror (as distinct from a literary Gothic) is beginning to be valued in critical discourse. However, these evaluations continue to be made according to pedagogical criteria. *The Telegraph's* Martin Chilton describes *Zom-B* as 'a clever mix of horror, fantasy and realism about the damaging "virus" of racial hatred and social paranoia' (2012). For Chilton, *Zom-B's* characters function as moral compasses, but also prompt children to think for themselves; the text is not simply didactic. For Chilton, the pulp horror elements perform a vital pedagogical function: they teach without seeming to.

Chilton's review illustrates a paradox at the heart of *Zom-B:* the idea that 'good' children's literature teaches important moral, social or maturational lessons, but that it ought not to impose or dictate ideology. Shan's commentary on the novels echoes this paradox. He argues that the series provides an important pedagogical

function, but is keen to avoid accusations of didacticism: 'I never set out to preach … but I do feel like I have to wear something akin to a teacher's hat' (Shan 2012b). His anxiety recurs throughout this essay, published on his website, as he insists that writers do not need to 'hold the reader's hands, but … should provide some sort of guiding light' (Shan 2012b). His equivocations attempt to cover over a paradox at the heart of his pedagogical project. This paradox is summed up by Stephen Thomson in a discussion about an earlier children's series, Phillip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* (1995-2000), which famously decries dogmatic Christian ideology. Thomson argues that any appeal to 'readerly freedom' from authorial didacticism 'leaves even the putatively unrestrictive text firmly in control' (2004, 145). In Shan's case, the desire not to be didactic is overridden by his belief that book (and author) must guide the reader to the right reading. Shan inherits this paradoxical pedagogy from a liberal humanist formulation of children's literature evident elsewhere in postmillennial children's Gothic. Charlie Higson, author of another children's zombie series, uses horror tropes to make his writing 'grimmer and more violent and nastier' (Higson quoted in Flood 2014). Higson implies that horror is an affective form and that zombies function foremost as violent spectacle. However, as I suggested in the introduction, for Higson this spectacle actually serves the therapeutic and maturational function of children's literature, which ought to teach children how to 'cope' and 'deal' with their fears (Higson quoted in Flood 2014).

Zom-B negotiates this paradox by offering two competing functions for horror. On the one hand, a gross-out horror aesthetic is deployed as pure spectacle; on the other hand horror is employed in service of pedagogy and education:

I wanted to write about racism and xenophobia in 21st century England and Ireland, but I wanted to do it in an exciting way, so that I could reach more readers. Zombies seemed like a good way to do that. (Shan 2014c)

The pedagogical function of the zombie is not something particular to children's fiction, as Shan notes when he acknowledges the influence of George A. Romero, whose zombie films 'held a mirror up to society' (Shan 2012b). Taking his cue from Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* (1968), Shan reveals how the zombie has come to be ascribed a pedagogical function more generally, not just since its migration into children's literature.

However, Shan's contradictory use of horror actually undermines these various zombie pedagogies. Principally, a pedagogical function for horror is undermined by Shan's recourse to a splatter horror aesthetic, seen in low budget horror comedies of the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s. These films, designated 'splat-stick' horror comedy by Linda Badley and 'gross-out' cinema by William Paul, refuse a role of social utility in favour of pleasurable indulgence in a spectacle of gross-out violence (Paul 1994, 420–421). Shan also borrows from more recent 'inversion' texts that transform the zombie from negative cultural symbol into empathetic protagonists, including *Warm Bodies* (2010, 2013) and *Breathers* (2009). *Zom-B*'s competing images of the zombie form the book into an 'assemblage' in the terms suggested by Deleuze and Guattari. As an assemblage, the book is 'unattributable', a 'multiplicity' that cannot serve one function or one politics (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 25). Like the zombie itself, Shan's series fiction is a 'body without organs' whose multiplicities and contradictions dismantle any organising principle or master schemata (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 25).

Pedagogy is a central theme of *Zom-B,* which relocates the zombie apocalypse to a school. In the first novel of the series a horde of zombies and mutants sweep through a high school, drawing the protagonist B Smith into a seemingly typical zombie apocalypse survival scenario. Yet, the zombie attack on B's classroom precipitates a line of flight away from the avowed pedagogical intentions of the text and of pedagogical readings of the zombie more generally. B Smith is an aggressive working-class teenager who, at the start of the series, holds overtly racist views expressed through truculent first-person narration. The novel initially offers B as a point of counter identification for the imagined reader, who is meant to find fault with B's morally reprehensible actions and beliefs, thus learning a lesson about racism. Nonetheless, the attack on the school offers B the opportunity to occupy a heroic position within the narrative, bravely leading a group of teenagers through the zombie infested chaos. In a twist at the climax of the novel, B is killed by a former classmate, Tyler, a boy who has previously been the target of B's racist bullying. However, at this point in the novel, the 'lesson' constructed around B becomes confused, a result of the contradictory locations B occupies as the narrative progresses. Moreover, the second novel in the series, *Zom-B Underground* (2012) sees B return as a 'revitalized' zombie. Shan offers a very different function for the zombie in the figure of this 'revitalized' zombie, who retains their memories and personality. The subsequent novels follow B as a zombie, the titular 'Zom-B', and chart a transformation from rebellious, reprehensible human to undead hero.

Though seeming to offer a straightforward moral lesson about the ways racism damages both object and subject, B's transformation initiates a nomadic trajectory of continual motion. Throughout the series B never remains in one location or in one role for very long. Typically, she occupies one or two key

locations and positions in each novel before moving on somewhere else. She is variously a prisoner, an itinerant, a mother, a fugitive, a bride, a soldier, a gladiator. In this way, B eludes the pedagogical structures of the text that would offer the zombie as a moral and social lesson. Though B's flight from the zombie infested school is initially presented as an 'escape', the series charts journeys through post-apocalyptic London that illustrate the other meanings of the word flight (*fuite*), 'not only the act of fleeing or eluding but also flowing, leaking, and disappearing into the distance' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 16). This trajectory disappears into the distance, into a place not in the here and now, but also not the determined future: this is the fantastic elsewhere of the post-apocalypse. I also find it significant that the zombie attack on B's school involves 'mutants' as well as the undead. Mutants, circus freaks and grotesquerie abound in Shan's post-apocalyptic London suggesting that this line of flight is also a moment of mutation. In Deleuze and Guattari's account of power relations, a 'mutation' in code, in language, or in biological life, prompts variations and transfers within and between cells, species and languages, offering the chance to challenge hegemonic structures (1987, 74, 244). Furthermore, Shan's mutants and zombies, B included, are leaky bodies, manifesting the 'leakage', or 'runoff' of the line of flight from restrictive bodily identities (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 225). Thus, as the inclusion of carnival and circus imagery suggests, Shan's Zom-B is also a grotesque body, offering an embodied, nomadic subjectivity beyond the constraint of a classical mode of being.

B's transformation further undermines the avowed pedagogical intentions of the text by offering the zombie as a grotesque, undecidable point of identification in place of an ideal child reader. B's grotesque zombie body returns identities that are disavowed by the text's identification with an ideal reading child. The ideal child

imagined by children's literature is male and middle-class. Children's literature emerges when the growth of the middle-class creates a lucrative market in publishing for children. Consequently, a paradigm of bourgeois childhood dominates that literature and its criticism. As John Morgenstern argues, the bourgeois child is both the imagined consumer of children's literature and the object of its representation (2002, 136). Moreover, it is the middle-class school*boy* who becomes the reading child as schooling in literacy comes to dominate conceptions of children's literature (Morgenstern 2002, 141). However, as Shan's horror fiction exemplifies, this image of a middle-class reading child is complicated by the presence of another child: the reluctant reader. Resistant to the text's pedagogy, the reluctant reader is courted through gory, action packed content. Shan draws on an explicitly 'male Gothic' tradition in this process of identification. Characterised by violence and monstrosity, this horror tradition has dominated Gothic in the latter half of the twentieth century 'in tandem with youth culture's male rebels and the rejection of the cosy domestic world fetishized in the books, radio and television programmes of the postwar period' (Reynolds 2001, 5). Shan's mobilisation of the horror aesthetic, then, imagines both a rebel and a schoolboy. These ambivalences emerge in B who offers an alternative point of identification to the ideal middle-class reading child. Though the text initially disavows B's violent, working-class masculinity, B's transformation into a zombie returns a working class masculinity *and* a female identity that have been disavowed or written out of the pedagogical project. Zombie B is a girl and her wounded but savage body both satirises and rehabilitates the appendages of violent masculinity within a body firmly designated female. Thus, Shan's zombie disavows neither the masculine nor the feminine, embodying a grotesque *un*decidability that is both repulsive and attractive.

The grotesque imagines a line of flight from binaristic gender and classed identifications through its representation of an undecidable body. Here I designate the grotesque as an aesthetic and structure of undecidable ambivalence, drawing on formulations of the term by Philip Thomson (1972) and Mary Russo (1994). Philip Thomson defines the grotesque as 'the unresolved clash of incompatibles in work and response […] paralleled by the ambivalent nature of the abnormal' (1972, 27). For Thomson, this unresolved clash centres on an incompatibility between the comic and the terrifying, but is also a wider structural component of the grotesque, resulting in a form that is anti-rational and disorientating (1972, 21, 42). On the one hand, this positions the grotesque as the perfect literary aesthetic for a pedagogy that aims at producing an actively questioning subject, the particular pedagogy at work in *Zom-B*. However, the grotesque also works to undermine the assertive maturity that this pedagogy aims at since the tension within the grotesque remains unsolvable and continually discomfiting.

Russo's notion of the female grotesque is also useful in my reading of *Zom-B* since it considers the gendered aspects of the grotesque aesthetic. Russo's reconfiguration of the grotesque critiques the tendency to essentialise gender often found in critical uses of the grotesque, whilst maintaining that the grotesque remains both a potentially positive and dangerous force. On the one hand, the grotesque is potentially positive for a feminist politics, since it posits a body that is open, dynamic, boundless, and can thus counter a static and contained model of femininity (Russo 1994, 8, 61, 63). On the other hand, the grotesque also powerfully re-inscribes the status quo and negatively abjects the transgressive female body (Russo 1994, 56, 60). In the end, the grotesque remains a 'painfully conflictual configuration' that is useful for examining the transformation that B undergoes from

macho tomboy to female zombie (Russo 1994, 159). Zombie B produces an image of the female grotesque that disrupts a male-gendered hero paradigm favouring aggressive activity and, at the same time, counters the feminised image of the reading child, passively subject to pedagogy. The grotesque zombie thus offers an alternative figuration of identity to the ideals constructed by pedagogical formulations of children's literature. Refusing the position of object in a lesson directed at a middle-class reading child, the grotesque zombie becomes a nomad, a mobilising agent within the multitudinous assemblage of Shan's text.

Identification as Pedagogy

Zom-B foregrounds and then disrupts the processes of identification necessary to a liberal-humanist, pedagogical formulation of children's literature. Identification is crucial to the pedagogical project of children's literature since critics need to establish which characters the reading child will identify with, and how active or critical their identification will be, in order to know what the child will learn from the book. However, as the constructivist challenge to children's literature illustrates, these questions of identification are oriented in the wrong direction. The reading child is constructed by the writer, the text and the critic. Thus, rather than ask with whom the *child* will identify, it is more pertinent to ask with which particular child the *book* identifies. What kind of reading child does it construct and why? *Zom-B* foregrounds identification in distinct ways that draw attention to this problematic. Initially, *Zom-B* offers an antagonistic first-person narration that aims to locate its reading child in opposition to the narrator. However, this aimed at identification is undermined because the addressee constructed by B's narration occupies an

undecidable position, oscillating uncomfortably between empathy and disagreement. Once B becomes a zombie, this fraught process resolves as the grotesque figure of the zombie eventually replaces that of the ideal reader. B's transformation into a zombie produces an identifiable hero-protagonist, reconciling B and the reading child. The child subject that emerges in this transformation is not one initially imagined by the author. Shan's intentions are available as a dialogic counterpoint to the novels in extra-textual authorial commentary, which discusses at length the issue of identification.

Shan's authorial commentary on the novel reveals what Lesnik-Oberstein calls 'the classical paradox of liberal humanism' that offers children's literature 'as the supposed ideal medium of non-intrusive, non-authoritarian teaching of children' (Lesnik-Oberstein 1998a, 19). Shan's ideal reader is constructed for this medium: they are ideally active and critical of hegemonic ideology, but also passively subject to the tutelage of the book; a reluctant reader who needs to be seduced by the pleasures of the horror, but eminently teachable; they seek pure indulgence, but receive sound instruction. Shan explains:

> I felt I had to do what I could to get young readers questioning the ways of their elders, to decide for themselves what is right or wrong, to look for the truth behind the cloud of lies. The main message I wanted to impart was – QUESTION EVERYTHING! (Shan 2012b)

The capitals anxiously assert that the novels seek to teach, without being didactic, how the central character has internalised the pernicious views about people of other races and religions espoused by 'certain sections of our media and society' (Shan 2012b). The realization of 'how B ended up in that situation' allows the imagined

reader to critique these incorrect ideologies, thus accepting the right ones (Shan 2012b). Whilst overt didacticism is rejected, the reading child is nonetheless constructed as a subject who must be the willing recipient of a lesson. Paradoxically, the exhortation to 'QUESTION EVERYTHING' requires a child reader that is passive.

Moreover, Shan's exhortation to 'question everything' imagines that his novel is able to place the child outside of ideology. However, as Stephen Thomson explains, 'the claim to ideological neutrality is profoundly ideological' (2004, 146). Even as Shan dismisses the 'cloud of lies' offered by pernicious media representations, he asserts a 'truth' in its place. This truth implicitly constructs certain identities, the young and the economically disadvantaged, as less able to make ethical and moral judgments: 'Many people believe the lies, especially people who (like me when I was younger) don't travel much or get to mingle with people from other cultures' (Shan 2012b). Limited life experience and limited opportunities for travel are barriers to the openness and active engagement Shan seeks in his ideal reader. This openness is yet another paradox in the liberal humanist formulation Shan inherits from children's literature. As Deborah Cogan Thacker and Jean Webb assert, writers and critics insisting upon the openness of the text 'clearly [have] a message to impart' (2002, 44). Shan asserts that there are 'correct' ways of reading and positions the child as passively subject to tutelage of the book.

The paradoxes plaguing Shan's formulation of his pedagogy originate in children's literature criticism, which has not satisfactorily theorised reader agency. One of the founding texts of children's literature criticism, Aidan Chambers's *The Reader in the Book* (1985), attempts to establish the reading child as an active participant in the process of making meaning. However, in Chambers' theory the

child's activity is prompted by and reliant on the book (or, its adult author). As Neil Cocks points out, Chambers' dualism between author and reader ends up with the author 'in total control of the text and the response to it' (2004, 95). Attempts to revise Chambers' ideas question this dualistic power relationship so as to rescue the child reader from didacticism. John Stephens' *Language and Ideology in Children's Fiction* points out that the reader is not separable from the text since it too is constituted by language (1992, 55). However, Stephens' linguistically constructed child reader is still forced to 'conform' to the discourses that constitute it and so Stephens replicates the problems he seeks to overcome (Cocks 2004, 111). Though Stephens theorises a reader constituted by language, his formulations of agency still rely on a child outside the text. He prefers 'carnivalesque interrogative texts' that 'situate the reader as a separately constructed subject firmly outside the text', but he struggles to conceive of a pedagogy outside didacticism (Stephens 1992, 156, 252). Even here the adult authored text is in control, constituting a child reader that can – through the machinations of the book itself – learn to be an independent and mature subject, not a passive recipient of the book's ideas.

Maria Nikolajeva's essay, 'The Identification Fallacy' (2010) represents a more recent intervention in this debate about pedagogy and agency, but like Stephens and Chambers, it fails to theorise reader agency within a pedagogical formulation of children's literature. Nikolajeva criticises literacy and educational professionals who advocate identification with fictional characters as beneficial to the child reader. For Nikolajeva, identification with a character will not encourage the reader to develop good critical faculties (2010, 188). Instead she insists that writers must 'subvert the identification compulsion' if they wish to help their readers develop empathy and critical engagement with the world (2010, 189). Nikolajeva

imagines a naïve child reader who wishes to identify with characters in the book, but must not be allowed to do so for its own good. For this purpose, Nikolajeva prefers first person narration since it is inherently dialogical and creates a dissonance between the narrative voice and the implied reader that will produce a critical response in the reading child (2010, 201). However, her theorisation of the dialogic nature of first person narration is one directional and points to a single way to interpret the text, against the narrator's voice. Nikolajeva concludes by stating that instead of identifying with characters, child readers must identify with the implied reader, or 'narratee', who will aid it in interpreting the text (2010, 190). She thus implies that if children learn to read in the right way they will then become more mature and better able to detect ideological manipulation. Thus, Nikolajeva offers her counter to the identification fallacy as the 'correct' way to read and also imagines a child located outside of ideology.

Zom-B reveals and negotiates these failures to theorise reader agency through its narrator B, who is initially offered as a counterpoint to the imagined reader, but whose narration eludes the pedagogical function it is ascribed. Shan expresses anxiety about B in his commentary, noting that Zom-B was 'the most daunting task I've yet to face as a writer' (Shan 2012b). His main concern is that his reader will incorrectly identify with the 'wrong' character, a worry that prompts a number of redrafts (Shan 2012b). B presents a problem for Shan from the outset. According to Nikolajeva's argument, Shan's choice to use first-person narration would seem exemplary: the ideal child reader will judge everything B says and does to be wrong, and thus learn to think for themselves. However, aspects of the first-person narration complicate this, not least because many of B's actions and attitudes prove successful in the context of a zombie survival narrative. The function ascribed to B thus

becomes increasingly undecidable since it is unclear whether B is a point of counter-identification, or an exemplary hero. Furthermore, the narration is candid and self-aware, positioning B's perspective as ultimately dominant since it explicitly invites and anticipates judgment. The narration oscillates between distance from and proximity to an imagined reader, whose position likewise becomes increasingly undecidable.

B is distanced from an ideal reading child through an expressed distaste for school, scribbling 'crude drawings' on exercise books and deliberately disrupting classes, but the narration is also shot through with self-reflective pathos. After provoking a fight with a class-mate, B offers an uncomfortable interpretation:

> I know I should feel ashamed of myself, and to a degree I do. But to my surprise and dismay, I also feel smug because I know Dad would be proud if he could see me now, bringing an interfering black girl down a peg or two. (Shan 2012a, 66)

B is racist and misogynist, obviously reprehensible. Yet, the reference to her bullying father offers a partial justification: B is seeking approbation where she finds only rejection. The uncomfortable oscillation between empathy and judgment is articulated by B, who expresses 'dismay', even as the word 'smug' undercuts this expression of remorse. Thus, the narration does not so much construct a reading child in opposition, as construct a narrating subject who herself cannot comfortably occupy one position.

As the mode of the novel shifts from a domestic school drama to zombie survival horror, B further shifts position as the narrative demands she perform a different function. In the context of a zombie survival scenario, informed by the

tropes of the hero narrative, B's violent and aggressive behaviour is justified. Attacking fellow humans (former classmates) infected by a zombie bite and abandoning fallen comrades to make good an escape are common tropes of zombie survival horror. B's single-minded, utilitarian approach to survival is necessary in her ascension to the position of group leader and hero. 'They're finished. No time to feel sorry for them', she declares as she leaves friends who have been cornered by zombies (Shan 2012a, 156). From this narrative position, B can also display aggressive masculinity with impunity. When the group of boys she leads takes down their first zombie, B knocks knuckles with Cassius, aptly named after Muhammed Ali, approvingly exclaiming, 'Sweet!' (Shan 2012a, 139). Here B is allowed to express pleasure in enacting a violent masculinity that was previously critiqued.

Performing Female Masculinity

B's uncomfortable position as a point of identification is also a result of the way gender is foregrounded by the text and forms part of its pedagogical project. *Zom-B* offers a pedagogical lesson about gender that produces contradictory ideas about the function of the feminine and the masculine and results in an ambivalently gendered hero protagonist. *Zom-B* initially marks its protagonist, B, as masculine. The name B Smith is a gender-neutral designation, but B's behaviour is marked as masculine through vulgar spoken language, rebellious behaviour at school, boyish clothing, short hair, and sexist comments about the 'hot and easy' girls at school (Shan 2012a, 19). Only in its closing pages does the novel reveal that B is a girl, just before she is killed. The aim of the text seems in line with Shan's stated exhortation to 'question everything'. The marking of B as a boy produces a trap for the imagined reader, who

is led to a mistaken assumption for the purposes of correction. The text imagines its reader naively asking, do I think only boys can be heroes in these kinds of action stories? A paradoxical pedagogy is again evident here since this twist imagines a reader in need of, but also receptive to, critical literacy strategies that will aid it in rejecting received notions of gender.

Yet the withholding of this crucial information about B disrupts the aimed-at process of identification because it again shifts B's function within the narrative. From a villainous point of counter-identification, B moves to a victim position, not only because she gets brutally attacked by a zombie, but because her masculine behaviour is reframed as a pathological performance, a response to the trauma she suffers at the hands of her father. At the same time, the revelation also sees B shift from the position of anti-hero to hero. The text suggests that B's behaviour as a boy is typical, but as a girl it is marked as extraordinary. Qualities marked as aberrant in the text's construction of its ideal reader (B's violence, her lack of sympathy) are the very qualities the reader is asked to accept once B's gender is revealed: girls can be heroic too, the text suggests, reframing those suspect masculine qualities as heroic when enacted by a female subject. Thus, B occupies an uncomfortable, undecidable position between these shifting and unstable constructions of the masculine and the feminine.

The text's pedagogical twist presents another problem for identification and pedagogy since it only reverses the hero paradigm it seeks to interrogate. As Margaret Hourihan notes, female heroes transposed into adventure stories are, with some exceptions, 'little more than honorary men' (1997, 68). Cranny-Francis also points out that the problem with role-reversal is that 'it does not challenge the nature of the role itself […] the role is preserved at the cost of the individual character [and]

its masculine gender coding is barely threatened' (1990, 84). Certainly, masculine coding remains in place for the last third of *Zom-B* when displays of callous machismo are demanded by the genre. Moreover, B's attitude is directly contrasted within the text with the more obviously feminine coded emotional responses of the girls in the group, such as Suze, who collapses in fear and guilt, exclaiming, 'we killed her!' when the group kills an infected classmate (Shan 2012a, 139). Femininity is coded as oppositional to heroic masculinity, a structure that suggests that B is only a viable hero because she eschews her femininity. This does nothing to disrupt a history of genre fiction in which women have had no presence other than 'an idealist construct composed from the negatives of masculinity' (Cranny-Francis 1990, 24). The notion that female functions as negative to male is coded into the structure of the twist itself: we learn that B is a girl only when she turns out not to be a boy.

Despite the problems with the novel's 'twist', I read B's gender identity as a performance that resists binaristic representations of masculinity and femininity. Jack Halberstam's theorisation of female masculinity offers an alternative to dominant masculinity because it is produced by both male and female bodies (1998, 1, 2). Within the novel's domestic setting, femininity is revealed as exactly that which B cannot afford to identify with, since it offers only victimhood and oppression. This is emphasised through the characterization of B's mum, Daisy, who is bullied and belittled by her violent husband. The passive position allotted femininity is a result of a performance of violent masculinity, epitomised by B's father. B's performance of female masculinity, as the only role available in a cultural location that provides little in the way of agency for female characters, destabilises this power relationship by revealing the conditions in which it is produced. B's

refusal to adopt the feminine position shows how femininity is abjected by association with 'passivity and inactivity' (Halberstam 1998, 269). Furthermore, as a performance of female masculinity, B demonstrates that masculinity is not the sole province of male sexed bodies and so disrupts the process whereby masculinity comes to be associated with power and privilege. B's behaviour demonstrates that the 'immense social power that accumulates around masculinity' does not have to be 'reserved for people with male bodies' (Halberstam 1998, 269). In terms of genre conventions, masculinity is exactly what B needs to embody in order to survive the zombie apocalypse, a fact that in itself does not necessarily deconstruct the hero trope, but nor does it whole-heartedly endorse it, since B's masculinity is designated as a contingent and context-dependent performance.

Initially the novel shows B mimicking her father in her performance of masculinity, but the flow of power is more complex than this initial relationship suggests. For Halberstam, 'the question … might be not what do female masculinities borrow from male masculinities, but rather what do men borrow from Butches?' (1998, 276). Following this, B's performance of masculinity becomes the example which others imitate. Her friends follow her lead: *she* makes the jokes, *she* confers the nicknames, *she* causes trouble in the local corner shop, and *she* leads the fight against the zombies. Her exaggerated performance of masculinity prompts the boys around her to perform too, a situation that suggests female masculinity is not simply the apeing of masculinity by an oppressed subject. B's performance mobilises a 'shift' in the 'flow of power and influence' imagined by Halberstam's model of female masculinity (1998, 276). Thus, when B turns out to be a girl at the end of the novel, the revelation of her gender does not function as the correction of a misidentification, nor as a disavowal of heroic masculinity in favour of femininity.

Rather, the fact that B is a female offers additional information through which to read her masculinity, rendering it an explicit performance of female masculinity. Indeed, she continues to be referred to by the ambiguous designation, B, despite her father briefly identifying her as 'Becky'. B remains an ambivalently gendered nomination that marks the character as female *and* masculine as the series progresses. B is not a disempowered female 'longing to be and have a power that is always out of reach' (Halberstam 1998, 9). Rather, B's performance constitutes a productive reversion of the structures – generic and social – that produce masculinity as dominant.

Despite offering a critique of essential and binary notions of gender, B's female masculinity is not a wholly liberating alternative. Nor does B's awareness that her behaviour is a performance sanction performativity as a viable alternative to normative gender roles. Instead, B's female masculinity critiques a particular configuration of performativity, understood as radical and subversive. As well as engaging with the tropes of zombie survival horror, *Zom-B* refers to an earlier gender twist narrative, Iain Banks's *The Wasp Factory* (1984). *The Wasp Factory* has become a canonical text in contemporary Gothic Studies and has been read alongside Shelley's *Frankenstein* as a study in Gothic masculinity. *Zom-B* invites comparison with Banks's novel because its gender reveal is similarly conceived. *The Wasp Factory's* narrator, Frank, a monstrous character who also suffers abuse at the hands of a violent father, is revealed at the close of the novel to be a girl. Berthold Schoene-Harwood asserts that this revelation 'ironically unwraps patriarchal masculinity' and constitutes a deconstruction of traditional gender formations in line with Judith Butler's theorising of gender as performative, fluid and open to re-signification (1999, 132). Schoene-Harwood's reading values performativity as a

radically transgressive act and fails to explore the conflictual nature of performativity.

Mary Russo argues that recognising the performative nature of gender does not constitute freedom from gender norms, since performativity is – in Butler's text – a 'compulsory practice' (Russo 1994, 48). Whilst the agency of the subject is not entirely foreclosed in Butler's model of gender, performativity does not automatically grant the subject control over identity. Performativity is not the assumption of deliberate and wilful choices (Russo 1994, 48). Schoene-Harwood's claim that Banks's 'coup' is to 'dismantle' masculinity by 'presenting his readers with a typical boy's tale whose hero is really a girl' avoids confronting the limiting and compulsory nature of the performativity of gender. B's performance of female masculinity, however, considers performativity as contingent on cultural location, rather than being a wilful choice or an act of radical subversion. Her performance of female masculinity is a critique of the fate of femininity in a gender structure dominated by masculinity, but it is also a survival strategy. B's narration is self-aware in this respect, noting that her behaviour is a social act, a necessary camouflage, including pretending to hate non-whites when she is with her father, or sharing in the sexist stories about her female classmates when she is with the boys.

Class Politics and the 'Laff Riot'

B's performance of masculinity also intersects with the text's attempt to identify with a specifically middle-class reader and its concomitant disavowal of working-class identity. The novel's 'lesson' about B's gender is bound up in problematic class politics because it offers B initially as a negative image of working class

masculinity. This negative conception of working-class masculinity is constructed in opposition to the middle-class reader whose image dominates children's literature and its criticism. I also read the representation of B as explicitly working-class in a wider context of representations in popular British culture in which the working class figure is produced through an aesthetic of disgust. Imogen Tyler argues that contemporary popular culture vilifies the 'chav', a representation that is symptomatic of 'middle-class desire to re-demarcate class boundaries within the context of contemporary … culture' (2008, 21). Tyler identifies 'the emergence of the grotesque and comic figure of the chav within a range of contemporary British media' and argues it is a sign of 'heightened class antagonism that marks a new episode in the dirty ontology of class struggle in Britain' (2008, 18). Elsewhere, Tyler traces this class antagonism and abject representations of social others, including the working class, to efforts by New Labour in the 1990s to make class a revolting subject. This was a time when 'questions of class-based inequalities were repressed, reconfigured and reformulated within sociological and political discourses and, latterly, within wider popular and public culture' resulting in the 'popular reconfiguration of the underclass discourse in the figure of "the chav"' (Tyler 2013, 16). Tyler's work gives a wider context for the representation of B's class in this first novel of the *Zom-B* series and suggests that Shan's representation of class is in part influenced by a wider social and political discourse of the 'chav'.

There are a number of places in the text where B's working-class masculinity is figured as revolting. B's crude language, swearing, violence and racism echo these negative representations of the working class, positioning B in direct opposition to a middle-class reading child. The pedagogical aim of this identification strategy is mirrored in the school setting, in which the action of the first novel takes place. The

middle-class child is a learning child. In contrast, B expresses her hatred for school and pays 'little or no attention to the teachers' (Shan 2012a, 85). Moreover, B's school is identified as a poor school. There isn't money for trips, she states, 'plus we're buggers to control when we're let loose' (Shan 2012a, 64). As Tyler notes, class disgust is also tied to racial difference and chav disgust is racialising (Tyler 2008, 25). The 'chav foregrounds a dirty whiteness – a whiteness contaminated by poverty' and, importantly for this discussion of B, represented complexly by the chav's 'filthy white racism' (Tyler 2008, 25). This language of racialised abjection appears frequently in descriptions of B's father, who attends National Front meetings. B recalls 'rooms full of angry white men muttering bloody murder' (Shan 2012a, 21). B's 'filthy white racism' is most emphatically represented in the fight with a black girl, Nancy, whom she goads by saying 'I know your kind aren't the most civilized in the world', defending herself with the retort, 'at least I'm white scum' (Shan 2012a, 49). The novel thus faces a problem in its formulation of an anti-racist message since it relies on a counter identification that racialises B as a member of the 'filthy white' working class. Racism is abhorred, but B's repellent racism marks her as a member of the revolting working class, whose abjection in popular culture manifests through racial disgust.

However, as with gender, B's narration subverts the text's identification strategies that position her as an object of disgust. Throughout she offers astute reflective commentary about her performance of working-class masculinity that anticipate disgust. In her encounter with Nancy, for example, she describes 'slipping into hateful character with alarming ease' (Shan 2012a, 49). B narrates in the present tense, but simultaneously offers a post-event perspective so that events supposedly narrated by the minute also contain reflective retrospective commentary. In part, this

is a result of Shan's need to provide a space for his imagined reader from which to judge B's behaviour rather than simply go along with it. However, the result produces an increasingly admirable B, whose reflective first-person narration is the source of the 'good' analysis as well as of the 'bad' ideology. The narrative style produces a character bound up in troubling performances of class and gender. B's performance of white, working-class racism and aggressive masculinity are refigured as neither wholly elective, nor entirely essential. B explains that 'the trouble with putting on an act is that sometimes it's hard to tell where the actor stops and the real you begins. It's rubbed off on me to an extent, the years of pretending to hate' (Shan 2012a, 21). Through self-awareness and reflection, B's narration combines the seemingly rejected first-person character and the privileged 'narratee'. The authority of B's reflections increases as the novel shifts mode into the survival scenario in which B excels. The result is that statements made early in the novel revealing B's seemingly 'bad' macho swagger are retroactively endorsed. Thus aspects of B's performance of working-class masculinity, elsewhere critiqued, gain authoritative status. This includes the early pronouncement: 'I'm B Smith. This is my turf. Any zombies on the loose should be worried about *me*' (Shan 2012a, 43). This confidence and swagger fit well when framed by the tropes of the zombie survival scenario. As B later jokes, she may receive 'straight F's in most courses […] but A plus in zombie survival!' (Shan 2012a, 187)

In the latter part of the novel, the reflective aspect of the narration shifts from offering a framework through which to analyse B, to justifying B's aggressive actions. As friends and teacher lay dead, B cracks a joke to the remaining survivors, and then comments:

It's hard to believe that I can make a joke at a time like this. But as awful as this is, as shocking as it's been, I can't shut down. Those of us in this group have a chance to get out and fight another day. We have to cling to life as tightly as we can, put the atrocities from our thoughts, deal with this as though it were a surprise exam. (Shan 2012a, 162)

Here, B's assessment of events becomes the privileged perspective, though not because of her hindsight. The narration is not reflective in a straightforward sense and there is no space in the present-tense time-frame for B's character to mature ethically or morally. In the fast-paced action of zombie survival horror B becomes a clear point of identification. The oppositionally constructed idealised child reader disappears as B's voice becomes increasingly assertive and *Zom-B* mobilises its zombies. The character initially located as an objectified point of counter-identification becomes the hero, a nomadic subject who escapes the pedagogical structure of the text.

The dialogic nature of B's narration, and the unstable shifts in her narrative position are mirrored in the undecidable push and pull of gross-out aesthetics on which the series draws. Throughout the series *Zom-B* offers pleasure in spectacles of gory violence for its own sake in direct contradiction to the backgrounded moral pedagogy offered by the author. B's narration revels in this violence, describing how classmates turn on each other: 'Drives the knife deep into her head, panting like a dog. Again. Blood flows. Bone splinters. He doesn't stop. Moments later he's gouging out chunks of brain' (Shan 2012a, 152). The fragmented sentences give an impression of the breathless gratification of the viewer of the gory spectacle. Shan also draws on a vocabulary of excessive gore and violent action: blades 'sink' into chests, 'guts ooze' and the school is plastered with 'trails of blood' and plenty of

vomit (2012a, 150, 127, 170). Through this vocabulary *Zom-B* invokes the gross-out aesthetic exemplified by low budget horror films such as *The Evil Dead* (1981). Paul argues that such films celebrate bad-taste and aggression and 'transform revulsion into a sought-after goal' (1994, 4, 10). For Paul, gross-out is the 'art of inversion', offering an undecidable oscillation between attraction and repulsion: 'In the confusing process of the push-pull aesthetic we are forced to consider what we mean by both *repellent* and *attractive'* (Paul 1994, 420). Gross-out is thus structurally grotesque, remaining undecidable in terms of pleasure and disgust.

Undecidable gross-out aesthetics represent a stumbling block for any pedagogical project. The material conditions of the gross-out cinema Paul examines are relevant to Shan's work, which is determined by the profit-seeking publishing industry. Shan's rapidly produced series fiction offers high sales, good return, and the potential for selling rights internationally. In the same way, gross-out films 'offer a radical challenge to taste and value … simply to make a buck' (Paul 1994, 20). Though gross-out aesthetics are subversive, they cannot be appropriated by a left-wing critical discourse that gives subversion a pedagogical function. As Paul points out, the central problem with valuing subversion is that works that are not sufficiently 'subversive' are designated symptoms of what is wrong with culture and pop cultural products are returned to a role of social utility (1994, 420-421). In other words, even subversive cultural products must teach the audience something. Gross-out, in contrast, is a spectacle seeking only '*indulgence*' and 'all spectacle must be suspect for both the right and the left because it bypasses rationality to appeal directly to the desire for pleasure' (Paul 1994, 421, 16; emphasis in original). Tracing the debates surrounding bad-taste cinema and its supposed effect on vulnerable 'young people', Paul concludes that a film's moral content cannot be

equated with an educational experience, since the film is spectacle rather than instructional: 'No matter what kind of attitudinizing one may try to encase in them, there always remains something of an appeal in the *shows* of violence' (1994, 12). This spectacle of violence increasingly characterises the tone of *Zom-B* as it reaches its climax. Furthermore, like the films Paul explores, its concluding scene is merely a prelude to the next instalment, not a summation of its moral and educational content. The sacrifice of B to the zombie horde is framed as punishment for B's racism, but really it is a necessary plot turn enabling the next instalment in the series in which B is resurrected, and the whole carnival of gross-out horror is repeated.

Paul suggests that there is something of the carnivalesque in the public, mass enjoyment of films denoted as 'bad taste'. This is the 'laff riot', a public 'circus of bad taste' (Paul 1994, 13). Whilst gross-out aesthetics produce a spectacle that undercuts the educational function of cultural products, the 'laff riot' tag-line attached to many gross-out films politicises the act of spectating. The deliberately incorrect spelling offers an 'aggressive assertion that the phonetic attempt of an uneducated writer, the "wrong" way, is in fact the right way. After all, we don't go to "'laff riots" for schooling' (Paul 1994, 13). The 'laff riot' positions the spectator in opposition to the pedagogical intent of the text. The title of the series as a whole offers this laff riot structure *en abyme* since it explicitly rejects proper spelling in its hybridisation of zombie and B, though it is perhaps most evident in Shan's eighth novel, *Zom-B Circus* (2014). Set in a circus run by mutants who prey upon the survivors of post-zombie apocalypse London, *Zom-B Circus* follows one of B's former teachers, whose family is being held as collateral so that she will perform humiliating and dangerous acts for the assembled crowd of mindless zombies and mutants. The teacher is ostensibly being taught a lesson: she has treated many people

badly in her bid to survive the apocalypse, and must now sacrifice herself to save her family. In the end, she makes the 'right' choice, but the ringmaster, a grotesque mutant clown, kills her family anyway, jettisoning her infant nephew from a cannon over the stadium walls (Shan 2014b, n.p). Throughout the novella, the reader is positioned as a spectator. Originally, the teacher is set up in opposition to the reader because of her selfish behaviour (echoing *Zom-B*), but becomes a more sympathetic character when she is captured. However, the circus setting ultimately positions the reader as a spectator of gleeful violence as the supposed 'lesson' comes to nothing, subsumed in a gory carnivalesque spectacle played at the expense of a figure of authority, the teacher.

The laff riot of *Zom-B* complicates the class demarcations the novel seeks to emphasise. A gross-out aesthetic is embraced by working-class B who embraces the 'lowest common denominator as an aesthetic principle' (Paul 1994, 3). When B is first introduced she is viewing a video of a supposed zombie outbreak in Ireland. B and her father 'crack up laughing' as B jokes about what they would do if zombies really attacked: 'Put my head between my legs and kiss my arse good-bye!' (Shan 2012a, 16) B watches the clip over and over, noting the now familiar scream of the woman when a zombie 'chews off a chunk of her skull' as well as the distinct sound of the camera-man vomiting. An illustration accompanies this description, emphasising B's perspective as spectator. Despite the gruesome details, B describes the footage as a 'bit of fun' (Shan 2012a, 19). Unlike the ideal reading child, B rejects education for the spectacle of gross-out, participating in the 'gleeful uninhibitedness' of the laff riot, watching the news footage as though it were a 'video nasty' (Paul 1994, 20). B narrates in the language of the 'laff riot', rambunctious, rowdy and profane. She is callous about the slaughter onscreen,

laughing along with her dad's racist and sexist comments. However, B's assertive response in the face of the zombie crisis reframes her as active and engaged, not a mindless spectator.

Indeed, B's narration and her role as active spectator offer a direct contrast to the novel's prologue, which describes the fate of a young boy in Ireland, Brian Barry, who passively watches the zombie attack. 'Crying, moaning, shivering', Brian watches helplessly as his mother devours his father (Shan 2012a, 6). He aimlessly wanders the streets looking for 'a police officer, a teacher, a priest … anyone' before falling prey to a zombie who 'feasts' upon his brain (Shan 2012a, 6, 11). Brian is a nice child, but his demise is retroactively made into a spectacle when B views the news footage. He becomes the object of the spectacle, whilst she is its viewing subject. Though B seems callous, she also conveys an admirable self-sufficiency: 'I head home alone through the dark. And do I worry about zombies? Do I bugger' (Shan 2012a. 29). The shift in narration style also suggests this move from passivity to activity, for whilst Brian is narrated B narrates. A member of the 'laff riot' mob, B is positioned as active and empowered in contrast to the passive child seeking adult guidance.

Eluding objectification: The Zombie as 'lesson'

Initially *Zom-B* draws on a dominant critical discourse that offers the zombie as an object lesson. Shan's authorial commentary echoes some of the central tenets of 'Zombie Studies', a body of criticism that tends to position the zombie as a negative cultural metaphor and a symbolic indicator of social anxiety or social crisis. Recent adult zombie texts are informed by this critical discourse, too. Fred Botting notes

that in the novel *Breathers: A Zombie's Lament* (2009), which is a zombie 'inversion' text that portrays the zombies sympathetically, the zombies are 'crassly' analogous to African-Americans in pre-Civil rights era United States (Botting 2012a, 30). Another recent 'inversion' text, *In the Flesh*, which aired a year after the publication of *Zom-B*, makes a similar move and uses the plight of its sentient zombie protagonist to work through issues of othering, scapegoating and civil rights in contemporary Britain, against a real-world political back-drop of anti-immigration rhetoric and increasing racism. *In the Flesh* and *Breathers* thus turn monstrosity 'to a good and moral purpose – a warning about the fate of the world in crisis' (Botting 2012a, 28–29). When Shan announces his intent to use the zombie to teach his readers about racism, he echoes a reading of the zombie already common in adult zombie texts and zombie criticism.

This use of the zombie belongs to a 'social anxiety' or 'socio-symbolic' reading model in which the zombie serves a broadly left-wing politics as a lesson about the degraded conditions of humanity in post-modern, late-capitalist consumer society. In an overview of 'Zombie Studies', Todd Platts claims that critics tend to read zombies as 'a monstrous tabula rasa whose construction registers extant social anxieties', citing Kyle Bishop (2009), Peter Dendle (2007) and Shawn McIntosh (2008), among others (2013, 547).[9] Peter Dendle notes that 'the zombie holocausts vividly painted in movies and video games have tapped into a deep-seated anxiety about society, government, individual protection, and our increasing disconnectedness', adding that in recent fiction the zombie has become 'increasingly nihilistic' (2007, 54). This critical narrative is echoed in commentary from popular

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[9] See Kyle Bishop (2009) 'Dead Man Still Walking: Explaining the Zombie Renaissance' (2009) in *Journal of Popular Film and Television,* 37 (1): 16-25; Peter Dendle (2007) 'The Zombie as barometer of cultural anxiety' in *Monsters and the Monstrous* ed. Niall Scott, New York: Rodopi, pp. 45-57 and Shawn McIntosh (2008) 'The Evolution of the Zombie: The Monster that keeps coming back', in *Zombie Culture: Autopsies of the Living Dead* ed. Mark Leverette and Shawn McIntosh, Lanham: Scarecrow Press, pp. 1-17.

culture too, in feature articles such as 'Night of the Living Metaphor' from the *Independent* in 2013 (Haynes 2011), the *Guardian's* 2009 article 'March of the Zombie' (Billson 2009), and *The New York Times'* comparison of modern life to a 'zombie onslaught' (Klosterman 2010). I find this dominant critical reading of zombies persuasive in relation to specific texts, specifically those that, like *In the Flesh,* draw on and thus confirm the critical discourse. However, this discourse has become something of a master narrative used by critics to homogenise a broad and varied body of work. Reading zombies in *Dawn of the Dead* as symbolic of the 'mindless consumer' caught up in a 'capitalist economy fuelled by a pathological need for growth' is convincing in relation to the specific (Dendle 2007, 51). Indeed, the film asks to be read in these terms. However, to argue that 'the zombie holocausts vividly painted in movies and video games have tapped into a deep-seated anxiety about society, government, individual protection and our increasing disconnectedness from subsistence skills' makes a conceptual leap from the particular to the general that I find less persuasive overall (Dendle 2007, 54).

The zombie as object lesson has been developed further recently in the emergent discourse of 'zombie pedagogy', which puts forward the idea that zombies are 'good to think with' (Gonzalez-Tennant 2013). Higher Education classrooms have recently embraced the zombie. In the US, Monmouth university offers a course titled 'Zombies: Social Anxiety and Pop Culture'; in the UK, the 2013 Higher Education Academy conference featured a keynote on 'Zombie Pedagogies' by American academic Jesse Stommel. Gonzalez-Tennant notes that zombies reveal 'cultural reactions to social anxiety' and that 'analysing zombie cinema supports a critical engagement with the unrecognized ways media can influence our understanding of cultural difference' (2013). In this zombie pedagogy, the zombie is

located as an object of social and cultural utility, and does not provide a positive formulation of identity and subjectivity.

These zombie pedagogies meet resistance in the body of the zombie, who is located both as antagonist and protagonist in *Zom-B*. In *Zom-B,* the zombie is the antagonist against whom B pits herself in order to escape the slaughter of the school. At the climax, B shoves a class-mate into the zombies at the behest of her racist father, but immediately regrets the action. Acknowledging that she must pay for her behaviour, she decides to

> take my chances among the zombies [rather] than go along with the racist beast who made me kill Tyler Bayor […] That's the last thing I see in this life, Tyler chewing on my heart, grinning viciously – revenge is obviously as sweet as people always said it was. (Shan 2012a, 141)

B's first-person commentary makes the moral lesson overt as she tells her father, 'you're a bigger monster than any bloody monster' (Shan 2012a, 197). The snarling, mindless zombie is equated with racism, aggression, and small-mindedness, with all the 'bad' ideologies the book aims to critique. At the same time, however, the zombie is also the victim (Tyler Bayor), a figure scapegoated by racist ideology, made monstrous by hate. As Tyler kills B, the zombie then becomes the avenger, meting out a gory punishment to the wrong-doer. The lesson embodied by the zombie thus becomes increasingly hard to read, not least since B's death is also an act of sacrifice that cements her position in the narrative as hero. Tyler's vicious grin further counters the moral lesson and the scene offers up a spectacle of violence for its own sake as the formerly meek Tyler enacts gleeful revenge. Thus, *Zom-B* locates

the zombie in multiple and competing functions within its pedagogical structure and it becomes increasingly unclear what the zombie *means.*

B's transformation into zombie forms the biggest stumbling block for Shan's expressed pedagogical intent. Rather than functioning as a final punishment, B's sacrifice offers a release from a fraught identity constructed around problematic binaries of class and gender. Through this transformation the zombie becomes a subject, not an object; active, rather than passive. In the second novel, *Zom-B Underground*, B adjusts to life as a zombie, incarcerated in an underground military base. She is asked to watch CCTV footage that shows her in a mindless state, attacking and eating a living person. The military organization which has captured B offers the footage as a lesson *and* a threat. They want to convince B that she is a monster, and could easily degenerate if she does not cooperate. They threaten to withhold food (processed human brain), which would cause B to return to a savage state. The footage is also offered as a teaching moment for the imagined reader, and prompts an extended passage of reflection from B, who recalls the words of a former teacher, Mr Burke: 'always remember that you might be the most black-hearted and mean spirited [person] of the lot, so hold yourself the most accountable of all' (Shan 2013b, 56). B initially objectifies the monster onscreen as the part of her identity that is being punished, dutifully promising to 'never forget' her reprehensible behaviour. At the same time, however, B explains that a place must be found within the self to 'house the horror, somewhere close to the surface, but not too close that it would get in the way of everything else' (Shan 2013b, 57). Though B's narration overtly moralises, it also discloses a problem for Shan's pedagogy: neither the series format, nor the zombie narrative, have space for continual moralising and introspection, for

accusations of guilt and accountability. The fast-paced zombie serial, and its zombie hero, must leave the pedagogical structure of the first novel behind.

The footage of B also offers an image of the zombie as active subject, able to refuse the controlling power structure of the pedagogical text, to elude its controlling gaze. At first, B is horrified as she watches herself: 'All I can do is keep my eyes pinned on the girl – the *monster* – on the screen and stare' (Shan 2013b, 52). In terms suggested by Foucault and Deleuze, the CCTV camera is a *dispositif* in service of State power, the military organization. It acts as a go between, positioning B in a negative relationship with the image of herself, producing a line of force that makes the zombie visible and gives it negative meaning (Deleuze 1992, 160). The controlling gaze behind the camera is emphatically a male gaze, and it is the male military scientist, Dr Cerveris, who first offers the word 'monster' to interpret the images onscreen. Becky's narration initially echoes his analysis:

> The zombie has cut the boy's head open and is digging out bits of his brain, spooning them into its mouth with none distorted fingers. It looks like a drug-addict on a happy high. The boy's arms are still shaking - he must be alive, at least technically. The zombie doesn't care. It goes on munching, ignorant of the trembling arms, the soldiers, everything.
>
> The zombie is a girl.
>
> The zombie is *me.* (Shan 2013b, 52)

Objectifying herself as the lesson, B at first refuses to positively identify with her image. Yet, the zombie onscreen disrupts this objectifying gaze through its uninhibited action. She ignores the soldiers, the camera, 'everything'; she is focused only on the pleasure of feeding. This pleasure reconfigures the initially

uncomfortable moment of identification as a spectacle, offering a position of distance for B, from which she can reflect on her new condition. Later, she thinks about the footage and considers her newly formed body. Though she admits that she has done 'plenty to be ashamed of', she does not reject her strong limbs, sharpened senses, nor her new appetites (Shan 2013b, 56). The forward movement of the plot demand that B must move on from her guilt, but B also begins to enjoy her monstrous body, announcing she is ready to 'face the world again' and so reconfiguring the zombie as an active participant, not passive object (Shan 2013b, 57).

As a zombie, B is sometimes heroic, sometimes selfish, but her actions continue to be described in the gory language of gross-out, which reveals uncontrollable appetites. Although reflections on morality and ethics continue to feature in B's narration, her zombie body is simply not subject to the same rules as a living body. Her evident delight in feeding on human brains recurs in many scenes, emphasising an appetite that resists objectification and passivity. As I have noted, a language of nourishment recurs in children's literature criticism, in which feeding is an act ascribed to the book (and its adult author), whilst the reading child is passively positioned as the one who is fed. Nikolajeva notes this passivity as she asserts that the child must 'learn to be critical toward what [it is] fed' (2010, 189). However, the child she imagines is rendered passive *a priori* since it is in the position of having to be taught these critical faculties by the text. This paradoxical proposition draws upon a vocabulary of nourishment and feeding freighted with a number of assumptions about the power dynamic between adult writer and child reader, and the text's responsibility to nourish the child in the right way.

In *Zom-B,* however, feeding is a gleeful unsanctioned act, offering a rabid sensory pleasure. Though initially sickened by the image of herself feeding, B nonetheless notes that the zombie 'looks like a drug addict on a happy high' (Shan 2012a, 52). Later, as a zombie, B admits to the desire to 'tuck into fresh, warm brains' (Shan 2013a, 196). She describes her own ravenous feeding when she stumbles on a corpse in the street:

> Like a monstrous baby taking to the teat, I latch on to the shattered bones and suck tendrils of brain from them. I run my tongue the whole way round the rim, not caring about the fact that it's disgusting […] In fact I'm ecstatic, getting an unbelievable buzz from the grey scraps, feeling myself strengthen as I suck. (Shan 2013a, 17)

B's description of herself as a 'monstrous baby' recalls and subverts the feminised figure of the reading child of children's literature criticism. Cogan-Thacker and Webb argue for a long-standing and lingering association between stories for children and 'mother's milk', a metaphor that denotes the nurturing function of stories for children (2002, 21). B is 'strengthened' by her feeding, but the body that feeds her lies grotesquely inert and passive, a decaying corpse. Thus the scene offers not a rejection of the model of feeding imagined by pedagogical formulations of children's literature, but a grotesque and parodic re-figuration of this act of feeding, one that refuses to locate 'being fed' in the passive position.

In *Zom-B* nourishment does not lead to growth and so undercuts the preferred pedagogy of children's literature. Though B needs human brains to survive, her inert zombie digestive system rejects the majority of what is consumed. Brains must be vomited back up, or else left to rot inside the dry tubes that once processed nutrients:

> I can no longer process food or drink the normal way […] it would sit in my
> guts, turn putrid and decay, unaided by digestive juices. The bits that broke
> down into liquid would flow through me and dribble out, meaning I'd have to
> wear a nappy. The solids would stay inside me indefinitely. If I ate enough,
> they'd back up in my stomach and throat. (Shan 2013b, 29)

Zombie consumption produces no growth. Instead food is regurgitated by a grotesque body incapable of nourishment. This dried-up zombie body counters a positive image of the Bakhtinian grotesque, which offers a body in tune with natural processes, a space of transition and fluidity. In Bakhtin, vomiting, along with 'urine and other eliminations' that the zombie body cannot produce, connotes the interconnectedness of life and death, and is related to the 'lower stratum of the body and with earth' (Bakhtin 1984a, 180). In Bakhtin's grotesque, the bodily element is 'deeply positive' and politically subversive as it counters the 'private and egotistic' forms of high culture, with something 'universal, representing all the people' (1984, 19). *Zom-B* invokes elements of the carnival in its gory spectacle of consumption and vomiting, but its zombie remains undecidable, rather than politically radical. The zombie body is a stumbling block, an inert receptacle, lacking the ability to process and change and the zombie eating offers gory spectacle, in which the pedagogical language of nourishment can find no purchase. This is a body that cannot be co-opted for a subversive politics any more than it can act as object lesson for pedagogical purposes.

Zombies, they're us: the Female Grotesque

"Zombies, they're us" is an often repeated critical adage in Gothic Studies, but it is not a positive symbolic identification and it fails to account for the affirmative subjectivity figured by the zombie in children's fiction. First, 'zombies, they're us' treats the zombie as a unit of the mass; it is undifferentiated and only symbolic in generalised terms. As this symbol of the masses, the zombie is mindless and blank, a fact that Platts acknowledges when he calls the zombie a 'tabula rasa' (2013, 547). Replete with significance on the one hand, representative of all manner of social anxieties, the zombie is, on the other hand, empty. Dendle describes the zombie as a symbol of 'supplanted, stolen, or effaced consciousness' (2007, 47). David Flint's assessment of the zombie in contemporary culture offers further evidence of this negative formulation of the zombie:

> The zombie rose to prominence during these turbulent years because zombies
> […] represented modern fears. A truly 20th century horror figure, the zombie
> […] spoke directly to audiences who felt that civilisation was collapsing
> around them. The apocalypse seemed close, and zombie movies, with their
> unstoppable, expanding army of monsters who couldn't be reasoned with and
> who acted without feeling or emotion, seemed to capture a feeling of mass
> helplessness. (2009, 7)

The 'modern fears' of the 'audience' are invoked here as a troubling generalisation about what zombies mean to writers and audiences. Flint's zombie lacks agency, becoming simply a passive receptacle for the fears of the reader. There is no possibility for pleasure in recognising the zombie as 'us' in this way, nor any reading

available that might counter a gloomy perspective on popular culture as the mirror of social breakdown and cultural catastrophe.

As Fred Botting has argued, 'zombies, they're us' is not a positive symbolic identification in zombie studies because zombies 'never seem satisfied, nor achieve the fullness of consumption or completion of death … Zombies are aimless, useless, destructive … they have "no positive connotations whatsoever" (Wood, 1986: 118)' (Botting 2013, 196). The identification with the zombie may seem to contain an element of attraction, but this attraction functions only to bring about expulsion: 'They're us. The identification may be desirable in that they are free from death, self-consciousness, enjoyment. It is also unbearable and demands expulsion' (Botting 2013, 200). Moreover, this critical act of identification is also an attempt to distance the zombie even as it claims it. This is signalled by the third person plural, 'they', and by the physical arrangement of the film scene in which the phrase is first uttered. In *Dawn of the Dead* (1978), Peter identifies the zombies as 'us' whilst stood upon a high rooftop, looking down at the zombie hoard gathered outside the mall. He is distanced from them, not one of the clamouring, mindless mass. Similarly, critics who make the identification now are also not identifying with the helpless, exploited masses they see represented in the zombie hoard. Zombies might be 'us', but they are very rarely 'me'.

Recent inversion texts seem to counter this process of (non)identification by making the zombies the protagonists, encouraging identification with the monster. Whilst some of these texts may have influenced Shan to cast the zombie as hero in *Zom-B,* I contend that their strategy, articulated by Botting as the exhortation to 'love your zombie', necessarily works to counter the trend towards non-identification and negative symbolic reading. There continues to be limited pleasure available in the

identification with the zombie since the lines that have been crossed during the inversion are usually redrawn by the close of the narrative (Botting 2012a, 31). The close of the film *Warm Bodies,* for example, sees the zombie protagonist transform back into a handsome, living human – his monstrous state revealed as only temporary. Thus, 'love your zombie' is not really an affirmation of otherness. Even in *Breathers,* where no cure is found, the pleasures that are momentarily expressed in identifying with a zombie body and its excessive desires end up being co-opted in service of a modernist politics, which rejects the pleasures of the here and now. Botting argues that the central 'drive' of *Breathers* 'seeks something other than an exhausted rapacious condition of equivalently consumptive zombie-humanity' (Botting 2012a, 34). However, 'something other' is never achieved and the identification with the zombie ultimately expresses a 'world-weary and worn out' attitude (Botting 2012a, 34). Thus, in these 'inversion' texts, Botting's observation stands: 'While humans can be zombiefied, zombies […] rarely find themselves humanized' (2012a, 26).

I offer Shan's B as a counter to these 'sympathetic' zombies of adult Gothic; B's grotesque zombie body offers an affirmative identification that eludes expulsion. Moreover, B as a zombie not only reimagines this negative symbolic identification, but also returns to the text elements of class and gender that the pedagogical project of children's literature seeks to disavow. Disavowed classed and gender identities not reconcilable with an idealised image of the 'reading child' return in a grotesque form, repellent *and* attractive. As narrator hero, Shan's zombie destabilises a negative formulation of the zombie found in Gothic Studies and undoes children's literature's identification with a clean, middle-class, reading child. The appearance of zombie B undercuts the structure of the first novel, which offers B as a point of

counter-identification, identifying the zombie as 'me', positioning the reader in identification with a grotesque body. This grotesque body also allows B to escape the uncomfortable gender identification offered to her as a human girl and occupy instead an identity configuration that Mary Russo designates the 'female grotesque'. This configuration allows elements of femininity that were covered over by the necessary performance of masculinity to reassert themselves. Thus the identification strategies already problematised by B's female masculinity break down altogether in the body of the zombie. When B makes the important identification with the zombie on the CCTV footage, this identification is explicitly female: 'The zombie is a girl. The zombie is me' (Shan 2013b, 52). Only when reconfigured as a specifically female zombie can B become a grotesque: unclean, repulsive, beautiful, powerful, ambivalent.

This new configuration is, in Russo's terms, 'painfully conflictual' since it must negotiate the effects of power that seek to limit and contain it (Russo 1994, 159). In *Zom-B Underground* the lines of force against which the zombie resists are mobilised by the military organization, who keep B locked in an underground facility, performing tests and training her to be a fighter. B rebels against their discipline just as she previously rebelled in school, but she also allows her body to be subject to their regimes. In one scene, a medic files B's teeth with a power tool: 'splinters from my teeth went flying back down my throat and up my nose and into my eyes. My teeth got hot from the friction and my gums felt like they were burning' (Shan 2013b, 21). Though this is a violently repressive act, the zombie body offers resistance. B notes the fear on the medic's face and afterwards she realises that her zombie teeth are still incredibly sharp and dangerous. The soldier admits, 'they'll always be sharper than they were' (Shan 2013b, 22). In her time in the military

facility B negotiates repressive force, masochistically enduring the regimes her new body is subject to. In Deleuze and Guattari's terms this is 'less a destruction than an exchange and circulation' (1987, 155). Her grotesque body converts the force applied to it and is able to apply force in return. The majority of B's experiences in this novel chart this circulation of power effects back and forth along lines of force and lines of resistance, but it is only her escape from the facility that realises a line of flight leading out of this power struggle.

B's embodiment of the female grotesque reconfigures markers of masculinity that previously denoted binaristic gender identities required by the hero narrative. Her hair, clothing and attitude remain masculine, though her (now grotesque) female body is made visible. B invokes a tradition of Butch women from Western cinema, exemplified in the figure of Ripley from the *Alien* franchise. For Halberstam, Ripley is not simply a 'stone butch', that is a dysfunctional rejection of womanhood by a self-hating subject who cannot bear her embodiment' (1998, 112). Rather, she offers a model of how female subjects can embody strength and aggression (Halberstam 1998, 186). The aggressive masculinity inscribed on B's body in the excessively long bones that pierce her skin and her sharpened, long teeth echo the prosthetics of heroic masculinity often exhibited by the action hero (Halberstam 1998, 3). There is an element of parody in this grotesquerie. Though the slightest scrape of her extended nails will kill a human, her overgrown teeth make it difficult to talk. At first, she struggles to make herself understood and her attempts to insult a military officer are framed as amusing: '"Skroo you, arsh hohl," I spat' (Shan 2013b, 22). B's aggressive response remains crude and rebellious, but it also constitutes an amusing critique of the excesses of heroic masculinity. Later, when B gains control of her bodily excesses, this aggressive masculinity can coexist with her newly visible

female identity. As a zombie, B is attractive, powerful, female. Though she continues to act in ways determined by a model of aggressive, heroic masculinity, she also uses her powers in new ways. In *Zom-B City,* for example, she walks miles across London to cut down a zombie who has been strung up in the sunlight by cruel zombie-hunters. This shift in behaviour denotes a shift in the self/other, hero/monster, masculine/feminine binaries demanded by the tropes of the hero narrative on which the zombie scenario draws. In her flight from her human identity, and from the military forces that intends to use her body as a weapon, B follows the line of flight of Deleuze's nomadic tribe, who 'swept away everything in their path and found new weapons' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 225).

As a zombie, B is able to identify as feminine in ways her masculine performance previously denied. She examines her ruined body in the mirror of her cell in an act of identification that eludes an objectifying male gaze that fetishises the female body as passive object. John Berger notes that the mirror is a common trope in this Western visual tradition; the mirror positions the woman alongside 'the spectators of herself' (Berger 1972, 50). Previously, B has looked at herself, and other girls, through the male gaze, disavowing and objectifying the feminine. In the first book, she colludes with the boys who share demeaning stories about the girls in their class, commenting on their female bodies whilst hiding her own: 'I was never a girly girl' she admits (Shan 2013b, 15). Now, though, she acknowledges that she used to admire her eyes when she 'was feeling slushy' and expresses sorrow to see this feminine feature has dried up (Shan 2013b, 15). This is a painful recognition that reveals a misogynistic fear of losing one's femininity that is the result of a visual economy that privileges the masculine as bearer of the look and the feminine as 'to-

be-looked-at-ness' (Mulvey 2009, 809). This fear is realised in brutal fashion in B's bodily wounds:

> My right boob is the same as it was before. But my left is missing, torn from my chest […] a fair bit of the flesh around it is missing too. And my heart's been ripped out, leaving an unnatural grisly hole in its place. Bits of bone poke through the flesh around the hole, and I can see all sorts of tubes inside, veins, arteries and what have you. (Shan 2013b, 27)

B literally has a hole for a heart. Her breast is ruined. There is nothing where the bodily signifier of her 'soft' femininity once was. Moreover, she can poke inside of herself, in a grotesque break down of bodily borders. Simply put, B's missing breast is a symbol of her rejected femininity.

However, this grotesquerie does not equate to a rejection of the feminine. Rather, it signals its transfiguration. B proudly displays her wound, deliberately ripping a hole in her t-shirt to make it visible, to display her undead, ruined body. This visibility of her bodily surfaces and disrupted bodily borders suggests that the female grotesque offers a powerful new identity. B studies her body in the mirror a lot and enjoys performing the role of monster and freak for her attractive military handler, Josh: 'I snarl . . . grin ghoulishly. "So I've turned into a big bad wolf. All the better to see, hear and smell you with my dear,"' B teases Josh, the 'good looking guy' (Shan 2013b, 46). Josh becomes the object of desire, B the bearer of a desiring gaze. Thus, the female grotesque allows B to operate outside the logic of the male gaze, allows her to express her desire without being subject herself to an objectifying gaze.

As a female grotesque, B also retains markers of her working-class identity, previously made abject. As Tyler shows in a variety of examples, from reality television programmes to news media, 'depictions of the white working class have always pivoted on appearance and, in particular, on a perceived excess of bodily materiality' (2008, 22). However, excessive bodily materiality and improper bodily functions become routine when B is a zombie and must regurgitate her food: 'The grey stuff come surging back up and I vomit into the bucket, shuddering as I spit the last dregs from my lips. 'Not very ladylike, is it?' I grunt' (Shan 2013b, 30). B's identity has already been contaminated by working-class behaviour – racism, school rebellion and foul-mouthed rambunctiousness – marked with the class disgust identified by Tyler through contemporary popular culture. Here, though, the physical excess of her zombie body is represented as resistance and rebellion, characteristics that mark her as the heroine. After B's transformation into a zombie, there is no uncontaminated identity upon which the text can anchor its image of an ideal reading child. B's grotesquerie remains marked by class but previously revolting aspects of a disavowed working-class identity are coopted into the image of B as a powerful heroine.

As Russo points out, the female grotesque is carnivalesque because it is contingent on spectacle and performance. As such it offers a chance to escape limiting structures of femininity, though not the 'boundless flight' often imagined in narratives of women's liberation or fantasies of artistic transcendence (Russo 1994, 11, 44). Russo understands the female grotesque as a performance 'in error', risky and contingent on probabilities and circumstance (1994, 13, 11). As in my reading of female masculinity, performativity does not, in itself, offer freedom. In Banks's *The Wasp Factory* femaleness is figured as 'an unfortunate disability', a disavowal

only remedied, in Schoene-Harwood's reading, by the revelation of the performative nature of gender (Banks 1998, 17; Schoene-Harwood 1999, 133). In contrast, the female grotesque is performative, but it offers a performance that acknowledges the ways femaleness continues to be figured as a disability in relation to masculinity, a disability that the performance can only partially rehabilitate. B's female grotesque zombie identity transforms her into a freak, a performance that remains full of error. Like Russo's female grotesques, B is one of the 'odd, frightening women […] stashed somewhere in the sideshow' (Russo 1994, 51). Rather than consigning female subjectivity to the side-lines, however, or placing it under scrutiny of the gaze, the image of the side-show freak provides a position from which to make trouble. B as the female grotesque offers a 'space of risk', a brief chance for transformation, rather than an image of sustained forward progress (Russo 1994, 11). B's experiences as a zombie will not lead to maturity or progress, since she will remain forever trapped within her ruined (adolescent) body. Nonetheless, this body offers opportunities to create trouble, displaying 'irony and courage in the face of danger, ridicule, disbelief, injury or even death' (Russo 1994, 13).

The female grotesque becomes a powerful spectacle offering a chance for aerial freedom in contrast to the earthy grotto of an essentialised grotesque. Considering the usefulness of Deleuze's line of flight for transgender identity, Fournier counters Deleuze's translator who insists that a line of flight 'has no relation to flying'. Fournier argues that its English translation 'suggests an Icarian figure, an escape too glorious to already have happened but still there, open, somewhere between "right now" and the closest future' (2014, 122). This flight is staged in *Zom-B Baby* (2014) when B is challenged to climb the London Eye by a male rival, Rage. The climb is agonising, but B beats Rage to the top and with a

'triumphant shout' finds something of the aerial freedom promised by the female grotesque as she hangs on the uppermost pod. The chance opened up here is small and temporary, though. Rage promptly pushes B off the top of the Eye and she 'plummet[s] towards the river like a stone' (Shan 2014a, 89). B's strong zombie body survives the fall, but the shock of it prompts her to reassess her situation. Yet again, B decides to leave behind the group she has been staying with and make it on her own in London: 'I turn my back and head off into the wilderness, abandoning the promise of friendship and redemption, becoming just another of the city's many lost, lonely, godforsaken souls' (Shan 2014a, 101). The grotesque as 'female bodily performance' in this sequence celebrates B's agile body as it beats the macho Rage to the top of the Eye (Russo 1994, 22). There is a brief moment of exhilaration associated with aerial elevation before B comes crashing back down. The brief moment of aerial freedom allows B to remobilise her nomadic trajectory, and she moves on seeking new territory. As a nomadic subject, then, the female grotesque does not follow the sustained forward movement of progress, but embodies a constant motion that opens up temporary spaces for freedom and affirmative embodiment.

Conclusions: Beyond Pedagogy

Throughout my analysis I have sought to show how the zombie of children's Gothic begins its life in the classroom, but is able to chart a route to another territory, a 'line of flight' towards another mode of being, one that is able, to some extent, to elude the 'relations between forces' in play in paradoxical pedagogical formulations of children's literature (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 122). Just as the Baudelaire orphans

in *A Series of Unfortunate Events* decide not to remain shipwrecked, B's flight is not a 'running away from the world' but a trajectory that flows away from the grasp of repressive power relations, symbolised by the school, teachers, doctors and military organisations who constantly attempt to bring her under their control (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 225). The zombie body may be a ruined body, but it does not enact a disavowal of either the masculine or the feminine, allowing a grotesque interplay between the two that complicates a pedagogical structure seeking to identify a particular idealised reading child. This newly grotesque, ambivalent zombie is designated 'me' and does not operate as a point of counter-identification or object lesson on behalf of a pedagogical project. Instead, the zombie body offers a risky opportunity of flight and freedom from restrictive conceptions of gender and class. Darren Shan's zombies display their gross-out lineage in their decaying, gruesome bodies and shows of gory violence. As such, they prove a difficult figuration for a pedagogical project: they are neither suitable objects nor subjects. The zombie is a spectacle of gory violence, offering pleasure to its 'laff riot' audience, not a lesson. Moreover, unlike the reading child, the zombie is not a maturing or learning subject, so nor can it be subject to pedagogy. Thus, in *Zom-B* the zombie becomes a figuration of identity that avoids the active/passive and subject/object binaries built into pedagogical formulations of children's literature. Furthermore, this zombie counters formulations of the zombie extant in Gothic Studies, which also positions the zombie as an object lesson. In children's literature, the zombie is a nomad, neither a teachable nor teaching object.

Chapter 3

Exiled Lovers:

Gothic Romance in Jamila Gavin's *Coram Boy* and

Paula Morris's *Ruined*

Introduction: Rethinking Romance, Refiguring Desire

Where the previous chapter identified a male reading child imagined by children's literature and its critics, this chapter alternatively explores the female reader constructed by Gothic literature and criticism. In *Zom-B* the imagined male reader is courted through gross-out aesthetics and the evocation of a 'masculine' horror tradition. In contrast, *Coram Boy* (2000) by Jamila Gavin and *Ruined* (2009) by Paula Morris evoke a 'feminine' tradition of Gothic Romance. This 'feminine' tradition is separated from 'masculine' Gothic in both critical discourse and popular commentary. Often, these gendered histories of Gothic disavow Romance and devalue female readers. Gavin and Morris counter gendered evaluations of Gothic by rewriting tropes from eighteenth-century Gothic Romance alongside love stories typically associated with mass-market romance fiction. Bringing Romance to the fore of Gothic, *Coram Boy* and *Ruined* partake in a postmillennial 'feminine' turn in Gothic writing that reveals a mutually constitutive relationship between Gothic and Romance, refiguring Gothic's denigrated female reader as an active, nomadic subject.

By rewriting Romance, *Ruined* and *Coram Boy* mobilise the affective power of desire as theorised by Benedict de Spinoza. In Spinoza's *Ethics* desire expresses a

foundational human essence, or *conatus*, that propels the subject to active self-dependence and self-affirmation (Spinoza 1996, 104). Spinoza's desiring subject is positively self-determined, a nomad propelled by an 'ontological force of becoming' (Braidotti 2011b, 21). I draw on this formulation of desire to suggest that Romance promotes agency rather than passivity in its indulgence of romantic desire. Expounding Spinoza, Beth Lord argues that desire promotes agency because pleasure increases the body and mind's ability to act: 'when we feel good, our being swells' (2010, 100). In relation to romantic desire, Lord asserts that the subject feels joy when they are esteemed by another, and draws power from imagining themselves as the cause of another person's love and affection (2010, 95). Lord draws on Spinoza's formulation of love as an affirmatory affective experience for both self and other: 'the greater the affect with which we imagine a thing we love to be affected towards us, the more we shall exult at being esteemed' (Spinoza 1996, 88). In their recourse to a romantic narrative that fulfils this desire to love, and be loved by, another, *Coram Boy* and *Ruined* position the romantic heroine in an active role. Evoking a positive formulation of desire, postmillennial children's fiction reveals that Gothic has long been shaped by a positive feminine desire that provides 'a recipe for transformation, motion, becoming' (Braidotti 2011a, 114). Deborah Lutz argues that Romance is a feminine tradition shaped by 'a woman's aesthetic' and 'what women desire' (2006, xi). In *Coram Boy* and *Ruined*, these desires are figured as compatible with a feminist literary project that interrogates patriarchal narratives that confine or limit women. Accordingly, the female reader of Romance is constructed not as a passive consumer or dupe, repetitively rereading the same unsatisfying stories, but as actively seeking positive transformation through openness towards other subjectivities.

The desire mobilised in these works of Gothic Romance posits itself in opposition to psychoanalytical theories of desire as lack. Rather than 'the entropic and negative theory of desire [found] in Hegel, Freud, and Lacan … [it is] a notion of desire that is not built on lack but rather constitutes a powerful force in itself (Braidotti 2011b, 21). This notion of desire counters a critical discourse that posits romance reading as a compensatory act. In her foundational study on Romance, Janice Radway draws on a psychoanalytic theory of desire as lack to argue that the nurturance demands placed on women by a patriarchal family structure produce an 'emotional drain' that is appeased by romance reading (1991, 57). Radway suggests that readers' 'lack of emotional nurturance combined with the high costs of lavishing constant attention on others is the primary motivation behind the desire to lose the self in a book' (1991, 94). For Radway, the Romance is 'first and foremost' the story of what it feels like to be 'the object of someone else's attention and solicitude' (1991, 64). In identifying with the heroine, women are 'telling themselves a story whose central vision is one of total surrender … she is required to do nothing more than exist as the centre of this paragon's attention' (Radway 1991, 97). Radway argues that Romance performs a compensatory function, but is ultimately unfulfilling, since the persistence of the lack and the failure of the narrative to address it fully, leads to repetitive reading (1991, 9). However, the romantic plots of *Coram Boy* and *Ruined* position the heroine not as a passive object, but active agent. The romantic plot is not compensatory, but acts as a prompt to discovery, action and transformation (of self and others). Gavin and Morris thus aim at an active female reader without disavowing the aesthetic and sensual pleasures licensed by romantic fantasy.

Through Romance, children's Gothic further constructs nomadic subjectivity and, in so doing, produces a non-binary map of Gothic. Gothic is not separated from Romance, and 'feminine' concerns are not devalued in favour of a 'masculine' horror tradition. Indeed, Gothic Romance constitutes an interface in which desire traverses categories and connects male and female subjects in a mututally transformative relationship. As Braidotti contends, 'desire need not be conceptualized according to the murderous logic of dialectical oppositions', but can produce an in-between space, a flow of self into other (2011a, 131). Conceiving of desire as active, of the beloved as agent, and of the romantic plot as charting the interconnectedness of self and other, *Coram Boy* and *Ruined* imagine a nomadic subject that affirms itself through its desire to be with others. In this figuration of desire as relational, gendered categorisations, which separate and differently value 'masculine' and 'feminine' forms of Gothic, collapse.

The Disavowal (and return) of Romance

Coram Boy and *Ruined* occupy very different publishing contexts and represent two distinct types of Romance. *Coram Boy* is a historical Romance, published just before the critical discourse championing Gothic for children began to gain dominance. The novel won the Whitbread Children's Book Award before going on to adaptation as a popular stage play. *Coram Boy* also won acclaim in the educational establishment. It is taught in Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 classrooms throughout the UK as a historical novel. Educational teaching materials on the text have been published by Heinemann. In contrast, Paula Morris's *Ruined* (2009) represents a form of pop-cultural Romance, following Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* (2004) and the burgeoning

popularity of 'Paranormal Romance' in Young Adult publishing. Whilst *Coram Boy* deploys Romance in its earliest sense as a literary mode dealing with past times and other places, *Ruined* deploys Romance in the sense of its popular usage to describe mass-market romantic fiction of the twentieth century. Accordingly, *Ruined* appears in Scholastic's *Point* series, home to category romance fiction explicitly targeting a 'teen' audience.[10] The series includes titles such as *The Lonely Hearts Club* (2010) by Elizabeth Eulbery and *Girls in Love* (2010) by Hayley Abbott.

Despite these different publishing contexts, *Ruined* and *Coram Boy* reveal the different ways Romance is integral to Gothic narratives. Both rewrite conventions from eighteenth-century Gothic Romance within narratives charting a romantic relationship between hero and heroine. *Coram Boy* contains many elements typical of eighteenth-century Gothic Romance: an aristocratic family feud, an illegitimate child, and a tyrannical patriarchal villain whose past sins haunt the present in ghostly form. However, rather than focusing on a single Gothic heroine, *Coram Boy* focuses on a group of children, and on the male hero in particular. Alexander Ashbrook is stifled by his domineering father, Lord Ashbrook, and the expectation he will take over the family estate in Gloucester. His passions are for music and for Melissa, a poor ward of the family. Unable to pursue either, Alex flees the family home to find employment as a musician in London, unaware Melissa has borne their illegitimate child. Melissa is persuaded to give the child to the 'Coram Man', an unscrupulous peddler who takes unwanted babies ostensibly to deliver them to the charitable 'Coram' hospital in London, though most end up in a shallow grave on the roadside.

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[10] "Category Romance" here refers to mass-market romance fiction that rose to popularity in the US and UK in the 1950s when publishers such as Harlequin, Silhouette and Dell and Fawcett, who had been taken over by large conglomerates, sought to construct a guaranteed audience of middle-class women by producing romance titles to a particular formula, then distributing these titles as cheap paperbacks through supermarkets. Initially, publishers sought to reproduce the reprint success of Gothic titles such as *Rebecca* by commissioning 'Gothics' following a set formula. However, the field rapidly diversified into various subgenres. See Janice Radway, *Reading the Romance* (1991), pp 25-31.

In its second part, the novel follows the fortunes of Aaron, Alex and Melissa's son, and his friend Toby, both orphans in care of the Coram Hospital. The boys fall foul of the 'Coram Man', now posing as a respectable merchant and patron to the orphanage. Like Walpole's Manfred, this Gothic villain is a fraud, but his crimes are those of the emergent capitalist bourgeoisie, not of a decaying aristocracy. The Coram Man supplements his profits from the Slave Trade by trafficking children from the hospital to clients overseas. Following the trajectory of eighteenth-century Gothic, the narrative of *Coram Boy* culminates in the revelation of family secrets and of the corrupt deeds of the Coram Man, allowing the Ashbrook family to reunite, restoring Aaron to his rightful place as Alex's heir and allowing Melissa and Alex to marry.

Gavin recontextualises Gothic Romance in a number of ways. Though she offers a romantic plot in the relationship between Melissa and Alex, she refocuses her narrative on male friendship. The novel opens by describing the friendship between aristocratic Alex and his lower-class friend Thomas, as they study together at the Cathedral School. In the second part of the novel, this male friendship is repeated as Aaron and Toby work together to uncover the corruption of the hospital's patron. Gavin also relocates what Hogle calls the 'falsified antiquity' of eighteenth-century Gothic Romance, typically figured as medieval Catholic Europe, to eighteenth-century London (Hogle 2012, 498). Gavin thus disrupts the 'progress of abjection' in which anxieties plaguing middle-class Western identities 'are cast off into antiquated and "othered" beings' (Hogle 2012, 499). Though the novel is set in a London of the past, this is not the London of antiquity, but of incipient modernity, the very moment Gothic crystallises as a literary genre. Deploying Romance as a critique of Britain's colonial history, specifically its involvement in

the Slave Trade, Gavin further counters what Robert Miles sees as Gothic's presentation of medieval barbarity as 'abject material … that must be expelled from the national body' (Miles 2001, 61). Gavin's villains are British merchants and officials, not foreigners. Gavin thus deploys Romance, in its sense as a story of the past, to refigure early middle-class Britain not as enlightened and progressive, but corrupt and barbaric.

Eschewing the historical setting of literary Romance, *Ruined* is set in contemporary New Orleans and follows a teenage girl, Rebecca, who has been left with her Aunt Claudia in an unfamiliar town whilst her father is away on business. As well as finding romance with a mysterious and handsome boy from a rich family, the heroine finds herself bound up in a supernatural mystery when she meets the ghost of a black girl, Lisette, in Lafayette Cemetery. Lisette's tragic history leads Rebecca to investigate New Orleans's most respectable and wealthiest family, The Bowmans. Rebecca uncovers the infidelity of the family's patriarch and the murder of his illegitimate daughter, Lisette, revealing the origin of a supernatural curse that has caused the death of a Bowman girl every generation for two hundred years. Though it is marketed as Paranormal Romance*, Ruined* draws on the same tropes of eighteenth-century Gothic as *Coram Boy*. It tells the story of an orphaned heroine (Rebecca's mother is dead and her father is absent) discovering her aristocratic birth-right after being persecuted by a corrupt aristocratic family. Rebecca discovers she is a member of the Bowman family, and the revelation of her identity undoes the curse that has haunted the family since the murder of Lisette two hundred years before. Joseph Crawford notes that Paranormal Romance novels typically focus on a romantic relationship between the heroine and a mysterious romantic hero (2014, 63). However, *Ruined* places the Gothic mystery centrally, with the romantic plot

between Rebecca and Anton acting in support. The romance between Rebecca and Anton is paralleled by the strong interconnection between Rebecca and Lisette, suggesting the importance of female friendship and multiple relationality for the emergence of an active Gothic heroine. Furthermore, like *Coram Boy, Ruined* also deploys Romance in its sense as a story of the past to interrogate colonial histories, here revealing the racial inequalities produced by the Slave Trade, inequalities that Rebecca recognises as continuing to shape present-day New Orleans.

Ruined and *Coram Boy* weave the popular Romance (a love story) *and* the literary Romance (a story set in another time and place) into a Gothic narrative of violence, transgression and haunting, problematising existing critical formulations of Gothic that reject Romance as inimical to Gothic transgression. As Crawford argues, Gothic 'has overwhelmingly been interpreted as, to use Punter's influential formulation, a "literature of terror", and Gothic criticism has, accordingly, tended to focus on themes of horror, violence and fear' (2014, 5). Likewise, Eugenia DeLamotte argues that a 'masculinization' of the Gothic canon manifests as a critical tendency to see 'high' Gothic as written by men, and to see Gothic in its 'fullest development as centring on a male rather than female protagonist', citing Leslie Fiedler and William Patrick Day, whose studies of Gothic side-line female centred writing (DeLamotte 1990, 12). The separation of Romance from Gothic into 'masculine' and 'feminine' histories tends to devalue the former, evident in the very earliest Gothic criticism. Montague Summers rejects 'Sentimental Gothic' in favour of 'terror-Gothic' and Robert Hume claims that 'horror-Gothic' is 'more serious and more profound' than 'sentimental' or 'historical' Gothic tales (Summers 1964, 28–31; Hume 1969, 282). Botting highlights Gothic criticism's unease with Romance in his exploration of *Bram Stoker's Dracula* (1992), a film which he argues returns

Romance to the Gothic, 'with a vengeance' (2008a, 1). Botting shows how reviews of *Dracula* formulate Romance in opposition to Gothic, decrying the film as reversing the affectivity of horror (Botting 2008a, 1, 4). Following these reviews, Botting argues that Romance cannot offer Gothic transgression, but works to 'recuperate gothic excesses' (2008a, 1).

The tendency in Gothic criticism to value transgressive works in contrast to romantic works results in a disavowal of feminine forms of writing. Indeed, Botting's book-length treatment tracing the relationship between Romance and Gothic quickly dismisses 'feminine' Romance in its opening pages, which it sees as occupying a separate literary history from transgressive Gothic works. Botting summarises and dismisses this tradition from the 'embourgeoisified' gothic romances of Anne Radcliffe, 'through the Brontës, Collins, Corelli, du Maurier and the host of popular romantic fictions packaged as "Harlequins", "Gothics", "Mills and Boon" . . . and on' (Botting 2008a, 11). *Gothic Romanced* instead recuperates Romance through texts such as *Neuromancer, Terminator,* and rewritings of *Frankenstein.* Focusing on a 'masculine' horror tradition, Botting explores the 'female gothic' via science-fiction works like *Alien* and *Alien Resurrection,* not by considering romantic or domestic narratives.

The disavowal of Romance in Gothic criticism motivates much of the criticisms levelled at *Twilight,* and, by extension, the genre of Paranormal Romance. This disavowal is evident in Serena Trowbridge's assertion that '*Twilight* is a romance dressed up as Gothic: it has the trappings of the genre but not the substance' (2013). Trowbridge's formulation opposes Gothic and Romance, polarising the terms to assert literary value ('substance') to one at the expense of the other. As Eric Murphy Selinger argues, disdain for Romance 'remains a way to demonstrate one's

intelligence, political bona fides, and demanding aesthetic sensibility, even in circles where resistance to such orthodoxies is the norm' (2007, 308). Crawford further reveals that even in Gothic criticism

> romances continued to be viewed not just as non-literature, but as a sort of anti-literature, and their readers continued to be pathologized and dismissed … The cultural legitimacy of Gothic fiction thus depended largely on its ability to maintain a proper distance from its despised daughter genre, the romance; and this was precisely what *Twilight* threatened. (2014, 223)

Crawford's central claim is that responses to Paranormal Romance have been so hostile because the genre represents a return to, rather than departure from, form for Gothic literature (2014, 5). In different ways, Gavin and Morris present a similar challenge to Gothic Studies in their multiple deployment of Romance. Their works offer a (re)turn to a 'feminine' romance tradition central to Gothic since its inception, but which has all too often been devalued in comparison with a 'masculine' horror tradition.

Feminist criticism has also tended to devalue Romance. As Kate Ferguson Ellis notes, 'feminist critics of the Gothic are divided on the issue of whether or not its heroines are submissive and thus models of patriarchally defined "goodness" for their readers' (2001, 458). This indecision comes from feminist critiques of Romance more generally. Critics express concern that Romance offers limited representations for women and so contributes to their oppression, even in studies that ostensibly recuperate the form. Lynne Pearce notes that Romance 'will, for many, continue to be regarded as a harmful "illusion" that is visited upon its unfortunate subjects as a kind of madness' (2006, 21). For example, Germaine Greer famously

asserts that Romance represents women 'cherishing the chains of their bondage' (2006, 174). Greer's disdain colours the foundational studies of Romance, including those by Janice Radway and Tania Modleski that ostensibly aim to recuperate the form for a feminist project. Modleski argues that romantic novels 'perpetuate ideological confusion' for their readers, whilst Radway concludes that the formulaic structures recapitulate patriarchal ideology and that romance reading can potentially disarm the impulse for change that leads readers to seek out romance in the first place (Modleski 2007, 35; Radway 1991, 211, 213). Likewise, Cranny-Francis's celebration of genre fiction remains sceptical of Romance, which she describes as 'patriarchal fairy tales for grown-ups' (1990, 183). For Cranny-Francis, the Romance remains a 'bourgeois fairy tale'; for Radway, Romance perpetuates a fantasy that compensates women, but ultimately shies away from challenging the inequalities really produced in patriarchal family structures (Cranny-Francis 1990, 192; Radway 1991, 148).

In their descriptions of Romance as fantasy and fairy tale, feminist critics echo Enlightenment critiques of Gothic Romance from the eighteenth century, which derided the works of female Gothic writers as fanciful and irrational. Sue Chaplin notes that early Gothic Romance was derided for its lack of literary accomplishment and its moral impropriety. It was seen as a kind of literary 'madness', which would have particularly disastrous consequences for its legion of imagined female readers (Chaplin 2013, 199). The concerns of eighteenth-century critics such as Samuel Richardson, were rooted in Enlightenment ideology, which valued reason, rationality and moral propriety. Their opposition of rational, moral literature with the irrational, immoral Romance constructs a gender binary, pitting the rational male critic against the irrational female romance writer and her readers.

Critics have attacked postmillennial Paranormal Romance, particularly Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* series, in similar ways, questioning its moral, educational and political effects. Catherine Spooner argues that criticisms of *Twilight* 'are based on the assumption that literature should be "educational" for young women – teaching them something and providing moral guidance' (Spooner, 2013). She cites criticisms of *Twilight* by UK government ministers, for example, who decry the books as unedifying. Their comments reveal 'plenty of prejudices about women's reading . . . not least the idea that young women can't make their own informed choices or be active critics of the texts they read' (Spooner, 2013). Similarly, Crawford explores the criticisms of *Twilight*, concurring that they rehearse the old criticisms of Gothic Romance: that it is badly written, irrational and morally dubious, and, moreover, that its readers are unable to see the text's shortcomings (2014, 187-189). Both in the eighteenth century, then, and in the twenty first, criticisms of Gothic Romance undertaken on behalf of a female reader are concerned with the utility of Romance and insist upon its negative powers of influence. The choices of the female reader are deemed unworthy and unliterary, assumed to originate in her naivety and lack of critical awareness.

Feminist criticisms of Romance are grounded in a similar assumption that fiction ought to serve a pedagogical and political function. Moreover, concerns about the effects of Romance on its female reader uphold this construction of the female reader as a dupe. Murphy Selinger notes this when he criticises Radway's assertion that Romance fails to supply the reader with 'a comprehensive program for reorganizing her life in such a way that all needs might be met' (Radway 1991, 215; Murphy Selinger 2007, 310). For Murphy Selinger, this is 'the stuff of self-help books' and is not a demand we would make of other forms of fiction (2007, 310).

Even Carol Thurston's more positive appraisal in *The Romance Revolution*, which sees romance reading as feminist influenced if not fully feminist, praises the form on the grounds that it offers readers empowering messages about sexuality that can have a positive impact on readers' lives (1987, 10). Like Radway, Thurston's concern with the personal uses of Romance reading leads to a concern with the texts' political function. Thus, Murphy Selinger argues that Romance criticism is too easily drawn into a restrictive debate: 'are these novels good or bad for their readers?' (2007, 319). This question insists on a broadly educational remit for literature for women, a remit which in turn constructs women as in need of education.

Postmillennial children's Gothic Romance troubles existing critical formulations that cast Romance as a conservative and limiting force, constraining Gothic excesses and containing a feminist impulse towards freedom from patriarchal ideologies. *Ruined* and *Coram Boy* do not structure Gothic and Romance in opposition to one another, but reveal them as mutually constitutive forms. They offer a non-binary model of literary form and of subjectivity that undoes polarising gendered categorisations of Gothic and its readers. In these novels, Romance acts as both an excessive and containing force, offering instruction in service of a rational pedagogy on the one hand and indulgence that exceeds social rules on the other. Both rational and irrational, Romance resolves a binaristic formulation of literature based on a text's political or pedagogical utility. Drawing on Spinoza's ethical schema, Romance suggests that 'we judge something to be good because we strive for it, will it, want it, and desire it' (Spinoza 1996, 76). In simple terms, the subject desires what is good for the preservation of its being, and since what preserves being is good and moral, desire is rational. *Ruined* and *Coram Boy* thus gesture towards a new ethics of Romance. One the one hand, Morris and Gavin deploy Romance to

perform a pedagogical function, both for instruction about the past and to aim at an empowered and critical female reader. On the other hand, they offer indulgence in the sensuous and often politically ambivalent pleasures of nostalgia and fantasy, pleasures that are often constructed as naïve or disempowering by critics of Romance. These varying functions of Romance are not mutually exclusive, but integral to the figuration of a multifaceted nomadic subject.

A non-binary formulation of Gothic Romance

Though the categories of 'masculine' and 'feminine' Gothic originate in feminist criticism, they are often invoked in support of a binaristic model of the form that disavows the 'feminine' Romance in favour of masculine Gothic transgression. Ellen Moers's original formulation of 'Female Gothic' posited Gothic as an important form through which female writers could express their anxieties and dissatisfactions (Moers 1985, 90–98). Kate Ferguson Ellis proposes the categories of 'masculine' and 'feminine' Gothic to establish the Gothic heroine as a proto-feminist figure, arguing that 'the Gothic novel expanded the female sphere to the point where women could challenge the basis of their own "elevation"' in a restrictive bourgeois ideology of separate spheres and domesticity (1989, xiii). Ellis locates the feminine Gothic as 'the center [sic] of [a] model for the development of the genre', positioning the masculine Gothic as a reaction to the feminine (1989, xvi). However, the lowly status of feminine cultural production within literary criticism more generally has produced a separation of 'feminine' Romance in critical histories of the Gothic. Various critics have argued that mass or low culture is often gendered as 'woman' in contrast to modernism, or high culture (Huyssen 1986, 44; McGowan

1991, 20; Cranny-Francis 1990, 5). This feminised culture finds its most obvious expression in mass market Romance, of course, a form that originates in Gothic Romance. Cyndy Hendershot's exploration of masculinity and the Gothic marks this feminine form of mass culture as the repository of a 'mummified' form of Gothic (1998, 1). Hendershot dismisses 'Gothic romances in the Harlequin vein, replaying plots of simplified Radcliffean heroines threatened by enigmatic villains in foreign castles', for a Gothic with 'disruptive potential' that she locates in the masculine genres of science fiction, horror film, adventure novels and detective fiction (1998, 1-2). Gothic criticism thus expresses contradictory impulses. On the one hand, it seeks to recuperate a once-vilified popular genre for academic study, including those works dismissed by eighteenth-century critics as unworthy 'women's poison' (Samuel Richardson cited in Chaplin 2013, 199). On the other hand, it continues to draw upon modernist-influenced notions of high art to defend the genre as radical, transgressive (hence valuable), disavowing feminine mass culture in the process.

Andrew Smith and Diane Wallace argue that gendered categorisations of the Gothic are increasingly questioned as essentializing (2004, 1). Nonetheless, these categorisations continue to be used. As Abbey Coykendall argues, 'the supposition that gender predetermines genre is, in fact, so ubiquitous in Gothic scholarship that critics who would otherwise be little swayed by the formulaic encodings of gender and genre remain unwilling to abandon the paradigm altogether' (2005, 446–447). Despite the feminist origins of categories such as 'female' and 'feminine' Gothic, and later poststructuralist critiques of them, Gothic Studies continues to delineate the masculine from the feminine in a way that devalues the latter. As Hendershot's study demonstrates, the notion of a 'Radcliffean' versus a 'Lewisite' Gothic, for example, denigrates 'feminine' Romance as formulaic, but values 'masculine' Gothic for its

transgressive potential. Botting echoes this evaluation in his swift dismissal of feminine Gothic from Radcliffe onwards, arguing that Radcliffe was 'very much the Barbara Cartland of her day' (2008a, 11). Botting favours 'male dark romance … licensing '"masculine" tendencies towards power and violence' (2008a, 11). Though Botting expresses doubt about the categorisations, 'masculine' and 'feminine', noting that 'dark-toned Romances in which love is more prominent than adventure' have been 'misperceived' as feminine, he nonetheless upholds a gendered binary by choosing to analyse texts from the 'masculine' tradition (2008a 11, 12). Botting's comments illustrate the ways that even critics interested in popular or otherwise marginalised forms of literature continue to treat genres read and written by women with contempt.

Though gender categorisations inform Gothic criticism, there is no neat delineation between Gothic and Romance, nor between 'masculine' and 'feminine' histories of the form. Gothic's origins lie in the Romance, simply defined by Umberto Eco as 'a story of *elsewhere*' (Eco 1994, 574). For DeLamotte, the 'core' of Gothic Romance is a 'world set apart from normal quotidian experience and from the logical and moral laws of everyday reality' (1990, 18). Moreover, 'Gothic' and 'Romance', originally used in concert, were often interchangeable. Since they are mutually constitutive forms, Gothic and Romance should not be opposed in terms of their themes, narrative structure or effects. As Crawford's study of Paranormal Romance asserts, 'the histories of those genres which we now call "Gothic" and "romantic" fiction have always been heavily interlinked' (2014, 5). Crawford notes a shift in the twentieth century towards the male Gothic counter tradition, offering violence, horror and monstrosity, followed by a postmillennial (re)turn to Gothic narratives of love and romance (2014: 235). Crawford's history of Gothic and

Romance is generous to a feminine tradition by demonstrating the Gothic history of popular Romance, but I would further add that Gothic texts often manifest both 'masculine' and 'feminine' impulses simultaneously. For example, *Wuthering Heights* (1847) has been read variously as a ghost story, a realist novel, a Gothic novel and a prototypical romantic novel. Robert Kiely calls the novel a 'masterpiece of English romantic fiction' but also notes its use of Gothic paraphernalia (Kiely in Moers 1985, 99). Cranny-Francis and Lutz both posit Brontë's novel as foundational for the development of mass-market Romance, with Lutz further arguing that 'all contemporary romance seems to grow out of the gothic… many of its dark and secret themes still resonate' (Cranny-Francis 1990, 178; Lutz 2006, 12).

Just as Gothic and Romance are interlinked, so are 'masculine' and 'feminine' Gothic. *Frankenstein* (1818) draws together 'the "deep subversive impulse" of feminist protest … found in the Radcliffean tradition and the pervasive pessimism of the Lewisite tradition' (Ferguson Ellis 1989, 183). The novel separates a feminine sphere of domesticity from a masculine sphere of scientific discovery, but the relationship between its exiled antiheroes is an exploration of the trauma of motherhood as much as it is of rebellion and monstrosity (Moers 1978, 93). Likewise the male and female characters of *Wuthering Heights* (1847) are caught between masculine and feminine narratives and spaces (Ferguson Ellis 1989, 214). Within the novel, masculine and feminine positions shift between characters and the boundaries between the separate spheres blur. This is noted in Gilbert and Gubar's reading, which argues that Heathcliff embodies a number of literature and myth's rebellious females and constitutes Cathy's 'almost identical double' (2000, 296, 298). A forerunner of the 'alpha male' hero of mass market romance fiction, Heathcliff also embodies what Botting identifies as a 'darkly romanticised masculinity' in his

lineage of 'masculine' Gothic works troubling social and sexual boundaries (Botting 2008a, 11–12). However, Heathcliff is also a feminised figure within the context of the narrative, initially lacking any social status or economic power. Heathcliff and Cathy exemplify DeLamotte's assertion that 'both the wanderer and the prisoner, shut into this alien world, are thereby shut out from ordinary life' (1990, 18). 'Masculine' and 'feminine' positions within Gothic Romance are thus interconnected, both embodying entrapment *and* exile simultaneously.

Echoing these interrelationships, *Coram Boy* offers a masculine narrative of exile alongside a feminine narrative of entrapment, borrowing from Radcliffean Gothic Romance, from *Wuthering Heights,* and *Frankenstein* in its romantic plot and exploration of maternal trauma. Romance and horror are mutually constitutive elements of this story in which the romance between an aristocratic male and a poor dependent female plays out against a back drop of infanticide and child abuse. The novel opens with a scene of child abuse as young Meshak, son to the 'Coram Man', is beaten as he helps his father collect abandoned children, stuffing them into sacks tied to their mule. Traumatised, Meshak sees 'trolls and witches; evil creatures crouching in shadows, lingering round trees, hanging in the sky; demons with hairless heads and glinting teeth' as he travels through the 'darkness of the forest' (Gavin 2000, 9). The novel evokes horror through Meshak's story, describing revolting scenes in which Meshak buries live babies: 'Meshak let go the feebly moving bundle. He heard it splosh into the ditch. He backed away whimpering. He never did like burying the live ones' (Gavin 2000, 18). Misshapen and clumsy, with 'a stack of wild red hair and large watery, blue eyes', Meshak recalls Shelley's monster. Like the monster, he is an outcast and wanderer, watching the seemingly happy Ashbrook family in their home from the outside, unseen. At first, Alex and

Melissa's romance is focalised through Meshak, a vantage point that feminises him as a desiring subject. Through Meshak, the novel vocalises a romantic desire normally associated with feminine romance plots: 'His heart tightened in his chest. He could hardly breathe with the emotion which swayed through him' (Gavin 2000, 104). Moreover, like Heathcliff, though Meshak occupies the position of the masculine exile, he is feminised since he possesses no social power, status or property. Later, he becomes 'mammy' to Melissa and Alex's abandoned child, saving it from death at his father's hands, playing a maternal role to Aaron in the second half of the novel (Gavin 2000, 162).

While Meshak is an exile, locked outside the home, Alex is trapped within it, occupying the enclosed position constructed and critiqued by 'feminine' Gothic (Ferguson Ellis 1989, x). Alex is confined and restricted by his tyrannical father, whom he is desperate to escape so he can pursue his dream of becoming a musician. Like Meshak, Alex is also figured as a desiring subject, and his love for Melissa is expressed in the sentimental language of Romance. He writes to her effusively, '*my dearest, sweetest and most treasured Melissa*' (Gavin 2000, 141; emphasis in original). Alex is also explicitly feminised by his father, who sneeringly calls Alex a 'songbird' and chides Lady Ashbrook for coddling him. Alex is uninterested in 'manly pursuits' and knows he is 'not the son his father hoped he would be' (Gavin 2000, 91). In her portrayal of Alex, Gavin explicitly draws on a feminine Gothic narrative of entrapment, noting that Alex is 'imprisoned by his wealth and class and forbidden the one thing he craved' (Gavin 2000, 92).

However, the gendered positions of *Coram Boy* shift when Alex decides to flee Ashbrook, running away to London in a self-imposed exile. The novel then brings Melissa to the fore; she takes up Alex's position of confinement. Gavin notes this

shift when the lovers part after a final meeting. Melissa is 'swallowed up into the house' and Alex disappears into the night (Gavin 2000, 143). When Melissa realises she is carrying Alex's child, she confines herself to the nursey. The first part of the novel concludes with a traumatic birth scene that sees the child 'snatched' away as its cord is cut, given to the Coram Man. Here the romantic plot culminates in pain and trauma for the female protagonist, recalling the indictment of the separation of an enclosed female domestic sphere from a male worldly sphere offered in Ferguson Ellis' formulation of feminine and masculine Gothic (1989, x). Gavin presents Melissa's experience of romantic love ambivalently. Towards the end of the novel, before she is reunited with Alex and Aaron, she considers her reflection in a mirror at Ashbrook, where she has remained for the duration of the second part of the novel:

> "Who am I? A mother without a child, a child without a mother." She stared at her face, which was no longer a child's, but already bore the marls of anxiety, unhappiness and grief. Where was the joy? She asked herself. Would she ever again experience the joy of that childhood? (Gavin 2000, 287)

Through the shifting roles of Meshak, Alex and Melissa, *Coram Boy* presents a complex re-figuration of feminine Gothic Romance. Alternatively entrapped or exiled, desiring or desired, male and female characters occupy different positions within the narrative as a romantic plot interweaves with an exploration of female trauma and isolation. For Melissa the affirmative powers of Romance are temporarily suspended while she is incarcerated at Ashbrook. However, *Coram Boy* does eventually reunite its characters in a resolution that fulfils her desire, redeems her lover's transgressions and heals their trauma.

Ruined likewise presents shifting 'feminine' and 'masculine' positions for its characters. The romantic plot is foregrounded when Rebecca meets the attractive Anton Grey. In this scene, Morris uses language typical of teen Romance: 'Rebecca couldn't help staring at the dark-haired boy. His face was angular, and though he was tall, he didn't seem gawky or clumsy. Even in the semidarkness, she could tell he was better looking than the other two boys … She wondered if this was the famous Anton Grey' (Morris 2009, 51). Rebecca's desire for Anton echoes teen Romance novels in which romantic desire

> brings heroines to womanhood, endowing their lives with meaning. Heroines' involvement in romance stimulates their interests in beautification which sexually objectifies them while simultaneously reproducing their positions in the sexual division of labor [sic] as consumers. (Christian-Smith 1987, 365)

According to Linda Christian-Smith's analysis of teen Romance as conservative gender texts, Rebecca's desiring look at Anton should propel her into a plot that will solidify patriarchal gender roles and normative notions of femininity. However, Rebecca's meeting with Anton in Lafayette Cemetery is incidental to a more important event. After spying on Anton, Rebecca meets the ghost Lisette, whose presence signals the corruption festering at the heart of New Orleans. Indeed, it is her desire to see Lisette again that draws Rebecca back to the cemetery, where she sees Anton for a second time. Rebecca asserts, 'she wasn't here to ogle Anton, however good-looking he was' (2009, 68). Later, when Rebecca's romance with Anton progresses, Lisette intervenes to prompt Rebecca to turn her attention to the unsolved mystery. As the pair kiss at a society ball, Lisette appears, 'just a foot away, staring straight at them … looking as startled as Rebecca. … The moment between them was broken, Rebecca knew' (Morris 2009, 169-170). Though Rebecca enjoys her

desire for Anton, 'she hadn't wanted the kiss to stop', the Romance is suspended by the demands of the mystery signalled by Lisette's haunting.

Morris subtly reworks teen Romance in other ways too, drawing on Gothic narratives of entrapment and exile to demonstrate the fluidity of feminine and masculine positions. Though pensive, brooding, dark-haired and mysterious, Anton is not the typical alpha male hero of Gothic Romance. The novel flirts with this image of the dangerous, Byronic hero when Anton hounds Rebecca to discover what she knows about the curse, accosting her in the cemetery 'like some kind of sinister vampire, blocking her escape route' (Morris 2009, 262). Tall and physically domineering, Anton looks 'haunted' and Rebecca is momentarily frightened, though she refuses to give in to his demands to tell him what she knows (262). However, after the novel's climactic denouement, in which Rebecca is almost killed by the Bowman and Grey families, Anton is revealed to be passive and weak. His investigations fail to uncover the information Rebecca finds, and he is unable to stop his family's plot to lure Rebecca to the cemetery where they intend to kill her. In the closing pages, he admits all to Rebecca: 'I was real confused. I just didn't know what to do' (Morris 2009, 297). Whilst Anton is self-pitying, Rebecca is assertive, chiding him: 'So you did nothing' (297). Anton's passivity reframes his earlier Byronic brooding, revealing that Rebecca has always occupied the more active position in their relationship.

Much like the aristocratic Alex of *Coram Boy,* Anton is also imprisoned. In contrast, Rebecca, who is an outsider to New Orleans, is remarkably mobile. Not only does she navigate between social classes, gaining entry to high society functions despite her 'plebeian' standing, she also moves through different spatial and temporal zones of the city. Her connection with Lisette allows her to travel

through districts of the city that Anton, and the other high society kids confined to the Garden District, never see. Lisette allows Rebecca to see images of the city's past, giving her privileged information denied to others. Rebecca's mobility is also contrasted Helena Bowman, her rival. In one scene Helena looks down on Rebecca from a window in her Garden District mansion. Helena is confined to her house, having supposedly taken ill, though this turns out to be a ruse to trick Rebecca into taking her place at the Mardi Gras parade where the Bowman family intend to kill her to appease the curse. Helena looks down at Rebecca, a predatory, 'tight smile' on her lips, and Anton comes to her side. Rebecca shudders at the humiliation, 'standing around in the street, gazing up at Helena and Anton like peasants gawping at members of the royal family' (Morris 2009, 223). Though Helena's smile is one of 'triumph', the position she and Anton occupy within the mansion is restricted, whilst Rebecca, on the street below, is free to explore the city and unravel the story that will bring the Bowman family to account. Morris draws on explicitly Gothic imagery to emphasise Anton's entrapment as Rebecca ponders his family's vault in the cemetery: 'It was weird to think of Anton getting buried in there one day. Or rather, getting *entombed ...* so much of his life seemed circumscribed' (Morris 2009, 195; emphasis in original). The italicised word, *entombed,* emphasises Anton's restricted position within the novel in comparison to Rebecca's mobility.

Morris rewrites the feminine and masculine positions of Gothic Romance, by reconfiguring Gothic space, remapping the heroine's claustrophobic location as a nomadic terrain. Morris draws on a discourse of the female Gothic to map New Orleans as a Gothic castle, explicitly figuring Rebecca as its prisoner: 'New Orleans was a strange dream of a place, extreme and claustrophobic, where her universe was confined to a few blocks – school, the coffee shop, the cemetery. In New Orleans,

she wasn't in exile: she was practically incarcerated' (Morris 2009, 182). Describing New Orleans as a 'strange dream', Morris offers the city as a romantic location, unreal and mysterious. Thus, New Orleans evokes a 'feminine' Gothic of confinement and incarceration. However, Rebecca also describes herself as an 'exile' and her displacement to the city affords her the mobility experienced by many of Radcliffe's heroines in spite of their incarceration. These heroine 'scurry up to the top of pasteboard Alps, spy out exotic vistas, penetrate bandit-infested forests. And indoors … [they] scuttle miles along corridors, descend into dungeons, and explore secret chambers' (Moers 1978, 126).

Arriving in New Orleans in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, Rebecca views it as a city of refugees and so further identifies with the masculine exile 'sent hundreds of miles from home' (Morris 2009, 4). Gothic New Orleans is a 'city in ruins' and its decay represents displacement: 'Thousands of its citizens were still living in other parts of the country. Many of its houses were still waiting to be gutted and rebuilt; many had been demolished' (Morris 2009, 3-4). An exile, Rebecca sees the city as a location in transition, its past in danger of decaying, its homes, like Lisette's cottage in Storyville, 'about to fall down' (Morris 2009, 140):

> They pulled down all the old houses and the old trees to that the big road up there could go in. Lots of ghosts there are real unhappy still. All they got to haunt is a big pile of concrete. (Morris 2009, 141)

Rebecca's displacement allows her to navigate these different zones of the city and, eventually, through her investigations into Lisette's murder, reconcile them. Moreover, Rebecca's journeys through the city allow her to discover her origins within it. Discovering that she, like Lisette and Helena, is also a Bowman, affords

Rebecca a double belonging. By the end of the novel she is able to travel freely between New Orleans and New York, calling both cities home. Rebecca's nomadism allows her to escape the either/or binary of 'feminine' entrapment and 'masculine' exile, finding mobility in both positions.

Remapping Gothic Romance, Morris imagines fluid gendered subjectivities as her characters occupy a variety of locations within the narrative. Anton shifts from occupying the role of romantic teen hero, to dangerous alpha male, to Gothic prisoner. Likewise, Rebecca plays the proto-feminist role of Gothic heroine, exploring the corridors of the Gothic castle refigured as the streets of New Orleans, to unravel the plot against her. Later she takes up the position of victim as she falls for the trap set by the Bowman family. Helena also shifts roles. Initially, she is located as the antagonist, the selfish and pushy 'other' woman of category Romance whose punishment restores the 'good' girl to the arms of the hero (Christian-Smith 1987, 385; Radway 1991, 131). However, Helena is increasingly drawn as a Gothic heroine too, incarcerated in her family's claustrophobic mansion. As Rebecca notes,

> however rude and stuck-up Helena had acted toward her, she didn't deserve so extreme a fate – either an illness too serious for her to attend school for an entire semester, or a fear so overpowering that her family wouldn't let her leave the house. Rebecca wouldn't be able to stand being locked inside all day, and she certainly wouldn't want to wake up each morning fearing for her life'. (Morris 2009, 191-192)

This contradictory representation of Helena offers a further commentary on romance tropes. The oppositional patterning that pits the 'good' girl against the 'other' girl is complicated by the revelation that Rebecca and Helena are cousins, intimately

connected together in the Gothic plot. Indeed, though the Bowman family seek to sacrifice Rebecca to appease the curse, it is Helena who dies in the novel's climactic scene: a chunk of masonry from the Bowman family tomb is dislodged, falling onto Helena and killing her instantly. Helena's death is figured not as a triumph of the 'good' girl over the selfish antagonist, but as a tragic outcome of a situation that has forced two women to become enemies. Though the antagonism between Helena and Rebecca is intra-textual, a result of the scheming of the Bowman family, it is also offered as a meta-textual commentary on Romance conventions that construct women according to a binaristic moral schema, only allowing the freedom of one at the expense of the other.

Rational Desire

As I discuss above, the earliest criticism of Gothic is rooted in Enlightenment ideology, which values reason, rationality and moral propriety. Eighteenth-century critics compared Gothic Romance unfavourably with the novel, which mirrored the real world and served a moral pedagogical function. Chaplin notes that 'the hostility to romance fiction was in part a consequence of its challenge … to Reason: its epistemological impropriety' (2013, 200). Romance's young, female readers were constructed as requiring rational and moral guidance. From the outset, then, feminine Romance and its female reader are constructed as irrational and naïve. For Enlightenment critics of Gothic Romance, the female reader should not be allowed to indulge in irrational desire, but instead inculcated into rational thinking.

This binary of rational versus irrational forms of fiction is echoed in criticism of twentieth-century romance, again in relation to younger (female) readers who are

imagined as needing guidance about their uneducational reading material. Berta Parrish describes how the release of 'Wildfire Romance' through Scholastic's Teen Book Club in the early 1980s found opposition from education groups in the US, who issued a statement decrying romance as detrimental for young girls (Parrish 1983, 612). Likewise children's literature critics in this period debate the educational value of romance. Writing in *The English Journal,* Sharon Wigutoff argues that Romance has no literary quality and will not help educators produce critical readers. Even Parrish, who argues that the books make young girls feel good, urges educators to 'guide' girls' reading with 'thought provoking questions' that will help them deconstruct the limiting patriarchal ideologies the books perpetuate (1983, 613). Christian-Smith's content analysis of a range of Romances from this period claims to offer teachers 'tools for deconstructing' their limiting patriarchal narratives so as to 'refashion' the ways young people make meaning through their reading, in particular training young female readers to 'challenge' oppressive representations (1987, 368, 393). These critical responses assume that fiction written for young people ought to be educational and rational, and that it should challenge fanciful wish fulfilment dangerous to girls in particular.

Contemporary attitudes towards Paranormal Romance, the successor to Gothic and teen Romance, inherits these attitudes about the rational, pedagogical function of literature for young girls. In feminist critiques of *Twilight,* the reader, or 'fan' of Paranormal Romance is constructed as undiscriminating and irrational in their consumption of 'the impossible fantasy of Edward and Bella's relationship' (Crawford 2014, 201). Crawford argues that critics of *Twilight* assume that Romance is 'harmful to its readers, who – perhaps because of their presumed youth and femaleness – often seem to be assumed, *a priori*, to lack the critical faculties

necessary to distinguish between fantasy and reality' (2014, 201). Crawford argues that critics of Paranormal Romance are concerned that the female reader will use fiction as a blueprint, reproducing damaging gender inequalities in her own life. Echoing the earliest critiques of Gothic Romance, these pronouncements construct the text as irrational and the reader as lacking in rational, critical faculties.

However, this polarisation of irrational and rational forms of literature is countered by early Gothic writers whose descriptions of their works defy Enlightenment categorisations of literature. For example, Horace Walpole's claim to blend 'ancient' with 'modern' romance offers a deliberate mixture of romance and realism (Walpole 2014, 9). Developing Walpole's formulation, Clara Reeve draws on the categories of both Romance and novel to describe her work. First she establishes a separation between the novel, 'a picture of real life and manners' and Romance, which 'describes what never happened or is likely to happen' (1930, 111). Defending Romance against charges of irrationality and immorality in comparison to the respectable novel, Reeve points to works that 'partake of the nature of both, but … [are] a different species from either' (1930, 127). She asserts that her own work, *The Old English Baron* (1778) unites 'the most attractive and interesting circumstances of the ancient Romance and the modern Novel' (Reeve 2008, 3). Chaplin argues that despite Reeve's 'ambivalence toward Gothic "fancy" . . . [she] maintained a commitment to romance, regarding it as in certain ways superior to realist fiction' (2013, 207). Both 'The Progress of Romance' and *The Old English Baron* suggest that romance straddles and exceeds the categories projected upon it.

Morris evokes Reeve by subtitling *Ruined* 'a novel'. She explicitly links Paranormal Romance to early Gothic's challenge to categorisations that separate Romance from novel, and rational from irrational forms of literature. Partly, the label

of 'novel' is a response to the scorn typically garnered by teen Romance. Like Reeve, Morris anticipates her critics by alluding to a literary category that has credibility. In so doing, Morris reveals that categorisations like 'novel' and 'Paranormal Romance' are overdetermined by suspect value judgments. Morris's use of the term 'novel' attempts to resolve an opposition between pedagogical, utilitarian literature (the novel) and irrational, disruptive fiction (Romance), following Reeve's argument that her works partake of both romantic imagination and novelistic rationality.

The binaristic opposition of rational and irrational fiction is resolved through an ethical schema proposed by Spinoza in which passions and desire are eminently compatible with reason and virtue, not their dark opposites. Desire is not irrational since it is a manifestation of the subject's *conatus,* that original, foundational desire to know (Braidotti 2011a, 18). The pursuit of rational knowledge, or adequate ideas, is part of a subject's desire to become self-affirming; likewise, desires and passions lead the subject to increase their rational knowledge. Lord explains that to pursue joy and indulge desire is the path to virtue since it 'involves increasing our understanding of ourselves and our world through empirical encounters' (Lord 2010, 114). The nomadic subject thus increases their agency and activity through indulging their desire, which works in concert with increasing their reason. *Ruined* is both an indulgent Romance, dealing in teenage love, desire and irrational supernatural events, *and* a rational novel, offering a pedagogical depiction of New Orleans' troubled history in a hermeneutic narrative that positions its heroine as a rational investigator. *Ruined* thus reflects nomadic ethics and Braidotti's assertion that nomadic figurations refuse 'to separate reason from the imagination' (2011a, 18).

The prominence of the hermeneutic plot in *Ruined* suggests that the Gothic heroine's indulgence in fancy and desire is linked to her acquisition of rational knowledge and agency. In this, Morris draws on Radcliffe's heroines, who were able to 'move beyond the restrictions of "the proprieties" set by critics' in their exploration of the Gothic castle and their investigation of the mysteries therein (Ferguson Ellis 1989, xiii). Ferguson Ellis's feminist reading of Radcliffe's Gothic heroine suggests that 'too much innocence is hazardous … she needs knowledge, not protection from the truth' (xiii). However, unlike Radcliffe's heroines, who discover a rational explanation behind seemingly supernatural events, Rebecca must accept irrational and unreal events to acquire an adequate understanding of the mystery and danger that threatens her. At first, she cannot believe that Lisette is a ghost, protesting that it is 'just too weird' and 'not possible', but as she holds Lisette's hand in the cemetery she becomes certain that she has passed over into a spectral world of ghosts: 'Something in Lisette's calm insistence that they wouldn't be seen made her stay put… They were invisible – as invisible as ghosts' (Morris 2009, 74). Rebecca's investigations force her to reassess her ideas of what is possible, of what is rational, as she works out the 'rules' for the new 'ghost-world' she has discovered (Morris 2009, 100).

This acquisition of knowledge through exposure to seemingly irrational events increases Rebecca's agency, following a Spinozan model of rational desire. As Lord explains, 'as the individual increases his activity of thinking (i.e. gains more adequate ideas) he becomes more active … increasing both his rational knowledge and his virtue' (2010, 113). Rebecca's discoveries about the 'surreal' town of New Orleans lead to self-affirmation and agency as she uncovers the circumstances of Lisette's death and her own origins. That is, Rebecca's investigations lead her to

positive action based on the rational understanding she is able to accrue of the seemingly irrational events she experiences. Moreover, her desire to pursue a romantic relationship with Anton and her willingness to believe in ghosts is what preserves Rebecca in the climax of the novel. However illogical Rebecca's attraction to Anton or her belief in Lisette, these preserve Rebecca's existence. Facing death in Lafayette Cemetery, Rebecca is saved first by Lisette, who makes Rebecca invisible and allows her to climb to safety, and then by Anton, who helps her flee. The climax of the story thus illustrates Spinoza's proposition that 'the mind strives to imagine only those things which posit its power of acting' since Rebecca's desire to be connected to both Anton and Lisette is what ultimately saves her life (1996, 98).

Romance further resolves the binary opposition separating the rational from the irrational by producing the past as a place of desire *and* instruction. *Ruined* and *Coram Boy* represent the past as a seductive and nostalgic fantasy whilst simultaneously teaching readers about the present. *Ruined* opens with a prologue set in New Orleans in the summer of 1853 and describes the effects of Yellow Fever as it 'ravages' the city. Recalling the grotesquerie and decay of an American Gothic aesthetic, Morris describes 'mass burials' and the 'putrid smell' of 'corpses rotting in piles' (2009, 1). Back in the present, Rebecca shudders thinking of bodies long buried bubbling to the surface, 'corpses peeping out of the wet soil like inquisitive worms' (Morris 2009, 12). However, this fantastic imagery of Gothic decay is framed by instruction. The prologue describes New Orleans as a city shaped by immigration and slavery, describing the fates of the city's migrant and black communities. This lesson about New Orleans' past is then related to the city's present as it recovers from the ravages of Hurricane Katrina. Aunt Claudia tells Rebecca about the city's involvement in the slave trade and its 'huge population of

slaves' as well as its Haitian community, adding that 'there are still more black people than white in New Orleans' (Morris 2009, 15-17). Later, Rebecca will see for herself the homes in black neighbourhoods left to ruin by a city that continues to treat its black citizens differently to its white population. In its attempts to educate the reader (through Rebecca) about New Orleans' past and present politics, *Ruined* continues a tradition of presenting romance as educational. Radway shows that writers and readers of romance have long defended the genre against the charge that it is indulgent nonsense by arguing that that it has an 'intrinsic value that can be transferred to the reader' (1991, 107). In particular, the romance's use of historical fact allows its defenders to claim that it is educational, and so a worthy pursuit (Radway 1991, 108).

Whilst *Ruined* engages in an explicitly educational project, it also revels in its Gothic representation of New Orleans. As well as signifying important facts about the city's history, New Orleans' ghosts become a sensational spectacle for Rebecca's consumption. In particular, Rebecca's interactions with the spirit world reveal Gothic Romance's origins in consumerism. E. J. Clery argues that in the eighteenth-century 'supernatural fiction figures as the ultimate luxury commodity' (Clery 1995, 5–7). Clery cites the phenomenon of the Cock Lane Ghost as a precursor to the success of Gothic fiction. Crowds assembled to see the purported ghost and to experience the frisson of terror and the ghost was soon 'caught up in the machine of the economy; it was available to be processed, reproduced, packaged, marketed and distributed by the engines of cultural production… levelled to the status of spectacle' (Clery 1995, 16). This consumption of Gothic as a spectacle for the sake of affect alone cannot be co-opted in the service of political or pedagogical utility. Thus, the Enlightenment critique of Gothic was in part a rejection of the commodification of terror and of the

indulgence in irrational ideas for mere pleasure. It is this Gothic spectacle of pure affect that Rebecca experiences with Lisette:

> The city was thronged with ghosts. Three hundred years' worth of ghosts, all of them wearing the clothes they had died in, many of them bearing – all too visibly in some cases – the injuries that killed them … Rebecca could see them all. And this sight was so amazing, so overwhelming, it was all Rebecca could do to keep her mouth from hanging open in surprise. (Morris 2009, 131)

Holding Lisette's hand, Rebecca is able to view a range of ghosts and grotesque spectacles from 'nineteenth century dockworkers with rope burns' to 'a gaggle of brassy prostitutes', 'an eighteenth century fop', an 'Asian guy in green hospital scrubs [with] a small wound in his chest – stabbed during a car-jacking', 'the Sicilian guys from the market', 'Spanish speaking soldiers' and 'a sallow-faced man in a frock coat clutching a duelling pistol' (Morris 2009, 134-136). The various periods of the city appear here as theatrical settings, the ghosts become actors in costumes presenting themselves for Rebecca's horror and delight as she partakes in a literal 'ghost walk', more spectacular than any experienced by New Orleans' many tourists.

Coram Boy also offers this double function of the past. In a foreword Gavin explains the historical details that inspired the novel and gives important background information about the eighteenth century. The foreword constitutes a pedagogical frame that constructs readers as in need of instruction about the past, giving facts through which to interpret the fiction. Gavin's foreword functions as a gesture of authentication, positioning Gothic Romance within the discourse of real, serious history, which offers meaning, truth and instruction through the presentation of real

events and real people. Gavin jettisons the playful metafictional fakery of Walpole's *Otranto* in her recourse to real historical fact, presenting Gothic Romance as rational and educational. In her blog, Gavin argues that historical truths are 'hidden away, embedded in folk tales, fairy tales and nursery rhymes' and that 'old folk stories and legends containing the most appalling horrors' are not simply 'titivation', but contain 'ancient truths' and 'moral lessons' (Gavin 2011). Drawing on Romance, and folk and fairy tales, Gavin interweaves fantasy with history, licensing a fantastic, indulgent representation of the past. Her factual history of the Coram Hospital quickly becomes a fantastic Gothic narrative representing a barbaric and terrifying past in which 'the highways and by-ways of England were littered with the bones of little children' (Gavin, 2000, n.p). Gavin borrows from eighteenth-century Gothic and nineteenth-century sensation with her description of 'brutalised' children and orphanages that were 'no more than dying houses'. The preface recasts historical personages as Gothic characters, describing how 'miserable women' abandoned their children to an imposter 'Coram Man', 'acting in his own interests' (2000, n.p.).

Gavin's eighteenth-century England is a sensual, nostalgic fantasy as much as a real, historical location. *Coram Boy* doubles the past, presenting it both as a lesson and as gothically transgressive; a 'darkly-imagined counter-world, embracing the less avowable regions of psyche, family, and society as well as the gloomy remoteness of past culture and rugged landscapes' (Botting 2001, 22). Like Rebecca's ghost tour of New Orleans, this Gothic version of eighteenth-century England is also the 'symptom of a voraciously consumeristic commercial culture' offering 'pleasure, sensation, and excitement' (Botting 2001, 22). This barbaric past location manifests trauma in the form of ghosts, 'demons' and 'nightmares' populating the 'dark, deep, dripping' landscape through which Meshak travels:

'Everywhere he looked, he saw tiny hands and fingers clawing at the sky, he heard wailing voices and choking cries' (Gavin 2000, 221). The frisson of terror offered by this tour of England's decaying woodlands gives way to a Gothic urban landscape, equally characterised by sensation. Aaron experiences the

> stench, smoke and smells of city streets and houses and hovels. The noise of the capital began to gather and roar like a distant wave and they could no longer walk a straight path, but had to dodge and swerve and battle with a sea of people. (Gavin 2000, 213).

Gavin's description of Gothic London is indebted to novelists like Dickens as much as it is to historical fact, and a mimetic representation of the past gives way to nostalgic 'past-ness'. For Fredric Jameson, nostalgia approaches the 'past' through stylistic connotation, conveying 'past-ness' that creates 'pseudo-historical depth in which the history of aesthetic styles displaces "real history"' (Jameson 1991, 71). My reading of Gothic Romance rejects Jameson's elitist dismissal of nostalgia as empty pastiche. Rather, I contend that Gavin's fictionalised past reveals that Gothic's relationship with the past is necessarily one with images and aesthetics. These images are not empty, but replete with affectivity. Gavin's educational use of the past can thus be reconciled with her nostalgic invocation of 'past-ness' as Romance maps a doubled location that performs a rational educational purpose supported by a Gothic affectivity mobilised by desire.

Existing critical readings of Romance, even those that offer a positive explanation of its cultural function, argue that Romance indulges desires that contrast with real material, social or political realities affecting readers. Radway, for example, sees the ending of romantic novels as offering a 'miraculous' resolution of

the anxieties that lead readers to Romance in the first place (1991, 148). Crawford argues that *Twilight* articulates 'an entire suite of extravagant wish-fulfilment fantasies, presenting a world in which pure desire has sufficient power to stave off … unavoidable realities' (2014, 226). Crawford defends *Twilight's* indulgence of excessive desire, noting that though Bella's desires 'are mad, illogical, amoral, impossible, anti-social, wildly excessive … by the end of the fourth book every single one of them has been fulfilled. For many readers, anxious about what and when and to what extent they may be permitted to desire at all, this is clearly exhilarating stuff' (2014, 172). Echoing Radway's analysis of the way adult Romance magically resolves the anxieties and lack felt by women in the patriarchal family, Crawford argues that *Twilight* offers an appealing fantasy in which all the contradictions surrounding love and sexual desire are 'magically resolved' (2014, 217). Though both Radway and Crawford seek to account for the positive effects of Romance, recuperating it within a literary critical tradition that typically denigrates it, their conclusions uphold a binaristic formulation of irrational desire versus rational logic. They imply that the 'dream logic' of romantic wish fulfilment defies the realities faced by readers (Crawford 2014, 172).

I contend that this opposition is resolved by Gavin and Morris in their recourse to a Spinozan ethical schema in which indulging in desire and imagination is a rational and virtuous act. Braidotti argues that 'the desire to reach an adequate understanding of one's potentia is the human being's fundamental desire' and that since desires arise from our passions, 'they can never be excessive – given that activity is the power that activates our body and makes it want to act' (2011b, 312). Thus, *Coram Boy* allows Alex to become a musician, to marry Melissa and to be reunited with his friend Thomas, and his son, Aaron, revealing that his passions and

desires are all, ultimately, productive rather than destructive. In *Ruined,* Rebecca solves a mystery that brings the corrupt elite of New Orleans to account whilst getting to ride in their prestigious parade. She sets Lisette's ghost to rest and gains the adoration of the handsome Anton, and even prompts her new friends to start up a renovation project to rescue New Orleans' dilapidated houses. Both texts provide the reader with horror and gore, hauntings and nightmares, indulgent nostalgia, a history lesson and the sensual pleasures of romantic desire. These 'affects' are not mutually exclusive, but constitutive of an affirmatory nomadic subjectivity.

Conclusions: Nomadic Relationality

Finally, I want to address the critical polemics that have restricted discussions of Romance by tracing the ways that *Coram Boy* and *Ruined* figure desire as transformative, as an outwards facing process that leads the nomadic subject into productive relationships with others. Offering an ambivalent formulation of Romance, Radway maintains that its 'narrative structure embodies a simple recapitulation and recommendation of patriarchy and its constituent social practices and ideologies' (1991, 210). In contrast, Deborah Lutz maintains that gothically inflected Romance offers an 'anarchical rebelliousness' that undercuts any didactic project (2006, 2). By characterising Romance as radically transgressive, Lutz's analysis leads to the aporia of deconstruction as she formulates love as a death drive, propelling inward towards 'the finitude of being, […] the edge of silence, […] fragmentation, and […] disintegration' (Lutz 2006, 2). Neither Radway nor Lutz's analysis of Romance, which are caught up in a binary of containment versus transgression, offer a satisfactory explanation of how Romance might, in its

contradictory nature, offer a productive figuration of subjectivity. *Ruined* and *Coram Boy* offer a way out of this polemic by representing romantic desire as transformative. The characters of Romance indulge their fantasies *and* achieve autonomy whilst maintaining positive and outward-looking relationships with others. The seeming contradiction of this is resolved in Spinoza's *Ethics* which states that subjects are most useful to one another when each one seeks their own advantage, but that seeking one's own advantage means acting in the interests of other subjects too (Spinoza 1996, 132-133). The characters' indulgence in romantic desire allows them to positively influence each other and their communities, revealing desire as a force that works towards change and transformation.

Though both novels draw on the trope of the exiled lover these are not stories of othering and isolation. The romantic hero is not a Gothic exile, trapped on the outside of the home, nor is the female heroine confined within. In Ferguson Ellis's formulation, the heroine of 'feminine' Gothic 'marries and creates a happy home, while the hero of the masculine Gothic dies or roams the face of the earth eternally' (1989, 220). For Ferguson Ellis, this 'ritual' maintains the separate spheres even as it critiques them (220). However, as my analysis has demonstrated, there is no neat spatial separation of male hero and female heroine in these texts. Rather, the characters come together across a variegated landscape of desire, negotiating pathways between entrapment and liberation. In this landscape, desire is not figured as a death-drive as it is in Lutz's analysis, leading to fragmentation and disintegration (Lutz 2006, 2). Lutz argues that romance has a 'paradoxical structure' that mirrors Heidegger's proximity principle, offering 'a paradoxical move toward while moving away' as the hero and heroine move away from each other even as the narrative looks forward to the consummation of their romance (2006, 27). Likewise

drawing on the death drive, Botting offers a vampiric metaphor for desire that leads to an unsatisfying aporia: 'In never being able to satisfy or kill off desire, romance reproduces the incompletion required for more' (2008a, 25). Essentially negative and unsatisfying, this formulation sees the subject as unable to move beyond the void of its own lack. In contrast, these children's texts offer a romantic plot aimed at mutual relationality and transformation; these are stories of interconnectedness offering a non-binary nomadic subjectivity.

Braidotti notes that 'empathy and compassion are key features' of nomadic subjectivity. 'The disappearance of firm boundaries between self and other, in the love encounter, in intense friendship… is the necessary premise to the enlargement of one's fields of perception and capacity to experience' (2011b, 167). This disappearance of boundaries is modelled by Alex and Melissa in *Coram Boy* when they consummate their love for the first time. Gavin describes the lovers lying in

> each other's arms … not knowing where affection ended and passion began, or which was the child and which the adult. They hardly knew what happened or how; just that feelings and sensations and emotions beyond their understanding overwhelmed them, and carried them outside the boundaries of anything they had ever experienced. (2000, 142)

As they indulge their desire, the borders between Melissa and Alex become porous. Though Gavin's depiction of sex is coy, typical in children's and teen fiction, it presents the lovers as undergoing transformation, a sexual maturation caused by a deeply felt connection with another person. Though it initially causes pain when they are separated, this union propels the characters forwards on paths that will eventually fulfil their desires and affirm their identities. When Alex and Melissa are reunited

towards the end of the novel, Alex in particular has been transformed. He is able to visualise Aaron's birth and feel Melissa's broken heart as he reconnects with her (Gavin 2000, 317). This is a romantic reunion, but more importantly is a reunion that produces empathy and mutual understanding. As Alex looks back over the events of the novel, 'it sometimes seemed that he was his own son and that somehow they had fused into one person' (Gavin 2000, 317). Alex's non-unitary vision of his subjectivity through his connection to Melissa and Aaron recalls Spinoza's proposition that 'we can think of none more excellent than those which agree entirely with our nature… two individuals of entirely the same nature are joined to one another, they compose an individual twice as powerful as each one' (1996, 125). Indeed, this multiple reunion of lovers, of mother and son, of father and son, revitalises the broken Ashbrook family and looks forward to the future.

Stories of romantic love are stories of productive relations with other subjects. Lynne Pearce argues that 'romantic love is frequently characterized by a profound need/desire to benefit the other' that is all too often interpreted negatively, through psychoanalysis, as 'the subject's need/desire to dissolve/transcend his or her own ego' (Pearce 2006, 8). Pearce draws on an essay by Jean-Luc Nancy to argue that romantic desire is 'experienced by both the lover and his/her beloved as an *outward motion*' (Pearce 2006, 8; emphasis in original). This outward motion is transformative even when it ends with a broken heart. Pearce explains that 'through the "event" of love, the subject is so transformed that s/he can no longer return to the self s/he was' (2006, 11). This redemptive and transformative model of romantic love, that reads desire as a positive break with the self, functions in opposition both to the tragic model of subjectivity offered by psychoanalysis and to the self-contained, stable model of the mature subject found in ego-relational psychology.

Romance produces a subject that is not contained, but always in process. However, this is not a self tragically split by an identification with the Other. Alan Soble affirms that 'whatever desire is or is not, it is clearly a *relational* function: a conclusion that concurs with Descartes's conception of love as an "outward motion"' (1990, 1). Radway also notes this outward motion in her assertion that 'the fairy-tale union of hero and heroine is in reality the symbolic fulfilment of a woman's desire to realise her most basic female self in relation with another' (1991, 155). I would add, however, that this outward motion is expressed not only through romantic relationships, but in the model of multiple relationality offered in these children's texts.

Coram Boy and *Ruined* are not only concerned with romantic love, but with friendships and familial bonds. Rebecca is mobilised and affirmed through her relationship with Lisette, whilst Melissa finds comfort in her connection to Alex's sister, Isobel. The multiple friendships in *Coram Boy* in particular reveal that Romance can forge multiple productive connections with others, and is not about a nihilistic desire to lose oneself in another. Melissa and Isobel's deep friendship is mirrored in that between Alex and Thomas, and later, by Aaron and Toby. The novel closes by framing all these relationships through Meshak's outsider perspective, reminding the reader of his unseen connection to all of the characters and the ways he has facilitated their friendships and bonds. He looks down upon Ashbrook house, thankful that his 'angels', Melissa, Aaron and Toby, have been reunited (Gavin 2000, 323). The bonds between the characters in C*oram Boy* offer a model of virtue found in Spinoza's *Ethics*. The novel imagines its characters living 'an ethical life … which enhances and strengthens the subject without reference to transcendental values but rather in the awareness of one's interconnection with others' (Braidotti

2011b, 313). The desiring subject is not an isolated individual, but occupies 'complex and mutually dependent corealities' (Braidotti 2011b, 312).

In *Ruined*, the ethics of interconnection and co-dependence manifests in the novel's closing pages, which turn away from the romance between Rebecca and Anton to the story of Lisette. Lisette's haunting and exorcism becomes emblematic of New Orleans as a whole as Rebecca and Anton become anonymous actors in a ritual that might transform the city:

> The girl reached forward, leaning the wreath against the door. "Good-bye," she said, and took a step back. The boy reached for a hand, and they stood for a moment in silence … One of the city's oldest curses had ended. At long last, one of the thousands of ghosts in New Orleans was resting in peace. (Morris 2009, 309)

Morris's decision to strip Anton and Rebecca of their names in this final scene recalls Braidotti's assertion that desire can result in 'a depersonalisation of the self in a gesture of everyday transcendence of the ego' (2011b, 167). Here desire becomes 'a connecting force, a binding force that links the self to larger internal and external relations' (Braidotti 2011b, 167). Returning to Lisette's story, Morris recasts Romance as transformative not only of the lovers, but for a wider network of connections. Lisette's ghost is released, the Bowman's family's sins are redeemed, and Rebecca and Anton's union provides a possible model for the ways in which the city as a whole might begin to heal itself of the traumas of its ancient, and more recent, past.

Desire transforms the lovers in these fictions from exiles to members of a rejuvenated community. Braidotti argues that 'desire is located transversally, in the

… immanent interrelations among subjects collectively engaged in the expression and actualization of their power of becoming' (2011b, 205). Accordingly, both novels end with an image of a traumatised community in the process of being rebuilt. In *Ruined,* this rebuilding is literal as well as figurative as Rebecca leads a project to restore houses left to rot after the Hurricane. They start with Lisette's former home, connecting New Orleans' past to its present:

> With the help of a local charity, and a group of enthusiastic volunteers… they'd managed to gut the house, clear out all the rubble from its collapsing roof, and give the exterior a fresh coat of pale blue. Work on the renovation would continue throughout the summer, even after the girl returned to her hometown, New York City. (Morris 2009, 308)

The renovation productively links the past with the present, and also looks forward to Rebecca's continued mobility, noting her return to New York. Rebecca's transformative effect on New Orleans will continue after she leaves, and her connection with the city remains. Indeed, Morris has written a sequel (*Unbroken,* 2013) that sees Rebecca return, suggesting that she divides her time between the two cities she now calls home.

In *Coram Boy,* desire positively transforms a traumatised community by connecting the past to the present, depicting a scene of family reunion in the cemetery where Alex and Melissa have gathered to say goodbye to Melissa's mother and Alex's friend, Thomas. Alex looks over the Gloucestershire landscape he had previously fled when

> two boys emerged from the undergrowth and came to the stile. One white. One black. Alexander's heart stopped beating. Everything ceased; even the

birds in their flight seemed suddenly suspended. The children of the crying wood faded away. On boy, the white boy, came forward slowly and stood before him. "Mr Ashbrook," said Aaron. "I think I'm your son". (Gavin 2000, 318-319)

Aaron's homecoming is not simply a family reunion, but it sees the formation of a new family network, containing different classes and races. Melissa is poor, Toby is black, but they both make their home at the rejuvenated Ashbrook Hall. The landscape surrounding them is also transformed. Though the locals still talk about the ghosts that used to haunt the 'crying wood' where so many babies were once buried, children now 'plunge in and fill their willow baskets' during the blackberrying season (Gavin 2000, 323). The close of the novel thus sees the healing of a wider community trauma and the exorcism of its ghosts, looking forward to a possible future in which the class and racial divides that split the Ashbrook family, as well as the horrors of the slave trade that shaped England's middle classes, might be healed. In both novels, then, desire is a force of propulsion and transformation. Following desire, the subject of Romance navigates their entrapment and exile, returning eventually to a transformed community space that maps 'possible worlds' and 'possible patterns of becoming' (Braidotti 2011b, 167-168).

Chapter 4

Dismantling home-made 'authenticity':

Gothic Parody in *Frankenweenie* and *Paranorman*

Introduction: Relocating Gothic 'Margins'

In this chapter I explore further the transformative capability of the nomadic subject of postmillennial children's Gothic by considering another pop-cultural form: film parody. As I argue in the introduction, some critics in Gothic Studies dismiss popular forms of postmillennial, postmodern Gothic, particularly those aimed at children. These critics express an anxiety about the status and function of Gothic in postmodern culture, an anxiety rooted in subcultural and modernist discourses. Subcultural and modernist discourses on cultural production draw evaluative distinctions between 'authentic' and 'inauthentic' texts, as well as between radical cultural 'margins' and a conservative 'mainstream'. These distinctions lead critics to argue that the proliferation of Gothic in popular culture empties the form of affectivity and its power to critique. I will consider three such critical accounts in this chapter, contesting their gloomy assessment of postmodern Gothic by exploring two texts that seem to confirm critics' worst fears.

Frankenweenie (written and directed by Tim Burton) and *Paranorman* (written and directed by Chris Butler and Sam Fell), both released in 2012, are feature-length children's animated horror films that stage a parody of older Gothic works, employing 'trash' aesthetics to produce humour as well as horror. *Frankenweenie* and *Paranorman* belong to a tradition of Gothic film parody, which Kamilla Elliott argues goes beyond 'simple mockery to reveal inconsistencies,

incongruities, and problems in Gothic criticism' itself (2008, 24). Elliott notes how parodies such as *Young Frankenstein* (1974) and *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein* (1948) mock Freudian and deconstructive theoretical criticism of Gothic (2008, 26, 27). Following these parodies, *Frankenweenie* and *Paranorman* stage and interrogate Gothic criticism's elitist dismissal of postmodern popular culture. The films dismantle the idea of 'authenticity' on which a critique of postmodernism is founded, revealing an aesthetics of 'authenticity' composed of artifice and fakery. However, the films do not employ parody only to deconstruct critical commonplaces. *Frankenweenie* and *Paranorman* employ parody to foreground Gothic intertextuality, transforming Gothic tropes and calling attention to new ways of reading them. Like Braidotti's nomadism, this use of parody constitutes 'neither a retreat into self-referential textuality nor… apolitical resignation', but a dynamic mode of fiction that imagines new ways of reading, learning and being (Braidotti 2011a, 11).

Parody is a transformative mode that allows postmillennial Gothic to imagine an agile reader able to negotiate the double-voiced nature of parodic intertextuality. Dan Harries argues that parody always says 'one thing whilst saying another' because the borrowed words, images and utterances from the target text retain their original meanings and intentions, even when the parody text holds them up to mockery (Harries 2000, 5). Linda Hutcheon asserts that parody is double-voiced; it allows for multiple and conflicting pragmatic effects, including provoking humour at the expense of the target text as well as reiterating its original meanings, resulting in a 'transformational synthesis' between old and new (1985, 32, 37, 38). Building on the theories of Harries and Hutcheon, I argue that *Frankenweenie* and *Paranorman* reconstruct Gothic film horror and transform it for a newly imagined audience. This

formulation of parody counters critiques of postmodernism that identify its primary modes as empty, imitative simulacra, evident in Frederic Jameson's account of postmodern pastiche as 'blank parody' (1991, 17). Jameson's critique of postmodernism, along with Baudrillard's formulation of simulacra (1994), influences assessments of postmillennial Gothic as repetitive, empty, nostalgic commodification. For example, Botting argues that postmodern Gothic reproduces tropes 'beyond exhaustion' so that its once transgressive monsters have become 'normal, domesticated, commodifiably differentiated, serialized' (Botting 2014, 501, 500). Though both *Frankenweenie* and *Paranorman* play with this image of the domesticated monster, their repetition of Gothic horror cinema tropes does not constitute empty nostalgia or commodification, but a complex double response to the popular proliferation of Gothic. They synthesise their homage to an 'authentic' canon of Gothic works with a critique of the very idea of 'authenticity'. Negotiating homage, nostalgia, irony and critique, these films posit new reading strategies for Gothic founded on naivety rather than cynicism, offering a way of experiencing mass market, popular Gothic as authentic, even as they reveal authenticity as temporary and performative.

Frankenweenie and *Paranorman* employ the double-voiced structure of parody to locate new readings of Gothic that draw on the transformative power of naivety, locating a reader able to recognise Gothic artifice and experience it affectively. This reader is not a 'real' child but a 'conceptual persona' constructed within the text, 'a theoretical navigational tool that evokes and mobilizes creative possibilities in order to change dominant subject positions' (Braidotti 2011a, 12). A position from which to theorise and think through philosophical propositions, Braidotti's 'conceptual persona' allows her to 'innovate philosophical form and

content' (2011a, 22). Likewise, these children's parody films innovate the Gothic form through the construction of a conceptual persona able to decode parodic intent whilst simultaneously remaining open to the affective power of Gothic. This conceptual persona is figured foremost through the films' protagonists, both of whom model a naïve suspension of disbelief in the face of the Gothic irruptions into their world. Victor expresses an innocent, though macabre, desire to resurrect his beloved pet, Sparky, whilst Norman insists that he can speak to ghosts even though his parents and peers mock him. In both cases, the children's naïve and outlandish beliefs transform their cynical communities, forging new relationships between members. These child protagonists may be outsiders, but they are not cynics, and their transgressions are constructive, not destructive. The model of productive naivety offered by Victor and Norman is echoed in the conceptual persona the texts imagine outside the narrative: a reader who does not have to be in the know to get the joke, and whose appreciation of parodic humour does not preclude being frightened.

Paranorman explores the affectivity of trash horror aesthetics and the effects of a mass commodification of horror through Norman, a horror nerd who loves zombie films and has a bedroom full of horror merchandise. Blithe Hollow, Norman's home, is a dilapidated New England town that trades cynically on a famous witch trial from its early history. Townsfolk sell key chains and 'Witchy Wieners', exploiting the town's history to draw in tourists. The cynicism of Blithe Hollow is contrasted with the innocent Norman, whose relationship with the dead of Blithe Hollow is empathetic rather than exploitative. Reworking the conceit of M. Night Shyamalan's *The Sixth Sense* (1999), combining it with the trash aesthetics of zombie horror, *Paranorman* celebrates the figure of the nerd, whose insights into the

supernatural save the town from destruction. Norman also brings about reconciliation through his interactions with the town's dead, including the zombie corpses of the town's puritan founders and the spirit of the witch they sentenced to death. Much like Burton's *The Corpse Bride* (2005), *Paranorman* enacts a reconciliation between the dead and the living, the past and the present, which sets the town on a more hopeful trajectory. The film's recycling of horror tropes and references to a variety of horror films, such as *Sleepy Hollow* (1999), *Witchfinder General* (1968), *Young Frankenstein* (1974), *Suspiria* (1977), *Halloween* (1978), *Friday the 13th* (1980) and *Dawn of the Dead* (1978), produces both comedy and horror, whilst the trash aesthetics of the film argue that 'authentic' horror is not necessarily to be found in modern ultra-mimetic film, such as the *Paranormal Activity* series, whose title is mocked by *Paranorman*.

Frankenweenie is the remake of an old Burton project originally shelved by Disney in the 1980s. In this 2012 remake, Burton affirms his own brand of 'Disneygothic' in which, much like *Paranorman*, trash aesthetics and references abound. This film also literalises Botting's critique of 'postmillennial monsters', which argues, drawing on Derrida, that as monsters become familiar and recognizable they are domesticated to the point of becoming pets (Botting 2014, 500; Derrida 1995, 386). Evoking the monsters of classic Hollywood horror and the trash aesthetics of low budget science fiction, Burton retells Shelley's *Frankenstein* as the story of isolated schoolboy, Victor, who resurrects his beloved pet dog as part of a science project. A cat, hamster and tortoise are all brought back to monstrous un-life in a monster-mash up reminiscent of the 1950s *Godzilla* and *Gamera* franchises. The protagonist of *Frankenweenie* is an isolated child, whose innocent desire to believe that he can bring 'Sparky' back to life contrasts with the cynicism of the adults

around him. Reimagining the moral debate at the heart of Mary Shelley's novel, *Frankenweenie* sets the cynical disbelief of the adult in opposition to the naïve conviction of the child. Also like *Paranorman,* this film employs stop motion animation and draws attention to the construction of a DIY, 'trash' Gothic horror aesthetic. Thus, the battle between cynicism and naivety that the film stages thematically is also staged at an aesthetic and visual level. *Frankenweenie* resurrects well-worn tropes from classic horror, borrowing from films such as *Frankenstein* (1931), *The Mummy* (1932), *Godzilla* (1954) and *Dracula* (1958), affirming their affective power for a reader who, like Victor, is willing to suspend cynical disbelief.

Frankenweenie and *Paranorman* exemplify a popular postmillennial trend for animated comedy horror films that might seem to confirm that the form has moved firmly from the margins of cultural production to its mainstream.[11] *Paranorman* was produced by the relatively small production studio Laika, following the success of their stop-motion adaptation of *Coraline* in 2009, directed by Henry Sellick. *Frankenweenie* affirmed Burton's return to the Disney fold following the live-action remake, *Alice in Wonderland* (2010), which Burton also directed for Disney. The current trend for animated horror film is traceable to the influence of both Sellick and Burton, whose earlier Disney production *The Nightmare Before Christmas* (1993) became a cult classic before being revamped and reissued by Disney first in 2000, and then again in 2006 and 2007 to popular and

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[11] Angela Carter's statement 'we live in Gothic times', originally articulated in the afterword to *Fireworks* (1974), is often repeated in Gothic Studies to support the idea that in Gothic proliferates in the contemporary moment, though the effects of this proliferation differ depending on the critic. In Carter's afterword the statement sits alongside her insistence that Gothic's function is to 'provoke unease', suggesting Gothic times are uneasy times (Carter 1981, 133). The sentiment is echoed in Mark Edmundson's *Nightmare on Main Street: Angels, Sadomasochism, and the Culture of Gothic*, which argues that Gothic novels and films proliferate in late twentieth-century American culture, and that Gothic despair more generally informs the images and narratives of news media and reality television (Edmundson 1999, xii, xiii). However, in Fred Botting's influential analysis of contemporary Gothic, 'Gothic times' indicates instead a proliferation of the form no longer able to provoke unease, since the pervasion of Gothic strips it of its depth and affective power (Botting 2008b, 37, 40).

critical acclaim (Mendelson 2013). Other mainstream Hollywood studios soon followed suit with the release of a number of animated horror films aimed at children, including Burton's *The Corpse Bride* (2005, for Warner Bros), Gil Keenan's *Monster House* (2006, for Sony) and Genndy Tartakovsky's *Hotel Transylvania* (2012, for Sony), followed by a sequel in 2015.

Critics who argue that Gothic has moved from the 'margins' to the 'mainstream' of cultural production offer a binaristic map of the development of Gothic since 2000. Separating the 'margins' from the 'mainstream' upholds a nostalgic fantasy that Gothic was once an 'authentically' 'marginal' form, rather than, at least in part, the product of a burgeoning publishing market aimed at a mass middle-class audience. Drawing on a distinction between the 'margins' and the 'mainstream', critics also imply that Gothic's proliferation in the postmillennial period constitutes a lamentable 'gushing up' of marginal cultural form to a mainstream context, echoing elitist subcultural discourse (Thornton 1995, 5). For example, Jeffrey Weinstock asserts that *Frankenweenie* places Burton firmly at the centre of Hollywood film production, marking the 'ascendency of the Gothic mode in American culture' (Weinstock 2013, 25).

> Whereas the *Frankenweenie* of 1984 was too dark for Disney, the *Frankenweenie* of 2012 is perfectly acceptable Disney fare. It seems that it is not Burton who has changed, but rather the world around him. The Burton twist, however, is that … what Burton primarily offers is not Gothic, but rather "Gothic". (Weinstock 2013, 25-26)

Weinstock suggests that Hollywood culture has changed to become more accepting of Gothic's darkness, but seems discomfited by this shift. The word 'dark' contrasts

with the more dismissive phrase, 'perfectly acceptable Disney fare', betraying nostalgia for Gothic's once 'dark', marginal position represented by the failure of the 1984 *Frankenweenie.* For Weinstock, the popularity and success of *Frankenweenie* (2012) suggests it has lost its 'darkness'. Indeed, for Weinstock, Burton's recent films 'substitute' 'humour', 'sentimentality', 'hope', 'euphoria', 'nostalgia', all decidedly 'non-Gothic' emotions, in place of horror (2013, 26, 27). The move from margins to mainstream is, for Weinstock, a move from 'authenticity' to 'inauthenticity', seen in his distinction between Gothic and "Gothic". In Weinstock's analysis, Burton's mainstream Hollywood works lack the 'affective punch' of Gothic (2013, 27). Thus, Weinstock's initial claim that *Frankenweenie* (2012) transforms Hollywood, reshaping it through Burton's Gothic imagination, dissipates in his concern about the loss of 'authenticity' attendant in the move from margins to mainstream, leading Weinstock, finally, to dismiss the film's monsters as 'more silly than scary' (2013, 25, 27).

My nomadic approach maps the relationship between the 'margins' and 'mainstream' of cultural production in these texts rather differently, charting a way out of this binaristic impasse. Both *Frankenweenie* and *Paranorman* open up a space *within* the mainstream that makes room for difference and critique, revealing productive interconnections between marginal and mainstream locations. Braidotti notes that difference usually carries a negative, pejorative charge: 'the concept of difference has become poisoned and has become the equivalent of inferiority' (2011a, 20). Both the logic of subcultural capital and the modernist aesthetic attempt a reversal of the status of difference, marking difference from the norm, the mainstream, as an escape from a tyrannical and oppressive, and increasingly commodified, logic of the same. However, the reappraisal of difference as

transgression does not adequately produce what Braidotti calls 'positive difference', nor for a concept of difference that might bring the 'margins' of culture and society into a more productive dialogue with its 'centre' (Braidotti 2011a, 20). Moreover, this reassessment of difference as radical transgression glosses over the fact that Gothic has always located itself between the mainstream and margins of culture, revealing them not as separate locations, but interconnected spaces. *Frankenweenie* and *Paranorman* draw attention to the fact that Gothic texts are neither straightforwardly 'marginal', nor obviously 'mainstream' in their mash-up of references to literary culture, popular culture, and 'cult' or 'subcultural' texts, blurring the distinctions between these designations. They mobilise the pedagogical potential of parody to reconstruct a Gothic film canon that brings together so called 'cult' or 'marginal' film texts with mainstream Hollywood production, blurring the boundaries between the 'margins' and the 'mainstream' erected by critics.

Frankenweenie and *Paranorman* map the interrelated connections between the 'margins' and 'mainstreams' of culture through their narratives, which tell the story of an outsider's return to the centre of their community. The action in both films dramatises not a 'gushing up' of Gothic to the mainstream, but a mutual transformation of both spaces as the naivety of the outsider transforms the cynicism pervading the mainstream community. Victor's neighbours join together at the film's close to save Sparky, and Norman achieves recognition for his part in ending the witch's curse. These shifts in the communities' perspectives offer an image of the centre transformed by its connection with the margins. However, the films also chart the movement of the outsider towards the centre, as both Norman and Victor are reincorporated into their families and their communities. Thus, the films deploy Gothic as a transformative force acting on both marginal and mainstream locations.

This constitutes a rejection of the way Gothic parody is often perceived as a cynical, deconstructive mode in contrast to mainstream nostalgia and sentimentality. This is the binary Weinstock's commentary on *Frankenweenie* upholds, for example. However, what Weinstock dismisses as *Frankenweenie's* mainstream appeal (Victor's 'childish disavowal of death', the celebration of imagination and innocence, the film's 'faith in the possibility of plenitude' and its drive towards the 'restoration' of family) are not evidence of Gothic's dissipated affectivity, as he asserts, but rather evidence of its transformative power (Weinstock 2013, 23). *Frankenweenie* and *Paranorman* do not position Gothic 'in an oppositional mode of negation' against the 'mainstream', but offer its 'transformative and inspirational' imaginative force to bring together seemingly separate cultural locations (Braidotti 2011a, 14). Thus, Gothic parody contributes to the ongoing project of nomadic subjectivity I trace throughout postmillennial children's Gothic, which works 'to compose significant sites for reconfiguring modes of belonging' and locates places from which subjectivity can be reconstructed (Braidotti 2011a, 11).

Gothic 'Authenticity'

Gothic criticism of 'mainstream' texts, such as these children's films, is informed by an anxiety over the 'authenticity' of postmodern cultural production and of postmillennial Gothic more generally. Weinstock does not seek to denigrate Burton's work, or to preclude *Frankenweenie* from serious academic discussion, but his conclusions about the film nevertheless invoke 'authenticity' by drawing a distinction between Gothic and "Gothic". Thornton argues that 'distinctions of this kind are never just assertions of equal difference; they usually entail some claim to

authority and presume the inferiority of others' (1995, 10). 'Authenticity' forms the background to taste judgments and the logic of subcultural capital opposes the 'authentic' with the 'phony' as it strives to maintain a separation between the subculture and the mainstream (Thornton 1995, 3). As Weinstock's distinction attests, even in literary criticism authenticity remains an unarticulated category, often addressed obliquely rather than overtly expressed (Richter 2009, 59).

Anxieties over 'authenticity' inform Gothic criticism, which can seek to reproduce Gothic as a marginal form, aligning it to a left wing academic tradition of critique as well as with the marginal status of Goth subculture, fashion and music. Elliott argues that Gothic is one of the devalued aesthetic forms 'recuperated by various late twentieth-century humanities theories, serving in return as proof-texts for these theories in their battles against formalism, high-art humanism, and right wing politics' (2008, 25). The myth of Gothic's marginal status and its subcultural 'authenticity' is evoked in the opening of Botting's *Limits of Horror*, which begins its critique of postmodern Gothic with a description of a Goth music gig. In Botting's account, The Birthday Party's performance of 'Release the Bats' stages the loss of Gothic's 'bite' in late twentieth-century postmodern culture (Botting 2008b, 1). Aligning himself with the post-punk, subcultural milieu of the early 1980s, Botting locates his critique of postmodern culture in an 'authentic' position, a 'marginal' vantage point from which he can critique the 'inauthentic' proliferation of Gothic that follows in the late twentieth and early-twenty first centuries.

An investment in 'authenticity' also leads some scholars in Gothic Studies to dismiss the 'surfaces' of Gothic in favour of its 'depths', mirroring children's literature criticism's evaluation of Gothic considered in chapter one. Both Botting and Beville, for example, find the surface 'trappings' of Gothic problematic. Beville,

in particular, distinguishes 'authentic' Gothic texts from 'phony' ones by rejecting pop-cultural texts that only have 'superficial gothic veneers' (2009, 8). Beville's suspicion of the surface trappings of Gothic suggests that 'authentic' Gothic texts are defined by the depth of meaning they offer and by their radical deconstructive power. She concludes that 'authentic' postmodern Gothic 'uncovers the negation of postmodern cultures [and] catharses the terrors of the dissolution of reality and subjectivity that lie at the heart of the postmodern condition' (2009. 200). Beville premises her definition of Gothic postmodernism on the assumption that its trappings are in themselves 'inauthentic', and that 'authentic' Gothic reveals the dissolution at the heart of subjectivity. 'Authentic' Gothic depths are thus not productive of subjectivity, but deconstructive. In Botting's analysis, it is the *repetition* of Gothic tropes that points to postmillennial Gothic's inauthenticity. He seeks texts able to produce a depth of meaning lacking in the banal surface repetition of Gothic tropes found in pop-cultural Gothic, which have become 'already too familiar' (Botting 2014, 500). In these accounts, Gothic's generic tropes are rejected in favour of a definition of Gothic as 'abstract, psychological, metaphorical, and ideological' (Elliott 2008, 26). That is, 'authentic' Gothic derives its charge from the depths it represents, not from its tropes. In this psycho-symbolic reading, Gothic serves a deconstructive psychoanalytic critique of postmodern subjectivity.

'Authenticity' is, however, a paradoxical social and discursive construct and Gothic Studies has not paid sufficient attention to its constructed nature. Critics in other fields of sociology are beginning to turn their attention to deconstructing or problematising 'authenticity'. Sociologist David Grazian explains that 'authenticity' 'pervades popular culture and public arenas … [and] refers to a variety of desirable traits: credibility, originality, sincerity, naturalness, genuineness, innateness, purity,

or realness' (Grazian 2010, 191). 'Authenticity' thus legitimises some cultural objects whilst devaluing others that are not seen to carry these traits. It is also a deeply paradoxical construct that mediates and commodifies that which it labels as precisely unmediated and uncommodified. For Grazian, this is most obvious in the 'underground' blues scene in Chicago, US, where 'authenticity' is produced and staged very consciously (Grazian 2005). As Funk *et al* argue, 'authenticity itself turns into a quality of mediation and is thus conditioned by what it seems to deny' (Funk *et al* 2012, 10). Grazian also claims that the desire for 'authenticity' in popular culture is premised on a paradoxical logic, since the more one searches for 'authenticity', the further away it seems (Grazian 2005, 11). Whilst Grazian locates it as a commodity of consumer capitalism, comparative literature scholar Jochen Mecke rejects 'authenticity' as a category devoid of meaning in fragmentary, postmodern times (Mecke 2006, 114, cited in Funk *et al* 2012, 11; Grazian 2010, 192). Yet, as Funk *et al* argue, it is 'too easy to simply claim that authenticity is nothing but an effect of careful aesthetic construction' since 'authenticity' remains one of the 'guiding values' of our times whether it is constructed, or not (2012, 11-12, 20). Likewise, Richter maintains that 'authenticity' remains a pervasive and important category of reference in terms of negotiating identity in popular culture, literature and critical discourse and, as such, it cannot simply be 'done away with' (2009, 73). A non-essential definition of 'authenticity', one that recognises its constructed nature can be adopted by those texts usually discredited by discourses invested in 'authenticity'. Funk *et al* argue that texts *are* capable of creating new forms of 'authenticity' (Funk *et al* 2012, 19). Such texts may take their status as always already mediated into account and recognise the paradox at the heart of any claim to 'authenticity', but they do not content themselves with this insight and

instead attempt to move beyond postmodern deconstruction, 'establishing a kind of paradoxical third-order authenticity' that is fragmented and performative (Funk *et al* 2012, 19-20). 'Authenticity' may not really exist, but simply deconstructing it belies its continued power in popular culture and critical discourse alike. If 'authenticity' is reconfigured as fragmented and performative, then it allows texts usually discredited by notions of 'authenticity' to claim some of its discursive power for themselves.

Gothic parody provides a fitting space in which 'authenticity' can be reconfigured as fragmented and performative because it reveals that Gothic has, since its inception in the cardboard crenulations of Horace Walpole's Strawberry Hill, been a form in which the artifice of aesthetics are foregrounded. Despite the fact that Gothic critics often acknowledge the fakery of Gothic, there remains an implicit investment in an 'authentic' Gothic in their dismissal of texts (particularly those for children) that employ fakery and pastiche.[12] Yet, Gothic's fakery, including its constant repetition of tropes and an emphasis on the production of aesthetics, is the means by which a critical investment in 'authenticity' can be revealed and contested. I contend that *Frankenweenie* and *Paranorman* make a strong claim for their 'authenticity' as Gothic whilst also revealing this claim as performative, showing the aesthetic practices necessary to its staging. This has the two-fold effect of claiming *some* of the discursive power of 'authenticity', and allowing viewers to opportunity to experience the text as authentic, whilst at the same time acknowledging that this experience is performative and temporary.

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[12] See, for example, Botting in *Limits of Horror,* in which he notes 'the artifice accompanying all Gothic productions from Walpole's fake original and fabricated castle, Twain's dismissal of Southern Gothic shams, to *Rocky Horror* camp and beyond' (2008b, 2). Despite this, Botting dismisses many forms of postmodern Gothic pastiche, from *Count Duckula* to *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, as evidence of the pervasion, normalisation and dissolution of a once authentically uncanny Gothic that has evaporated into 'simulations' (2008b, 9-10).

Reconfiguring 'Disneygothic'

Frankenweenie and *Paranorman* challenge the charge of 'inauthenticity' levelled at postmillennial Gothic by offering a counter to the pejorative critical terms, 'Disneygothic' and 'Candygothic'. As mass-market children's Gothic, these films are apt to be included along with dolls and breakfast cereal in Botting's list evidencing the shift that Gothic has made away from the 'cultural margins' to become the 'standard if not dominant form of aesthetic expression' (2008b, 37). Botting's notion of 'candygothic' attempts to account for the new function of Gothic in the face of its rapid circulation in a postmodern economy. In its original context, 'candygothic' accounts for the ways in which Gothic texts provide both pleasure and pain, romance and trauma, and describes how Gothic might function in a cultural context that has erased limits and taboos as consumers move swiftly on to the next thrill (Botting 2008b, 9, 47–48). However, 'candygothic' is used by other critics to support dismissive value judgments about postmillennial Gothic texts. In Beville's analysis, 'candygothic' denotes a work which is 'not really Gothic' in which terror is 'obviously a novelty… created by stereotypical Gothic tropes' (2009, 9, 38). Similarly, though Weinstock does not use the term 'candygothic', his accusation that *Frankenweenie* is 'Gothic lite' echoes the same value judgment.

If 'candygothic' has struggled to remain a judgment free term, Botting's other contribution to this debate is even more problematic. 'Disneygothic' signals a shift into an 'anything goes' pervasion of Gothic, a gothic of pure simulacra (Botting 2008b, 3). 'Disneygothic' constitutes a damning critique, which largely follows Baudrillard's account of postmodernism, one that tells of the degeneration of an 'authentic' Gothic into mere artifice and simulation. The use of the word 'Disney' refers to arguments made by Baudrillard, but also has far wider connotations in the

academy, pejoratively denoting sanitised commodified mass culture (Baudrillard 1994, 14-14; Walz 1998, 51; Wasko 2001, 113; Ross 1999, 51). Disneygothic has thus become a pejorative critical term that constructs a polemic between a mass of texts denoted as popular, frivolous, childish and inauthentic – texts that offer empty simulation – and a precious few that may still manage to elicit feelings of the uncanny, offer moments of radical transgression or 'reflect critically and culturally on modernity' (Botting 2008b, 12). The binaries erected in this term between the modernist and the postmodern, the 'authentic' and the inauthentic, between literary value and mainstream appeal are not easily escaped.

As the latest in a series of collaborations between Tim Burton and Disney, *Frankenweenie* embraces and redefines 'Disneygothic.' Here, Disneygothic becomes a label that identifies with both terms equally, privileging neither. I do not wish to claim that Gothic Disney films did not exist before *Frankenweenie,* nor that Disney films more generally are not open to Gothic readings. Indeed, the latter is evidenced in a number of popular and critical discussions about the 'darker' side of Disney (Swan 1999; Oxberry 2006; Keeling 2012). However, I do contend that *Frankenweenie* is the moment when 'Disneygothic' emerges as a self-identified form, overtly *both* Disney *and* Gothic. *Frankenweenie* arrives at a pertinent moment for Gothic Studies and intersects in striking ways with critical anxieties circulating what Gothic has become in the new millennium.

Botting's concern about the domestication of Gothic monstrosity is also expressed in popular terms as a 'disneyfication' horror film and reflected in popular commentary on *Frankenweenie.* For example, the name of the film, a specifically American reference to a cute domestic pet, puts some critics off, whilst others find Burton's association with Disney makes the film feel 'tame and compromised' (Scott

2012; Bond 2012). Whilst individual Disney films may contain Gothic elements, explore dark themes or potentially terrify children, the Disney brand itself is promoted as a purveyor of wholesome, innocent fun, and continues to be perceived that way. The first version of *Frankenweenie* (1984) was not released by the studio because they considered it too macabre. Soon after they pulled the film, Disney fired its creator, the then apprentice animator, Burton, for spending time and money on projects that were too 'dark and scary' (Adams 2012; Vincent 2012). Burton's view on Disney during this period, that it was boring and not innovative, is one that is still shared by many film critics and is apparent in the response to his recent collaborations with the studio. Crucially, Burton represents eccentricity, a 'quirky aesthetic', positioning himself as the 'rebellious outsider', whilst Disney is held to be mainstream and conservative, its characters and themes reinforcing 'the key elements in mainstream US culture' (Weinstock 2013, 2; Wasko 2001, 2). The Disney brand, represented by the Walt Disney signature and enchanted castle logo, also connotes consistency, uniformity and familiarity. Disney scholars point out that the company is 'notoriously protective of its brand' and maintain 'a carefully regulated self-image' (Wasko 2001, 3; Doherty 2006; Pallant 2011, ix).

The 2012 remake of *Frankenweenie* is significant because it appears to undermine both this sacred self-image and the distinction between an eccentric outsider director and a mainstream studio. This move is apparent from the opening few seconds of the film, before the story gets underway. Everything begins as expected: the camera pans down over a familiar twilight landscape, with its snaking river and twinkling lights rendered in a soft colour palette of blue, purple and pink; colourful fireworks appear as the iconic enchanted Disney castle logo comes into the foreground; the familiar 'wish upon a star' theme music plays out, almost to

completion. However, in the last bar, the music shifts into a minor key and the gentle melody is replaced with crashing organ chords and spooky choral voices. Suddenly the magical scene switches into black and white and the fireworks are occluded by a stormy night sky. Briefly, a lightning flash illuminates the now shadowy and clearly Gothic Disney castle. Only the Walt Disney signature that materialises in the foreground retains its familiar appearance. The transformation takes place in a matter of seconds and is onscreen for the briefest of moments, but it is significant for the way in which it juxtaposes and thus recontextualises the conventions of both Disney animation and classic Hollywood Gothic cinema. There is a brief and unstable shift into the Gothic mode that disrupts the connotations a viewer might associate with the usual opening Disney logo screen. Usually, these few seconds of animation prior to a film are unlikely to gain any sustained viewer attention, since the Disney logo is so familiar. It is only when it is placed in direct contrast with a Gothic cinema aesthetic that the viewer is encouraged to consider what associations it conjures. Indeed, recontextualised in this way, the Disney logo is implicated as being all that is inimical to Gothic, saccharine sweetness and fairy tale enchantment, and the initial effect of the 'Burtonesque' transformation is to assert the dominance and value of horror over the Disney brand. This might be termed a 'reverse Disneyfication.'

'Disneyfication' is widely conceived of by critics in the liberal arts and humanities as a negative process that reduces potentially interesting or subversive content into something sanitised, homogenous and conservative – the perceived parameters of the Disney brand. Typically, 'Disneyfication' is described as 'that shameful process by which everything the studio later touched, no matter how unique the vision of the original from which the studio worked, was reduced to the limited terms Disney and his people could understand' (Schickel 1997, 225).

Elsewhere, 'Disneyfication' denotes the bowdlerization of literature, myth and history in a simplified, sentimentalised, programmatic way (Walz 1998, 51). The modal shift employed in the opening of *Frankenweenie* can be read in part as a self-conscious response to this negative perception and the concomitant implication that Disney is not capable or nor qualified to produce an eccentric, creepy or quirky film like those Burton is famous for.[13] In this opening sequence, the collaboration between Burton and Disney is represented as a take-over of the brand, albeit temporary and sanctioned, with the enchanted castle and all it represents being hijacked by the Gothic director. Yet, the shift is also more complex than my term 'reverse Disneyfication' accounts for, since it offers up both the values of Disney and the aesthetic conventions of Gothic cinema as targets for parodic recontextualisation. In addition to playful parody, the transformation of the Disney logo is also a way of legitimising the studio as a producer of horror, lending it the cultural authority and canonical knowledge required to make an authentic Gothic horror film. Another reading of the sequence might also suggest that *Frankenweenie* simply appropriates the conventions normally associated with classic horror studios – notably Universal, AIP and Hammer – for sanctioned Disney use, and constitutes a straightforward Disneyfication even as it appears to undermine the brand. My own reading, however, sees the modal shift as a double quotation, which stylises both elements – Disney through Gothic and Gothic through Disney – in a way that leaves both open to transformation. Is this a Disney film or a Gothic film? The opening credits suggest that *Frankenweenie* legitimately can be both. Thus *Frankenweenie* stages its critique of 'Disneygothic' and counters the distinctions this term has come

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[13] Whilst Disney may still hold immense influence and popularity in popular culture, this is not the case in the academy. Disney studies, as Doherty points out, seems to be primarily concerned with defacing the pristine image of Disney, deconstructing its politics and demythologising its history, with an increasing socioeconomic focus (Doherty 2006).

to denote, between authentic and inauthentic, and between marginal and mainstream cultural production.

'Home-made' Aesthetics

Frankenweenie and *Paranorman* draw attention to their own production techniques and so further complicate notions of 'authenticity' by revealing the artifice inherent in the production of an 'authentic' home-made, 'trash' aesthetic. Both films open by screening a film within a film that celebrates and showcases a low budget horror film aesthetic. In the opening of *Frankenweenie* Victor screens his own short *Monsters from Beyond!* to his parents. Victor's film is a reference both to Burton's own oeuvre – including his animated short *Stalk of the Celery Monster* (1979) and the feature film B-movie homage *Mars Attacks!* (1996) – as well as to the low budget horror and science fiction films from the 1950s and 1960s. *Monsters from Beyond!* features a conventional monster plot, involving Victor's dog Sparky (sporting a home-made costume) heroically fending off a (plastic model) pterodactyl as his (cardboard box) town is engulfed in (fake) flames. The low, sonorous brass music and clunky voice over of Victor's film provide the diegetic sound opening for *Frankenweenie*, briefly merging the two films, and associating the latter with low-budget, B-movie monster horror, evoking nostalgia for a 'lost' era of horror film. However, this is not the mournful nostalgia implied by the 'Disneygothic' critique circulating in Gothic Studies, but rather a celebration of a fake visual aesthetic, represented in Victor's cardboard sets, plastic models, and home-made costumes. Everything looks fake, but the fakery is neither weary nor cynical. *Monsters from Beyond!* is Victor's triumph, opening *Frankenweenie* with a celebration of pop cultural, pastiche horror film.

Paranorman also begins by screening a film within a film, in this case a low budget zombie horror with appalling special effects and acting, which Norman is watching on his television. Again, *Paranorman* seems to invoke nostalgia for a 'past' era of film-making and offers low-budget film production techniques as more 'authentic' than the new methods favoured in Hollywood horror. The aesthetics showcased here deliberately present themselves in opposition to mimetic film-making techniques such as digital imaging technology and the 'found footage' style of modern horror. *Paranorman*'s film within a film begins with the shot of the heel of a shoe squishing a brain. The brain then becomes stuck to the heel and makes squelching noises as the screaming victim attempts to flee from a zombie. As with *Frankenweenie*, the nostalgia evoked in this trash aesthetic differs from that expressed by Gothic critics, since the 'past' texts evoked are not critical of mass culture, but products of it. Universal Studios and Hammer, for example, made films to maximise profit, reusing sets, stories and actors in a bid to capitalise on the success of previous films. *Paranorman* and *Frankenweenie*'s reference to 'pastness' through 'trash' aesthetics revels in the affective possibility of repetition, rather than decrying repetition as the death of Gothic. In these films, the naïve repetition of cliché tropes marks, rather than precludes, their 'authenticity'.

Both films stage a paradoxical claim to home-made 'authenticity' through the production of a fake 'trash' aesthetic that reveals their big-budget production and mainstream release. Stop-motion animation emphasises an 'authentic' DIY aesthetic that is implicitly pitched against 'inauthentic' 'modern' film production techniques. This 'authenticity' is located in the obvious physical labour involved in producing and animating the clay models. The artistry and labour of stop-motion is emphasised, even though the visuals simulate trashy, cheap production techniques. Victor's

efforts, as amateur film auteur, stand in for Burton's own, referencing a DIY aesthetic in Victor's use of a cardboard set, toy soldiers, a costumed pet dog and a plastic pterodactyl. The audience can see both the string and the stick to which the pterodactyl is attached in shot, as well as Victor's hand moving the models. Attention is drawn to the home-made aesthetic further when Victor's father comments 'isn't that your grandmother's table-cloth?' The hand in shot also shows the auteur's presence in the work and codes film-making as a labour of love, while the home-made props signal the auteur's control over production. Victor's film uses a mixture of stop-motion animation, live manipulation of objects, voice-over and diegetic screams, as well as title cards normally associated with silent film. This patchwork of styles produces a pointed failure of mimesis. Nothing in Victor's film looks real or convincing. 'Authenticity' is thus located not only within DIY aesthetics, but also in the aesthetics of failure, or 'trash' cinema. Similarly, the film within a film that opens *Paranorman* uses the clay models of stop-motion animation to ham up the trash aesthetics of the (live-action) horror genre it is referencing. Though this type of horror is characterised in both cases by a failure to create mimesis, especially in its fake-looking props, it is nonetheless presented as having an 'authenticity' that, by implication, modern horror does not.

The use of stop-motion animation in both films also signals that this trash, DIY aesthetic is a fake aesthetic. Stop-motion animation requires time, money and the indulgence of a big studio to be viable. The original *Frankenweenie* from 1984, for example, was not produced in stop-motion because the cost was too prohibitive (French 2012). As Rob Latham argues, big budgets recreate DIY aesthetics better than DIY aesthetics (2013, 140). Though it is at pains to produce a low budget aesthetic, *Frankenweenie's* homage to the artistry of 'trash' cinema reveals the

indulgence of its mainstream studio, Disney. Similarly, though the trash aesthetics of the zombie film Norman watches are heavily exaggerated, its trash aesthetic contrasts with the seamless, professional animation of the parent text. In both cases, the 'authentic' DIY, home-made, 'trash' aesthetic appears firmly in quotation marks as a camp (re)construction.

This first portion of *Frankenweenie* is concerned with foregrounding kitsch, out-dated and thus, 'authentic', film production techniques in order to reveal the paradox behind claims to 'realness' and 'authenticity'. After Victor's short finishes, he rushes to his attic editing suite to fix a portion of broken film. The attic, which is transformed into a Gothic laboratory, is where Victor makes his films, and contains a hand-made rolling scenery contraption and editing desk with a stapler, rolls of film and some scissors. Here, Burton further validates 'home-made' techniques and Victor's skills at the editing table draw attention to the skill and effort required in a stop-motion animation, which for Burton 'shows the artist's work more' (Burton, quoted in Griffiths 2012). The conflation of 'authenticity' with artistry and home-made production techniques is reflected overall in the choice to film in black and white: 'I just felt it was more emotional in black and white than in colour, and more real in a strange way' (Burton in Griffiths 2012). Black and white film is 'real in a strange way' because it pretends to realness even as it fails at mimesis compared to shooting in colour. In *Frankenweenie,* 'realness' is achieved by foregrounding the artificiality of film production and by drawing attention to the processes whereby the film is made.

This focus on the process of production becomes thematic when Victor's attic film studio becomes a Gothic laboratory. Here *Frankenweenie* suggests contiguity between the mad scientist and the film auteur. Both work with whatever

materials they can gather, cobbling together their creation in the isolation of their Romantic garret. To prepare for the experiment, Victor collects a bizarre assortment of banal household items. The result is that his studio is transformed into a replica of the original laboratory used in James Whale's 1931 production of *Frankenstein*. The laboratory was reused in Mel Brooks's *Young Frankenstein* (1974), itself a parody of the original film, and thus its reappearance here in *Frankenweenie* further emphasises it as a kitsch cliché. Nonetheless, the laboratory is not offered up for ridicule, rather the fact that it is cobbled together from items such as bicycle wheels, a kitchen whisk, an ironing board, a desk fan and a toy robot has a potentially dual effect: alleviating the horror on the one hand, and increasing it on the other, by making everyday items uncanny, strange and grotesque. Burton's emphasis on the home-made conditions of Sparky's resurrection reveals that all monsters from Gothic horror cinema are in some way DIY creations, artificial and fake, but nonetheless 'authentic'. The other monsters created in *Frankenweenie* are all home-made in some way, too, resurrected using home or garden products in a cobbled together DIY experiment. The crucial difference between these creatures and Sparky, however, is that their production process lacks 'love.' *Frankenweenie* thus locates 'authenticity' in the loving investment of the auteur and in the labour of the production process. Burton's comments on his love for the trash director, Ed Wood, whose works influence *Frankenweenie,* similarly site 'authenticity' within trash aesthetics because of the love and 'artistry' they reveal having gone into the creation: 'they are bad, but they're special… there's a certain consistency to them, and a certain kind of weird artistry' (Burton and Salisbury 2006, 130–131).

Frankenweenie's monster creation scene also reveals 'authenticity' as a staged performance rather than an essential, inherent quality of the text. The

laboratory is very clearly a stage set, not only because it contains Victor's props and film production equipment, but because it is a fabricated reproduction of a famous Gothic film set. The scene's 'authenticity' is also located in Victor's frenetic actions as he brings Sparky back to life. These are not represented as very scientific, rather the scene is staged in order to be a Gothic spectacle and the processes Victor engages in are aesthetic, rather than obviously functional. The performance is also a *re*-production, a *re*-staging of an already familiar spectacle, suggesting that 'authenticity' does not have to emerge from originality. For Funk et al, 'authenticity' is always contested, a site of ongoing power struggles, open to revision and reinvention (2012, 13). Thus, 'authenticity' always involves a re-negotiation of values and meanings. In *Frankenweenie*, this struggle is situated in Victor's performance of the mad scientist role, recombining fragments of previous iterations of the monster creation scene in new ways. The result is a staged performance of Gothic 'authenticity' rather than a cynical, weary pastiche of well-worn tropes and images.

Paranorman likewise establishes its 'authenticity' through references to previous Gothic performance in a way that reveals the constructed nature of the fake 'trash' aesthetic. The earlier parody, *Young Frankenstein* (1974), cited in *Frankenweenie,* also appears in *Paranorman* in a scene where Norman must prise a book from the hands of a corpse. In the original scene, a locked box is prised to humorous effect from the hands of the desiccated body of 'Baron von Frankenstein'. When the scene is repeated in *Paranorman,* it is on the one hand another cheesy cliché recycled and celebrated. However, it is also recontextualised in a way that underscores the painstaking production techniques of this film. There is a heavy physicality to the scene that is markedly different to the original: Norman struggles

to remove the book from his uncle's hands and he ends up stuck with the corpse in a number of humorous and uncomfortable positions. It takes far longer for the scene to play out and the clay models are manipulated over and over again to produce a number of detailed close-ups that showcase the model corpse's bloated face and grotesque facial features. The details and artistry of the models, as well as the time consuming filming process are emphasised. Trash aesthetics and 'fakery' require skill and money to produce. The zombies who menace Blithe Hollow, for example, evoke low budget zombies with their green skin and comically squishy body parts, but minute detail in the models is required. On the one hand, then, clay models and stop motion animation emphasise artistry and skill. On the other hand, they constitute a further level of fakery beyond the original trash aesthetics they reference: *Paranorman*'s zombies are, paradoxically, both faker than the B-movie zombies they reference, since they are miniature dolls, but 'authentic' since they are the result of a particularly labour and skill intensive animation style.

Stop motion animation draws more attention to the fakery used in Gothic horror film aesthetics and appears, paradoxically, as both more 'authentic' and more fake. As such, stop-motion animation offers an apt embodiment for 'authenticity' itself. This is significant since live-action Gothic parody films already 'heighten awareness of their constructedness and, by extension, the constructedness of the Gothic [adding] further layers of fakery to the Gothic re-faking of fakery' (Elliott 2007, 224–225). In live action Gothic parody, such as *Young Frankenstein*, these additional layers of fakery draw attention to the real costumes, actors and make-up used to create the original fakes (Elliott 2007, 225). In the references that *Paranorman* and *Frankenweenie* make to these earlier parody films, the stop-motion animation adds yet another layer of fakery. Whilst making a claim for their own

'authenticity', *Frankenweenie* and *Paranorman* highlight the inauthenticity of their production techniques, their aesthetic choices and their characters: the re-faking of fakery at the heart of their visual aesthetic. Contesting the subcultural binary of 'authentic' versus 'phony' reproduced in critiques of postmodern Gothic, both *Paranorman* and *Frankenweenie* point to the fact that 'authenticity itself can never be authentic, but must always be performed, staged, fabricated, crafted or otherwise imagined' (Grazian 2010, 192). The films represent the integral role of staging in the production of 'authenticity' and both make a strong claim for their 'authenticity' as Gothic whilst, at the same time, arguing that this is a claim that must be performed, at pains to reveal the aesthetic practices necessary to its staging. Both films also position themselves within a network of Gothic and horror texts, parodically recontextualising Gothic literature and film. In this way they employ similar strategies to the novel, *Coraline,* considered in the first chapter of this thesis, since they foreground their intertextuality and code it as part of their Gothic aesthetic. These films' relationship with their intertexts is characterised by irony and humour and both films employ parody not only in their aesthetic mode (utilising visual quotation and pastiche), but also in the way they construct their viewer in relation to these intertexts. It is this pragmatic dimension of parody I will explore next.

The Pragmatics of Gothic Parody #1: Pedagogy

Parody is the critical term that best communicates the double-voiced intertextual pragmatics of *Frankenweenie* and *Paranorman,* since it is a mode that neither cynically deconstructs nor plays faithful homage to its target texts, but rather synthesises them into something new. For Hutcheon, parody is the repetition of a

target text with critical distance, marking difference from, rather than similarity to, an 'original' (Hutcheon 1985, 6). Though this critical distance is often achieved through irony, parodic texts do not necessarily mock their target texts and, as Hutcheon points out, parody can 'cut both ways' (1985, 37). For Hutcheon, parody is a 'bitextual' form, 'bouncing' the reader between complicity with and distance from a target text, a process that produces a new text (1985, 32, 38). Despite the fact that she describes parody as a paradoxical form, partly invested in inscribing continuity with the past, Hutcheon emphasises the difference of parody from the 'original'. To combat this emphasis, Dan Harries argues that parody oscillates between similarity to and difference from its target in a way that is more equalised than in Hutcheon's account, though still results in the synthesis of a new text (2000, 6). This oscillation of parody, between similarity to and difference from the intertext, is employed in *Frankenweenie* and *Paranorman* to establish and connect to a 'tradition' of Gothic horror film, but also to open up this 'canon' to new readings and innovation. This pragmatic dimension of parody likewise constructs an agile, nomadic reader who swiftly negotiates the different responses parody provokes.

Parody's complicity with past forms, its conservative preservation of past works, suggest that it is, in part, a nostalgic mode. However, through their parodic recontextualisation of prior works, *Frankenweenie* and *Paranorman* do not construct an exclusive 'canon' of Gothic film for a select, knowing audience, but open up into a broad intertextual network of Gothic and horror film texts for exploration by an imagined audience of new viewers. *Frankenweenie*'s allusions and references include Universal Studio's monster pictures of the 1930s, notably James Whale's *Frankenstein* (1931), *The Mummy* (1932), *Bride of Frankenstein* (1935) and *Son of Frankenstein* (1939); early German expressionist cinema, notably *Nosferatu* (1922);

Roger Corman's Poe films of the 1960s, starring Vincent Price; Christopher Lee's Hammer Horror films of the 1950s and 1960s, notably *Dracula* (1958) and 1950s 'trash' science fiction, notably *Godzilla* (1954), *The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms* (1953), *Rodan* (1956) and *Gamera* (1965). *Paranorman* extends its canon a little later into the twentieth century, with references to an era of gory splatter or 'slasher' films from the 1970s and 1980s, notably *Suspiria* (1977), *Halloween* (1978), *Friday the 13th* (1980) and *Dawn of the Dead* (1978). In *Frankenweenie* and *Paranorman,* the reference to these past, 'classic' works does not function to exclude viewers' participation. Indeed, the films' construction of a Gothic film canon is not dependent on the audience spotting every citation. Instead, they celebrate a broad and inclusive Gothic horror film aesthetic. Trash aesthetics, small budget films, recurring characters, reused costumes and sets, and low-tech monsters are elevated to the status of a canonical, or 'classic' Gothic cinema. This act of recuperation not only elevates 'trash' cinema, but also relocates 'cult' cinema to a mainstream context, for a mainstream audience.

In part, *Frankenweenie* and *Paranorman* deploy parody pedagogically to teach viewers about Gothic film and to promote genre literacy. Harries notes this aspect of parody in his assertion that it functions to teach the 'logonomic system' of the target text (2000, 104). The logonomic system is the broad genre or mode, which guides the viewer by explicitly drawing their attention to particular textual norms and conventions (Harries 2000, 104). Hutcheon also notes the 'didactic value of parody in teaching or co-opting the art of the past by textual incorporation and ironic commentary' (1985, 27). She also claims that parody texts can aid readers in the difficult process of decoding by sharing cultural codes, reminding or educating readers, so that they can become competent decoders (1985, 27). The Gothic

transformation of the Disney logo in the opening credits of *Frankenweenie* begins this pedagogical process, drawing attention to a number of Gothic clichés that recur throughout the film. Later, Burton's representation of New Holland's pet cemetery offers further opportunities for promoting Gothic literacy in its exaggerated *mise-en-scène* of a stormy, ruined graveyard. As Sparky moves between the looming headstones, lightning illuminates the laughably cute names of the deceased pets inscribed upon them, and a bunny carved in stone sits atop as memorial in place of a grimacing gargoyle. Here, the gentle parodic humour targets Mary Lambert and Stephen King's *Pet Sematary* (1989) as well as the broader literary and filmic trope of the Gothic graveyard. Yet, the humour of the scene does not function as deconstructive mockery, but works to draw attention to the referenced conventions. The parody simultaneously asks its audience to become familiar with, to understand, and to enjoy, the generic codes of Gothic film.

Frankenweenie constructs a 'canon' of Gothic film to argue for the continued importance and affectivity of past works. In one scene, Christopher Lee as Dracula appears on Victor's parents' television screen. Victor's parents are rapt by Lee's performance, as Victor sneaks back into his house with the freshly exhumed corpse of Sparky the dog. Non-diegetic music from *Dracula* accompanies Victor's entrance, functioning as diegetic sound in the context of *Frankenweenie,* with the swells and accents of the original film score marking the points at which Victor risks detection. The double function of the music gives viewers untutored in horror conventions a quick lesson in the logonomic system of a horror film score, marking the affective points of the music through Victor's actions. More importantly, the Hammer Horror film has not been rendered in clay stop motion animation. Its jarring appearance as a live action visual marks it as special and important. Though it is recontextualised,

with its musical score providing a more comedic function in the diegesis of *Frankenweenie, Dracula* is presented as a piece of affective Gothic horror: Victor's parents shudder in delight as they watch the film. Furthermore, the inclusion of *Dracula* in its original format – a direct, rather than oblique, reference – marks this parodic reference as a specific quotation, which acts itself as an invitation to viewers unfamiliar with the Christopher Lee text to seek it out.

Throughout *Frankenweenie,* the names and faces of key figures from a canon of 'classic' Gothic film are echoed in the names and faces of characters. Elsa van Helsing, Victor's neighbour, is a reference to Elsa Lanchester, whilst the shock of white hair on her pet poodle, Persephone, visually recalls Elsa's role as the *Bride of Frankenstein* (1953). Vincent Price's visage is recreated in clay in the features of Mr Rzykruski, Victor's science teacher. Here the reference to previous horror films is doubled in that this relationship also echoes Burton's autobiographical short, *Vincent* (1982), in which a young boy forms a bond with Vincent Price through his love of horror film, a relationship replayed in the relationship between the eponymous trash cinema director and Bela Lugosi in *Ed Wood* (1994). The climactic scene of *Frankenweenie* is another double quotation, reprising the windmill scene in *Frankenstein* (1931) and Burton's *Sleepy Hollow* (1999). Without mockery, the scene plays out along the same affective lines as the 'original(s)', rather than with ironic detachment or distance. In all these cases of specific, marked references, *Frankenweenie* makes a claim for the repeatability and continued affective power of those texts it constructs as 'classic' Gothic cinema.

Paranorman uses parody to teach the 'logonomic system' of Gothic horror film by employing many clichéd conventions. These clichés are not parodied for the purposes of mockery, but in order to restage their affective power. Early in

Paranorman, the clichés of zombie cinema are marked comedically in Norman's morning routine. A zombie alarm clock wakes Norman with an electronically generated groaning noise, and a plastic zombie arm reaches out of its base. Norman's arm likewise reaches up into the shot, waving around aimlessly, much like a poorly coordinated zombie limb, as he makes a similar groan, though this time resulting from his early morning grogginess. In the next scene, Norman brushes his teeth in front of the bathroom mirror with a zombie-themed toothbrush. The toothpaste foams as Norman opens his lips, grimacing, giving him the appearance of a slack-jawed zombie. Again, Norman's early morning grunts and groans accompany the scene. These sounds, gestures and facial expressions are all later repeated by the actual zombies who pursue Norman through the woods and into the town. In the first instance, the cliché is marked as humorous, and also linked to the commodification of horror through the branded alarm clock and toothbrush. In these sequences, the groans, flailing limbs and facial grimace are not marked as scary, but their connection with zombie films is made clear through the zombie-themed products. Thus, as the clichés are parodied they also serve as a teaching example in preparation for their next appearance in the film. The second iteration of the clichés occurs in the context of a more typical zombie film narrative: the protagonist flees for his life from undead attackers. In this second iteration, the clichés are marked as eliciting fear in the fleeing Norman. Their previous iteration as humorous notwithstanding, the zombies' movements and sounds are represented as retaining the power to terrify.

The fact that the clichés appear more than once in *Paranorman* allows the audience to gain a lesson in the logonomic system of Gothic in advance of the cliché's second appearance. The movements of the zombie in the film within a film that opens *Paranorman* work similarly to Norman's morning routine as an amusing

introduction to the conventions of zombie films. In the film within a film, the zombie's advance upon the screaming victim is marked as silly. Nonetheless, when zombies advance upon Norman as he raids his Uncle's house for clues about the witch's curse, they are marked as threatening and terrifying. Norman rifles through piles of books in his Uncle's study when he hears banging at the door. Immediately, the non-diegetic music of the earlier zombie film can be heard in the soundtrack, signalling to viewers what to expect. Again, music is used as a means through which to teach the logonomic system as the soundtrack anticipates the appearance of the zombie. Repeating the television movie from the opening of *Paranorman,* the zombie's hand punches through the door and bursts it open. Interestingly, this cliché is repeated a third time, but recontextualised again, when Norman and his friends are trapped inside the town hall by an angry mob of townsfolk. This time, it is the hands and arms of the townsfolk punching through the walls, attempting to grab the children trapped inside. The repetition of the convention marks the town mob as monstrous, and their aggressive attempts to get Norman and his friends are posited as genuinely frightening. In *Paranorman,* then, each iteration of a cliché renders the narrative situation more threatening, not less. The townsfolk's murderous intents towards Norman are scarier than the early zombie advance, which was scarier than the zombie advance Norman watched on his television screen in the opening scene. Each time, the cliché reiterates the rules of a zombie film, simultaneously upping the potential affectivity of the cliché.

As I state in the introduction to this thesis, pedagogies of the Gothic often imagine an unequal power relation between an authoritative text and an untutored child reader. This hierarchy is resisted by *Frankenweenie* and *Paranorman,* which critique didactic forms of education. School educators in particular, with the

exception of the eccentric science teacher Mr Rzykruski in *Frankenweenie*, are brutish fools who terrorise rather than encourage their pupils. The action of *Paranorman* is precipitated by the failure of a patronising act of education, designed to keep a young girl docile. Every year, Norman's uncle reads a 'bed time story' to the spirit of the witch, actually a little girl, so that she will 'go back to sleep for another year' and not cause trouble in the town. When Norman's uncle fails to carry out this duty, the witch wakes up and takes her revenge on Blithe Hollow. Instead of taking up his uncle's role, Norman rejects the tradition of placating the witch because it fails to engage with the town's real history and only leads to a disastrous build-up of resentment and fear. Norman's intervention offers a message: children should not be patronised or fobbed off with cynically motivated acts of 'education'. The patronising fairy tale is echoed in Ms. Henscher's school play that Norman and his class mates are forced to take part in. The play is a heavy-handed retelling of the witch trial, critiqued by the school children who recognise it as an inaccurate and stereotypical depiction of a witch. Ms Henscher dismisses the pupils' concerns. She tells them that the play is not supposed to be accurate; it is supposed to sell key-chains to tourists. Victor's school fails its children because it does not offer the right sorts of learning experiences. Knowledge is vital if the town is to survive, as Norman's independent investigations into the town's history demonstrate, but this is not knowledge learned in school. Likewise, *Frankenweenie* presents the school environment and school educators as offering little in the way of valuable learning experiences for the protagonists. The school's response to Mr Rzykruski's unconventional science lessons, which is to sack him, is represented as small-minded and anti-intellectual. Mr Ryzkruski is replaced by a bullish and uninspiring gym teacher, who removes the chance of creative expression by reducing the school

science fair to the lowest common denominator, giving the prize to the least imaginative experiment.

Norman and Victor are positioned as outsiders in educational institutions that are represented as small-minded and limiting. However, it is this outsider status that allows them to model new types of knowledge for their peers. They possess the right sort of knowledge, developed out of their geeky love of Gothic horror, to save their dull suburban communities. In *Paranorman,* Norman's supernatural abilities save the town from destruction by the witch's curse. His expertise is emphasised in his empathy with and understanding of the zombies, which allows him to work out the truth behind the story of the witch's curse. This expertise upsets the hierarchies fostered by school and Norman's sister, a popular cheerleader, is initially disgusted that 'the geeks are in charge'. However, she later defends her brother to a jeering mob of townsfolk, exclaiming 'I really think he knows what he is talking about.' In *Frankenweenie,* the learning experience is rather different, since the experiments initiated by Victor, later copied by the other elementary school pupils, lead to chaos and destruction in the town. Nonetheless, Victor's creative use of science and the supernatural inspires his peers far more than the dull text-book lessons foisted upon them by the replacement science teacher. Victor, who is initially isolated, is validated as an expert. Later, Victor's Gothic expertise saves the day as he and Sparky use their ingenuity and knowledge gleaned from monster movies to fight the other monsters rampaging at the town fete. In both films, the protagonists use their unusual expertise to become heroic, educating the town in new forms of knowledge, combating the cynicism and patronising didacticism of adult-sanctioned forms of learning.

In their pedagogical use of Gothic parody, promoting genre literacy and constructing a canon, *Frankenweenie* and *Paranorman* would seem to employ parody didactically. Yet, within the narratives themselves, the hierarchies of teacher and student, adult and child, expert and amateur are undercut. In *Paranorman*, for example, Norman is far more literate than the foolish adults, who are not able to understand the supernatural events in Blithe Hollow. But it is not only Norman's Gothic literacy that marks him as more capable than the adults, it is his lack of cynicism and naïve engagement with supernatural events. Similarly, in *Frankenweenie,* Victor's naïve attempts to carry out a science experiment based on the unreal and fantastic conventions of Gothic film exhort the disenfranchised adults to have more faith in their children's understanding of the world. Contrary to the logic of subcultural capital, Norman and Victor are thus not cynical outsiders. Rather, their unusual expertise and naïve faith in Gothic marks it as a potentially transformative force and works to resolve the films' anxiety about the pedagogical function of parody. Both films construct a 'canon' of Gothic horror film and use parody to promote genre literacy to an audience of children, constructed as untutored and ignorant of 'classic' Gothic texts and conventions. However, within both narratives, this marginal Gothic material is best understood by the child protagonists, who deploy its transformative and affective power. Frankenweenie and Paranorman imagine a new Gothic reader, a nomadic subject able to negotiate the multiple meanings offered by their parodic recontextualisation of Gothic tropes. It is this nomadic reader I want to explore next.

The Pragmatics of Gothic Parody #2: The Sophisticated Naïve Reader

Frankenweenie and *Paranorman* construct a nomadic 'conceptual persona' whose response to Gothic testifies to its continued affective power. This is not a real audience member, nor can it account for the myriad of ways various real viewers might read the parody. Rather, the conceptual persona offers a new position from which to consider the pragmatic effects of parody. In Hutcheon's formulation of parody the intention encoded into the parody text by its producer and the recognition of the intent by a reader are both required for the successful *énonciation* of parody. This formulation depends on readers recognising the inferred intent and so requires readers to have the requisite genre, linguistic and ideological competencies, 'an ability' to decode the intended parodic meaning (Hutcheon 1985, 22). Harries views Hutcheon's model as culturally 'elitist' in the way that it infers that an ideal reading of parody is possible, one in which a 'sophisticated subject' matches competencies with the producers of a text in order to decode it in the preferable way (Harries 2000, 109; Hutcheon 1985, 94). Harries contends that parody texts offer a wide range of readings and that this ideal model of reception rarely, if ever, emerges. I agree that a range of readings of a parody text will always be available since an almost limitless host of factors might contribute to the context of reception. However, the notion of a 'conceptual persona' allows me to consider how these recent parody films construct a particular viewer whose response acts as a catalyst for the innovations presented in the filmic text.

Typically, commentary on children's film echoes a hierarchical formulation of the pragmatic effects of parody. Reviewers often put forward a 'different levels' account of reception, claiming that children and adults read film on different levels. Rohrer Finlo notes that parodic references in animated film will be 'missed' by

children, and are intended only for the adult audience (2009). This 'different levels' argument is clear in Angie Errigo's review of *Frankenweenie,* which notes that the references to classic Hollywood horror in the film 'sadly will go over a lot of oblivious heads these days' (2012). Jeffrey Weinstock likewise notes that *Frankenweenie* has been made 'for those with the requisite Burton and Hollywood "literacies"' and Edwin Page suggests that Burton's pop culture references are not likely to be recognised by children but can be enjoyed by the adults accompanying them (Weinstock 2013, 2; Page 2006, 231). In this hierarchical formulation of the effects of contemporary parody, critics construct two viewers: those with competencies (adults) who can decode the text, and those without (children) who respond naively. However, *Frankenweenie* and *Paranorman* resist the binaristic hierarchies of a didactic pedagogical structure, demonstrating faith in the competency of their imagined readers, whether child or adult.

Paranorman constructs a viewer in whom it has complete faith, building the competencies required to decode its parody into the text. *Paranoman'*s viewer does not need knowledge of extra-textual material or prior genre literacy. Chris Butler acknowledges that the film includes several 'eye-winking' references 'for horror movie fans'. Although those references may go over the heads of most children, Butler argues that they work for a range of reader competencies:

> What's interesting is that… when Neil wears the hockey mask [from *Friday the 13th*], children squeal with laughter just because Neil himself is funny. I don't think that you need to get that it's a reference to *Friday the 13th*. I think it works on multiple levels. (Butler, quoted in Laws 2013)

Though Butler still offers the 'different levels' argument to account for the effects of this reference to slasher movie horror, I argue that the material needed to decode the parody is provided within the narrative. In providing this material the film imagines a reader who can decode its references to slasher horror, even if they might not know the specific titles of the specific films in question. The target for the parody here is what is referred to by a character in the film as a 'slasher movie vibe'. Neil's brother Mitch uses this description to refer to the old house out of town that Norman investigates for clues about the curse. The house looms menacingly above Norman as he approaches and its interior is represented as filthy and threatening. Norman creeps about the house anxiously, frightened to disturb the piles of clutter and strange objects that litter the grimy surfaces. Here, the 'slasher movie vibe' is established by the *mise en scène*, regardless of whether a viewer has seen or even knows what a 'slasher' movie is. The subsequent specific references to *Halloween* and *Friday the 13th* are thus placed within this frame of reference, marked as belonging to this logonomic system of 'slasher' movies.

In one scene, the theme music from *Halloween* plays on Norman's phone, making Norman jump briefly, before he realises the source of the noise. The staccato music of *Halloween* is sufficiently at odds with the diegesis and is thus marked as significant both within the diegesis – through Norman's reaction – and extra-diegetically, through its contrast with the non-diegetic sound in this scene. The realisation that it is simply a ringtone that has spooked Norman works to create comedy through incongruity, regardless of whether it is noted as a reference or not. However, the viewer is given access to enough material within the narrative to understand that the ringtone is likely a further reference to Norman's love of horror film, demonstrated by his collection of horror movie memorabilia. Moreover, the

ringtone echoes the staccato rhythm of the soundtrack of the trashy zombie flick that opens the film, and *Paranorman* has subsequently demonstrated how horror soundtracks work to emphasise climactic scary moments. In this context, the ringtone is identified as belonging to a horror film. This is then confirmed when Neil – Norman's friend – appears below Norman's window, wearing the hockey mask worn by Jason in *Friday the 13th*. The film invites an affective response as well as one of ironic detachment. First, the *mise en scène* is focalised through Norman, who looks down out of his window at this strange faceless figure. Neil looks spooky and comical at the same time; the mask blots out his facial features, yet his rotund figure and ginger hair are visible. Here, Paranorman oscillates between horror and humour, but marks that shift for the viewer, who is invited to empathise with Norman's fear whilst also laughing at Neil. Neil does not remove the mask, but his muffled voice comes through after a few seconds, dispelling Norman's momentary fear. The logonomic system of the 'slasher movie' is coded into the narrative through a series of references, musical, visual and verbal. The way these references are linked together in sequence codes into the narrative opportunities for any viewer to 'pick up' the parody as they go.

Paranorman does not teach the rules of the genre in a didactic way, interrupting the narrative diegesis to signal a particular moment as parodic. Instead, the logonomic system is coded into the narrative without disrupting the suspension of disbelief or affectivity of events. Harries' notion of the 'sophisticated naïve' reader is a useful way to think about how these films construct a reader that is neither 'adult' nor 'child', neither genre savvy nor illiterate, but one who is able to access genre literacy to decode the parody and, at the same time, enjoy the texts naively. For Harries, this 'sophisticated naïve' reader gets a 'quick lesson' in the parody as

they watch, learning as they go, and, perhaps accessing different readings if they view the text multiple times (2000, 110). Harries follows Derrida, who claims that 'parody always supposes a naivety withdrawing into an unconscious, a vertiginous non-mastery' (Derrida 1979, 79). Derrida's suggestion is that language is incalculable but that parody allows some kind of access to it because it presumes a position of naivety. Robert Phiddian elaborates upon this by claiming that Derrida treats notions such as 'language' and 'truth' as though they were in a play of parody, and so parody is itself a form of deconstruction since it foregrounds the processes that exist within language itself (1997, 673). I contend that the notion that parody encourages a naïve reading, and that a reader can be simultaneously naïve and sophisticated, has a particular resonance in these children's Gothic parody texts. I would go further than Harries' notion of the 'quick lesson', and suggest that parody functions to create a space for the naïve reader's enjoyment, and, more than this, celebrates naivety itself as the ideal reading position.

Indeed, even in texts where Gothic parody appears to deflate expectations and subject the naïve reader to a lesson in rationality, pretensions to mastery are lampooned. Jacqueline Howard argues that Jane Austen's Gothic parody, *Northanger Abbey,* pits the naïve and inexperienced enjoyment of Catherine Morland against the detached irony and knowing pretensions of Henry Tilney. Henry tutors the naïve Catherine, whose love of Gothic novels is tempered by his calm rationality. Nonetheless, Howard claims that the final lesson comes at Henry's expense. Austen has Henry 'overstate his case' when rubbishing Gothic novels and

> treats such blinkered avowals of an ordered society and security from threat with some irony. Furthermore, Henry's pleasure in feeling superior to Catherine, whom he loves for her freshness, honesty, teachability, and 'very

ignorant mind' both undercuts and limits his perceptions. (J. Howard 1994,

167)

Catherine's naivety is anything but ignorant as she is well versed in the conventions

of the books she loves: 'I know it must be a skeleton, I am sure it is Laurentina's

skeleton. Oh! I am delighted with the book!' Catherine effuses to a friend about her

enjoyment of Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (Austen 1995, 36). Her

expectations of the genre are based on extensive reading, as her comment about the

skeleton suggests, but neither her knowledge nor the repetitiveness of the tropes have

lessened Catherine's enjoyment or suspension of disbelief. Catherine's enthusiastic

enjoyment of Gothic is echoed in the enjoyment that *Frankenweenie* and

Paranorman encourage in Gothic film conventions. These children's Gothic texts

utilise some of the techniques of parody, not to inculcate a cynicism about the

parodied texts in their implied naïve viewers (children who are unlikely to have seen

James Whale's 1931 *Frankenstein*, for example), but in order to imply that naïve

enjoyment of Gothic is still available to all readers even as Gothic tropes reveal

themselves as recycled citations made out of inauthentic materials. Naivety is the

preferred reading strategy offered by Gothic parody because it allows continued

belief in and enjoyment of Gothic, elsewhere dismissed as emptied of affectivity and

meaning. The films construct a naiver, but agile reader, opening up a Gothic 'canon'

to renewal and innovation, rather than monumentalising it, or rendering it inert. As

Elliott argues in relation to the representation of Dracula in an earlier Gothic film

parody, *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein,* 'Gothic, film, and parody remain in

excess of prior ideological uses, ready for new uses, ready for new narratives, new

films and, of course, new parodies' (Elliott 2008, 40).

Conclusions: Naivety and Transformation

Frankenweenie and *Paranorman* tell the story of protagonists who are initially marginalised and isolated within their communities. Victor spends most of his time alone in his attic, whilst Norman escapes the scorn of his peers and parents by watching trashy horror films. Though Victor and Norman are marginalised, their engagement with Gothic is presented as productive, not destructive. Indeed, the narrative climax of each film stages a triumph of naivety and belief, reversing the logic of subcultural capital and a cynical account of postmillennial Gothic cultural production. Relocating from the margins to the mainstream, these Gothic outsiders transform their communities. Throughout the films, 'authenticity' is equated with naivety and innocence, evoked through the use of toys. Toys feature prominently in Victor's home-made film as props, and, later, in his laboratory. Toys based on Gothic horror also fill Norman's bedroom: there is an alarm clock; dolls and figurines; posters; even a pair of zombie slippers. Victor's toys may mark him as a film producer, whilst Norman's mark him as a consumer, but their prominence indicates that making and watching Gothic must be an innocent pleasure if it is to be 'authentic'. This innocent enjoyment experienced by the child protagonists is contrasted with the gloomy cynicism of the adults in the films. Norman's parents, especially his father, berate the trashy film and Norman's 'weird' hobbies. A similar conflict emerges between Victor and his father. It is Victor's father's insistence on making 'compromises' that leads Victor to take part in the fateful baseball game in which Sparky is killed by a passing car. In both cases, this conflict between the adult and a child is finally won by the child: naivety overcomes cynicism; idealism overcomes pessimism; and narratives of loss are overturned as the living and the dead are reconciled; belief in the supernatural trumps disbelief as the insights of the

once marginal outsider come to be valued by a community utterly transformed. The films reinvest a supposedly exhausted textual world with wonder and delight. There is also a utopian dimension, too, since they offer lessons about community, about the integration of social outsiders and the most beneficial and transformative types of education.

The conclusion of *Frankenweenie* demonstrates the triumph of naivety over cynicism as Victor's father is won over by the strength of Victor's love for his undead companion, Sparky, and his conviction in his ability to return him to life. The rampaging monsters are defeated by Victor's ingenuity, but are swiftly replaced by a rampaging mob of townsfolk, eager to punish Victor and his undead creation for bringing this evil upon their town. As in *Paranorman,* the townsfolk are presented as monstrous because of their fear, hatred and cynicism. It is the mayor, the most brutish and visually ugly of all the adults, who accidentally sets the windmill on fire with his niece Elsa inside. The adults must learn their lesson accordingly, and look on helplessly as Victor and Sparky save the girl. Sparky functions in this scene as a reminder of the faithful, heroic dog narratives once popular in sentimental US television and film texts, made famous in *Lassie* (1954), *The Littlest Hobo* (1963) and *Bingo* (1991). Burton's use of Gothic, then, brings together sentimental narrative with Gothic fear and monstrosity, confounding the separation of the forms imagined in Mark Edmundson's account of late twentieth-century American culture (1999).

Frankenweenie structures its ending in stages, and, at each stage threatens to foreclose on Victor's naïve idealism. Earlier in the film, Victor's father chides Victor, rather comedically, for 'crossing the boundary between life and death, reanimating a corpse… it's very upsetting!' Victor's suburban parents cannot believe that their son has resurrected the family's deceased pet dog. Victor's response is one

of naïve confusion: 'you said it yourself: you'd bring back Sparky if you could!' Victor's father's reply is representative of a cynical adult attitude in Burton's New Holland, which dismisses children's curiosity: 'It's easy to promise the impossible' he scoffs. Burton codes cynical disbelief as the province of adults, and naïve conviction as the privilege of the child. As the film reaches its climax, it seems as though Victor will have to finally learn the lesson of compromise and loss. A firefighter emerges from the ashes of the ruined windmill, with Sparky's corpse in his arms. As Victor leans over him, sobbing, there is a pause that suggests Victor's time with his faithful childhood friend has come to an end. However, this is stalled when Victor's father begs the townspeople to start their car engines. Shocked, Victor reminds his father, 'you said I had to let him go'. Here the relationship between father and son is transformed, as Victor's father learns from his son's conviction and idealism: 'Sometimes adults don't know what they are talking about'. The angry mob relinquish their burning torches and encircle the boy, using their car engines to revive Sparky. The community gesture seems futile, and, for a few moments, it seems as though Victor will have to learn the hard lesson of loss after all: 'It's ok boy; you don't have to come back,' Victor whispers to the unmoving corpse. However, this foreclosure is overturned one last time when Sparky does, at the last moment, finally revive. Not only is one boy's naïve idealism justified through this ending, and the innocence of childhood promised eternal existence in the revived body of Sparky, but a whole community is transformed by the events initiated by Victor's experiments. From the margins to the centre, Victor is transformed from weird outsider to the centre of his community.

The resolution of *Paranorman* likewise sees the action of a vilified outsider transforming the community, placing himself at its centre in the process. The ending

stages reconciliation between past and present, and between adult and child, through the healing of the trauma suffered by the child witch, Agatha, at the hands of the adult townsfolk who feared her. Norman solves the problem of the witch's curse by finding the spirit of the 'little girl' hiding inside the vengeful witch. Again, this film positions the innocence of the child against the cynicism of the adult and forgiveness rather than punishment is posited as the solution to the community's problems. The idealised ending even sees the vicious bully, Alvin, recuperated as a positive character when he tells a reporter that Norman is his best buddy, and that they write a paranormal investigation blog together. Norman's conversation with Agatha at the climax of the film reiterates its message: 'you're not alone'. Naivety is celebrated through the emphasis on the importance of happy endings. 'Aggie' lets go of her hatred and revenge, as she recalls the place that her 'mommy' used to take her as a child: 'We sat under the tree and she told me stories. They all had happy endings'. Even though the themes of *Paranorman* are markedly dark, dealing with persecution and the murder of a child, a happy ending is presented as possible and necessary. As Agatha fades into bright light and melts away, the scene switches to a view of the trashed town of Blithe Hollow, with a close up on the severed head of the town's warty-faced witch statue. The townsfolk mill around, clearing up and talking to the press. As in *Frankenweenie,* Norman's father awkwardly embraces his son, saying 'well done'. Everything returns to normal in Blithe Hollow in a narrative of comic restitution rather than Gothic disintegration, but it is a renewed and transformed normality. Finally, *Paranorman* transforms the domestic space of the home, which is figured in the opening not only as drab, but marked by familial conflict and mistrust. The film ends just as it opened, with Norman seated in front of his television, watching a trashy horror film. This time, however, he is joined by the whole family,

who have a new-found appreciation for Norman's favourite film genre. They are also reconciled to the presence of the ghostly grandmother who haunts the house. With the dead and the living finally reunited, the family follow Norman's example and sit down to enjoy Gothic horror together.

Paranorman and *Frankenweenie* also pit belief against disbelief, echoing earlier Gothic film parodies that resist critical *disbelief* in Gothic. According to Elliott, Gothic parody film texts resist criticism's attempts to map onto them critical readings that assert that Gothic narratives are representative of something else (Elliott 24, 27, 37). Elliott argues that twentieth-century Gothic parodies, such as *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein* and *Love at First Bite* 'always already [subject] any deconstructive operations upon themselves to parody' and 'laugh at critical formulae' as much as they do Gothic clichés (2008, 27, 30). Though Gothic film parodies seem to 'diminish the power of literal manifestations of the Gothic supernatural to terrorise and horrify, representing them as mere metaphors' in lines such as 'you've gone bats', they also parody the way criticism makes Gothic monsters into mere metaphors, by rendering these critical metaphors themselves as conventional clichés (Elliott 2008, 31). Elliott's account of the reduction of critical formulae to harmless cliché works for films such as *Love at First Bite* and *Young Frankenstein*, which in particular parody Freudian psychoanalytical accounts of Gothic. The resistance to critical disbelief is rather different in *Paranorman* and *Frankenweenie,* though. Like these earlier texts, they use parody to mark Gothic clichés, metaphors and tropes as repetition and artifice, thereby resisting a 'depth' reading of Gothic. However, their resistance to critical acts of deconstruction does not render the Gothic trope harmless and empty, but imagines a reader that will reinvest in the narrative of the film as it presents itself on the surface.

Elliott argues that some Gothic novels, such as those by Jane Austen and Ann Radcliffe, chart a character's 'journey from terrified belief in the Gothic supernatural to rational disbelief', whilst in others, like *Dracula*, 'characters journey in the opposite direction: from scoffing disbelief into awestruck belief' (2008, 37). In contrast to a pervasive critical disbelief in the supernatural narratives of Gothic fiction, Gothic parody encourages audience investment in the supernatural, requiring a 'willing suspension of disbelief' (Elliott 2008. 37). In *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein*, for example, the rational sceptic Abbott contrasts with the terrified believer Costello. Elliot argues that 'Abbott becomes a parody of those menacing monsters, their rational, quotidian, bullying, delimiting double' (2008, 38). Ultimately, it is Costello's affirmation of belief ('I saw what I saw what I saw what I saw') that represents, for Elliott, the role of Gothic film parody in undermining critical disbelief: it 'serves as a slogan for how what one sees at first continues to construct what one sees thereafter [and] critiques pervasive tendencies to see only what one has seen before, to discover only what one already knows, and to affirm only what one always already believes in recent Gothic criticism' (Elliott 2008, 39). In *Paranorman* and *Frankenweenie,* the relocation of the naïve child from the outside to the centre makes a similar claim for resisting disbelief in Gothic. The naivety and willing belief manifested by Norman and Victor triumphs over the disbelief of the rest of their community. Norman's wish that everyone 'could see what I see' has, to some extent, come to pass by the end of the film. Whilst his family cannot see the ghost of their grandmother, they now accept that she is there rather than reading her manifestation as a bizarre bid for attention by a disturbed little boy. The 'child' believer occupies the position of mastery at the film's close, a narrative outcome that is echoed in the way these texts make room for a

sophisticated naïve viewer within the text, someone who can come to the film without the 'requisite literacies', and yet is nonetheless able to decode and enjoy the parody.

In summary, *Paranorman* and *Frankenweenie* counter claims made by some Gothic critics that postmillennial gothic is exhausted through repetition and diluted through pervasion into popular culture. These films embrace the negative term 'Disneygothic', and recontextualise it, identifying as both 'Disney' *and* 'Gothic' in a way that subjects both terms to mutual transformation. These films also foreground the production of 'authenticity' in such a way as to contest discourses that mark mainstream popular culture as 'inauthentic', whilst simultaneously providing ways in which 'authenticity' can be reconfigured as a temporary and performative designation, rather than as a value judgment. Finally, parody functions in these three films as an alternative pedagogy, one that posits naivety as the ideal reading position. Naivety allows viewers to approach postmillennial gothic with enchantment, rather than with wary cynicism. Moreover, the nomadic reader constructed by these parodies initiates interaction between territories separated by the elitist logic of subcultural capital and modernist accounts of cultural production. In these films, the naivety of the child is posited as an outsider perspective, providing an opportunity for defamiliarisation not only with conventional Gothic narratives, but with attitudes about learning and being. These texts use parody to promote self-reflexivity, but this self-reflexivity does not lead to deconstructive emptiness. Rather, as in Braidotti's nomadic theory, with increased self-reflexivity comes defamiliarisation: 'a new critical distance is established between oneself and one's home grounds – a sense of estrangement that is not painless, but rich in ethical rewards and increased understanding' (2011a, 16). The films chart a move from the 'margins', represented

by Victor's attic and Norman's bedroom, to the 'mainstream', represented by the town square and the family living room. In this relocation the centre is 'set in motion toward a becoming minoritarian [requiring] qualitative changes in the very structures of its subjectivity' (Braidotti 2011b, 20). However, it is not only the centre that is transformed, but the margins too, as Gothic parody enacts a mutual transformation that connects rather than isolates cultural spaces.

Chapter 5

The 'Great Outdoors':

Anthony Horowitz's *Power of Five* and

Derek Landy's *Skulduggery Pleasant*

Introduction: Nomadic Encounters with the Weird

The final iteration of postmillennial children's Gothic fiction I will consider is the Weird fiction fantasy series by Anthony Horowitz and Derek Landy. The *Skulduggery Pleasant* series by Landy (2007 – 2016) and *The Power of Five* series by Horowitz (2005 – 2014) combine Weird horror fiction (a style typified in the works of H. P. Lovecraft, first published in the pulp magazine *Weird Tales* in the 1920s) with twenty-first century pop-cultural appropriations of Lovecraft's 'Cthulhu Mythos', within the framework of a children's fantasy series. The Weird sits uneasily alongside both Fantasy and the Gothic, particularly as the two forms have been typically deployed within children's literature. Foremost, the ontological and epistemological horror aimed at by Weird fiction rejects the mastery and transcendence offered by heroic fantasy narratives.[14] There are no heroes: everybody dies or goes insane. So too does the Weird run contrary to the concept of Gothic as a means of catharsis in which terror is evoked so as to be expelled or assimilated.[15] Weird monsters are not manifestations of repressed psychological material or

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[14] Rosemary Jackson argues that the genre of high fantasy, typified in works by J. R. R. Tolkien, C. S. Lewis or Ursula le Guin, offers a nostalgic, humanist vision in which dark 'others' are defeated (R. Jackson 1981, 1, 5, 90).

[15] As discussed in the introduction, Jackson et al express this particular concept of Gothic when discussing why it is suited to the project of children's literature (A. Jackson *et al* 2008, 8). Chris Baldick dates this tradition of 'anti-Gothicism' in Gothic back to the eighteenth century, where often writers borrowed the 'nightmares of a past age in order to repudiate their authority' (Baldick 1992, xiii–xiv).

cultural anxieties and so cannot be assimilated or expelled from experience. Rather, Weird monsters gesture to a material realm beyond human perception, what Lovecraft terms the 'chaos and the dæmons of unplumbed space' (1927, 3).

Through an encounter with the Weird, postmillennial children's Gothic pushes to its limits the nomadic project of unhoming the child subject in order to refigure it outside the bounds of pedagogical and psychoanalytical narratives. Opening out into a Weird universe that is both incomprehensible and indifferent to human subjectivity, Landy and Horowitz utterly *unhome* their protagonists, propelling them into a world of epistemological anxiety and potential oblivion. Despite their seeming incompatibility, the Weird and children's literature are mutually transformed in *Skulduggery Pleasant* and *The Power of Five*. The injection of ontological horror into the terrain of children's fantasy undermines and complicates the stories of maturation and mastery they promise and further challenges the psychoanalytic and humanist accounts of the 'I'. In its new figuration within children's literature, the Weird denotes a space beyond the limits of the self, in which the nomad encounters what speculative realist philosophy designates the completely 'foreign territory' of the material realm (Meillassoux 2009, 7). Here, the nomad flirts with the pleasures of oblivion, or, rather, with the feeling of being 'entirely elsewhere' (Meillassoux 2009, 7). This is not the 'realm of non-signification', a world of dark 'Things' imagined in deconstructive psychoanalytic accounts of the Weird, but rather the territory of materiality in which the nomadic subject is empowered through its indirect engagement with objects beyond the self, in the '*great outdoors*' (R. Jackson 1981, 25; Botting 2012b, 283; Meillassoux 2009, 7).

The Weird aims to produce both ontological and epistemological horror in its revelation of what Lovecraft terms 'spheres of existence whereof we know nothing and wherein we have no part' (Lovecraft 1927, 2). Lovecraft biographer and scholar S. T. Joshi suggests the Weird deals in '"supernormal" phenomena' that lie outside human understanding but *within* material reality (1990, 8). For Joshi, these supernormal phenomena prompt epistemological horror because they reveal 'our ignorance of certain "natural laws"' (1990, 7). In contrast, contemporary Weird writer and critic, China Miéville argues that the horror of Weird fiction is specifically *ontological*:

> The Weird is not the return of any repressed: though always described as ancient, and half-recalled by characters from spurious texts, this recruitment to invented cultural memory does not avail Weird monsters of Gothic's strategy of revenance, but back-projects their radical unremembered alterity into history, to en-Weird ontology itself. (Mieville 2008, 113)

In Miéville's account, the Weird rejects a Gothic, or uncanny, 'return of the repressed' for an encounter with a material world made radically strange. According to Miéville's focus on the ontological, the Weird presents not with a problem of *how* knowledge is established, but remakes the very material fabric of the world.

Skulduggery Pleasant and *The Power of Five* evoke *both* ontological horror and epistemological anxiety in their revelations of a hidden world of Weird magic and creatures existing alongside everyday reality. This is not the 'sword and sorcery' magic of traditional fantasy, but a dangerous power employed by and against monstrous entities from an 'outer' realm, beyond human existence. Recalling Lovecraft's 'The Call of Cthulhu', *Skulduggery Pleasant* posits the existence of god-

like beings from another plane of existence, 'The Faceless Ones', whilst Matt in *The Power of Five* discovers the existence of 'The Old Ones' lurking behind the quotidian world (Lovecraft 1963a, 57). The protagonists are tasked with protecting the oblivious inhabitants of the human world from these terrifying outer beings who seek to reclaim dominance on earth. In the first *Power of Five* novel (*Raven's Gate*) Matt must confront the *a priori* nature of the Weird. He describes it as 'living on one side of a mirror: you think there is nothing on the other side until one day a switch is thrown and suddenly the mirror is transparent' (Horowitz 2005, 214). Initially, Matt is horrified by the epistemological error humanity has made: 'The Christian church talks about Satan, Lucifer and all the other devils. But these are just memories of the greatest, original evil: The Old Ones' (Horowitz 2005: 214). However, as the series progresses, this epistemological error opens out into a Weird universe that replaces the ontology of the human world. For Stephanie, in *Skulduggery Pleasant*, the adjustment to a Weird world is also destabilising: 'Bit by bit, she was seeing how close magic had been to her when she was growing up, if only she had known where to look. It was such a strange sensation … *Better get used to that feeling*' (Landy 2007, 187. Emphasis in original). As in *The Power of Five,* Stephanie's encounter with this other world forces her to view all aspects of her world anew, and Weirdness increasingly permeates even her own home, undermining the quotidian and retroactively rendering it strange.

Though they seek to evoke the sanity-blasting power of Lovecraft's mythos, Landy and Horowitz reject the aporia and dissolution offered in deconstructive psychoanalytic accounts of the Weird and Gothic. Indeed, the deconstructive psychoanalytic criticism I have so far traced throughout accounts of the Gothic is itself an expression of the 'linguistic turn', a mode of thought that 'glori[fies] the

aporetic' (Braidotti 2011a, 77). It is against this deconstructive linguistic turn that Braidotti positions nomadism (2011b, 5). Weird fiction complements Braidotti's project because it too is implicated in a response to the 'linguistic turn' through the speculative writing of philosophers such as Quentin Meillassoux and Graham Harman. This 'speculative turn' in philosophy seeks to examine 'reality in itself' as an alternative to humanist correlationist thought, drawing on the writings of Lovecraft as an expression of a speculation about material reality (Bryant, Srnicek, and Harman 2011, 1, 3). Briefly, correlationism follows Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781) with the thesis that there is no possible access to things-in-themselves except by way of a correlation between objects and perceiving subjects. That is, objects cannot be thought of without subjects. Kant's philosophy designates objects in themselves 'noumena', a term most often considered in its 'negative sense' as an object outside the subject's 'mode of intuition' (Kant 2007, 259). Kantian correlationism prompts the 'linguistic turn' of theorists such as Lacan and Derrida, in which there is effectively no access to reality outside language. The seductive aporia of the 'linguistic turn' informs Fred Botting's account of the relationship between horror and materialism in his recent discussion of Weird fiction (2012b). In Botting's analysis, Kant's noumena become the dark 'Things' of a Lacanian Real: 'the Thing lying outside categories of sense, knowledge, reason; it intimates a realm of horror, revulsion, nausea, dissolution, a place where names do not apply and speech fails in heart-rending screams or strangled silence' (Botting 2012b, 283).

However, Botting's recourse to Lacanian 'Things' belies the more affirmative account of reality offered by speculative realists. Graham Harman uses Lovecraft's writing to argue that 'reality is object-oriented … made up of nothing but substances – and they are *weird* substances with a taste of the uncanny about

them, rather than stiff blocks of simplistic physical matter' (Harman 2008, 347). In Harman's 'weird realist' philosophy, Lovecraft's writing draws attention to the 'gaps' between objects and perception, between reality and language, but also provides a speculative and indirect access to those weird objects lying just outside perception (Harman 2012, 5). Harman asserts that 'the absent thing-in-itself can have gravitational effects on the internal content of knowledge, just as Lovecraft can allude to the physical form of Cthulhu even while cancelling the literal terms of the description' (2012, 17). Whereas Botting links impossible noumena, or 'Things', to horror, Harman argues that the Weird substance of reality itself is not necessarily horrifying (Botting 2012b, 283; Harman 2012, 4). Harman's account of Lovecraft allows for the possibility that Weird writing might affirm a material world beyond perception, rather than lead to the melancholic aporia of deconstruction.

My reading of *Skulduggery Pleasant* and *The Power of Five* proposes a synthesis of Braidotti's nomadic materialism and Harman's weird realism. In nomadic thought, the materially embodied subject is able to assert itself outside the 'master code or single central grid' imagined by linguistic and constructivist accounts of subjectivity (2011b, 5). Moreover, this embodied subject entails the dissolution of the humanist, universal 'I', and so functions for Braidotti as a potentially feminist body (Braidotti 2011a, 15). Finally, nomadism's 'ontology of presence replaces textual or other deconstruction' (Braidotti 2011b, 132). If Braidotti's nomadic body is a material presence, it exists in relation to an external material reality and is mobilised by encounters with other material objects. Harman's object-oriented ontology, which attempts to trace the force real objects exert on the phenomenological world, forms a useful counterpoint to Braidotti's 'enchanted materialism' (Harman 2008, 336; Braidotti 2011b, 5). Harman questions the

reductively materialist reading of Lovecraft expressed by Michel Houellebecq, who asserts that Cthulhu is simply an 'arrangement of electrons, like us' (Houellebecq 2008, 32). For Harman, material objects are more than this, asserting themselves on the sensual realm of human perception, deforming it, making it Weird. Likewise, the objects we access within the phenomenal world of sensual perception are more than simply relational; they have a reality beyond that phenomenal world. In its encounter with these objects, the nomadic subject affirms its own material force and potentiality. *Skulduggery Pleasant* asserts the empowerment available in this encounter through the protagonist, Stephanie. Stephanie's discovery of the Weird universe is, in part, an affirmative experience. Breathless, she exclaims, 'I've seen a world I never even knew *existed*' (Landy 2007, 64. Emphasis in original). Though Skulduggery insists on returning Stephanie to her 'normal life', Stephanie refuses to go home, and insists that Skulduggery shows her more. Soon, Stephanie discovers that she possesses magical abilities and is able to assert her own material force upon the world of sense and perception through the mastery of Weird energies. Thus, although Landy's exploration of the Weird evokes Lovecraft's 'atmosphere of breathless and unexplained dread', it also produces wonder, delight and power (Lovecraft 1927: 3). Stephanie's delight and eagerness allows the Weird to become playful.

Finally, *Skulduggery Pleasant* and *The Power of Five* appropriate the Weird to produce a space of intertextual nomadism that figures the reader as agile and active. Like the parody films of the previous chapter, *Skulduggery Pleasant* and *The Power of Five* engage in postmodern playfulness and metafictional self-reflexivity, connecting different forms of culture in what Henry Jenkins calls 'an impertinent raid on the literary preserve' (Jenkins 2014, 26). This playful Weird fiction marks a

shift in the cultural status and function of a form that was, until recently, not very visible in popular culture. In the past decade Cthulhu has emerged from the shadows of pulp magazines and roleplaying games into the mainstream. Initially, this was confined to adult texts such as Comedy Central's *South Park*.[16] 'Cute' versions of Cthulhu have also become visible in merchandising, comics and online culture (Mizsei Ward 2013). These comedic and cute versions of Cthulhu, as well as the sale of Cthulhu cuddly toys on *Amazon*, indicate a change in the way the Weird is being read and appropriated. For example, a recent episode of the children's animated series *Scooby Doo! Mystery Inc.* (2010 –2013) pits Scooby and the gang against a tentacle faced monster, 'Char Gar Gothakon', whose other-worldly shriek renders his victims gibbering wrecks (Cook 2010). The episode playfully lampoons writers and works from the 'Weird' tradition in a parodic homage, inviting child and adult viewers alike to get in on the joke. Moreover, the episode title, 'the Shrieking Madness', brings to mind not only Lovecraft's hysterical protagonists, but Botting's description of Weird horror as 'a place where … speech fails in heart-rending screams or strangled silence, where bodies shudder and collapse, and minds spin in delirium or shut down in utter vacancy' (Botting 2012b, 283). *Scooby Doo!* represents a postmillennial, popular form of the Weird that rejects the cynicism of such criticism. *Scooby Doo* suggests that the Weird is no longer a signifier of what Miéville calls 'crisis-blasted modernity', but opens up the form to playfulness and pleasure (2008, 128).

In its playful poaching of past works, postmillennial children's fiction rejects the authority of the literary critic, and of Lovecraft himself, as authorities on the Weird. Embracing popular culture and mass-market audiences, the Weird fiction of

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[16] See, for example, the episode titled 'Mysterion Rises' (Parker 2010).

Landy and Horowitz counters Joshi's attempts to police the borders of the form. In his insistence that the Weird is an '*epistemological*' rather than '*ontological*' form, Joshi privileges a modernist aesthetic over postmodern forms of fiction (Joshi 1990, 7. Emphasis in original). In drawing this distinction, Joshi follows Brian McHale's assertion that modernist fiction is epistemological in character and postmodern fiction, which supersedes it, is ontological (1987, 9–10). Like the Gothic critics I discuss in chapter four, Joshi expresses an elitist and nostalgic desire to maintain a modernist and marginal status for Weird fiction that is at odds with its pulp origins and current popularity. His insistence that good Weird fiction comprises 'a small modicum of genuine literature' read by a 'discriminating audience' further echoes the subcultural investment in 'authenticity' and distaste for 'mainstream' audiences expressed by the Gothic critics Botting and Beville (Joshi 2001, 3). Though Joshi's monographs on Weird fiction, *The Weird Tale* (1990), *The Modern Weird Tale* (2001), and *The Evolution of the Weird Tale* (2004), come at the very beginning of a postmillennial explosion of Weird fiction in popular and literary culture, and so cannot account for its later proliferation, they attempt to establish a modernist, cult, literary status for Weird fiction that precludes the inclusion of popular works. Like Beville, Joshi dismisses the surface features of genre in his assertion that the Weird is 'an inherently philosophical mode' (1990, 11). Joshi laments that 'the amount of meritous Weird fiction being written today is in exactly inverse proportion to its quantity' and suggests that contemporary Weird is reduced to 'a body of conventionalized scenarios and tropes from which authors can draw and upon which they can, as it were, hang a tale' (2004, 1; 2001, 2). Through these evaluative manoeuvres, Joshi sets Lovecraft's works as a standard against which later fictions are judged, and appoints himself as the judge. Though Joshi's work on Lovecraft is

responsible for drawing the academy's attention to Weird fiction, it reproduces a hierarchical model of reading in which the critic is positioned as a 'sanctioned interpreter … working to restrain the "multiple voices" of popular orality, to regulate the production and circulation of meanings' (Jenkins 2014, 26). Counter to this, postmillennial Weird fiction appropriates Lovecraft's mythos according to the model of reading suggested by Michel de Certeau in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, in which the reader is not passively moulded by a text, but makes it their own through an act of re-appropriation (1984, 166).

Both *Skulduggery Pleasant* and *The Power of Five* re-appropriate the Weird within a pop-cultural, mass-market series fiction, a form that itself spawns yet more versions. The first novel in Horowitz's series was recently adapted as a graphic novel, with the others soon to follow, and a Skulduggery Pleasant film is in development. As pop-cultural works, *Skulduggery Pleasant* and *The Power of Five* incorporate the irreverence and playfulness that can be seen in *Scooby Doo!* yet also manage to retain the ontological horror of the Lovecraftian Weird. The reader of this mass-market Weird is nomadic, 'migrating and devouring its way through the pastures of the media' (de Certeau 1984, 165). De Certeau's formulation of the reader as a nomadic poacher influences Henry Jenkins's accounts of fan culture, which perceives fans and readers as 'active producers and manipulators of meaning' (Jenkins 2012, 22). As fans of Lovecraft, Landy and Horowitz reappropriate Lovecraftian tropes to initiate their adolescent *protagonists* into a Weird universe. At the same time, they employ reflexivity and metafictional play to figure the *reader* as an initiate into the cult of Lovecraft. In so doing, Landy and Horowitz counter the logic of subcultural capital I have identified in some criticism of postmillennial fiction by conferring subcultural capital upon a new, mainstream audience.

Discovering a canon of Weird fiction through Stephanie, Skulduggery and Matt, the child reader imagined by Landy and Horowitz is included in the Lovecraft cult, able to embody subcultural capital through 'being in the know' (Thornton 1995, 12). De Certeau and Jenkins's nomad, who reads by 'poaching their way across fields they did not write', also presents a challenge to the authority of the writer and academic critic. This nomad does not read for authorial meaning, but instead engages in the production of new meanings (de Certeau 1984, 174). Landy and Horowitz imagine a nomadic reader able to negotiate the intertextual threads of their work, creating new meanings through juxtapositions between different cultural texts (Jenkins 2014, 33). This playfulness remakes the Weird into an affirmative space that imagines a child reader capable of agency and mobility.

Rewriting Epistemological Horror

In a typical Lovecraftian tale knowledge of the Weird universe inevitably results in madness and death. Through its concern with epistemology, the Weird suggests that human knowledge is woefully inadequate. Joshi notes that Lovecraft provokes horror by inserting 'many horrible events into the real history of the ancient and contemporary world … what Lovecraft seems to be suggesting is that *more* things have happened in history than we suspect' (Joshi 1990, 194). In Lovecraft's stories, real world places co-exist with imaginary towns, real and imaginary dates and events jostle for our attention, and 'lost' artefacts and manuscripts are discovered among historical facts. Miéville notes that these Weird insertions into accepted history produce a horror not of intrusion, but realization: 'The world has always been implacably bleak; the horror lies in our acknowledging that fact' (Miéville 2005, xiii). Both *Skulduggery Pleasant* and *The Power of Five* draw on this

epistemological anxiety of Weird fiction. In *Skulduggery Pleasant,* the Faceless Ones are consigned to myth, initially dismissed by the characters as nonsense. Skulduggery scoffs at the stories, telling Stephanie, 'it's a legend. It's an allegory. It didn't really happen' (Landy 2007, 82). However, throughout the course of the first book, Skulduggery and Stephanie untangle a knot of history and legend to uncover the terrible truth: the Faceless Ones are real. Both epistemological and ontological horror are produced here. Not only must the protagonists accept that *what* they know about the world is wrong, but they also come to question *how* they know.

In *Skulduggery Pleasant* and *The Power of Five* epistemological anxiety centres on the validity of sources and the textual documentation of history. Repeatedly, in both series, texts that document important 'truths' are inevitably lost, destroyed or turn out to be useless. Much of the action of *The Power of Five* is dedicated to finding an important manuscript that supposedly reveals important information about the Old Ones' return, the diary of a mad monk, Joseph of Cordoba. However, when the characters finally get their hands on this tome, they find it is written in a language they can't understand, 'and anyway his handwriting was almost illegible' (Horowitz 2009, 117). The one character that might have been able to translate the text is killed before he has a chance to read it. Thus, the text that the children had thought to be a prize turns out to be of no use whatsoever. In *Skulduggery Pleasant,* the fabled *Book of Names*, a powerful tome listing everything and everyone that ever has or will exist, is disintegrated. The book has been protected under a powerful spell for centuries, thought to be indestructible: 'it can't be torn; it can't be burnt; it can't be damaged by any means we have at our disposal' (Landy 2007, 148). Yet, by the end of the novel it has 'disappeared in a cloud of dust' before it can give up any of its secrets (Landy 2007, 359).

Skulduggery Pleasant and *The Power of Five* suggest that it is not only records of the past that cannot be trusted to provide knowledge, but that all potential future instances of recorded knowledge are likewise questionable. Joshi notes how Lovecraft not only inserts events into historical record, but also obliterates them too, often simultaneously (1990, 195). This strategy appears in *The Power of Five* when Matt discovers that Raven's Gate, one of the portals used to let the Old Ones into the world, is the site of the very first stone circle ever built, though its name doesn't appear in any records. Following the events at Raven's Gate, in which Matt successfully prevents the Old Ones from breaking through into the human world, all textual records are obliterated: 'Nobody ever spoke of it again. It was as if Raven's Gate had never existed' (Horowitz 2005, 213). In this novel, any sense of resolution experienced in Matt's success at closing the gate and banishing the Old Ones is undercut by the erasure of the whole episode from written record. Matt's journalist friend, Richard is not able to get his story printed, and the heroes and villains, including the chief villain, Sir Michael Marsh, simply disappear:

> Here was a man who had once been an influential government scientist, who had received a knighthood. Yet there were no obituaries, no comment, nothing. He might as well have never existed. (Horowitz 2005, 237)

The erasure of the episode from recorded history has two important effects. Firstly, written records are revealed as false and worthless. Truth is only ever glimpsed in fragments, between the lines of print, in what is not recorded. As such, Horowitz follows Lovecraft in his suggestion that any grasp on knowledge is slippery at best. Secondly, the events at Raven's Gate are not reported because the Weird cannot be integrated into reality; it remains impossible. Richard notes, 'this is the twenty- first century and the one thing that people cannot live with is uncertainty… We live in an

age where there is no room for the impossible' (Horowitz 2005, 280). In this sentiment, Richard echoes Joshi's analysis of the scepticism at the heart of Lovecraft's writing: 'Better … actively to conceal certain things in the past than to come face to face with our own fragility' (Joshi 1990, 198).

The scepticism inherent in Weird's epistemological and ontological horror disrupts a maturation narrative premised on the protagonist's eventual triumph over darkness or mastery of knowledge. In the past two decades the 'felix culpa', or innocence-to-experience, narrative can be seen in a number of popular children and Young Adult fantasy texts, such as Garth Nix's *Sabriel* (2002), J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series (1997 – 2007) and Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* (1995 – 2000). Though Landy and Horowitz borrow the framework of these adolescent fantasy narratives, their use of Weird fiction posits knowledge as disastrous rather than empowering. In 'The Call of Cthulhu', Lovecraft famously asserts:

> We live on a placid island of ignorance in the midst of black seas of infinity, and it was not meant that we should voyage far… but some day the piecing together of dissociated knowledge will open up such terrifying vistas of reality, and of our frightful position therein, that we shall either go mad from the revelation or flee from the deadly light. (Lovecraft 1963a, 47)

Such pronouncements suggest Lovecraft is an anti-Enlightenment writer, sceptical of the reach of human knowledge. Certainly, Lovecraft's stories do not glorify a human quest for knowledge since characters following this path always suffer a spectacular doom. Joshi argues that in Lovecraft's Weird universe 'knowledge, which in itself is morally neutral, can cause profound psychological trauma' (1990, 207). The trajectory of the Weird tale thus works in the opposite direction to adolescent fantasy

narratives, such as Pullman's *His Dark Materials,* which chart a fortunate 'fall' into knowledge and the growth of the protagonist.

This notion of knowledge as trauma is echoed in *The Power of Five* and *Skulduggery Pleasant.* Here knowledge of the Weird universe is corrosive, a taint that the protagonists will never be rid of. In *Skulduggery Pleasant,* Stephanie is increasingly isolated from her family as she learns more about the Weird world. Her Uncle Fergus is frightened and disgusted by the 'filthy magic' she is learning and orders Stephanie to stay away: 'I don't want you teaching my daughters anything' (Landy 2011, 361). Fergus' fierce care of his daughters highlights Stephanie's isolation: she is forced to keep most of her life secret from her own parents. Early on in *Raven's Gate,* Matt too realises that he carries the taint of Weird knowledge that excludes him from normal life. His neighbour shuns him: 'I'll never forget the look on her face. She was horrified. More than that. She was actually sick … She was horrified and sick because of me' (Horowitz 2005, 184). None of the children who are inducted into the Weird universe in *The Power of Five* feel blessed by the knowledge they have. Throughout the series, characters repeatedly wish that they had never heard of the Old Ones. When, at the close of the first novel, Matt learns that there is a second portal that needs to be closed, he implores, 'I don't want to *know* any more' (Horowitz 2005: 282; emphasis mine).
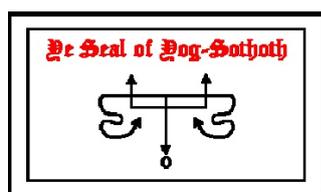
Yet, Landy and Horowitz also reframe the anti-Enlightenment tendency of Weird fiction, countering Lovecraft's scepticism by making other forms of knowledge available to their protagonists. Even as the Weird isolates and taints the protagonists, it also marks them as special and confers upon them status denied those characters who remain in the quotidian world. Indeed, the protagonists' initiation into the Weird is as much a celebration of Geek culture as it is an expression of

epistemological anxiety. Lovecraft's increasing popularity in recent decades is down to the rise in visibility and popularity of Geek culture, participation in which can confer subcultural capital on the previously uninitiated. Numerous pop-cultural spaces have opened the Weird up to this increased participation, including websites such as T*he Onion*'s 'Gateways to Geekery'. This website, which aims to demystify Geek culture for a mainstream audience, notes the existence of 'a real world cult of Lovecraft that's been dissecting, debating, and expanding on his legacy for decades' (Heller 2009). Landy and Horowitz not only evoke a Weird universe *within* their narratives, but also open up this *extratextual* 'real world cult' to readers.

Again, I find Thornton's theorisation of subcultural capital as the means by which young people negotiate and accumulate status helpful in understanding the gesture made in Landy and Horowitz's fiction (1995, 163). Thornton argues that subcultural capital allows members of a subculture to 'assert their distinctive character and affirm that they are not anonymous members of an undifferentiated mass' (1995, 5, 10). In *Skulduggery Pleasant,* Stephanie gets to be *in* on a subculture that is far more out there than just wearing black, listening to metal or quoting obscure science fiction. She is simultaneously initiated into a universe of Weird magic *and* the cult of Lovecraftian fiction, as the novel's playful references to 'Mr Howard L. Craft' illustrate. Within the narrative, uncool characters do not get the reference, but Skulduggery and Stephanie invite the reader to be in on the joke, giving just enough background information for readers to follow up the reference (Landy 2007, 300). In this way, *Skulduggery Pleasant* constructs its own Weird subcultural space, membership of which entails 'being in the know' as well as gaining magical powers. Stephanie saves the world *and* makes Geeky, witty quips as she does so. Here, the construction of a Weird universe is not simply about inspiring

epistemological horror; it also expresses the desire to transmit subcultural knowledge (and status) to new audiences. Landy follows 'Gateways to Geekery', and other pop-cultural manifestations of the Weird, in opening up its fictional worlds to a mass-market, mainstream audience.

The Power of Five also makes playful use of existing Weird fiction, partaking in the ongoing production of the Weird as cultural and literary text in process. In an interview, Horowitz discusses Lovecraft's 'mythos' as though it were real, and describes 'a strange, sixth century text called the *Necronomicon*' (Horowitz 2011). With a meta-fictional nod, Horowitz inserts his books into the 'Cthulhu Mythos' by employing a device used by Lovecraft and other Weird writers, who deliberately include references to one another's fictional mythical texts as 'real' sources in their stories. Horowitz's 'mad' Spanish monk, St. Joseph of Cordoba, is also a knowing nod to Lovecraft's invented occultist and author of *The Necronomicon*, Abdul Alhazred. While I cannot comment on what Horowitz does or does not believe, it is tempting to read his reference to the grandfather of these fake occult tomes – *The Necronomicon* – as a playful gesture that contributes to the wider fan culture. Horowitz does not only borrow from Lovecraft; he also takes material from fan-authored sources, poaching fragments from the many versions of the *Necronomicon* available on the internet. The symbol used by the Lesser Malling witches in *Raven's Gate*, for example, is identical to this symbol taken from one such internet source:

 (Ottinger 2014)

These borrowings from official and unofficial sources suggests that Horowitz is not only paying his dues to a literary Weird tradition, but also contributing to a fan subculture that 'constructs its own identity and artefacts from resources borrowed from already circulating texts' (Jenkins 2012, 3). Jenkins' assertion that texts accumulate meaning through use can be seen in the way new meanings of the *Necronomicon* are possible when it is recycled in a new fictional setting. A body of writing 'constantly in flux', the Weird is an open text no longer requiring the authentication of Lovecraft, or a sanctioned interpreter, but becomes available to a community of fans who themselves become writers (Jenkins 2012, 23).

The Power of Five's intervention in this wider Weird text is complex. On the one hand, Horowitz's insistence on the *Necronomicon* as real, uncovered by his research and utilised in his stories, maintains a status quo whereby readers are subordinated to his privileged position as holder of knowledge and meaning. On the other hand, Horowitz's borrowings from unofficial sources counter author-centred accounts of the Weird, like Joshi's, whereby subsequent contributions to the field are judged by how they hold up to a standard set by the originator. Horowitz's playful references to Mythos elements resist this hierarchy, allowing the field of Weird fiction to expand into new territories where readers become participants. In interview questions reprinted at the back of *Necropolis*, Horowitz tells readers he will print a portion of the *Necronomicon* at the beginning of the book for them, which in turn initiates much fan activity over the internet as readers share with one another their attempts to translate this strange excerpt: 'Ia sakkath. Iak sakkakh, Ia sha xul' (Horowitz 2009: 395, 14). The phrase is meaningless, based on nonsense phrases used in the various *Necronomicon* texts available online. Though Horowitz's game playing positions the adult author as holder of arcane knowledge, this fragment

works to disintegrate the validity and authority of source documents. Since it is undecipherable, its meaning is opened up to multiple interpretations and re-appropriations. Landy and Horowitz are writers as fans, opening up Lovecraft's tales to create new texts, seeking to welcome a new generation of readers into a subcultural space that they do not need to be 'discerning' to enjoy.

Weird Monsters: Encounters with objects

In its depiction of impossible monsters that elude description in language, Weird fiction figures a space beyond the limits of the 'I' and points to a territory beyond the phenomenological. De Certeau argues that reading is 'an impertinent absence' that removes the reader 'elsewhere, where they are not, in another world' (1984, 173). De Certeau's nomadic reader creates a space beyond the social 'checkerboard' that limits and structures subjectivity in a rebellious act of 'deterritorialisation' (De Certeau 1984, 173). In Weird fiction, this nomadic reader-in-exile finds an 'elsewhere' that gestures not only beyond social structures and constraints, but beyond perception itself, to the realm of real objects. In Weird fiction these real objects manifest as monsters, terrifying in part because they mark the limits of language and sensory perception. Lovecraft's hysterical description of Cthulhu notes 'the Thing cannot be described—there is no language for such abysms of shrieking and immemorial lunacy, such eldritch contradictions of all matter, force, and cosmic order' (Lovecraft 1963a, 95). However, these monsters do not simply mark an impossible space beyond language, denoting the emptiness found in deconstruction or Lacanian psychoanalysis, but exert a strong physical force on the phenomenological world. In their bulk and cosmic size, Weird monsters are excessively real. In *Skulduggery Pleasant* and *The Power of Five* monsters oscillate

between functions as they phase between appearance and retreat, manifesting as spectacularly material in one moment, disappearing from perception in the next. The protagonists of the novels deftly negotiate these tricky encounters with the Weird objects of reality, navigating an object-oriented ontology that mobilises the force of the nomadic subject.

Foremost, the Weird monster represents a catastrophic event that destabilises the traditional narrative schema of children's fantasy, which demands monsters be defeated or banished to effect closure and restitution. For Joshi, the emergence of Cthulhu from the Pacific depths in 'The Call of Cthulhu' is 'an unprecedented union of horror and science fiction unlike anything that went before… it embodies the quintessential phenomenon of the Weird tale – the shattering of our conception of the universe' (1990, 190) Likewise, Miéville posits the Weird monster as 'the narrative actualisation of the Weird-as-novum, unprecedented, Event' (2008, 110). The Weird monster as 'Event' is most obvious in the excessive bulk and size of the creatures who appear in *Skulduggery Pleasant* and *The Power of Five.* In *Skulduggery Pleasant* the arrival of 'The Faceless Ones' creates a series of massive shockwaves. Stephanie cannot comprehend the cosmic dimensions of the creatures she sees 'passing behind the tree, five times as tall, a towering, changing beast' (Landy 2009, 352). The monsters defy Stephanie's senses; she can only view them from the 'corner of her eye' rather than confront them with a totalising gaze. This fragmented vision, denoting incomprehensible, cosmic size, also features in *Raven's Gate* when Matt first glimpses the Old Ones:

> The blackness welled up, blotting out the red, thrusting it aside in a chaos of swirling bubbles. A brilliant white streak seared across the surface of the pool. The black thing brushed it away and with a shudder Matt saw what it

was: a huge hand. The monster that owned it must have been as big as the reactor itself. He could see its fingernails, sharp and scaly, and he could make out the wrinkled skin of its webbed fingers. (Horowitz 2005, 248–249)

This creature is clearly other-worldly, but its physicality is depicted in sharp fingernails and webbed fingers. These monsters are not 'material' beings in a reductive sense, but nor are they completely outside sensory perception. As Harman notes, the 'strangeness of … objects comes from the fact that they can never be exhaustively described or defined', but nonetheless constitute a chunk of 'obstinate reality' within the phenomenological realm (Harman 2008, 355). Weird monsters are objects in this sense; they straddle the gap between a perceptual realm in which material objects exert their force, but also mark a noumenal space beyond perception. The whole of the monster retreats beyond what it is possible for Matt and Stephanie to process or describe.

The Faceless Ones and the Old Ones constitute a break with the types of monsters usually found in children's fantasy, since they upset one of the traditional functions of the monster as bogeyman. For Marina Warner, the bogeyman is a vehicle through which cultures magnify menace, courting 'fear and dread' in order to produce 'catharsis' (Warner 2000, 9). Weird monsters interrupt this process because they refuse to be fully captured in language, constituting an impasse in the process of signification itself. For Miéville, Lovecraft's 'regular insistence that whatever is being described is "un-describable", is, in its hesitation, its obsessive qualification and stalling of the noun, an aesthetic deferral according to which the world is always-already un-representable' (2009, 511-512). Harman argues that this aspect of Weird writing points to a 'vertical gap' between the real world and sensual perception and reveals the 'crippled descriptive power of language' to capture real

objects (2012, 27). Stephanie's description of a 'Faceless One' suggests this inadequacy. Though the monster's image 'burns' its way into her mind, she is only able to express it as 'the hint of an idea, or the memory of something she'd never known' (Landy 2009, 353). Fleeting, uncertain, the Faceless Ones are 'impossibility made manifest, the formless given form' (Landy 2009, 353). Stephanie's articulation of what she does not properly see draws attention to a gap in the power of language to describe and contain, but also attempts to bridge this gap by giving form to the formless. Harman notes that

> Reality itself is weird because reality is incommensurable with any attempt to represent or measure it. Lovecraft is aware of this difficulty to an exemplary degree, and through his assistance we may be able to learn about how to say something without saying it … When it comes to grasping reality, illusion and innuendo are the best we can do. (2012, 51)

Likewise, Landy does not allow the monster to completely retreat beyond the reach of sensory perception and language, but imagines ways in which fragments of it may be encountered. However, this encounter cannot produce the catharsis imagined in Warner's account of the bogeyman, since the object always remains partially elusive.

The *Power of Five* also describes indescribable monsters, but likewise refrains from gesturing to the aporia beyond language. Chaos, the king of the Old Ones, is described as 'a black hole in outer space' with 'no face' and 'no features of any sort', erasing reality as he moves (Horowitz 2007, 290). Chaos appears at a climactic moment in the fantasy narrative, at the peak of a battle between the heroes and the Old Ones, but the description given fails to definitively articulate what the Old Ones are. Like Landy, Horowitz utilises a typical Lovecraftian trope, deferring

articulation in his assertion that Chaos is 'too gigantic to be seen, too horrible to be understood' (Horowitz 2007, 337). Rosemary Jackson's Lacanian reading of Lovecraft describes Weird monsters, such as Chaos, as 'thingless names … mere signifiers without an object… indicating nothing but their own proper density and excess. The signifier is not secured by the weight of the signified: it begins to float free' (R. Jackson 1981, 40). In this deconstructive psychoanalytic account, Weird monsters become only signifiers, not objects, 'superficially full' names that open out into 'a terrible emptiness' (Jackson 1981, 40). However, Horowitz's evocation of the Weird resists this deconstructive account through its insistence that the monster is an object, not an empty signifier. Chaos 'cuts' his way through the phenomenological world, in a 'twisting or torsion' of human perception (Horowitz 2007, 290; Harman 2012, 360). Though the object is difficult to register in the human sensual realm, it nonetheless feels real (Harman 2012, 240). Harman asserts that the term 'black hole' is suitable for the 'allusive, withdrawn object that Lovecraft so often loves to establish', but that even as objects appear 'absolutely distant', they are also 'near to us insofar as they inscribe their distance in directly accessible fashion' (2012, 239).

As well as pointing to a gap between human sensual perception and reality beyond, Weird monsters also reveal a gap between the object as a whole and its myriad surfaces. Harman designates this a 'horizontal gap' located within the phenomenological realm which marks the subject's inability to fully account for the many qualities of the objects it encounters (2012, 25). Harman argues that Lovecraft points to this gap through his 'cubist' style in which language is 'no longer enfeebled by an impossibly deep and distant reality … [but] overloaded by a gluttonous excess of surfaces and aspects of the thing (Harman 2012, 25). Miéville also alludes to this cubist aspect of the Weird in his assertion that its monsters constitute 'a radical break

with anything from a folkloric tradition… agglomerations of bubbles, barrels, cones, and corpses, patch-worked from cephalopods, insects, crustaceans, and other fauna notable precisely for their absence from the traditional Western monstrous' (Miéville 2009: 512). Not only are Weird monsters ontologically horrifying because they manifest a bizarre teratology, but this teratology is made up of an excess of surface features. The Old Ones in *The Power of Five* display a fragmented excess of such features, including tentacles, pincers, eyes on stalks, teeth, beaks, scales, feathers and claws. Horowitz describes the Old Ones as 'an infestation… a horde with no shape or formation, just an oozing mess of nightmarish creatures… a crazy mixture of arms and teeth and beaks and scales and feathers and claws, all brought together to create unimaginable monsters' (2007, 288–289). Horowitz's Weird monsters are not empty signifiers, nor are they manifestations of social anxieties or psychoanalytic 'depths', but rather an expression of the surplus surfaces of objects, the many 'qualities, planes, or adumbrations, which even when added up do not exhaust the reality of the object they compose' (Harman 2012, 3).

Horowitz's blending of the visual spectacle of fantasy and horror fiction with the 'unrepresentable' monsters of the Weird suggests a desire to exceed, or out-do, the sense of unprecedented 'Event' marked by Cthulhu's appearance from the Pacific waves. The emergence of the Old Ones from the opened portal in book two, *Evil Star*, prompts a frenzied description spanning five pages. Horowitz begins with the horrific bulk of a huge hummingbird and gigantic spider, invoking disgust and terror through their insectoid features, the 'glistening fangs', 'black and brilliant' eyes and 'twitching' bodies (Horowitz 2006, 334). The description progresses from this into the realms of the grotesque, drawing attention to the 'buzzing' of a 'swarm' of 'flies with fat black bodies and beating wings' (2006, 335). The creatures form

and reform as Matt looks on, becoming degenerate 'strange freakish shapes' 'stretching' and 'bulging', 'part animal, part human', 'dirty yellow pus dripping' from their gaping wounds (2006, 335-336). Horowitz describes monsters as bizarre and tortuous experiments, each one 'more deformed, more horrible' than the last (2006, 339). Horowitz's excessive descriptions point to the heightened visibility of the Weird monster evident elsewhere in popular culture. From game miniatures and fan art to cartoons and cuddly toys, a multitude of images celebrate the bizarre forms of Weird monstrosity. As well as horror, this increased visibility suggests possibilities for fun and enjoyment, allowing these children's texts to incorporate the bleak cosmic vision of the Lovecraftian Weird, whilst simultaneously indulging in a gleeful spectacle.

In its gluttonous excess of surfaces, the Weird is a spectacle that provokes more than ontological horror. Just as the monster as object exerts its force on the phenomenological realm, so the protagonists' encounter with the monster allows them to likewise exert force in return. Both *Skulduggery Pleasant* and *The Power of Five* stage a (temporary) defeat of Weird monsters in a way that would be unthinkable in a Lovecraft story. *The Faceless Ones* climaxes in a chapter titled 'Killing Gods', in which the heroes discover a weapon that will banish the monsters from the human world. Stephanie fires the 'Sceptre of the Ancients' as though it were a gun, the black lightning it emits functioning as a bullet 'hitting the Faceless One in the chest':

> It staggered, and even though it had no mouth, it shrieked, an inhuman
> scream of pain and rage. The black lightning curled around its body… The
> skin dried and cracked … and the body emptied into a cloud of dust…

Skulduggery ran over, "What happened? Are you alright? What was that scream?"

"That was the sound of a god dying." (Landy 2009, 375)

Despite the initial paralysis of her encounter with the Faceless Ones, Stephanie here occupies the position of triumphant hero, and, briefly, the Weird monster is dispatched. Horowitz offers the same spectacle in *Nightrise*, staging a fantasy battle scene reminiscent of Tolkien rather than Lovecraft:

Chaos… seemed to explode outwards, completely losing his human shape, becoming nothing more than a huge shadow, a sort of living night that was at last being torn apart by the coming of the day. He screamed one last time and his servants knew, right then, that the battle was lost… Every evil being in the universe heard it and knew that the end had come… Jamie looked up and saw that at last the clouds had parted and the sun had been allowed to show its face. (Horowitz 2007, 308-311)

In this blending of Weird with high fantasy, Landy and Horowitz borrow from pop-cultural and fan-authored Cthulhu fictions in which Weird monsters are reimagined as monsters to be faced in battle. The most notable of these reinventions are Chaosium's role-playing games and the more recent *Arkham Horror* board game series, both of which pit players directly against Shoggoths, Hounds of Tindalos, and even Cthulhu himself.

At the intersection of Weird excess, pulp horror, and fantasy game-playing, *Skulduggery Pleasant* and *The Power of Five* construct a Weird monstrous that is able to embody a number of competing functions, imagining a reader able to deftly navigate these shifts in the image of the monster. In *Skulduggery Pleasant,* for

example, crisis and ontological horror blend with playful mockery. Many of the novels carry a humorous tag-line. The cover of *Skulduggery Pleasant: The Faceless Ones* jokes, 'Do Panic. They're Coming', suggesting that not even the unimaginable horror of the Weird is immune to playful mockery. Thus, both *The Power of Five* and *Skulduggery Pleasant* continually oscillate between possibilities for what Weird monsters can mean. On the one hand, they posit the Weird monster as crisis, but one that can be laughed or shot at, effectively dispatched with violence or humour. On the other hand, they continue to provoke ontological horror in their revelation of 'outer, unknown forces' utterly inimical to humanity (Lovecraft 1927).

The oscillating function of the Weird monster manifests as a series of encounters with and retreats from the objects of Weird reality. Neither *Skulduggery*'s humour nor the fantasy heroics of *The Power of Five* results in complete expulsion of the Weird monster. Indeed, in *Nightrise* Horowitz suggests that the defeat of Chaos is merely temporary, since time is 'circular' and 'the whole thing will begin again' (Horowitz 2007, 330-331). After the novel's epic battle scene, the spectacular visibility of Horowitz's Weird monstrous rapidly dissipates as the Old Ones retreat to the edges of the story and to the dark corners of perception. In *Necropolis*, the monsters are faceless, haunting the city crowds, but never revealing themselves. The protagonist notes, 'they were here, in Hong Kong… The Old Ones were toying with her. They were the ones who were controlling the crowd' (Horowitz 2009, 237). Here, the Weird monster retreats from the field of vision, where it can be diminished and dispatched, to a space beyond the human gaze. Warner notes a similar manifestation of the bogeyman, the hooded 'el coco', who 'shrouded, still invisible under his hood, continues to stalk on the edges of the gaze, unseen' (2000, 182).

The Weird monsters of *Skulduggery Pleasant* make a similar retreat, but remain an unsettling presence at the edges of the story. In *Dark Days,* the sequel to *The Faceless Ones,* Stephanie discovers that the defeated monsters lurk on the other side of a portal. They haunt an empty world, never fully manifesting but instead inhabiting the broken, decomposing body of their human victims. Travelling to this world to rescue a friend, Stephanie gains a disturbing reminder of the Weird monster's continuing power to disrupt reality:

> She staggered, feeling the goose-bumps ripple. The inside of her mouth was tight, dry skin and her beating heart was the drum it was stretched across. She stumbled over the body and fell, and now she was crawling. Her head was filled with deafening whispers. The Faceless Ones were coming. (Landy 2010, 97)

Stephanie successfully completes her rescue and returns safely home, though this time she elects to hide from the monsters rather than face them in battle. As she wryly notes, 'there wasn't a whole lot she could do against a Faceless One, except maybe distract it by dying loudly' (Landy 2010, 101-102). Mockery and spectacle have not robbed the Weird monster of its power to disturb. As real objects, Weird monsters are not simply relational, easily dispatched by the exertions of the hero. Nor are they only noumenal, existing beyond sense, nor empty signifiers beyond language. They are something more than these interpretations suggest. The nomadic protagonist propelled into a Weird universe encounters the monster as an oscillating presence, but which remains always to some extent in excess of the text's strategy to describe, contain, defeat and mock.

Conclusions: The Pleasures of Oblivion

Skulduggery Pleasant and *The Power of Five* offer a variation on the usual narrative found in Lovecraft's stories, in which an adult protagonist uncovers the terrifying truth about the universe. In *Skulduggery Pleasant* and *The Power of Five*, the discovery that 'en-Weirds' the universe is made by a child on the cusp of adolescence. Stephanie is twelve; Matt is fourteen and their rite of passage between childhood and maturity involves a shift into the Weird. In *Raven's Gate*, Matt leaves the care of his Aunt and enters the LEAF project, a rehabilitation programme for young offenders. As well as struggling to come to terms with his adolescent abandonment issues, Matt has to cope with the discovery that his new foster carers are cultists who want to sacrifice him in order to bring the 'Old Ones' back into the world. The book begins with Matt travelling to Lesser Malling, a village modelled on Lovecraft's dilapidated and isolated New England town, Innsmouth, from 'The Shadow over Innsmouth' (1936). The unnatural woodland surrounding the village denotes the shift into the Weird as Matt notes that 'nature wasn't meant to grow like this' (Horowitz 2005: 86), recalling Lovecraft's description of the 'deep woods that no axe has ever cut' in West Arkham where 'the hills rise wild' (Lovecraft 1963b, 176). Yet, it is not simply the movement into a Weird landscape that creates ontological horror. Rather, it is Matt's growing understanding that what he encounters in Lesser Malling will transform him forever. There is no escaping the terror of the Weird: 'The darkness was waiting for him. He was like a fly on the edge of a huge web' (Horowitz 2005, 86). Here, the Weird is figured as a threshold that must be crossed as part of the maturation process, but crossing the threshold means entering the jaws of the monsters waiting on the other side, with no hope of triumph or return. The irruption of the Weird into these adolescent narratives disrupts the

trajectory of growth and mastery typically associated with the adolescent hero. The epistemological horror evoked by the *a priori* existence of Weird monsters precludes the mastery of knowledge, whilst the en-Weirding of ontology disrupts the process of becoming and being. Hailed as Harry Potter-meets-Lovecraft, these novels offer a very different hero narrative in which knowledge is destructive and oblivion might be desirable.

Rather than engaging in the construction of identity, these Weird fantasies toy with the obliteration of the self. Weird monsters are predators, 'stalking' humans to obliterate in the void. When the Faceless Ones arrive in Stephanie's world, they immediately seek to possess human hosts. The process of possession is gruesomely depicted as a brutal effacement of physical and psychic identity:

> His hair fell gently out, strand by strand, and his head tilted upwards in time for Valkyrie to see his face melting. The nose and the ears were first to go, sinking back into the skin. The lips congealed, sealing the mouth, and the eyes turned to liquid and dripped from the sockets down either cheek, like tears. The eyelids closed and ran into each other. The Faceless Ones had taken their first vessel. (Landy 2009, 353-354)

Following the depiction of cultists in Lovecraft's stories and in contemporary mythos fictions, those who offer themselves up to the Faceless Ones are consumed by a power that transcends man. One does not even have to be possessed by a Faceless One to be swallowed by the void, a mere glimpse is enough to result in a 'broken' mind (Landy 2009, 373). In *The Power of Five* even the heroes destined to fight the Old Ones can become their prey. Scott's experiences as a prisoner of the Old Ones result in a disturbing change to his personality, manifesting in moments of

utter blankness: 'He stood where he was, frozen to the spot. He wasn't even blinking. Matt could see his chest heaving and his whole hands seemed to be locked in place' (Horowitz 2009, 111). As the story climaxes, Matt realises that he cannot trust Scott, seeing in him a growing coldness and cruelty (Horowitz 2009, 128). This function of the Weird monster indicates a concern with the fragility of identity, particularly relevant for texts charting the process of maturation. Thus, unlike other children's texts celebrating a hero's gradual mastery of a magical world (in particular the texts that prefigure the postmillennial Gothic period I am exploring, including *Harry Potter* and *His Dark Materials*), the formulation of the adolescent's identity is here en-Weirded, corrupted in its encounter with Weird reality.

The Weird creates tension with the developing hero narrative, resulting in a fissured text that will not settle on one definitive trajectory for the hero protagonist. In contrast to the hero narrative, which also informs these narratives, there is no 'boon' for the triumphant hero, here, nor any chance of reintegrating into normal society (Campbell 2008, 29). In *The Power of Five*, Matt occupies the position of hero and fights the forces of the Weird. He is no hapless researcher helpless in the face of his discoveries and is actually able to defeat the Old Ones in the final instalment in the series, *Oblivion* (2012). However, as Matt becomes increasingly heroic, he is *used up* rather than invigorated, losing his drive and fight the closer he comes to the end. At the climax of the novel, Matt surrenders to his fate to be sacrificed (a fate that, in the first novel, he fought bitterly to avoid) in order to finally expel the Old Ones. As his companion notes: 'Matt had changed … the two of them were complete strangers. It was as if everything they had been through together had somehow been left behind' (Horowitz 2012, 584). As a character, Matt fades during the second half of this latter book, becoming more like a Lovecraft protagonist: his

individual psychology is effaced as he gives himself up in a 'surrender to the ineluctability of the Weird' (Miéville 2009, 512). In terms of fulfilling the conditions of the adolescent hero narrative, Matt is actually denied maturation, finding only oblivion in his last act of triumph. In a post-script, we learn that Matt has been granted an existence of sorts in a dream world beyond reality. Whilst consolations of transcendence could be read here, the maturation narrative is thwarted since Matt never grows up.

Stephanie's fate is equally precarious as the *Skulduggery Pleasant* series progresses. She too is engaged in a battle for her sense of self, with an amoral magical being, Darquesse, who usurps her identity. The threat of dissolution and evacuation of self-hood is constant throughout, brought out by the inclusion of Weird elements into the traditional hero narrative. The threat of oblivion suggests that Landy and Horowitz imagine a child reader who doesn't want happy endings, healing, or a mature sense of self. The series offer neither maturation, nor a fortunate fall, but rather a wilful surrender according with Miéville's view that Weird fiction offers 'radical humility' rather than promethean power (Miéville 2009, 512). However, Matt and Stephanie's surrender to the Weird also expresses a *desire for* trauma as much as a resistance to it. As her fight with the otherworldly alter-ego progresses, Stephanie admits to herself how 'good' it feels to let Darquesse 'take over' (Landy 2013, 62). Other pop-cultural manifestations of the Weird also offer this reading. *South Park*'s Cartman revels in his newfound friendship with Cthulhu, and fake religious tracts can be found online offering advice on how to hasten the demise of humanity by gleefully worshipping Lovecraft's Old Ones (Van Lente and Ellis 2000; Parker 2010). In these last examples there is humour, and pleasure, rather than humility and dissolution, available in a surrender to the Weird.

Children's Weird fiction is characterised by contradictory impulses and oscillating monsters, creating a fissured text that allows for multiple readings. The narrative's movement towards oblivion competes with a desire for mastery and status. Ontological terror on the one hand also produces epistemological wonder and subcultural inclusion on the other. Abject and grotesque horror, denoting the limits of signification, likewise also offers an indulgent spectacle of Weird objects. These texts do not simply re-create the haute weird of the early twentieth century: they remake it. As the 'shrieking madness' of Cthulhu referenced in *Scooby Doo!,* threatens to become a twenty-first century cliché, Landy and Horowitz develop a new form of Weird that manages to retain its bleak horror alongside new functions. Not least of these is the way the Weird transforms traditional narratives of maturation and mastery, countering the linear narratives popular in earlier children's fantasies. Yet, an encounter with the Weird does not lead to the oblivion, or black hole, of deconstructive psychoanalysis. Rather, it offers a complete deterritorialisation that connects the nomadic subject with the Weird substances of reality. Though Weird writing points to the gaps between reality and perception, between objects and their surfaces, this gap is *productionist*, not *deconstructionist*. Weird writing does not aim at a real 'outside', of course, but engages in the production of a fictional space in which the nomad can experience new realities within and beyond the interior of their subjective experience.

Conclusion

In the introduction to this thesis I explored how Lemony Snicket's *A Series of Unfortunate Events* refigures the child protagonist of Gothic as a nomad, whose journey constitutes an engagement *with* and *within* the world rather than a rejection of it. Daniel Olson suggests that *A Series of Unfortunate Events* opens and closes with 'despair', offering only a 'tantalizing' glimmer of 'unlikely' hope in its final image of the Baudelaire orphans setting sail (Olson 2010, 521, 522). Olson's emphasis on the melancholic nature of *A Series of Unfortunate Events* marks the work as a 'Gothic Goodbye' (2011, 506). In contrast, I argue that the books mark a beginning, not only of a period of proliferation of Gothic within children's literature and culture, but of a period of innovation and diversification. The playful intertextuality of *A Series of Unfortunate Events* functions as an invitation to explore and remap the terrain of Gothic fiction. I have traced the nomad of children's Gothic through the explicitly 'uncanny' Gothic house of *Coraline,* into the grotesquerie of Darren Shan's post-apocalyptic landscape in *Zom-B*, into past worlds imagined through the desiring subjects of Gothic Romance in *Coram Boy* and *Ruined*, to a realm of Gothic artifice in the parodic films*, Frankenweenie* and *Paranorman*, and, finally, into contact with the strange material of the Weird Universe revealed by *Skulduggery Pleasant* and *The Power of Five*. These diverse works reimagine the 'child' and the Gothic in various ways, challenging critical conceptions of children's *and* Gothic literature in the process.

Though the works I have considered in this thesis are largely ignored by Gothic literary criticism, children's Gothic continues to attain status and significance in wider culture. The importance and influence of children's Gothic is evidenced by the recent UK Costa Book of the Year, which was awarded to Frances Hardinge's *The Lie Tree* (2015), a neo-Victorian Gothic novel written for children. Hardinge's explicitly feminist Gothic tale, which mixes science with the supernatural, eschews the idea that Gothic is a cultural expression of anxiety and fear. Rather, the protagonist's encounter with the Gothic emboldens her to become a mobile, active subject determined to transform her society. The

success of Hardinge's novel, as well as those considered in this thesis, points to the ascension of children's Gothic in the UK and the US as a creative mode that imagines new ways of being. At the close of the twentieth century, Mark Edmundson suggested that the 'culture of Gothic' infusing American culture functioned as an expression of fear and haunting in response to stories of 'easy transcendence' offered by sentimental cultural forms (Edmundson 1999, 5, xvii). However, Edmundson's social anxiety reading of Gothic, does not hold as the twenty first century progresses. In postmillennial children's fiction, Gothic is not an expression of latent or growing cultural anxieties, but a creative force through which to imagine positive self-transformations and productive inter-connections with others.

Accordingly, this thesis has argued that postmillennial children's Gothic constructs new figurations of the 'child' beyond the limiting pedagogical framework of traditional humanist and ego-relational concepts of children's literature. At the same time, the nomadic subject of postmillennial children's Gothic refuses the melancholic cast of Gothic criticism, producing vibrant, embodied, productively desiring figurations of subjectivity that refuse the aporia, or black hole, of deconstructive criticism in its various forms. My work in this neglected area of Gothic cultural production prompts a new way of accounting for the functions Gothic can perform. This thesis set out to explore the postmillennial manifestation of a long-standing relationship between Gothic and Children's Literature. Though at times they seem to express contradictory impulses, Gothic and children's literature open up into a productive creative space of mutual transformation in the postmillennial moment. Where these fictions evoke the Gothic as a transgressive and unsettling force, they imagine a child subjectivity outside the confines of a limiting and paradoxical pedagogical framework. These postmillennial Gothic fictions also subvert the linear teleology of maturation and development favoured by accounts of children's literature that draw on theories of ego-relational psychology. However, when Gothic is remapped by intertextual and playful children's fiction, it becomes an inclusive space that enfolds the cultural centre and its margins. In its creative reimagining of Gothic, postmillennial children's fiction resist the melancholic figuration of postmodern subjectivity offered by some Gothic critics. Moreover,

pop-cultural children's fiction deconstructs Gothic criticism's investment in 'authenticity' and subcultural capital, reclaiming previously maligned forms of Gothic as valid spaces for a subversive project of reimagining subjectivity.

My critical approach pairs Rosi Braidotti's concept of nomadic subjectivity with theories of intertextuality, based on the writings of Bakhtin and Barthes, to offer an alternative and productive reading of postmillennial children's Gothic. Nomadic theory posits subjectivity as a process of becoming across multiple cultural and social locations. This figuration of the subject runs counter to the theory of the split, or riven, subject offered by deconstructive psychoanalysis, and to the essentializing, humanist model offered by ego-relational psychology. The nomadic subject also offers a productive alternative to the constructivist argument in children's literature criticism that holds that 'there is no child'. Though I acknowledge that any subjectivity imagined by children's Gothic is a construction, the 'child' constructed in the intertextual network of postmillennial children's Gothic is not a blank frame, but a creative assemblage. Postmillennial children's Gothic constructs its nomadic subject out of creative fictions, cultural discourse and critical theory, imaginatively connecting these threads in a multiple figuration of the 'child' in order to point to possible modes of being.

Following the lead of this nomadic subject, I employ multiple theoretical approaches to map postmillennial children's Gothic. Chapter one draws on Barthes' concept of text to resist linear, monologizing accounts of psychological Gothic. Chapter two evokes Mary Russo's feminist revision of the grotesque to consider how zombie embodiment reconfigures class and gender identities in children's fiction. In chapter three, I read Gothic Romance through a Spinozan notion of desire to imagine a nomadic subject in empowering relationships with others. Chapter four employs postmodern theories of parody and 'authenticity' to counter elitist value judgments made of popular culture. In chapter five, I read the Weird alongside the writings of speculative realist philosophy to account for the way postmillennial children's Gothic imagines a space beyond the confines of the anthropocentric 'I'. Finally, I draw on Henry Jenkins and Michel de Certeau to read

postmillennial children's Gothic as a terrain shaped by the nomadic poacher, a reader-cum-writer who refuses the authority of the author and critic in their (re)appropriations of Gothic. Though I have questioned the existing pedagogical frameworks of children's literature, problematizing the image of the 'child' they construct, I do not reject the idea of pedagogy altogether. Indeed, I contend that postmillennial children's Gothic might teach critics new ways of thinking and reading, encouraging them to become agile, nomadic readers.

My heterogeneous approach traces postmillennial Gothic through a number of different manifestations, each offering its own figuration of nomadic subjectivity. First, I show that the nomadic subject of children's Gothic is an intertextual construction forged from the interrelationships between cultural discourse, theory and Gothic literature. The nomadic figure of 'Coraline' points to a concept of subjectivity beyond the narratives of psychoanalysis that have dominated accounts of children's Gothic to date. Far from the 'uncanny' landscape of psychological Gothic, chapter two finds a subversive figuration of the nomadic subject in the grotesque body of the zombie. This zombie subject is not a middle-class, teachable body and resists the processes of identification as they are currently theorised within children's literature, instead embodying classed and gender identities that children's literature typically disavows. The Gothic Romance of chapter three imagines a nomadic subject propelled by the vital force of desire. This desire brings the nomadic subject into a productive and transformative relationship with others. The 'child' of chapter four is likewise a transformative nomadic subject, a naïve reader who responds to Gothic as an affective mode, bringing the 'margins' and 'mainstreams' together in a process of mutual transformation. Chapter five traces a subject that moves beyond the interiority of the 'I' into a Weird universe where it encounters the Weird objects of reality. In this Weird space beyond the self, the linear maturation of humanist accounts of subjectivity become impossible, and oblivion becomes desirable. In all of these imaginative spaces, the nomadic subject of postmillennial children's Gothic emerges through its relationship with others and with the world. The nomad is thus something quite different to the isolated wanderer of early Gothic for it represents the positive potential of engagement with difference and otherness.

As Braidotti contends, nomadic subjectivity is particularly apposite for our current social and cultural moment because it defies dualistic and oppositional thinking that divides and distances subjects in an increasingly fragmented and contradictory social imaginary (2011a, 8). Braidotti notes that the current historical moment is one of upheaval and transition, in which society and culture is being reshaped by postcolonial politics, by the feminist movement, by the emergence of queer identities and by the flows of globalization. Her project of nomadic subjectivity aims to give expression to emerging subjects-in-process and new patterns of becoming (2011a, 8). My mapping of the nomadic figurations of the child in postmillennial Gothic fiction is a small contribution to this wider cultural and theoretical project. The nomadic subject of children's fiction is one way writers and readers negotiate the fragmentary and often contradictory nature of postmodern culture. The popular, mass-market children's fiction explored herein offer a mode of representation that imagine 'the sort of subjects we are in the process of becoming' (Braidotti 2011a, 11). As I have shown, these postmillennial Gothic texts reject a modernist aesthetic for culture, finding sites of empowerment and transformation within postmodern commodity culture. Through parody, poaching and re-appropriation, the nomadic subject mobilizes itself within the power relations of contemporary culture. This nomadic subject also resists hierarchical and oppressive pedagogical models, and offers inclusive and expansive modes of reading.

My study of postmillennial children's Gothic is necessarily limited to a handful of texts. In particular, I focus on the gendered identities of the nomadic subject, and on the denigration of 'feminine' cultural production in literary criticism, with some discussion of the class identity of the 'child' imagined by children's literature criticism. Whilst class and gender are important locations for the imaginative work of nomadic thought, Braidotti also emphasizes the global and postcolonial contexts of nomadic subjectivity. Braidotti's 'nomadic subject pursues the same critique of power as black and postcolonial theories, not in spite, but because of the fact that it is located somewhere else' (2011a, 9). My focus on Anglo-American fiction by largely white authors neglects the postcolonial contexts shaping postmillennial cultural production. Jamila Gavin's *Coram Boy* points to the ways that

children's Gothic provides a space for a critique of the ongoing effects of colonial ideology and for the creative reimagining of postcolonial subjectivities. However, I do not explore this aspect of her writing in my chapter on Gothic Romance. Following this thesis, I intend to extend my exploration of postmillennial children's Gothic to consider how Gothic nomadism functions in texts written by authors in a variety of global locations affected by colonisation, and by writers in the UK, like Jamila Gavin, Bali Rai and Malorie Blackman, who write about non-white subjectivities from within the former colonial centre.

What I have presented herein is not intended as a totalising account of postmillennial children's Gothic, which is a body of work still very much in process. Nor do I seek to offer a totalising argument about the cultural function of this form. Rather, I seek to explore just some of the ways that children's Gothic reimagines pedagogy, reading and subjectivity in the postmillennial moment. Rather like Lemony Snicket's *The End*, I offer this conclusion as an invitation for further explorations of Gothic cultural production for children. As in Braidotti's account of nomadic subjectivity, 'there is no possible conclusion, only more productive proliferations' (2011a, 13). The project of nomadic thought is ongoing and looks to the future as a space of yet more exploration and productive dialogue. Nomadic thought, like the nomadic subject itself, aims for 'a forward-moving horizon that lies ahead… between the no longer and the not yet … [it] traces the possible patterns of becoming' (Braidotti 2011a, 205-206). In this thesis the 'no longer' is represented by staid critical approaches such as the monologizing account of children's literature offered by psychoanalysis, the aporia of deconstructive accounts of the Gothic and by the melancholic cast of the 'linguistic turn' more generally. The 'not yet' is a space of possibility towards which the nomadic subject travels. Indeed, children's fiction is perhaps the most fitting space in which writers and critics can take up the project of mapping nomadic subjectivity. It is a mode of writing that imagines within and without a subject in process, that figures being as becoming without recourse to the teleology of maturation, and whose movement is future-directed.

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