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Possessed Child Narratives in Literature and Film

Contrary States

Adrian Schober
For my mother, my best friend
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Preface

This book undertakes a study of the trope of the possessed child in literature and film, first given serious consideration in Henry James’s celebrated psychological-cum-ghost story *The Turn of the Screw* (1898), and reaching its peak of popularity in William Friedkin’s blockbuster film of William Peter Blatty’s bestseller *The Exorcist* (1973 and 1971 respectively). The possessed child is understood as a young person whose mind and/or body is under the influence of an evil spirit, alien intelligence or deity. The book adopts as its central metaphor poet William Blake’s notion of ‘contrary states’, which is taken to refer to an unresolved dialectic between Calvinist and Romantic ideologies of childhood. It is argued that possessed child narratives, because of the way they problematise issues of guilt, innocence and agency, frequently negotiate tensions between the Calvinist and Romantic. More importantly, it is argued that the possessed child is fundamentally an American phenomenon which, first, can be traced first to the Calvinist bias of the United States as a nation with its roots in Puritanism; and, second, to the ascendancy of Roman Catholicism in contemporary American life and culture, to which Puritanism owes its origins. It is suggested that, in their metaphysical and moral assumptions about good and evil and human nature, Roman Catholicism and Puritanism form part of a common discourse. The intersection of the two belief systems in *The Exorcist* has, by intensifying Calvinist ideologies of childhood, powerfully impressed the possessed child on the popular imagination, giving the image its distinctively American face. It is more difficult, therefore, to envisage such narratives in a non-Puritan or non-Roman Catholic cultural context such as, for example, England, where Anglican theology prevails.

For my purposes, I have conformed to the Australian legal definition of a child as a person between the ages of 0 and 18. However, in my choice of works for extended analysis I have opted to focus specifically on children in the somewhat younger age group to minimise the ambiguity associated with what constitutes a child. While I have included canonised works and more obscure examples, I have deliberately chosen to focus on popular or ‘representative’ texts. Also, for the purposes of comparison, I have given extended analysis to two contributions from the field of children’s literature. The introduction covers important ground by outlining
two meta-narratives integral to the construction of the child figure in Western literature and culture: those that incorporate Calvinist ideologies and those that draw on the Romantic Movement. This is first discussed in terms of the universal motif of the lost child, before narrowing the focus to the more culturally specific motif of the possessed child, framed as a special case of the lost child. To delineate further what is meant by a possessed child, other themes and variations in the evil child genre are also discussed. I then provide an overview of the different discourses that impinge on the possessed child phenomenon, as well as theoretical frameworks that will be implemented to enumerate its historic and cultural specificity.

Chapter 2 traces the possessed child’s formative influences in historic American Puritanism in relation to Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter* (1850) while, linking James with Hawthorne, I discuss *The Turn of the Screw* (1898) as the first sustained treatment of the possessed child motif. In chapter 3, I explain the possessed child’s ‘coming of age’ in Friedkin’s/Blatty’s *The Exorcist* by examining the crucial interplay between historic Puritanism and contemporary developments in Roman Catholicism in the United States. In this chapter, I also briefly consider one of the many *Exorcist* imitations, *Amityville II: The Possession* (1982). In chapter 4, I examine in Robert Wise’s film of Frank De Felitta’s novel *Audrey Rose* (1977 and 1975 respectively) further evidence of the possessed child’s debt to religious/cultural discourses, where Eastern spirituality intersects with Judeo-Christian beliefs. Chapter 5 assesses the viability of the possessed child in English culture in James Herbert’s *Shrine* (1983), while chapter 6 assesses the ability of the field of children’s literature to deal adequately with the ‘adult’ theme of possession in William Mayne’s highly literary *IT* (1977) from England and Victor Kelleher’s somewhat Americanised treatment, *Del-Del* (1991), from Australia. In my conclusion, I fully explicate the cultural factors and anxieties surrounding the possessed child’s occurrence.
Without contraries is no progression. Attraction and repulsion, reason and energy, love and hate, are necessary to human existence.

From these contraries spring what the religious call good and evil. Good is the passive that obeys reason: Evil is the active springing from energy.

Good is Heaven; Evil is Hell.

(William Blake, The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, circa 1793)
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1

Introduction

Contrary states

Assumptions about human nature are inseparably bound up with the representation of the child, whether in narratives addressed to an adult or to a child audience. The shifting perceptions of the child, whether as good or evil, innocent or corrupt, can be traced back to the influences of the Calvinist/Puritan and Romantic/Rousseauian traditions in Western culture. When Calvinism was assimilated into Puritanism in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, there was an emphasis on the inherited wickedness of the child, the child as damned, born in sin. This stems from the Christian doctrine of original sin: the belief that through the fall from God’s grace we are born into this world in a state of sinfulness, which is the underlying cause of all our actual sins. For the Puritans, discipline and education were a process of beating out the moral blackness in the child, breaking its will as it were, until it actively resisted its evil nature. To punish the child’s body was to save its immortal soul. The Wesleyan and later evangelical movements enthusiastically adopted these strict and repressive child-rearing beliefs and practices. However, it was not until the latter half of the eighteenth century that we find a sufficient retort to these views of the child. Far from being born evil, the child, according to Rousseau and the Romantics, was born good. (As in Calvinist ideology, support for this belief could also be found in the Bible, in Christ’s exhortation that we should become as little children in order to gain entry into the kingdom of heaven.) For Rousseau, the child was truly innocent until corrupted by civilisation and culture. In *Emile* (1762), he laid down the incontrovertible rule of child care: ‘that the first impulses of nature are always right; there is no original sin in the
human heart, the how of the entrance of every vice can be traced’ (56). He argued that education should be geared to nurturing a child’s unspoiled nature, its innate interests and capacities, instead of moulding (meaning: de-forming) that nature to suit society’s ends. Rousseau idealised this natural state of existence in the figure of the noble savage.

Situated historically and theoretically between these opposing views of the child is John Locke’s influential child-rearing theory, as set out in his *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690) and later in *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693). Locke rejected the notion of original sin, believing that the child was neither right nor wrong, but rather, a *tabula rasa* or blank tablet awaiting inscription from experience. Reacting against Calvinist ideology, Locke advised against frequent beating or chiding, advocating more relaxed approaches to child-rearing based on instilling a sense of shame in the child, as well as appeals to its reason. Locke also provided the foundation for Rousseauian child-rearing philosophy. Somewhat inconsistently with the *tabula rasa* paradigm, he proposed that the pace of the child’s education should be adapted to the child’s individual temperament and character, that is, nature (Leader 12). While far from advocating a permissive-accepting approach to child-rearing, he recommended that childish play and behaviour be ‘left perfectly free and unrestrained, as far as they can consist with the Respect due to those that are present, and that with the greatest Allowance’ (*Thoughts Concerning Education* 119–20). Like Calvin earlier and Rousseau later, Locke exerted a major influence on child-rearing philosophy in both England and America.

In the twentieth century, Locke’s views are reflected in Bertrand Russell’s theories of education. ‘The fact is that children,’ he wrote in *On Education* (1926) ‘are not naturally either “good” or “bad.” They are born with only reflexes and a few instincts; out of these, by the action of the environment, habits are produced, which may be either healthy or morbid’ (24–5). Depending on the environment, Russell believed that the malleability of the child’s nature provided the raw material for a good citizen on the one hand, and a criminal on the other.

By the first decade of the nineteenth century the child was established as a vehicle through which questions about human nature might be discussed (Pattison 69). However, these questions and the figure of the child have not always been so bound up. The ‘discovery’ of the child and childhood, it is generally acknowledged, is a fairly recent event in history and culture. According to the constructivist or poststructural position, the child is ‘an identity which is created and
constructed differently within various cultures, historical periods, and political ideologies’ (Lesnik-Oberstein 2). This is an opposition to the essentialist view, which posits that the child has a special quality or essence rooted in its nature that transcends history and culture. In his landmark study, *Centuries of Childhood*, Philippe Ariès made the extraordinary assertion that in ‘medieval society the idea of childhood did not exist’ (125). For example, when children were represented in pictorial art they would appear as miniature adults and this is how they were regarded. An awareness of childhood as a special and unique phase of the life cycle, that is, distinct from adulthood, began to appear in the seventeenth century, owing largely to the actions of moralists, pedagogues and the clergy. Here, says Ariès, we have the ‘beginning of a serious and realistic concept of childhood’ (129). Around this time more Romantic notions of childhood innocence found expression. Hitherto little or no concern was expressed about tainting childhood innocence in regard to, for example, sexual matters since ‘nobody thought that this innocence really existed’ (104). With the acceptance of childhood innocence arose the perception that the child was weak and corruptible and in urgent need of supervision, education and discipline.

A continuous theme in Ariès’s study is that the concept of childhood has its genesis in the middle classes. The middle classes were the first to replace the apprenticeship system, which thrust the child early on into the working world of adults, with the school, which prolonged and perpetuated the period we think of as childhood. In contrast, the working classes were slower to abandon the apprenticeship system, such that the notion of a short-lived childhood persisted for an unconscionably long time among them. Along with the school, the appearance of the family in the seventeenth century, itself a middle-class phenomenon, helped to remove the child from adult society. In the working classes, however, children continued to be speedily absorbed into the world of adults as soon they did not need their mothers or guardians. In the eighteenth century, ‘the concept of childhood found its most modern expression in […] the enlightened bourgeois who admired Greuze and read Émile and [Richardson’s] Pamela’ (Ariès 322–3). Other writers, historians and sociologists have since been in agreement that the idea of childhood and particularly of the ‘ideal’ child is originally a product of middle- to upper-class values, beliefs and experiences (see Empey 44–5; Stone 449–80).1 While Ariès’s claims have been hotly contested, his contention that the child is a social artefact has had a major impact on contemporary thinking on childhood. Putting these poststructural ideas into
proper context, Calvinism and Romanticism are simply two opposing constructions of childhood.

The rise of childhood has been linked to the rise of capitalism in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and particularly to the Industrial Revolution of the nineteenth century. From the great changes brought by capitalism emerged a new stratum of society which historians today recognise as the middle class (Empey 43–4). As mentioned above, it was among the middle classes that the first notion of childhood flourished. Yet it is a tragic irony that industrial capitalism, with its ruthless emphasis on profit at the expense of workers’ quality of life, was at the same time the enemy of childhood. The horrendous treatment of children employed in factories and workshops has been well documented. Significantly, the rhetoric for debates over child labour and slavery from poets, novelists and social reformers was heavily informed by Romantic discourses of childhood. In Pricing the Priceless Child, Viviana Zelizer addresses the moral conflict over child labour between the notion of a ‘useful wage-earning child’ on the one hand, and an ‘economically useless but emotionally priceless child’ (57) on the other. How did the middle-class notion of an ideal childhood coexist with the harsh reality of a working childhood? Neil Postman suggests that the ideal of childhood was a luxury that only the middle classes could afford. However, testimony to the majesty of the ideal, childhood eventually made its way into the working classes (45). Yet, despite crossing class lines, the ideal of childhood was then as now a predominantly white as well as middle-class construction. As Diana Gittins discusses, the campaign by the white middle classes to universalise and mythologise childhood ultimately led to the ‘denial of the validity of different childhoods and a concerted campaign to both rescue and destroy such differences’ (138). Thus, for example, the black child, in so far as it differs from the white middle-class norm, was viewed as both deviant and even pathological. In denying race or ethnicity, the black child was reduced to Other; what an ideal childhood is not.

C. John Sommerville has convincingly argued that ‘Sustained interest in children in England began with the Puritans, who were the first to puzzle over their nature and their place in society’ (3). As evidence he cites the pioneering efforts of English Puritans to produce child-rearing manuals for parents, as well as a literature exclusively for children. In contrast, Peter Coveney in The Image of Childhood and Leslie Fiedler link the rise of the child in literature and culture with the rise of Romanticism. For Coveney, ‘Childhood as a major theme came with the generation of Blake and Wordsworth’ (29). The ‘cult of sensibility’
of the Romantic Movement, with its core values of emotion, intuition and imagination, was a direct reaction against the materialistic, rationalistic and deterministic values of the Enlightenment. Coveney argues that the child was forged out of this conflict between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, this movement from Reason to Feeling. The Romantic poets, as exemplified by Wordsworth in ‘Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood’ (1807) and *The Prelude* (1850) and Blake in *Songs of Innocence* (1789), stressed the original virtue and innocence of the child and its inevitable entry into experience, as well as its affinity with nature. In his account of the movement of the child from the periphery to the centre of art and culture, Leslie Fiedler speaks of the revolution which took place in the mid-eighteenth century and replaced the belief in original sin in the child with the belief in original innocence, as championed by Rousseau (‘The Eye of Innocence’ 221). For George Boas, the emergence of a ‘cult of childhood’ is bound up with this concept of innocence, as well as a more general belief in cultural primitivism.

Nina Auerbach emphasises the persistent coexistence between Calvinist and Romantic ideologies in Victorian conceptions of the child: ‘Rousseau and Calvin stood side by side in the nursery’ (413). She sees the child as a highly ambiguous figure in Victorian culture, a site of extremely conflicting attitudes for adults, which surfaced more openly in books than in real life. David Grylls stresses the persistent competition and conflict, as well as coexistence, between these two streams of thought on the Victorian child. Often the two streams would come together to produce highly ambivalent and idiosyncratic attitudes towards children. Thus it was not uncommon for Victorian parents to express love and affection for their children, but also to subject them to harsh discipline fuelled by a belief in original sin (Grylls 23). For all their disagreement, the Calvinist and Romantic ideologies of childhood, Grylls fascinatingly notes, were both peculiarly bent on sending the child to an early grave. Kimberley Reynolds and Paul Yates suggest that the lack of expressions of parental anguish and grief in early literature for children dealing with the theme of childhood death was most likely ‘denied in and so repressed by the discourses of Puritanism … and especially Calvinism’ (156), as in didactic literature like James Janeway’s infamous *A Token for Children: Being an Exact Account of the Conversion, Holy and Exemplary Lives and Joyful Deaths of Several Young Children* (1671–2), which became standard reading for both children and parents. This was literature designed to instil in children religious awareness, especially of the doctrine of
original sin, attended by warnings of hellfire and damnation for those who refused to repent, obey God and live piously. Janeway’s *A Token for Children* was especially popular in the intensely religious milieu of Puritan New England, as was John Cotton’s *New England Primer* (1691[?]), which taught that ‘In Adam’s fall / We Sinned All’ and his *Milk for Babes* (circa 1640s) was also predicated on the idea of innate infant depravity and a vengeful God.

In *A Token for Children*, Janeway idealised the ‘good’ childhood death, in which a child of precocious strength and piety is delivered to heaven by God’s grace (Reynolds and Yates 156–8). In the Calvinist/Puritan outlook early death served as a warning to children and as a demonstration of faith. For some of these children, records Janeway, the practice of the good death was an ecstatic experience. The reason for the Romantic preoccupation with childhood death is less clear but seems partly motivated by pathos, as notoriously exploited by Dickens. The extraordinary outpouring of grief with which the Victorians received the death of Little Nell in his *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1840–1), for example, prompted Oscar Wilde to remark that one would have had to have a heart of stone not to think of Little Nell’s death without laughing. Fiedler classes Nell as a Good Good Girl who ‘must die, not only that we may weep (and tears are, for the sentimentalist, the way to salvation), but also because there is nothing else for her to do–no course of action which would not sully her’ (‘The Eye of Innocence’ 223). There is a disturbing nexus in both the Calvinist and Romantic views between early death and childhood virtue, making the distinction between them an often very murky one. Indeed, the sentimental deathbeds of the Romantic view often ‘borrowed some trappings from evangelical magazines’, such that ‘the two leading attitudes to children converged on the coffin and the grave’ (Grylls 41).

Dickens’s morbidly sentimental treatment of the girl child in *The Old Curiosity Shop* is an excellent illustration of this convergence of attitudes. Indeed, Little Nell is cast squarely in the mould of evangelical heroines and biographies. It is no coincidence that her flight with her grandfather from the darkness of London to the light of the countryside parallels Christian’s journey from sin to salvation in John Bunyan’s *The Pilgrim’s Progress* (1678). Indeed, it is an analogy which Nell herself makes (175). However, unlike Christian, Nell must die in order to reach the Celestial City, as portrayed in the final illustration of Nell being carried away by angels. Moreover, this is a ‘good’ death based less on Christian conversion than on the fact of her youthfulness. (In *Oliver Twist* (1837–9), by contrast, Dickens makes Oliver’s
trials, which similarly have him flirt with death, a parody of Bunyan’s Puritan allegory as well as William Hogarth’s A Rake’s Progress (1735), as announced by the book’s subtitle, ‘A Parish Boy’s Progress’). Thus Dickens, ordinarily celebrated for his Romantic treatment of the child figure as the innocent victim of adult society, was also influenced by Calvinism. More often than not, Dickens consciously rejects Calvinist ideologies of childhood, as his satirical treatment of evangelicalism in the fanatical Mrs Clennam of Little Dorrit (1855–7) or the Murdstones of David Copperfield (1849–50) clearly show. Yet The Old Curiosity Shop also demonstrates how the influence of Calvinism was not necessarily negative (even in a book which uses the image of Little Bethel to decry the joylessness and gloom of evangelicalism). Nor was Dickens, it seems, always fully conscious of the extent of that influence in his work.

Thus far it should be clear that the relation between Calvinism and Romanticism is not only one of competition, or of coexistence, but of codependence. Sometimes, as in Dickens’s The Old Curiosity Shop, Emily Brontë’s Wuthering Heights (1847), George Eliot’s Silas Marner (1861) or Charles Kingsley’s The Water-Babies (1863), the two ideologies inform each other. Nevertheless, Dickens and these other writers, for all their debt to Calvinism, ultimately worked within Romantic assumptions about the child. It is a truism to say that treatments of childhood and the child figure have tended to privilege one ideology over the other. Contemporary writers, whether writing for adults or for children, have tended to be fundamentally Romantic in their assumptions about the child. In this sense, the ‘culturally dominant construction of childhood … can be usefully termed a Romantic phenomenon’ (Richardson 26). However, it is my contention that it is really only in the post-Romantic age, coinciding with the turn of the twentieth century, that we witness something essentially new: in some ways, a more sophisticated treatment of the child relying on specific creative tensions between these opposing ideologies of childhood. Here, the motif of the lost and possessed child became the ideal vehicle for amplifying these tensions.

The lost child

The motif of the lost child, whether abandoned, rejected, stolen or forgotten, is very old. It has its roots in folklore and can be found in Shakespeare’s late plays, as well as various literary fairytales (the Brothers Grimm’s Hansel and Gretel (1812/1857); Hans Christian
Andersen’s *The Snow Queen* (1880)). However, it was Blake’s ground-breaking poems from *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* (1794) that were first to explore, in a larger dialectical framework that encompassed tensions between Calvinist and Romantic ideologies, notions of the lost child. As indicated in the subtitle to the combined anthology, Blake sought to show the ‘Two Contrary States of the Human Soul’, for ‘Without contraries,’ he wrote in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* circa 1793, ‘is no progression’ (105). In ‘Holy Thursday’ from *Songs of Innocence* these contraries are brilliantly seen in the way Romantic ideologies of childhood seem to provide an ironic commentary on Calvinist ideologies. In this extremely double-edged poem, the speaker marvels at how children of a charity school are able to transcend, by virtue of their hallowed innocence, their impoverished lot in life by bursting into uplifting religious song – presumably their way of bestowing their gratitude on the beadles. Yet this Romantic scene is subtly undercut by Calvinism. Into St Paul’s the children walk ‘two & two in red & blue & green’ (139), models of strict order and obedience. The ‘wands as white as snow’ which the beadles carry evoke not only ceremonial shafts but also switches or rods used for corporal punishment in charity schools (Leader 18–19). Unbeknown to the children, these ‘wise guardians of the poor’ are also their oppressors. What is invoked through irony in ‘Holy Thursday’ from *Innocence* is stated loudly in its contrary poem from *Experience*: ‘Is that trembling cry a song? / Can it be a song of joy? / And so many children poor? / It is a land of poverty!’ (144). Thus the state of innocence is always shadowed by experience.

Many of the themes and conventions of Blake’s poems from *Innocence* and the combined *Songs* were influenced by seventeenth- and eighteenth-century children’s literature and verse, particularly that which grew out of the Calvinist/Puritan tradition in works like *A Token for Children* and Bunyan’s *A Book for Boys and Girls* (1686). These themes and conventions Blake transforms and undermined. In the highly satirical ‘A Little Boy Lost’ from *Songs of Experience*, an innocent little boy dares to set ‘reason up for judge / Of our most holy Mystery’ (152). In the presence of his weeping parents, the innocent is bound in an iron chain and burned at the stake by a fanatical priest for his unforgivable act of ‘blasphemy’, reminding us of Janeway’s fearful admonition to insolent children that they are not too little to die and go to hell. In the manner of a martyr, the little boy is condemned to death because his ‘unorthodox’ views threaten to expose the hypocrisy and lies behind mainstream religion. In *Experience*, we confront most
clearly Blake the humanist. His lost children, as they appear in ‘London’, ‘The Chimney Sweeper’ as well as ‘Holy Thursday’ (the latter poems of which, in the context of the combined Songs, could be seen to expose the pretensions and falseness of their Innocence versions), have been lost to their parents and society. (In Blake’s true successor Dickens, this sense of bitterness and outrage over the plight of England’s lost children was kept topical in works like Oliver Twist.) A debate continues to rage in Blakeian criticism about whether Innocence and Experience should be considered independently (as they were originally conceived) or as two parts in a larger framework or design. However, it may be argued that, even when the two sets of Songs are viewed within a larger framework, the dialectic Blake negotiates between them remains unresolved. In Blakean terms, there is no relation of progression between the two contrary states.

The theme of lost children flourished in nineteenth-century English literature such as the above-mentioned works of Dickens, George Eliot, Kingsley and the Brontës. Many of these children were foundlings. However, it is really only in the twentieth century that we find the more interesting use of the theme for setting up tensions between Calvinism and Romanticism. For example, in A High Wind in Jamaica (1929), Richard Hughes undermines and subverts Romantic ideologies in his depiction of children lost on a pirate ship. In this post-Darwinian fable, Hughes gives us a group of young ‘subjects’, ranging in age from three to thirteen. This allows him to study aspects of children’s personal, social and moral development. The lost child Emily, who is aged ten, is the most vividly realised. Early on, she has an epiphanic moment: ‘She suddenly realized who she was’ (94). This realisation is written through her body, ‘the little body she suddenly realized to be hers’ (94). She commits the Calvinist sin of prying into considerations about the nature of God (more than a century after Blake’s ‘A Little Boy Lost’) and believes for a time that she is God. Her belief is quite shameless, ‘but at the same time she knew, beyond all doubt, in her innermost being, that she was damned, that there never had been anyone as wicked as her since the world began’ (109–10). Whether she is damned or not, Emily’s epiphany spells a kind of fall.

Emily is not without self-protection, though: to ensure that others leave her alone, she has enough sense to keep her newfound awareness a secret. Hughes insists here on a difference between children and adults, drawing a relation between children and their natural talent for secrecy. Later, Emily hides the most appalling secret imaginable: the killing of the Dutch Captain while she is in a terrified, fevered state.
The Calvinist imagery of Emily as damned is particularly strong in her moments of self-reflection on her ‘original sin’. In committing this ‘mysterious crime against the Holy Ghost which dwarfed even murder’, Emily feels that ‘the pity of Heaven was sealed against her!’ (130). She sees for herself ‘only a violent road, leading to Hell, open’ (132), standing by even while the hapless Margaret is blamed. Hughes’s novel exploits to good effect the notion of innocence masking corruption, where Emily’s ‘beautiful, innocent grey eyes’ (128), her sweet childish countenance, afford her the perfect alibi or protection for her crime.

In its disturbing evocation of the dark side of childhood, Hughes’s novel bears obvious comparison to Golding’s fabulist *Lord of the Flies* (1954), another story about lost children, this time on an idyllic, uninhabited island. Here, Golding casts us as observers to another experiment in human nature. His subjects: a group of typically British schoolboys. His hypothesis: that, after allowing for all the variables of civilisation – the outer layers of culture, education, etiquette, morals – human beings will inevitably revert to their natural state, which is inherently that of a savage, part of our biological make-up. However, it is precisely these terms ‘civilisation’, ‘natural’ and ‘savage’ that Golding sets out to problematise. Not surprisingly, some writers have construed the boys’ penchant for evil as support for the doctrine of original sin. In Golding’s apocalyptic vision, ‘it is the end of innocence’ and in its place we have ‘the darkness of man’s heart’ (192). In other words, the child for Golding is already fallen. Thus Golding’s conception of childhood derives largely from Calvinism, although complicated, as in *A High Wind in Jamaica*, by Darwinism. According to recapitulation theory, which has its origins in eighteenth-century thought (as incorporated by Darwin in his evolutionary theory) ‘ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny’. In his own version of recapitulation theory, pioneering developmental psychologist G. Stanley Hall proposed that the stages of childhood, adolescence and adulthood correspond to three stages in human evolution: savagery, barbarism and civilisation, respectively. *Lord of the Flies* (like H. G. Wells’s similarly dystopic *The Island of Dr Moreau* (1896)) presents a case not for evolution but for devolution, whereby the children slide from civilised values into barbaric behaviour.

If there is *any* hope for salvation in Golding’s book it is with the adult and not the child. It is certainly the case that ‘adult’ civilised values as we know them come under harsh attack by Golding and are exposed for all their hypocrisies. When the naval officer arrives on the island and scolds Ralph and the boys for failing ‘to put up a better
show than that’ (192) – that is, for degenerating into barbarism – there is an appalling irony to his words, for he is the guilty one here, a major player in the destruction of the human race. As an ‘adult’ he should know better. Nevertheless, it would seem that these so-called civilised values are on the whole a good thing for humanity. That is, it just might be possible that Golding is suggesting that our social and political institutions (school, family, church) serve to curb the human instinct for aggression and violence, although not completely. In Freudian terms, they prevent the id impulses from finding full form and expression. In Calvinist terms, there is hope for the adult, for, as Fiedler on the doctrine of original sin points out, ‘If one began by believing that an originally corrupted nature must be trained (cajoled and beaten) into the semblance of orderly virtue, he ended by being convinced that an adult had some chance of attaining goodness, the child little or none’ (‘The Eye of Innocence’ 221).

By far the most malevolent children in Golding’s novel are Jack and Roger, both associated with images of shadow and darkness. Once the veneer of civilisation has been stripped away, their inherently wicked natures are unleashed. And if they are possessed by the force of evil, of hate, then Simon is possessed by the force of good, of love. It seems that Simon is the only thoroughly good character in the novel, but he must die for it. He has been described as a visionary, a saint and a Christ figure. The way he elects to spend time alone in the forest where he can engage in introspection and be at one with nature is not only Christ-like (‘the holy fool’) but Wordsworthian. Thus, while Golding writes the lost child here in a chiefly neo-Calvinist light, Simon’s characterisation is unmistakably Romantic. This is to say, that there are two kinds of lost children on the island. However, it may be seen that Romantic ideologies are finally overwhelmed and consumed by neo-Calvinist and neo-Darwinian ideologies.

The possessed child: themes and variations

A special case of the lost child, which henceforth will be my main focus, is the possessed child. Spirit possession has been defined as ‘any altered state of consciousness indigenously interpreted in terms of the influence of an alien spirit’ (Crapanazano 7; emphasis in original). In this definition, an altered state of consciousness refers to deviations in mental states (such as the ‘trance’ state, usually associated with medium possession, discussed below), while the notion that possession has an indigenous dimension importantly acknowledges that the phenomenon is
interpreted differently across different cultures (Crapanazono 9). That is, possession is a cultural construct. For my purposes, possession usually entails some form of influence and control over the mind and/or body of the subject. When the possessed is a child, the effect is doubly provocative. While the notion of the possessed child is historically very old, as old as the notion of possession itself, the fictional portrayal of the possessed child is relatively recent. Although the locus classicus of the idea may be found in Henry James’s turn-of-the-century novella The Turn of the Screw (1898), it was not until The Exorcist, William Friedkin’s sensational film of William Peter Blatty’s bestseller (1973 and 1971 respectively), that the possessed child would reach its zenith of popularity and become an icon in American mass culture, spurring an outbreak of possessed children in the 1970s.

Alleged cases of possession have been reported throughout the globe, but particularly Asia, Africa and Latin America. Many of the world’s religions have their own concept of possession: for example, the feared Dybbuk of Jewish folklore which inflicts mental and spiritual harm on its helpless victim, or voodoo possession of the voluntary kind by an ancestral or animistic deity. However, perhaps the most familiar variety is Christian possession by the Devil or a demon, as in the New Testament account of Jesus ordering the demons out of a man (‘And he said, Legion: because many devils were entered into him’, Luke 8: 30 (King James Version)) into a herd of Gadarene swine. In Christian theology, we also find two of the earliest accounts of the possession of a child. In the first of these New Testament accounts, a Syrophoenician woman beseeches Jesus to exorcise or expel the unclean spirit from her young daughter. The woman then returns home to find her daughter has been miraculously healed (Mark 7: 25–30). In the second and more detailed of these accounts, which serves as a more dramatic demonstration of Jesus’ amazing faith-healing powers, a father implores Jesus to heal his only son who has long been tormented by an unclean spirit that sends him into violent convulsions and tries to destroy him by throwing him into fire and water. One of Jesus’ disciples has already tried to exorcise the boy, but has failed. Jesus suggests that the failure is due to a lack of faith. Surrounded by a crowd, Jesus commands the evil spirit to leave the agonised boy’s body and never return, and here exorcism is fascinatingly identified with resurrection: ‘And the spirit cried, and rent him sore, and came out of him: and he was as one dead, insomuch that many said, He is dead. But Jesus took him by the hand, and lifted him up; and he rose’ (Mark 9: 26–7).
The witch-hunts in Western Europe and North America in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries produced a veritable legion of victims of demonic possession. In the post-Reformation era, witchcraft prosecution seems to have reached its heights in areas particularly subject to Protestant/Calvinist influence, such as Scotland, Switzerland and New England. However, it remains difficult for historians to establish a causal link between Calvinism and witchcraft hysteria. In France, nuns accused priests of being in league with the Devil and for causing their own possession, as happened at an Ursuline convent in Loudun in 1634 (famously recounted by Aldous Huxley in *The Devils of Loudun* (1952) and sensationally filmed by Ken Russell as *The Devils* (1971)). In Britain, by contrast, where witchcraft hysteria took time to spread, children were cast in the role of accusers, as in the famous cases of the Throckmorton children at Warboys (1595), Thomas Darling the Burton Boy (1597) and the Leicester Boy (1616). In the religiously volatile climate of Puritan New England, similar cases of bewitchment and possession were recorded: the Connecticut Witches (1662), Elizabeth Knap (1671), the Goodwin Children (1688), the Salem Witch Hunt trials (1692) and Mercy Short (1693), to name but a few. The infamous Salem witchcraft episode, in which the American colonial divine Cotton Mather’s work on witchcraft is believed to have played a part, was the only case of mass possession in the United States. Possession victims on both sides of the Atlantic, notes Godbeer, displayed similar symptoms of lewd and violent behaviour and were often obsessed with their moral condition, in which possession was usually preceded by feelings of ‘spiritual inadequacy’ (109). For Godbeer, these victims, by shifting blame for their sinful thoughts and actions onto a devil or demon figure, were engaging in possession as part of an elaborate mechanism of scapegoating and denial, thereby giving them an avenue to resolve the spiritual dilemma between self-blame and self-absolution (Godbeer 105).

In 1848, the daughters of the Fox family, fifteen-year-old Margaretta and twelve-year-old Kate, heard strange noises in their old farmhouse in Hydesville, Wayne, New York State. Although the noises caused great uneasiness for the Methodist family, the sisters gamely responded with noises of their own. From this they managed to elaborate a code (beginning with one rap for ‘no’ and three for ‘yes’) to communicate with the spirit rapper they called ‘Mr Splitfoot’. An inquiry by the father into the former tenants of the farmhouse revealed that Mr Splitfoot was a poor pedlar who had been murdered in the sisters’ bedroom many years earlier. (Depending on which story, human remains were either found or not found in the basement.) When news
of these remarkable events spread to the locals the sisters’ celebrity grew, eventually attracting people from all parts of America and later abroad prepared to pay large sums of money to the sisters for helping them contact their deceased loved ones. Not surprisingly, the Fox sisters were met with hostility by some members of the public (particularly orthodox Christians) who maintained that they were in league with witchcraft and the Devil. The final years of the Fox sisters’ biography were far from a success, ending in poverty and alcohol abuse for both; however, these early events in Hydesville are generally seen to herald the beginning of modern spiritualism (or spiritism) in the United States. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and Victor Hugo were two of its more famous believers; Harry Houdini was one of its debunkers. The notion that children are equipped with a special faculty to communicate with spirits of the dead appears in The Turn of the Screw and, more recently, The Sixth Sense (1999). In the case of James, he was no stranger to the study of modern spiritualism or psychical research, in part because of his esteemed brother William’s involvement in the American Society for Psychical Research and its English parent society (Beidler 38). For the Catholic priest Montague Summers, ‘Modern Spiritism is merely Witchcraft revived’ (269). For its proponents, spiritualism enables the medium (most often a woman) to make contact with dead loved ones. For its opponents (namely, Catholics), spiritualism makes the medium particularly vulnerable to demonic possession. Indeed, it may be seen that mediumship is a form of possession: for the duration of the seance, the medium is in a trance state, in which the spirit force takes over his/her mind and body.

In our post-enlightened age, possession would be variously diagnosed as epilepsy, hysteria, dissociative identity disorder (formerly multiple personality disorder), role playing and even ergot poisoning. The tension between superstitious interpretations of abnormal behaviour and the medical model is, as we shall see, central to a number of possessed child narratives such as The Exorcist. Blatty’s book and particularly Friedkin’s film helped spark a new wave of interest in possession. In the 1970s and 1980s, mental health clinicians published cases of ‘cinematic neurosis’ after viewing The Exorcist (see Bozzuto 187–97), along with case histories of cacodemonomania, the delusion of being possessed by a demon (Schendel and Kourany 198–209). In Minds in Many Pieces, first published in 1980, Dr Ralph B. Allison, a noted authority on the diagnosis and treatment of dissociative disorders, describes how ‘In the absence of any logical explanation, I came to believe in the possibility of spirit possession’ (166).
By the mid-1980s, however, the focus on victims of spirit possession had been eclipsed by victims of satanic ritual abuse. It is believed that the moral panic, which has been compared to the witchcraft hysteria in Western Europe and Salem and the McCarthy witch-hunt trials of the heady 1950s, spread through the zealous, reprehensible and misguided efforts of health-care professionals, social workers, police, fundamentalist Christians and even feminists. No concrete evidence to support cult survivors’ claims has ever been found. An important source of narrative for satanic ritual abuse is Michelle Remembers, first published in 1980 and written by survivor Michelle Smith with her Canadian psychiatrist Lawrence Pazder. This third-person narrative, which closely follows the psychoanalytic structure, details the unspeakable atrocities (torture, rape, degradation) committed by members of a satanic cult against a five-year-old child. Michelle was diagnosed by her doctor with multiple personality disorder. This, along with the notion of recovered memory, became important to the discourse of satanic ritual abuse in the 1980s and 1990s. More rocking to the moral foundations of American society than these ex post facto claims of satanic molestation were the testimonies extracted from children themselves, who ultimately (as in Salem Village) became accusers. Highly publicised cases such as that of McMartin Preschool in Los Angeles in 1984 fed the public’s seemingly insatiable appetite for descriptions of satanic practices and paedophilia. The lack of evidence in such cases was frequently attributed to a massive conspiracy and cover-up. Nor was the moral panic confined to the United States. In Britain, social workers specially trained to identify such abuse from the training they received in the United States ‘uncovered’ similar cases in Nottingham (1989), Rochdale (1990) and the Orkney Islands (1991). The inquiry into the ‘Orkney raids’, which led to the removal of children from their families, cost British taxpayers over £6 million. Central to the discourse of satanic ritual abuse was the unquestioned assumption that the children must be believed at all costs. Debbie Nathan and Michael Snedeker suggest that the children in such cases were little more than the victims of suggestion from adults, who had decided beforehand they had been ritually abused when they had not. Thus, what ultimately ‘came from the mouths of babes was juvenile renderings of grownups’ anxieties. For the young accusers in ritual abuse cases, the act of speaking constituted a profound irony, because the more they said, the more their efforts were silenced by adult projections and fantasies’ (3). The possessed child figure, I will likewise demonstrate, is the site of adult anxieties, projections and fantasies.
The advantage of the possession motif for writers, as Neilson points out, is that it casts the child as both good and evil, innocent and corrupt, victim and villain:

Because the child does the evil deeds, he/she is a villain, but being under the dominance of another being, the child is actually innocent. This mix, the child as both villain and victim, has produced the most subtle and sophisticated of the evil child/teenager stories, whether the rationale be psychiatric, religious paranormal or simply demonic. (192–3)

Herein lie the tensions between Calvinist and Romantic ideologies, as exemplified in The Turn of the Screw and The Exorcist. Sometimes the relationship between childhood innocence versus corruption and possession is further problematised by having the possessed child ambivalently complicit in the possession, as also seen in the two aforementioned works. In order to grasp fully the workings and dynamics of these tensions, I argue, it is necessary in our reading to incorporate the notion of an unresolved dialectic, in which the ideas of one ideology influence, emphasise, inform and define our thinking of the other. Thus this book takes its title from Blake’s metaphor of the two contrary states of the child’s soul. In order to clarify the parameters of the thesis and define exactly what is meant by a possessed child, I will now outline the different themes and variations of the evil child sub-genre in both literature and film and show their relation to the possessed child.

Two books, both published in 1954, seriously undermined the cult of innocence of the child. One, William Golding’s Lord of the Flies, has already been mentioned. The novel has a group of British school-boys, by now degenerating into mayhem on an uninhabited island, commit murder. The second was William March’s The Bad Seed, later adapted into a highly successful Broadway play and Hollywood film, which dealt with a child-murderer. Today, March’s notion of a ‘bad seed’ has become synonymous with the image of a bad or evil child. The story is set in America’s Deep South and tells of eight-year-old terror Rhoda Penmark, who first ruthlessly murders her classmate Claude Daigle for a coveted penmanship medal, and then the janitor Leroy who threatens to incriminate her. Rhoda is a study of youthful innocence masking innate evil. Her mother, Christine, must come to terms with her daughter’s carefully concealed murderous tendencies, as well as her own repressed memories of her lost childhood. She
learns that she is the daughter of a notorious murderess (Bessie Denker, clearly a figure of what Barbara Creed calls the monstrous feminine), which leaves her convinced that she has transmitted a criminal gene to her own daughter. In so far as she is governed purely by her id, which includes a deadly killer instinct, Rhoda is ‘possessed’ by evil. Christine personally takes on the shame and responsibility of being the carrier of the ‘bad seed’. Reacting against behaviouristic models dominant in psychology in the 1950s, which assume that people are neither good nor evil but simply the product of their environments, *The Bad Seed* postulates a criminal entirely the product of inheritance. It is therefore entirely irrelevant that Rhoda comes from a wholesome, nurturant, middle-class household. She is constitutionally evil. In the book’s argument of nature over nurture, the original sins of the mothers are the sins of the daughters.

Although important precursors may be found in *A High Wind in Jamaica*, Christina Stead’s *The Man Who Loved Children* (1940) and Agatha Christie’s *Crooked House* (1949), March’s riveting portrait of the child as serial killer provided the blueprint for an entire generation of homicidal youngsters of the 1970s. However, unlike Rhoda, their penchant for evil has not necessarily been the result of genetic factors. That evil may be a product of oppressive Catholic religion and disturbed family relations, as with the unhinged title character of Alfred Sole’s cult film *Alice Sweet Alice* (1977); or a psychologically disturbed adolescent boy’s hatred of his father and his alienation from his peers might drive him to open fire on his teachers and keep his classmates hostage, as in Stephen King’s novel *Rage* (1977); or a child prodigy, raised by her father to regard the adult world with intense fear and paranoia, will be desperately driven to murder to prevent outsiders from discovering her hermitic existence, as in Laird Koenig’s novel *The Little Girl Who Lives Down the Lane* (1974). Only Ira Levin’s *The Boys from Brazil* (1976), which deals with an elaborate scheme by Dr Mengele to clone a new generation of Hitlers, complicates this picture by arguing that the development of evil in a child is the result of a complex interplay between genetics and environment.

Far less kind are narratives which supply no apparent reason for the child’s evil disposition, as in Stephen King’s novella ‘Apt Pupil’ from his fine short-story collection, *Different Seasons* (1982). ‘[T]otal all-American kid’ (117) Todd Bowden, aged thirteen, is a straight-A student with all the advantages of American suburban middle-class life. However, unknown to his loving parents, he nurtures an immoral, sadistic side which eventually overtakes him. He discovers
the ageing Nazi war criminal Dussander in hiding and, by threatening him with exposure if he refuses to cooperate, grills him on Jewish atrocities for his own perverse pleasure. King’s story is thus not merely a tale of innocence corrupted. Although King’s view of children is fundamentally Romantic, a strong case can be made here that Todd is already less than innocent, and that Dussander only ‘tends a small but perfect flame of hatred deep in his heart’ (264), making him his very willing and very ‘apt pupil’. In other words, Todd is already fallen. Here, King hints at a potential for evil in all of us. In the film *The Good Son* (1993), the all-American kid Henry (*Home Alone’s* (1990) Macaulay Culkin, effectively cast against type) murders his baby brother for a rubber duck before the film begins. Yet, like Rhoda Penmark and Todd Bowden, he comes from a privileged (upper-) middle-class American family. Again, no reason is given for his evil nature. He just is. Both ‘Apt Pupil’ and *The Good Son* use the child to evoke cultural anxieties about the dark side of human nature.

The children described thus far have had their evil natures and consequent acts of evil determined by natural causes (environmental, genetic). Even when the cause is not known, no supernatural discourse (at least not directly) is invoked. The child is treated realistically. In contrast, there is another class of children whose evil natures are attributed to unnatural causes, via some form of satanic, extraterrestrial or unknown agency. King credits Ira Levin’s *Rosemary’s Baby* (1967), *The Exorcist* and Thomas Tryon’s *The Other* (1971) with having initiated the horror ‘wave’ of the 1970s (*Danse Macabre* 284). Significantly, all three books centre on diabolical children. As the noted film critic Robin Wood points out, the recurrent motif of the ‘Terrible Child’, just one of several recurrent motifs which have dominated the American cinema since the 1960s, often intersected with that of Satanism, diabolic possession, the Antichrist’ (181), as in *Rosemary’s Baby, The Exorcist* and *The Omen* (1976). In *Rosemary’s Baby*, faithfully adapted from the novel by Roman Polanski in a celebrated 1968 film, Rosemary Woodhouse is duped by her ambitious actor husband (who has made a pact with the Devil to advance his struggling career) and by her oddball, yet seemingly innocuous neighbours Minnie and Roman Castavet (really devil worshippers, members of a modern-day witches’ coven) into bearing the son of Satan. Despite the fact that she has just found out that she has given birth to a hideous creature with horns, claws, yellow eyes and a tail, Rosemary’s initial horror gives way to maternal feelings. She entertains hope that the devil-child (Adrian/Andrew), because it is also descended from her, may not be all bad and may even be capable of
conversion: ‘Even if he was half Satan wasn’t he half her as well, half decent, ordinary, sensible human being? If she worked against them, exerted a good influence to counteract their bad one …’ (204). The idea that Satan’s spawn may be reformed by sound child-rearing practices is the darkly comic premise of Ira Levin’s 1997 sequel to his original novel, *Son of Rosemary’s Baby*.

While we had to wait thirty years for Ira Levin to publish *Son of Rosemary’s Baby*, Richard Donner’s box office hit *The Omen* could almost have sufficed in the meantime for a sequel to *Rosemary’s Baby*. When promising American diplomat Robert Thorn (Gregory Peck) is told that his wife Kathy (Lee Remick) has just given birth to a stillborn baby in a hospital in Rome, he unknowingly consents to substituting the child for the son of the Devil, born on the sixth day of the sixth month of the sixth year. The changeling, whom they name Damien, at first appears to be normal and healthy. However, the Thorns’ familial bliss is short-lived. Kathy starts to feel that the child is alien, evil, not human. A repentant Irish priest, Father Brennan (Patrick Troughton), tries to warn Thorn of the signs that mark the Second Coming of the Antichrist, foretold in the book of Revelations. He informs Thorn that Damien will kill Kathy’s unborn child and then his earthly parents: ‘And with your wealth and power he will establish his counterfeit Kingdom here on earth, receiving his power directly from Satan.’ *The Omen* and its sequels, *Damien: Omen II* (1978) and *The Final Conflict* (1981), may be read as a male *Bildungsroman* of a rather different kind of passage from innocence to experience. The films chronicle how a corrupt child makes a corrupt adolescent makes a corrupt adult. Individual corruption in turn is seen to make a corrupt society, which is linked to Machiavellian discourses of government and corporate business. *Rosemary’s Baby* implies that Satanism is behind John F. Kennedy’s unexpected 1960 electoral win (Williams 100). *The Omen* films, appearing in the post-Vietnam and Watergate era when faith in institutions was at an all-time low, make explicit this link between Satanism and politics.

However, critics who dismissed *The Omen* as derivative of *The Exorcist* were missing the point: what we are dealing with is a fundamentally different kind of diabolical child. It is true that Father Brennan tells Thorn that ‘It is by means of a human personality entirely in his possession that Satan will wage his last formidable offence’; however, Damien’s possession by Satan, even if we can call it that, has him caught in a nightmare of predestination, which neither he nor the other characters in the story can escape from. Over the
course of the three films, the life and death of Jesus Christ provide an intriguing counterpoint to Damien’s rise and eventual fall. In *Damien: Omen II*, Damien, now fourteen, discovers his true identity as the satanic Messiah from the Book of Revelations. Overwhelmed by the knowledge, he runs away distraught, through trees in the autumn (the fall), away from himself. Crying helplessly to Satan the father, ‘Why me? Why me?, this lost child must resign himself to the fact that his destiny is beyond his control. Fascinatingly, *Damien: Omen II* shows that Damien may not be entirely evil, that a torturous struggle of good versus evil is taking place within his soul. Damien is sincere when he tells his cousin Mark, ‘I love you like a brother. You are my brother.’ Even when Mark refuses Damien’s offer to join his evil Kingdom and Damien telepathically wills Mark’s death, it is not, significantly, without remorse.³ It as if the satanic power he possesses is also beyond his control. However, in a major point of departure from the possessed child in, for example, *The Exorcist*, Damien and Adrian/Andrew are not so much figured as the medium or conduit of evil, but rather as evil incarnate. As will be illuminated by close readings of *The Turn of the Screw* and *The Exorcist*, the possessed child may be less than initially innocent and even complicit in the possession (although this is particularly difficult to determine in James’s story, which may not be a possession tale at all). However, that child is usually carefully differentiated from its possessor, be it the Devil or an alien. In contrast, when the child is figured as Satan’s spawn, no such clear differentiation exists. In Graham Masterton’s *Mirror* (1988), the notion of a possessed child is conflated with the notion of the child as Satan’s spawn, with confusing results.

The pivotal question in narratives that figure the child as evil incarnate is, how do these children come into being? That is, how is a child conceived as satanic/alien/monstrous? The child, for example, may be the product of a union between a human mother and the Devil (*Rosemary’s Baby*), or between a jackal and the Devil (*The Omen* and *Damien: Omen II*). Such children could be loosely termed demon seeds. In contrast, evil children might be of deadly alien stock (*Village of the Damned* (1960, 1995) and its sequel *Children of the Damned* (1964); *The Visitors* (1979)), or freaks of nature (‘sports’) which defy adequate explanation (Doris Lessing’s novel *The Fifth Child* (1988)); the monstrous babies in Ray Bradbury’s short story ‘The Small Assassin’ (1947) and Larry Cohen’s *It’s Alive* (1974) films). The question of the essence of the child’s nature is severely problematised when that child’s lineage is shrouded in mystery, as in John Carpenter’s *Halloween* (1978), in
which a child killer grows up for no apparent reason to be the bogeyman bent on human destruction, himself indestructible. In Gore Verbinski’s *The Ring* (2002), the highly effective American remake of the Japanese horror original, the otherworldly origins of the vengeful ghost of Samara, who unleashes her lethal curse via a videotape, are never satisfactorily explained. Concomitantly, the horror novels of Bernard Taylor (*The Godsend* (1976)) and Lawrence Block (*Ariel* (1980)) capitalise on the unknown factor, casting the child as Other. It is no coincidence that a large number of these children are adopted, whether officially (*Ariel, The Godsend*) or unofficially (*The Omen*). The sentiment that ‘you never really know what you are getting’ with an adopted child is a recurrent anxiety, hence the suspicion that the child is a changeling. And yet, whether of alien or demon seed, it does not necessarily follow that the resultant offspring will be wholly evil (*Damien: Omen II*, John Carpenter’s remake of *Village of the Damned*). The child, as we saw in *Damien: Omen II*, may even try actively to resist the evil part of its nature. On the basis of these examples we would infer that supernaturally evil children are born, not made. This is by and large the case. However, in Stephen King’s *Salem’s Lot* (1975) and Anne Rice’s *Interview with a Vampire* (1976), children are corrupted by vampires, while in *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) and *The Children* (1980), children are transformed into killer zombies. A further example is provided by King’s *Pet Sematary* (1983), where a little boy is resurrected as a killer monster after being buried in ancient Indian ground.

King is an interesting case in point. The phenomenally successful author broke into the literary scene in the 1970s with a book about a lost adolescent girl possessed of terrifying supernatural powers. The book was *Carrie* (1974), which owed much of its popularity to a highly successful (and arguably more interesting) film by Brian De Palma in 1976. The children and youths in this category could be properly designated ‘psichopaths’ (to borrow Newman’s neologism (46)). Although King popularised psychopathic fiction in the 1970s (first in *Carrie* and later in *Firestarter* (1980), with similar vengeful destructive results), he was by no means the originator of the idea. In the 1950s, John Wyndham had children able to communicate telepathically with each other in *The Chrysalids* (1955), and even possess the townspeople in *The Midwich Cuckoos* (1957). It is decidedly ironic that King should criticise in unusually harsh terms Blatty’s style in *The Exorcist* as belonging to ‘the Humorless Thudding Tract School of horror writing’ (*Danse Macabre* 333), when *Carrie* so obviously owes a debt to *The Exorcist* and the diabolical child craze it helped spawn. However, it is
obvious that Carrie is not possessed, at least not in the way that Regan is possessed in *The Exorcist*. In this category, the child/adolescent is not victimised or controlled by an outside spirit force, but rather is the victim of paranormal powers that ultimately become too much for him or her to control.

In *Carrie*, the very downtrodden title character is victimised by both her schoolmates and by a mother given to religious mania. In King’s novel, the mother’s religion seems to be a distorted form of Christian evangelicalism, while in De Palma’s film version, the religious iconography found in the White household is more specifically, though perversely, Catholic. In obsessively guarding Carrie against the stain of sin, Mrs White rears her daughter in an extreme state of ignorance, such that when she menstruates belatedly for the first time in the shower at her school she is both confused and horrified: essentially a little girl trapped inside a woman’s body. Humiliatingly, her schoolmates mock her sexual innocence with exhortations to ‘plug it up’ (13), as they bombard her with sanitary towels and tampons. Menstrual blood is equated in this context with feminine power, coinciding significantly with Carrie’s burgeoning telekinetic powers. (In *Omen IV: The Awakening* (1991), the development of the powers of Damien’s daughter Delia, although she is only eight, similarly coincides with the premature onset of menstruation.) It is these powers which convince Mrs White that her daughter is in league with witchcraft and the Devil, a descendant of Eve, and there could well be substance to her claims. Carrie uses her powers to destroy not only much of the town but her mother as well, and, although it is difficult not to sympathise with her here, Carrie knows her powers spell her final damnation. Fittingly, Brian De Palma’s film has the White house collapse in on itself and suck Carrie and her mother, both now dead, into the nether regions of hell. In *Firestarter*, seven-year-old Charlie and her father are pursued by an underground CIA-like organisation known as ‘The Shop’ seeking to use Charlie’s awesome pyrokinetic powers for its own evil ends. The child is quite literally a walking time-bomb ready to explode. Psychic teenage twins Gillian and Robin from John Farris’s *The Fury* (1976), also filmed by Brian De Palma in 1978, are similarly pursued by a shady government agency (headed ironically by a man named Childermass) for their ‘psychometric’ as well as telekinetic talents. The lost children/adolescents in *Carrie*, *Firestarter*, *The Fury* and Ramsey Campbell’s *The Nameless* (1981) are the innocent victims in a fallen corrupt world. They potentially have the power for good but, misused and manipulated by the adults around them, are driven to use their
power destructively. When these children are so driven they almost seem in their immature rage possessed. Since the publication of the first instalment in 1997, J. K. Rowling has captivated millions with the amazing exploits of boy wizard Harry Potter, who, at best, is a distant relation to the child as psychopath.)

Horror writers like H. P. Lovecraft and Dennis Wheatley toyed with the theme of spirit possession in their fiction. However, the theme did not figure commonly in the horror film prior to *The Exorcist* (Tudor 175–6). Some of the earliest treatments may be found in *Haxan* (1922), *Supernatural* (1933), the Yiddish-language production *The Dybbuk* (1937) and the ‘obscure, and apparently lost’ (Schreck 76) *Going to Glory, Come to Jesus* (1947). When possession was featured in films it was most often in those which dealt with witchcraft, as in *Burn Witch Burn* (1962), *The Haunted Palace* (1963), *The Mephisto Waltz* (1971) and *The Possession of Joel Delaney* (1972). Moreover, when characters in films were possessed, it was usually by something other than the Devil. Perhaps because of a certain religious conservatism, the early horror film was not ready to deal with the subject of possession and the Devil. Significantly, the Legion of Decency in America, an organisation within the Catholic Church, for many years exerted powerful pressure on the film industry to enforce the Production Code (Powers, Rothman and Rothman 18–19). It was only in the 1960s and 1970s that the Legion of Decency’s influence began to decline, preparing the way for controversial R-rated films like *The Exorcist*. The very idea of possession, notes Tudor, ‘whether by demonic invasion, reincarnation, or witchcraft, is a particularly distinctive threat since it postulates a highly personal attack upon our being. The fact that our bodies may be inhabited, and physically changed, generates possibilities previously only minimally exploited’ (63). Yet, the horror film has presented us with interesting variations on the theme of possession, for example, the werewolf (*The Wolf Man* (1941), *I Was a Teenage Werewolf* (1957), cat woman (*Cat People* (1942, 1982)) and the split personality (*Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1941). Even more minimally exploited in the horror film prior to *The Exorcist* has been, as we shall see, the notion of the possessed child, with Jack Clayton’s *The Innocents* ((1961); an acclaimed adaptation of *The Turn of the Screw*), Bernard McEveety’s *The Brotherhood of Satan* (1971), Steven Spielberg’s made-for-television film *Something Evil*, Peter Sasdy’s *Nothing but the Night* and Robert Mulligan’s *The Other* (all 1972) being notable exceptions.

However, in the science fiction and fantasy film, Cold War America of the 1950s produced a stream of narratives about extraterrestrials
invading the minds and bodies of human beings. This started with *Invaders from Mars* and *It Came from Outer Space* (both 1953) and was followed by Don Siegel’s political document of paranoia in overdrive, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956), and its less distinguished reworking, *I Married a Monster from Outer Space* (1958). The loss of identity is a fear that runs deep in the human psyche, up there with the fear of the Other, and films like *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* were frightening dramatisations of what would happen if somebody dear to us – our mother, father, brother, sister or, most dear of all, ourselves – woke up one morning and was one of ‘them’, a stranger, an alien or, worst of all, a communist. In *Invaders from Mars*, a little boy must watch in helpless horror as his parents and the town are taken over by aliens. He even watches as little Cathy Wilson is taken over. She mysteriously dies from a ‘cerebral haemorrhage’ but not before she sets the Wilson house ablaze. Somehow the situation of a child confronting another child who is possessed is doubly horrifying. Much of the film’s power derives from having the events filtered through the little boy’s innocent point of view. In films like *The Lady and the Monster* (1944), *Donovan’s Brain* (1953), *The Brain Eaters* and *The Brain from Arous* (both 1958), individuals are represented as psychically possessed by a monstrous brain. Fascinatingly, in Jack Arnold’s neglected anti-Cold War piece, *The Space Children* (1958), children are telepathically possessed by a disembodied brain from another planet, which uses them to sabotage a nuclear missile project. The children emerge as saviours of the human race. The film, clearly summing up its Romantic ideologies, ends with the well-known verse from Matthew 18: 3: ‘Verily, I say unto you except ye become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.’ Similarly, in Madeleine L’Engle’s award-winning children’s book of the Cold War era, *A Wrinkle in Time* (1962), child prodigy Charles Wallace is possessed by a disembodied brain called simply IT.

In the endeavour to offer a more rigorous definition of the possessed child for the purposes of analysis, it is helpful to adopt the Roman Catholic distinction between the states of obsession and possession. In obsession, the devil or evil spirit is said to reside outside the body of the victim, interfering with the victim by negatively influencing his/her thoughts. In possession the devil actually resides inside the body of the victim and exercises control over his/her body. Signs of possession include wild and painful contortions of the body and super-normal strength. Classically, possession follows a path from infestation (ghostly or poltergeist activity such as scratchings or thumpings in the
victim’s household) to obsession to possession, as observed in *The Exorcist*. Thumpings in the attack are first mistaken (rather implausibly) by Regan’s mother for rats in the attic. Then it appears that Regan’s imaginary playmate Captain Howdy, with whom she communicates via an Ouija board, has possibly told her that her mother wants to remarry, fuelling jealous feelings. Finally, the child’s mind and body are physically taken over, the ravaging signs of which are manifest. In Tobe Hooper’s *Poltergeist* (1982), by way of contrast, the lost child’s obsession never progresses to possession. Five-year-old Carol Anne Freeling (Heather O’Rourke) becomes mesmerised by the static on her television set, through which evil spirits communicate to her. Even when she is sucked, like Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz* (1939), through an otherworldly dimension via her wardrobe and taken possession of by evil spirits in the house (which has been built on sacred Indian burial ground), this never constitutes a possession of her mind or body. Rather, she remains caught in the grip of obsession. As Tangina (Zelda Rubinstein), a powerful but eccentric medium, informs the Freelings, the satanic presence which has punched a hole into the earthly world to seize Carol Anne, keeps the innocent child close to it by lying to her: ‘It says things only a child can understand. It’s been usin’ her to restrain the others [lost spirits]. To her it simply is another child. To us it is the Beast.’ It is children gripped by possession (as opposed to simple obsession) that will form the central focus of this book.

In *Images of Children in American Film: A Sociocultural Analysis* (1986), Kathy Merlock Jackson analyses the shifting visions of the child in American historical culture in relation to twentieth-century portrayals of the child in the American cinema. She notes that by the time films were introduced to American society, the Romantic image of the good child (which filmmakers duly adopted) prevailed, while the bad child of Calvinist ideology had faded into the background (15). Her thesis is that ‘Prior to World War II, the image of children in American films was one of unqualified innocence’ (1). In the silent film era children were frequently depicted as helpless, innocent victims in danger, as in Edwin S. Porter’s *The Life of an American Fireman* (1902), and D. W. Griffith’s *The Adventures of Dolly* (1908). In his landmark film *The Kid* (1921), Charlie Chaplin cleverly used an innocent ragamuffin (Jackie Coogan) to emphasise the innocent and childlike qualities of his celebrated Tramp character. America’s sweetheart Mary Pickford’s peculiar portrayals of children in films like *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm* (1917) and *Pollyanna* (1920) combined the pure and ‘virtuous little girl’ with the ‘rambunctious street urchin’ (Jackson 46). Ultimately, Pickford was the embodiment of
innocence, as was the irrepressible moppet Shirley Temple of the child star-obsessed Depression era. Her cute ‘fix-it’ persona was fantastically adept at righting the world around her. In the 1940s, the American cinema frequently allied children with animals (itself a very Romantic notion that harks back to Wordsworth) in such films as *National Velvet* (1944), *The Yearling* and *Black Beauty* (both 1946). Later expressions of childhood innocence may be found in the Disney films of the 1950s and 1960s (*Pollyanna* (1960), *Mary Poppins* (1964)) as well as, more recently, Stephen Spielberg’s *E.T. The Extraterrestrial* (1982).

However, while the Romantic model continued to be the standard, a noticeable change began to occur in representations of the child following the Second World War that would have been inconceivable in the prior decades (Jackson 93). There were signs of a swing away from the bright side to the dark side of childhood, beginning with the homicidal child of *The Bad Seed*, continuing with the wild, undisciplined, handicapped child of *The Miracle Worker* (1962), and reaching its fruition in horror films like *Rosemary’s Baby*, *The Exorcist* and *The Omen*. In these film representations, ‘The glories of childhood innocence were downplayed as demon children and tough, precocious imps [such as Tatum O’Neal’s savvy Andie Loggins of *Paper Moon* (1973)] inhabited the screen. These images no longer told of the dream. Instead, they revealed societal fears; they foretold the nightmare’ (Jackson 9). However, rather than suggesting that the myth of the good child was simply eclipsed by that of the bad child during this period, as some writers have, Jackson stresses throughout the persistent coexistence of these two images in American culture. She links the development of these darker visions of childhood to changes in the child’s symbolic role as futurity. Prior to the First World War, the child with its freshness, innocence and wonder came aptly to represent optimism in what lay ahead. However, following the droppings of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki and later the Kennedy assassinations and the Vietnam War, which effectively dashed all faith in the future, the portrayal of the child inevitably changed, along with these history-making events. ‘These new images reflected a growing ambiguity toward children and their ability to solve the world’s problems and ensure a promising future’ (Jackson 126). Although the Romantic belief in childhood innocence continues to prevail, that innocence must now be increasingly qualified.

There is much to recommend in Jackson’s socio-cultural approach, particularly her diagnosis of cultural tensions and anxieties in the American cinema. As she points out, images of children in film may betray cultural values and anxieties that Americans have towards their
children, which may be ‘directly reflective, conflicting, or symbolic’ (5). However, her section on the child-as-monster is highly problematic. In her analysis, for example, she claims that in *The Omen*,

> the innocent child becomes the manifestation of an exterior force, evil. As in *The Exorcist*, in *The Omen*, a line exists between child and the devil. In *The Bad Seed*, which is in some ways even more chilling than *The Exorcist* and *The Omen*, a real child does the killing; in the others, it is not a child at all but rather a demon contained in a child’s body. This, however, causes confusion, especially in *The Omen*, in which Damien’s parents are not aware of the truth of their son’s identity … (145)

There is more confusion here than Jackson realises. She does not seem to be clear on what kind of child she is dealing with. Ill-defined use of terms like ‘possessed’, ‘innocence’ and ‘evil’ seriously hampers analysis. Earlier, I argued for a distinction between the possessed child and the child as evil incarnate. Jackson misses this crucial point in her analysis. The line between child and the devil in *The Omen* is not, as Jackson suggests, clearly drawn as it is in *The Exorcist*. Nor is she correct to assert that in *The Omen* it is a demon contained in a child’s body, as is definitely the case in *The Exorcist*. In *The Omen*, the demon merely takes the form of a child. Elsewhere, Jackson carelessly conflates these two types of children into this unhelpfully general category of ‘possessed’. One might be forgiven for thinking that Jackson has employed the term in a more inclusive sense, but it is hardly clear why she then refers to other representations of malign children in the 1970s who were, by contrast, not possessed and proceeds to a discussion of the mutant baby in *It’s Alive*. Jackson’s analysis, by its exclusive focus on the American cultural scene, tends to obscure the fact that the possessed child, along with its cousin, the satanic child, is, in essence, an American construction.

Published in 1987, Sabine Büssing’s *Aliens in the Home: The Child in Horror Fiction* has the advantage of considering both literature and film texts and the British and American cultural scene, as well as a few foreign examples. She chronicles a general development in images of children in both literature and film from victim to victimiser, aggressor, monster. When portrayed as victim, the child, Büssing observes, is unrivalled, in large part due to its long literary heritage as pure and innocent and vulnerable. A recent film like Alejandro Amenábar’s *The Others* (2001), in which children are seemingly placed under threat by
ghosts in a Jersey mansion (more than shades of The Turn of the Screw), shows how the image remains potent today. The child as victim also confers on it an advantage when it is portrayed as victimiser, because then its evil intentions seem to be at odds with the laws of nature (xvii). Between these two poles of nature, the victim and victimiser, lies a more subtle variation of child which Büssing labels the ‘evil innocent’, which became prominent in the 1960s and 1970s. Under this category she places the possessed child, as well as the child as catalyst or medium (what I have already discussed as the child as ‘psychopath’).

While she acknowledges The Turn of the Screw ‘as the first famous representative of the “evil innocent”’ (102), she dismisses The Exorcist as a ‘flat and unimaginative’ novel, which neither in plot nor in its representation of the possessed child ‘contributed any original aspects of the theme under discussion’ (104). In her loose analysis, she asserts that after the demon has been exorcised from the child’s body, ‘No intervention has taken place; the demon was merely a visitor’ (104). Such a statement needs problematising. Later, Rosemary’s Baby and The Omen receive a similar unjust dismissal by Büssing: ‘the children presented in them do not contribute any novel aspects to the image of the child in horror fiction’ (123). Moreover, some of the claims of her book seem to lack support. For example, she claims that the notion of the changeling is seldom invoked in horror fiction (xvii). In so far as it pertains to the possessed child, I will be arguing that the changeling idea is indeed frequently invoked. Later, Büssing asserts that the child’s gender is generally of no relevance in horror fiction (xvi). Given that in a disproportionate number of cases the possessed child is a girl and not a boy, I will be arguing that gender is of crucial importance. While her breadth of material is commendable, Büssing’s analysis often lacks depth. More sustained questioning is necessary, especially of the cross-cultural differences between possessed and satanic child narratives. Such an analysis yields valuable insight into exactly why the United States seems almost to hold a monopoly on these types of narratives.

Culture, religion and discourse

This book addresses the problem of why narratives of the possessed and satanic child have flourished in the United States but not, for example, in British or Australian culture. In other words, what discourses in American culture, not dominant in British or Australian culture, explain the possessed child’s manifest American bias, as well as the sudden resurgence of such narratives in the 1970s? The principal
discourse, I argue, has been religious/cultural. The early American colonies in New England were mainly settled by Puritans, while the Anglican colony in Virginia and William Penn's Pennsylvanian Quaker settlement were still in the loose sense 'Puritan' in religious conviction (Albanese 111, 147). Without oversimplifying formative religious influences and historical contexts in the United States, it is still unquestionably Puritanism, with its theological and political programme, its premium on education, that has left the most lasting impact on American culture. As Albanese has shown, Puritanism has been important to the development of 'public Protestantism' in the United States (396–430).

The historic influence of Puritanism on the satanic theme in American horror cinema of the 1970s, along with changing treatments of the child and family, is discussed by Tony Williams in *Hearths of Darkness* (1996). He traces a line of inheritance from twentieth-century portrayals of possessed and satanic children of the 1970s to the American Puritan tradition’s possessed and satanic child, as depicted by Nathaniel Hawthorne in his classic 1850 Gothic romance *The Scarlet Letter* (106). The Puritans exhibited a particular fascination with the possessed child, whose bodies they saw as especially susceptible to assaults by Satan. As well as the bodies of children, the bodies of women as the ‘weaker sex’ were, according to Puritan discourses of depravity, more susceptible to satanic assaults than men (Reis 322–9). This intersection may be seen in the Salem witch hunt trials, where the majority of bewitched victims who served as accusers were adolescent girls. Similarly, a large number of the victims in possession books and films of the 1970s were adolescent girls (*Ruby* (1977)), or girls on the verge of adolescence (*The Exorcist, Audrey Rose* (1977)). Moreover, many of the evil child narratives, whether they fall into the possessed, satanic or psychopathic category, have as their main settings, or part of their settings, New England locales, as in *The Other, Suffer the Children*, the novels of Stephen King (*Carrie, Pet Semetary*), James Patterson’s *Virgin* (1980), and *The Scarlet Letter*.

In contemporary possessed and satanic child representations, an American Catholic intersection is almost a condition or requirement. As Büssing notes (but fails to appreciate its significance), a novel trend in the late 1960s throughout the 1970s is begun by *Rosemary’s Baby* with a series of sinister child films with a Roman Catholic bias, either in their depiction of Catholic ceremonies or doctrines or Catholic churches as their main settings, or featuring Italy as the heart of Catholicism as part of the backdrop, as for example in *The Omen* (148).
This Catholic intersection is coincident with the remarkable growth in Roman Catholicism in the American post-war years. Even when American Catholicism underwent a decline in the late 1960s and 1970s (the so-called ‘Catholic crisis’), by the 1980s one-quarter of the American population was Roman Catholic (Albanese 98). At any rate, the Catholic faith had truly emerged from its humble origins in the United States.

Although Puritanism has historically been opposed to Roman Catholicism, it is nevertheless indebted to Roman Catholicism. For example, the devotional practices of the Puritans were clearly modelled on the Roman Catholic tradition, as Hambrick-Stowe (25–39) and others have argued. The Puritans, he observes, drew heavily on Catholic devotional materials, especially the works of St Augustine whose notions of piety are reflected in both of their theologies. The Puritan method of meditation, with its incorporation of the confession and self-abasement, also has its origins in the Roman Catholic tradition (Hambrick-Stowe 36). Before his conversion to Catholic Christianity, St Augustine subscribed to dualist Manichean notions of good and evil, as embodied in the cosmic forces of Light (God/Spirit) and Darkness (Devil/Matter). Although this was officially branded a Christian heresy, this dualism is yet another line of continuity that may be traced between Catholic and Puritan beliefs, as is their common preoccupation with the body as a temple of evil, located as the site of antagonism between the forces of good and evil. Moreover, while the Puritans sought to purify the Roman Catholic Church of its so-called corrupt influences, including its reliance on the ‘magic’ of sacraments, shrines and holy relics, they still lived in what David Hall has aptly described as a ‘world of wonders’, where supernatural phenomena were accepted as reality (29–51). This included the belief in possession and the power of exorcism. To be sure, they differed in their 

*modus operandi*: rejecting the sign of the cross employed by their Catholic practitioners, the Puritans opted to cast out the invading demon by fasting and prayer (Thomas 572). However, confidence in the power of exorcism brought the Puritans closer in line to the Catholic than the Anglican or other Protestant Churches who chose to remove themselves from this practice (Thomas 315–16, 570–3). Thus, it may be speculatively argued that the Puritan appropriation of Catholic discourses further accounts for the possessed and satanic child’s special niche in American culture. Although it is uncommon to encounter a possessed child narrative from, say, British culture, it would be intellectually remiss of me to omit case examples which might not fit neatly...
into the main line of argument. Therefore, this book will analyse at length two narratives from the British scene, as well as one from Australia, and determine the extent and form of the cultural gap that separates such narratives from the American scene. Such an analysis will problematise, not obviate, my religious/cultural hypothesis.

In addition to religion, this book will discuss other discourses which have been important to representations of the possessed child in both literature and film. The incessant ‘psychologising’ of the child in these representations is itself a reflection of the increasing psychologising of contemporary American culture, which from the 1960s onwards has witnessed a sharp increase in the number of doctorates awarded in psychology as well as publications on psychological matters (Skolnick 174). The growth in ‘pop’ psychology may be traced in significant part to the general public’s fascination with Sigmund Freud. By the 1970s, Freudian ideas about childhood sexuality and development (which are conventionally seen to challenge popular notions of childhood innocence) and family relations, particularly the Oedipus Complex, had become part of the idiom of popular American culture. It may be seen that writers like William Peter Blatty and Frank De Felitta (Audrey Rose), as well as filmmakers, were deeply familiar with Freud, as demonstrated by their incessant ‘oedipalising’ of the possessed child. This has important implications for feminism. As Donovan points out, many feminists of the 1970s rejected psychoanalytic theory, viewing it as a form of brainwashing to keep women passive (104–5). A favourite target for feminists was the ‘revisionist’ school of American psychotherapists, which they saw as founded on a belief in female inferiority (Donovan 104). Hence an analysis of possession narratives entails an application, as well as critique, of psychoanalytic theory, in so far as psychoanalytic discourses are being used as a tool of female oppression reinforcing patriarchal ideology.

Another discourse which has been very important to representations of the possessed child falls under the rubric of ‘paedophiliac’. In his first volume of The History of Sexuality, the French theorist Michel Foucault implies that the paedophile is a recent invention, but one of a gallery of perverse adult types appearing in the nineteenth century that also included the homosexual (105). James R. Kincaid, in his bold and brilliant work, Child-Loving: The Erotic Child in Victorian Culture, insists that our discourse of sexuality creates a space for the paedophile onto which society (via elaborate mechanisms of denial and self-deception) projects its darkest fears and desires. In other words, says Kincaid, society needs the paedophile in order to explain acceptably the attractions of the
erotic/eroticised child. This is provided we can keep the paedophile at a safe distance, which means turning him into a figure of the Other, or what we are most emphatically not (Kincaid 5). Kincaid’s arguments are of the same tenor as Jacqueline Rose’s in *The Case of Peter Pan*, in so far as she believes that children’s fiction both masks and exposes adult fantasies about desire for the child. On this level, she reads Lewis Carroll’s *Alice* books as one man’s ‘fantasised seduction of a little girl’ and J. M. Barrie’s *Peter Pan* (1904) as ‘the desire of a man for a little boy (or boys)’ (3). This is, as Rose notes, disturbing in its implications because ‘just at the moment when we are accepting the presence of sexuality in children’s fiction ... we are asked to recognise it in a form which violates not only the innocence of childhood, not just that of children’s fiction, but what we like to think of as normal sexuality itself’ (3). Kincaid and Rose both give us a way of thinking about possessed child narratives as funded or driven by paedophiliac desire.

In *Child-Loving*, Kincaid specifies that ‘Objects of pedophilic desire must be initially vacant if they are to be occupied; that is the first rule’ (311). In its vacant state the child becomes

a repository of cultural needs or fears not adequately disposed of elsewhere. For Freud, for pedophiles, for parents and pedagogues, for all of us, the child could carry meaning, a meaning that might, moreover, be easily deleted. The child was impermanent, untrustworthy, protean, here-today-gone-tomorrow. Whatever meaning we placed there wouldn’t last too long. The child could be erased, was in fact in the process of being erased even as we packed meaning in. If the child had a wicked heart from birth, that heart could be ripped out and a new one planted there in no time. If the child was ignorant, that wouldn’t last long; if disobedient, there was always the whipping cure; if angelic, death would take him in or, more likely, her; if loved or loving, that too would pass. Any meaning would stick, but no meaning would stick for long. The child, coming unglued itself, could not hold the glue of labels. (78–9)

Actually, the condition of vacancy or emptiness in the child is not a difficult condition to satisfy, given that its ‘natural innocence’ is almost invariably identified as a negative attribute, the absence of, for example, evil, strength or knowledge. In this way, ‘Innocence is a beginning state, uninscribed, a blank’ (Kincaid 77). Innocence with its connotations of passivity has been conventionally thought of as the opposite of experience, which may or may not include connotations of
'evil', 'depravity' or 'wickedness'. Evil, as in 'causing injury or harm', connotes something more active and present. With the exception of a few pioneering writers like Nathaniel Hawthorne and Henry James, both American, it was later writers of the twentieth century who exploited more fully the possibilities of the child as a vessel, capable of being empty and full at the same time. It was this vacancy called child that had allowed writers to ‘fill’ the child, to freely load it with contrary signification: to be either good or evil, innocent or corrupt, ignorant or knowing, or both. Here the child becomes lost in its own mystification.

Although Kincaid acknowledges in Child-Loving that a study of child sexuality might have some bearing on cultural constructions of female sexuality, he asserts that gender is of no particular importance to the discussion of paedophilia (13–16). I will be arguing quite the opposite; specifically, that discourses of paedophilia in representations of the possessed child intersect with discourses of femininity and patriarchy. Paedophilia, as it underpins possessed child narratives, is ostensibly a male activity and a male fantasy, directed by the way males are represented in positions of power. This is largely enforced through the male gaze, and here the feminist critic Laura Mulvey’s highly influential essay, ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’, is important. She contends that the woman displayed as erotic object in the mainstream cinema has traditionally operated on two levels: ‘as erotic object for the characters within the screen story, and as erotic object for the spectator in the auditorium, with a shifting tension between the looks on either side of the screen’ (19). According to Mulvey, the mainstream cinema codes ‘the erotic into the language of the dominant patriarchal order’ (16). The scopophilic pleasure of using another person as an object of sexual stimulation through sight is ordered in terms of the active/male and passive/female binary. The male reduces the female to an erotic object by subjecting her to an active, intense and controlling gaze. This gaze leaves little opportunity for the woman to return, or, more precisely, own the gaze. In Mulvey’s psychoanalytic formulation, the meaning of woman in the cinema is based on a certain quality of her sexual difference: her physical lack of a penis. Her castrated state, which blocks her entrance into the patriarchal order, gives rise on the part of the male to castration anxiety, which he deals with by fetishism or voyeurism. When the child, notes Kincaid, is made the object of voyeurism, the paedophiliac gaze seeks to imprison the sight of the child rather than the child itself, whereby ‘the envisioning is also an end in itself, an erotic world on its own’ (227). For
Kincaid, ‘Pedophilia seems almost always to be on intimate terms with such possessive looking’ (227). In possessed child narratives such as The Exorcist and Audrey Rose, the paedophiliac male gaze projects its fantasy onto a budding girl-child’s body.

The second wave of feminism in the 1960s and the 1970s profoundly challenged cultural perceptions about gender roles in family life and marriage. Within a few years of the landmark America’s Pageant demonstration in Atlantic City in 1968, the women’s movement had firmly established itself as a force to be reckoned with. The movement sought to undo patriarchal assumptions about male privilege and power responsible for the oppression and marginalisation of women. Women were no longer willing to resign themselves to the conventional ‘marriage plot’ (Skolnick 107). There was now an unprecedented number of women participating in the workforce. However, this brought with it from some cultural quarters anxieties about masculinity, the perception from many men that women were becoming too powerful and independent and that their own masculinity was being consequently threatened. As if in response, the women’s movement in the late 1970s met with a powerful anti-feminist backlash in which many social critics blamed the movement for the supposed destruction of the family, rising divorce rates and child neglect (Skolnick 117–24). These cultural guilts and anxieties underpin possessed child narratives, in which mother and her child (which in many cases amount to one and the same) are reduced to Other, or that which society refuses to acknowledge or accept about itself. The representation of women in such narratives frequently operates to reinforce patriarchal and phallocentric assumptions about power, in which women’s rights and independence are denied or questioned. The male projects his anxieties about her sexuality onto her, including his own repressed femininity, so that he may render her as inferior. Consequently, it is extremely rare to find female practitioners in this mode of narrative: almost invariably the writers, directors and producers are male.

The feminist psychoanalytic critic Barbara Creed discusses specific male anxieties about female sexuality in her book, The Monstrous Feminine (1993). ‘All human societies,’ notes Creed, ‘have a conception of the monstrous-feminine, of what it is about woman that is shocking, terrifying, horrific, abject’ (1). Among the various ‘faces’ of the monstrous feminine which she discusses in relation to the contemporary horror film are woman as archaic mother, possessed monster, monstrous womb, vampire, witch and castrator. She sees the possessed Regan in this regard as a ‘truly monstrous figure’ whose possession
‘becomes the excuse for legitimizing a display of aberrant feminine behaviour which is depicted as depraved, monstrous, abject—and perversely appealing’ (31). She sees Regan as utterly *abject* (a term she borrows from influential feminist critic Julia Kristeva and which implies a threshold state) in the way she crosses the border between normal and supernatural, good and evil (11); while the graphic imagery of bodily wastes (blood, vomit, urine, bile) attached to her also foregrounds her as abject and monstrous. It is thus Regan’s body which becomes the site of a struggle between the ‘subject and the abject’ (40). My only quarrel with Creed’s analysis, a point which I will be redressing here, is that, by discussing Regan as the archetype of woman, she overlooks the important fact that she also happens to be a child.

In her psychoanalytic re-reading, Creed argues that the image of woman as monstrous in the horror film not only derives from her status as castrated, giving rise to male castration anxiety, but also her status as castrator, which, she argues, ‘clearly points to male fears and phantasies about the female genitals as a trap, a black hole which threatens to swallow them up and cut them to pieces’ (106). The image of the *vagina dentata* (or toothed vagina), the castrating mother (as in *Psycho* (1960)) or the *femme castratrice* are some of aspects of woman as castrator. The possessed girl children in *The Exorcist* and *Audrey Rose* are likewise represented as castrating, as is the adopted evil child Bonnie from *The Godsend* who infects her father with the mumps, rendering him sterile. However, Creed is careful to emphasise that images of the monstrous feminine in horror films say more about male desires and fears than female desire: ‘Woman is not, by her very nature, an abject being. Her representation in popular discourses as monstrous is a function of the ideological project of the horror film–a project designed to perpetuate the belief that woman’s monstrous nature is inextricably bound up with her difference as man’s sexual other’ (83). Almost invariably, male anxieties about female sexuality are displaced in this manner onto the female. However, *Amityville II: The Possession* (1982), warrants distinction for the way it dares to foreground the actual problem of masculinity.

Mary Ann Doane in *The Desire to Desire* describes a certain type of ‘medical discourse’ film in which the woman figures at the centre, and which can be found in many films of the 1940s (*Cat People, Possessed* (1947), *Johnny Belinda* (1948)). In this medicalisation of femininity, the woman and particularly her body are associated within patriarchal ideology with the pathological, that is, inscribed as full of disease (Doane 39). Here, ‘the woman is quite literally the object of knowledge,
her body the site of a continual examination of symptoms’ (Doane 134), whereby the erotic gaze becomes subsumed under the medical gaze. Drawing on the work of Foucault and his notion of the medical gaze versus glance, she locates the woman within the almost exclusively male discourse of medicine, in which her body is read as a text for symptoms. Possession films, especially those which set up a tension between science and religion or the supernatural (The Exorcist, Audrey Rose), closely resemble the medical discourse film described by Doanne, in which the body of the possessed child is read as a text for symptoms via the medical gaze.

In primitive societies, delinquent and criminal behaviour was, according to the demonological view, believed to be caused by demonic possession (Shoemaker 4). In the midst of a renewed fascination with magic and the occult in the late 1960s and 1970s, these old explanations of waywardness and delinquency became fashionable again. It is therefore possible to read possession in these narratives as a metaphor for juvenile delinquency, which, by the time The Exorcist was unleashed onto cinema screens, was a major talking point in the United States. (Lycanthropy in I Was a Teenage Werewolf has been similarly read as a metaphor for juvenile delinquency.) A sociological discourse of delinquency which was very influential in the United States during this period was labelling theory, which proposed that the juvenile delinquent was a product of the courts and penal system. However, I would query too close a link between possession and juvenile delinquency because of delinquency’s strong association with problems of the lower-class (at least this was the finding of a 1967 report by the President’s Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice (Empey 81)). A striking feature of possessed child narratives is the way the possessed child is almost invariably located in a white middle- or upper-middle-class setting. In explaining the nature of this ‘rupture’, it seems that what these narratives are primarily reflecting is middle- to upper-class cultural anxieties about children becoming delinquent or aberrant. Discourses of class, as we shall see, are also very important to British possessed child narratives, more so than those from the United States.

Finally, Tzvetan Todorov’s structuralist study of the fantastic as a literary genre will be considered specifically in relation to the possessed child. For Todorov, the experience of the fantastic is that which depends on a hesitation between two adjacent generic modes, the uncanny and the marvellous. In the uncanny, or supernatural expliqué, phenomena in a text that are apparently inexplicable become explicable
after all, while in the marvellous, or supernatural accepted, new laws of
nature must be entertained to account for those phenomena. When the
reader cannot decide between these two, he/she occupies that ambigu-
ous realm of the fantastic (The Fantastic 41–57). It may be hypothesised
that possessed child narratives which employ Todorov’s fantastic
hesitation are caught between the ambiguous realms of innocence and
corruption in the child, as in The Turn of the Screw and The Other. It may
also be suggested that narratives which tend towards the uncanny as an
explanation move more towards the ‘corrupt’ interpretation of the child
(who is a free agent and thus operating according to its own evil will);
while those that tend more towards the marvellous move more towards
an ‘innocent’ interpretation of the child (whose will is under the
control of an alien invading intelligence). However, such a formulation
is too simplistic and needs problematisation. In some of these narratives
the child may be complicit in the possession, so that the acceptance of
the marvellous does not necessarily entail an unqualified acceptance of
the child’s innocence. Although Todorov’s study is concerned with the
field of literature, his approach to classifying the fantastic lends itself
readily to the cinema.
The New England Connection

[T]he following Account will afford to him that shall read with Observation, a further clear Confirmation, That, There is both a GOD, and a Devil, and Witchcraft ... That, The Malice of Satan and his Instruments, is very great against the Children of God: That, The clearest Gospel-Light shining in a place, will not keep from entering hellish Contracts with infernal Spirits: That, Prayer is a powerful and effectual Remedy against the malicious practices of Devils and those in Covenant with them.

(Cotton Mather, Memorable Providences, Relating to Witchcrafts and Possessions, 1689)

Three years before the outbreak of witchcraft hysteria in Salem in 1692, the Reverend Cotton Mather (1663–1728; the third in line of a family of influential American colonial divines who could each be seen to epitomise the values of New England Puritanism) gave an account of a Boston family thrown into calamity by the demonic possession of four of its six children. The first of the Goodwin children to become afflicted was thirteen-year-old Martha, who began to suffer strange fits. These were soon followed by the possessions of her seven-year-old sister Mercy and two brothers, Nathaniel and Benjamin, aged fifteen and five, respectively. What most excited Mather’s hellfired Calvinist imagination was the gruelling physical nature of possession, in which the children’s bodies became the battleground for demons. Mather relates:

Sometimes they would be Deaf; sometimes Dumb, and sometimes Blind, and often, all this at once. One while their tongues would be drawn down their Throats; another while they would be pull’d out...
upon their Chins, to a prodigious length. They would have their Mouths opened into such a Wideness, that their jaws went out of joint; and anon they would clap together again with a Force like that of a strong Spring-Lock. The same would happen to their Shoulder-Blades, and their Elbows, and Hand-wrists, and several of their joints. They would at times ly in a benumbed condition; and be drawn together as those that are ty’d Neck and Heels; and presently be stretched out, yea, drawn Backwards, to such a degree that it was fear’d the very skin of their Bellies would have crack’d. They would make most pitteous out-cries, that they were cut with Knives, and struck with Blows that they could not bear. Their Necks would be broken, so that their Neck-bone would seem dissolved unto them that felt after it; and yet on the sudden, it would come again so stiff that there was no stirring of their Heads; yea, their Heads would be twisted almost round; and if main force at any time obstructed a dangerous motion which they seem’d to be upon, they would roar exceedingly. Thus they lay some weeks most pitiful Spectacles; and this while as a further Demonstration of Witchcraft in these horrid Effects, when I went to Prayer by one of them, that was very desireous to hear what I said, the Child utterly lost her Hearing till our Prayer was over. (Mather, Memorable Providences 4–5)

Historically, cases of possession have occurred more frequently in intense religious households or communities, as it did among the Puritans and Dissenters. The Goodwin children had a strict religious upbringing, as did the first of the young Salem Village girls to become possessed, nine-year-old Elizabeth Parris (Betty) and her eleven-year-old cousin Abigail Williams, who lived with the Parris family. Thus it seems that victims of possession were rebelling against their religious discipline and repression. In the case of the Goodwin children, possession allowed them to neglect their duties and responsibilities, religious and otherwise. It prevented them from doing housework, eating their meals, washing their hands or performing their religious exercises. Under the guise of possession, the Goodwin children were able to rebel against the expectations and standards of their elders without incurring their disapproval or punishment. This also had the advantage of making them the focus of attention. Indeed, for the Salem Village girls who zealously accused their neighbours of the crime of witchcraft, possession gave them a celebrity status unprecedented for their lowly class and sex. In the Puritan habit of thought that externalised evil and liability, it was the demons and not the children that were to blame.
Mather has been charged with helping to foster the climate of witchcraft hysteria in seventeenth-century New England. In his works *Memorable Providences* and *Wonders of the Invisible World* (1692) Mather categorically affirmed the existence of supernatural evil and the Devil. Many historians have characterised the religion of the New Englanders as a basically coherent worldview based on order and reason, which did away with much superstition (Hackett 28). However, more recently, David H. Hall has argued that the New Englanders lived in ‘an enchanted universe … a world of wonders’ (29) that absorbed the magical beliefs and practices of other systems of thought, some pre-dating Christianity. In this world of wonders, it was not uncommon to hear tales of ghosts visiting people at night, of phantom ships sailing into the harbour and of voices speaking from heaven (Hall 29), many of them catalogued in Cotton’s masterwork, *Magnalia Christi Americana* (1702). He shared his father Increase’s belief that natural phenomena such as earthquakes, hurricanes, comets, hailstorms and even monster births were the work of supernatural forces, whether commanded by God or Satan (Lippy 31–2). The satanic side to supernatural experience is evidenced by the New England obsession with witchcraft and possession (in concert with the official viewpoint, witchcraft was usually treated as a form of possession (Lippy 28)). Practitioners of magic and astrology were offered access to this occult supernatural realm, and this belief in astrology to predict human destiny, as Lippy notes, in ‘the power of the stars to guide human destiny was not incompatible with belief in divine providence. After all, there is a fine line between the fatalism associated with occult phenomena like astrology and the doctrine of predestination identified with formal Puritan theology …’ (27).

The predicament of the Goodwin children was not the only occasion that the Reverend Cotton Mather was called on to minister to the souls of children or youths believed to be in the grip of demonic possession. Just as madness and unreason were spreading through the Salem community, Cotton treated a seventeen-year-old servant girl named Mary Short who began to show signs of possession. When she was fifteen she had been kidnapped by Indians. Her subsequent illness would probably today be diagnosed as a post-traumatic stress response to that experience. But Mather transforms her experience into a compelling tale of possession by an Indian-like devil. The Puritans saw their mission into the New World as ordained by God. As such, the trials of colonisation in the wilderness became the confrontation with a satanic world of darkness inhabited by devils, that is, Indians (Ruland and Bradbury 26–9). The threat of being taken by Indians or, worse, of turning
Indian/going Native was never far from the Puritan mind. Thus when Mary Short complains of her body being pinched, bitten and slashed, she is not only exhibiting the signs of possession, she is also reliving the Puritan nightmare of Indian captivity. The Indian-devil serves the all-important role of scapegoat in the exorcism ritual, which ‘is likened to the hunting down and slaying of rabid beasts embodying all qualities of evil’ (Slotkin 154). The bestial Indians personify the beast that is in every man (Slotkin 154). The ultimate Puritan purpose, as noted above, is to reassign evil outward.

It is customary to think of possession as the battle waged by Satan or one of his minions for the possessed person’s body and soul. That is, the contest of wills is between Satan and the possessed. Here, the possessed’s body serves as the temple of evil. However, underlying this is the greater contest between Satan and God who each has a special stake to claim on the possessed person’s body and soul. This almost implies a double possession; one satanic, the other divine. Yet why weren’t the Salem Village girls’ thrashings and moanings equally interpreted as possession by God and not Satan? This is the question posed by Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum. They argue that the young girls’ agonised behaviour could just as well have been interpreted as the hopeful signs of a religious revival. This is indeed what happened in the ‘Little Awakening’ of the comparatively peaceful Massachusetts community of Northampton in 1735, more than forty years after the notorious Salem episode. It was the town’s Puritan minister Jonathon Edwards (whose efforts here were a kind of rehearsal for his role in The Great Awakening) who guided the interpretation of the girls’ experiences into causes for prayer and worship (Boyer and Nissenbaum 510).

In this form of divine possession, the bodies of the girls had been transformed into temples of God. Thus what Northampton experienced was not an outbreak of witchcraft but a religious conversion.

The influence of Puritanism on the American literary imagination has been marked. More recent scholarly work has insisted on its ‘centrality for the American imagination’ (Ruland and Bradbury 32). This influence has been both positive and negative. Puritanism, because of its heavy stress on allegory and its unwillingness to open out to different meanings, has been charged with limiting American writing (Ruland and Bradbury 31–2). In poetry as well as in prose, writers such as Nathaniel Hawthorne, Emily Dickinson and William Carlos Williams have reacted against Puritan ideology. Whatever the extent and nature of this influence, Ruland and Bradbury come to the most balanced assessment: ‘The Puritan imagination does not explain
the extraordinary variousness American writing was to achieve, but it
certainly does not deserve the status of an eternal negative adversary.
Puritanism may have set certain limits on the American imagination; it
was also one of its essential roots’ (32).

In *The American Novel and its Tradition*, Richard Chase forcefully
argues that what is regarded as the best and most representative of
American fiction has been shaped by contradictions, disunities, alien-
ation, disorder. He sees these contradictions as traceable, first, to the
solitary nature of American settlement, which was enforced very
early by Puritan beliefs, and, second, to the Manichean sensibility of
New England Puritanism, which exerted a strong impact on writers
like Hawthorne and Melville (11). The Christian heresy of the
Manichean, with its radical dualisms of Good and Evil, Light and
Darkness, Spirit and Matter was embraced by an unconverted
St Augustine and much later, as several scholars have noted, by the
New England Puritans. In fact, Puritanism has been described as
‘perhaps as close to the Manichean as any Christian sect has come;
the Power of Evil was acknowledged with the same fervour as the
imagination, like the New England Puritan mind itself, seems less
interested in redemption than in the melodrama of the eternal strug-
gle of good and evil, less interested in incarnation and reconciliation
than in alienation and disorder’ (11).

Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter*

The contradictions which give American fiction its notable form and
vitality are clearly seen in the opposition between Calvinism and
Romanticism. One representative American writer who, it is seldom
acknowledged, engages in a complex dialogue between these
conflicting sentiments is Nathaniel Hawthorne, who was born in
Salem, Massachusetts on the 4 July 1804 into an old New England
family. His earliest American ancestor, William Hathorne (Nathaniel
added the w later when he became a man of letters) was a magistrate
involved in the persecution of a Quaker woman, while William’s son
John was one of the judges at the Salem witchcraft trials. These well-
known incidents in the Hawthorne family history are related in the
lengthy ‘Custom House’ introduction to *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), in
which Hawthorne takes the original sins of his Puritan ancestors on
himself, and prays that ‘any curse incurred by them ... may be now
and henceforth removed’ (8). Hawthorne also explores the theme of
inherited sin in *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851), which deals with a family curse imposed by a landowner unjustly executed for the crime of witchcraft. Hawthorne’s writings reveal an unfavourable attitude towards Puritanism, which he regarded as hard, cold, joyless and inflexible. *The Scarlet Letter* is best described as a diatribe against Puritanism. ‘Yet,’ as Leslie Fiedler points out in *Love and Death in the American Novel*, ‘for all his quarrel with Puritanism and its persecuting zeal, he knows that no American can really leave behind the America which the Puritans have once and for all defined’ (218).

In his acclaimed author study, Henry James stresses the importance of Hawthorne’s New England heritage on his work. ‘The cold, bright air of New England,’ he writes, ‘seems to blow through his pages’ (*Hawthorne* 3–4). Puritanism, James observes, in *The Scarlet Letter* is subjectively as well as objectively ‘in the very quality of his own vision, in the tone of the picture, in a certain coldness and exclusiveness of treatment’ (114). James famously criticises *The Scarlet Letter* for its want of realism and excessive symbolism and allegory. However, as Chase points out, the allegory of *The Scarlet Letter* derives from Puritanism, particularly with its Manichean sensibility (76). Samuel Chase Coale specifically links Hawthorne’s radical dualism, as well as allegorical clashes, to this Manichean sensibility, which influenced American writers from Melville to Henry James (1). It is perhaps because of its fascination with Manichean distinctions between good and evil that the Gothic has also translated so well across the Atlantic in Puritan writers like Hawthorne and Melville. In *The Scarlet Letter*, the Puritan child is ambiguously written between the Manichean extremes of innocence and corruption, sin and sanctity, damnation and salvation, heaven and hell, and so on. Herein lies an unresolved dialectic between the two contrary states of the child, giving rise to tensions between Calvinist and Romantic ideologies. The effect is highly oxymoronic. In this heavy, dark tale, I contend, Hawthorne gives us the forerunner to the possessed child, as well as its variant, the satanic child. That is to say, he conflates the notion of the possessed child with the satanic child.

*The Scarlet Letter* is set in Puritan Boston of the seventeenth century and concerns itself with the inescapable consequences of breaking the Puritan law. Little Pearl, the love-child of Hester Prynne and the Reverend Arthur Dimmesdale, is living proof that the Puritan law has been broken. That law, we are told, was almost identical to religion in Puritan society (*Hawthorne* 50). As such, Pearl is, we are constantly reminded, the ‘emblem and product of sin’ (95). The sin of the scarlet letter, as personified by Pearl, is often identified by critics as original
sin. At least according to some radical Biblical interpretations, sexual intercourse was equated with original sin, while the Devil was linked to wantonness and lust. Hawthorne seems to condone Hester’s and Dimmesdale’s sin. However, the sins of the mother are specifically visited upon the daughter.

In her place and function in the book’s Puritan allegory, Pearl is the scarlet letter in living form (the letter ‘A’ for adultery that Hester wears embroidered on the front of her dress as punishment by the Puritan authorities). And yet Pearl is also figured as an innocent whose life has sprung out of a guilty passion (90). By an incomprehensible and mysterious act of Providence, Hester has been both blessed and punished with a beautiful, almost sublime child, ‘who was worthy to have been brought forth in Eden; worthy to have been left there, to be the plaything of angels, after the world’s first parents were driven out’ (91). Her name, as well as expressing Hester’s belief that her daughter is of great price, connotes the whiteness of purity and innocence. And yet it is precisely Pearl’s faultless physical aspect that makes Hester wonder if this merely conceals an evil nature born of the ugliness of her evil deed. After all, no child conceived out of sin could be so beautiful. Is Pearl an original innocent or a ‘sin-born infant’ (64)? The book equivocates between these two interpretations of her nature.

Pearl is, very aptly, described by Hawthorne as ‘the living hieroglyphic’ (217). Readings therefore which merely stress Pearl’s innocent, sinless nature over and above everything else are not only unsubtle and simplistic, they also miss the point. Any satisfactory reading of Pearl, I believe, must seize directly on the creative tension between Calvinist and Romantic ideologies of childhood. In his classic review of The Scarlet Letter in The Atlantic Monthly (April 1886), Hawthorne’s own son Julian pointed criticism in the right direction with his incisive observation that the ‘contrast or, perhaps it is more correct to say, mingling, of the opposite poles of being, sin and innocence, in Pearl’s nature is an extraordinary achievement’ (83). Recognising her as the book’s true and original creation, he notes that Pearl ‘has not, as yet, what can in strictness be termed a character; she is without experience, and therefore devoid of good or evil principles; she possesses a nature, and nothing more’ (83). Thus, it may be seen that Pearl accords with Locke’s conception of the child as a tabula rasa. This gives Hawthorne free rein to write the child or, more precisely, write on the child.

Critics seem unable to decide whether Pearl is a realistic or symbolic child, or both. In discussions of Pearl as a realistic figure, critics frequently point out that Hawthorne based her on his own daughter,
Una. However some, such as Fiedler, complain that she is devoid of depth and seems ‘less a real child than an allegorical representation of the fruit of sin’ (Love and Death 215). It is probably more accurate to say that she operates on both levels. In my view, the fusion of the realistic and symbolic in Pearl’s portrait is not very convincing, a judgement shared by a number of critics. In her original innocence Pearl seems more like a cipher who, in her chiefly symbolic function in the story, is filled full of original sin. In other words, she is both empty and full. Somewhere perhaps between these poles of sin and innocence lies Hawthorne’s realistic child, but I am not so certain.

The world which the Puritans inhabit in The Scarlet Letter is, to borrow Hall’s phrase, a world of wonders. The narrator describes their world thus:

Nothing was more common, in those days, than to interpret all meteoric appearances, and other natural phenomena, that occurred with less regularity than the rise and set of sun and moon, as so many revelations from a supernatural source. Thus, a blazing spear, a sword of flame, a bow, or a sheaf of arrows, seen in the midnight sky, prefigured Indian warfare. Pestilence was known to have been foreboded by a shower of crimson light. We doubt whether any marked event, for good or evil, ever befell New England, from its settlement down to Revolutionary times, of which the inhabitants had not been previously warned by some spectacle of this nature ... It was, indeed, a majestic idea, that the destiny of nations should be revealed, in these awful hieroglyphics, on the cope of heaven. A scroll so wide might not be deemed too expansive for Providence to write a people’s doom upon. The belief was a favourite one with our forefathers, as betokening that their infant commonwealth was under a celestial guardianship of peculiar intimacy and strictness. (160)

The likely influence of the writings of Cotton Mather on The Scarlet Letter, particularly Magnalia Christi Americana, is documented by Ryskamp and others. For example, the Puritan ‘bogey-man’ story of the Black Man who haunts the forest and who has people write in his book of blood is frequently referred to by Hawthorne and is briefly related in Magnalia Christi Americana (327). Hawthorne may have also drawn on that work as a source of information about the witchcraft tradition in Puritan New England (Ryskamp 38). Given their susceptibility to the supernatural, it is not difficult to see how the Puritans might believe that Pearl is in league with witchcraft and the Devil.
However, before discussing Pearl as an early candidate for the possessed/demonic child, we must carefully consider Hawthorne’s relation to the fantastic. He is conventionally thought of as a writer of romances, by which is meant fiction that is less committed to a mimetic representation of reality (as opposed to the novel with its realistic portrayal of character and manners, as exemplified by James in, for example, *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881)), and which draws freely on myth, allegory and symbol. In drawing on demonology, witchcraft and Puritanism as background sources for his style of American Gothic fiction, Hawthorne explored many supernatural themes and subjects, and also frequently employed Gothic motifs and clichés. For example, the discovery of the old manuscript by the narrator in the ‘Custom House’ introduction to *The Scarlet Letter* is a well-worn Gothic (and Romantic) device. However, Hawthorne’s approach in that romance maintains a fine balance between Todorov’s adjacent genres of the fantastic, the uncanny and the marvellous.

On the one hand, the narrator appears to be explaining away the marvellous. Yet, on the other, there are many instances in the book where the supernatural seems real, and Hawthorne, by supplying us with a range of other possible explanations to choose from, never fully dismisses the possibility. As Hoffman points out, the reader sees old Salem both as [...the Puritans] saw it, accepting their values, and as it appears from Hawthorne’s very different view. Thus the Puritan values function both as absolutes (to the characters) and as one of several possible choices to the reader. Hawthorne so manages this doubleness that he can criticize Puritanism without destroying our suspension of disbelief in its premises. (153)

This allows for a certain openness to the possibility of the fantastic in the text, without fully availing itself of that possibility. Take, for example, the episode when Dimmesdale unveils his own fleshly version of the scarlet letter to the Puritan multitude. Is the Reverend’s letter punishment from God, a ‘ghastly miracle’ (269), a form of stigmata born out of shame and remorse? Or has it been inflicted by Dimmesdale on himself as an act of penance? Or did the scholar and physician Roger Chillingworth make it appear on his chest with the aid of magic or drugs? Or was it mass religious delusion? These sundry explanations are all offered by the narrator and we are obliged to hesitate in their interpretation between the uncanny and the marvellous.
It may be suggested that Pearl is caught in this ambiguous realm of the uncanny and the marvellous. This is where the problem of interpretation lies: the more the reader leans towards the Puritan viewpoint with its acceptance of the marvellous, the more the reader believes that Pearl is corrupt; the more the reader leans towards the post-enlightenment viewpoint with its acceptance of the uncanny, the more the reader believes that she is innocent. The acceptance of the marvellous aligns us with the Puritan vision, with its Calvinist ideologies of childhood, relish for demonology and its world of wonders. The acceptance of the uncanny aligns us with the voice of the narrator commenting on Puritanism from the vantage-point of contemporary, that is, nineteenth-century beliefs and values. In general, nineteenth-century values are presented as an advance on Puritan values. The narrator’s contribution to our understanding amounts to a meta-textual commentary which ironises the imperfect Puritan allegory. There are markers in the text that we should also read Pearl in this way. Implied in the voice of the narrator is the voice of Hawthorne himself who, despite his belief in a version of inherited evil, harbours fundamentally Romantic views of children and childhood.

Through the intense, prying eyes of the neighbouring Puritans, Pearl appears an ‘imp of evil’ (95). The Puritans, vainly looking for the child’s father but not finding one, are content to assign demon origin to her. Even Hester, daily meditating on the knowledge that her treasured daughter is none the less the product of sin, is unable to dismiss such thoughts from her mind. She frequently wonders about her daughter’s origin. ‘O Father in Heaven,’ she despairs, ‘– if Thou art still my Father, – what is this being I have brought into the world!’ (97). When Hester asks Pearl, ‘What art thou?’ Pearl replies half-seriously and half-playfully: ‘I am your little Pearl!’ (99). Not satisfied, her fears aroused, Hester presses Pearl: ‘Tell me, then, what thou art, and who sent thee hither?’ (100). But Pearl, inscrutable with regard to the extent of her knowledge versus ignorance as ever, returns the question to her mother, who replies, after a moment’s hesitation, ‘Thy Heavenly Father sent thee!’ (100). Preying on her doubt, Pearl touches the mother’s badge of shame with her forefinger and cries with a conviction that does nothing to alleviate Hester’s gravest maternal fears: ‘He did not send me! ... I have no Heavenly Father!’ (100). In any case, these fears extend beyond the philosophical or spiritual.

Further fuelling Hester’s suspicions is her dread of a certain peculiar look in Pearl’s face and eyes, brimming with preternatural intelligence and sometimes even smiling malice, which so unnerves Hester and
makes her wonder if ‘an evil spirit possessed the child, and had just then peeped forth in mockery’ (98). Pearl never seems more lost to evil than when she displays that possessed/demonic look. Hence evil is something associated with knowledge or intelligence. The intelligence of that look unsettles because it seems to apprehend too much for its age. She shares with victims of possession access to hidden knowledge. Pearl is seemingly privy to hidden knowledge of her mother’s sin, which, in turn, suggests to Hester an awareness on Pearl’s part of the ‘the secret spell of her existence’ (99). Pearl also seems to be able to penetrate her estranged parson father’s heart of darkness. He shares with Hester a fear of his own daughter. Endowed with knowledge of sin, Pearl might be construed as corrupt.

However, is Pearl literally a demon offspring, or, in the alternative theory, possessed by evil? Or is this the way the Puritans, according to their supernatural reality, perceive Pearl? The latter is the interpretation enforced by the subtly mocking tone of the narrator towards the Puritans. ‘Luther,’ we are told, ‘according to the scandal of his monkish enemies, was a brat of this hellish breed; nor was Pearl the only child to whom this inauspicious origin was assigned, among the New England Puritans’ (100). This renders the Puritans slightly absurd in their overzealous efforts to find and root out evil. The narrator also frequently questions Hester’s perceptual judgements based on this supernatural reality. This positions us to read Pearl ambivalently, thus conveying her dual nature. Hester, Puritan outcast that she is, is nevertheless by her upbringing a victim of Puritan theology and so is limited in her vision. Her ingrained values and beliefs contaminate her perceptions of Pearl and feed her maternal paranoia, to the point that she seems almost eager to overlay her child with evil connotations. Hester’s modus operandi here could well be ‘seek and ye shall find’, until her worst fears are confirmed and become self-fulfilling prophecy. Thus Pearl’s unnatural beauty must conceal unnatural evil. She must know too much. Pearl might be Hester’s blood relation, but she can account for the child’s character only ‘most vaguely and imperfectly’ (92). This helps Hester to align her daughter with the demonic, as well as turn her into the projection of her own guilt and anxieties. ‘Day after day,’ recounts the narrator, ‘she looked fearfully into the child’s expanding nature, ever dreading to detect some black and wild peculiarity, that should correspond to the guiltiness to which she owed her being’ (90–1). Looking is the operative word, synonymous with seeking. Again, when Hester is looking at her own image in Pearl’s eyes, ‘she fancied she beheld, not her own miniature portrait, but another face’
(98), full of smiling malice. ‘Many times afterwards had Hester been tortured, though less vividly, by the same illusion’ (98). The choice of the words ‘fancied’ and ‘illusion’ is significant, and suggests that Hester’s perceptions issue largely from the depths of her clouded Puritan imagination rather than from objective reality. This alerts the reader to Pearl’s innocence.

In concert with the idea that she is possessed by evil, Pearl is constructed as a changeling. In European folklore, the changeling (which means literally ‘little changed person’) was the deformed or imbecilic offspring of fairies or elves, dwarfs or gnomes, or of a witch or demon secretly exchanged by them for the parents’ true child. The belief in changelings is understood to have derived from the idea that infants are particularly susceptible to demonic possession before the performance of certain purificatory rites, namely, baptism (Leach 208–9). Pearl, who has ‘no place among christened infants’ (95), is variously inscribed as a changeling, whether it be an imp ‘seeking to mould itself into Pearl’s shape’ (108), or a fairy, or, most insistently, an elf and sprite. For example, the odd hexed look Pearl has in her face and eyes is described as ‘elvish’ (98), as is her ‘sprite-like intelligence’ (97). If Pearl’s feet do not touch the ground, then perhaps she is literally not of this earth. Or perhaps, in the way she resists being held or pinned down (which could equally apply to her meaning), she is not even real, as when Hester feels compelled to pursue this little elf in flight to assure herself that Pearl ‘was flesh and blood, and not utterly delusive’ (93–4). The witch Mistress Hibbins identifies Pearl as a ‘lineage of the Prince of the Air!’ (256), while the shipmaster in the marketplace tells Pearl that she is a ‘witch-baby’ (259), which covertly inscribes Pearl as the offspring of a devil father and witch-mother.

The Puritan framing of life and people seemingly leaves little or no room for making joking or even affectionate remarks about elves, sprites, fairies or witches. The way the Puritans are described in The Scarlet Letter deems them humourless and, above all, denies the play of language. However, is The Scarlet Letter itself a humourless text, or is Hawthorne inserting more humour in the text than is first apparent? In undermining the Puritan allegory, the often tongue-in-cheek references by the narrator to Pearl’s elvish qualities serve to endear her to the reader, conjuring up an image of an irrepresibly flighty personality. There is even room to read Hester’s perceptions of Pearl’s ‘airy charm’ (84) in this way. These references are sometimes so playful and even absurd that we are almost surely not meant to take them without a dose of good humour. For example, there is the way she flits and
dances around ‘with the humoursome gesticulation of a little imp, whose next freak might be to fly up the chimney’ (99). Consequently, this further liberates the reader from the Puritan viewpoint.

The scene which perhaps crystallises Pearl as a changeling occurs when she refuses to cross to the other side of the brook to be with her mother. On this boundary between two worlds Hester is dramatically confronted by ‘another child – another and the same’ (219). So strong is the impression that the mother feels estranged from her child, and vice versa. But here the narrator intervenes to offer his prudent judgement: ‘There was both truth and error in the impression; the child and mother were estranged, but through Hester’s fault, not Pearl’s’ (219, emphasis added). It is intimated that Pearl feels displaced by the figure of Dimmesdale at her mother’s side; she feels ‘another inmate had been admitted within the circle of her mother’s feelings’ (219). She is lost, unable to find her way back to her mother’s side. In this scene, Hester also discards her token scarlet letter, thereby disowning her shame. However, she unwittingly disowns her child and turns her, in her mind’s eye, into something alien. For Pearl here the scarlet letter signifies ‘mother’ (Selden 78). We know that the letter is the first thing Pearl has noticed in her life and that she has never seen her mother without it. It thus has become a permanent fixture in her life. Understandably, when Hester discards the letter in the forest, Pearl feels doubly alienated from her mother. In fact, she becomes distraught, almost hysterical. In a description which could well be an excerpt of Mather’s account of the possessed Goodwin children, Pearl ‘suddenly burst into a fit of passion, gesticulating violently and throwing her small figure into the most extravagant contortions. She accompanied this wild outbreak with piercing shrieks’ (221). Pearl’s possession-like ‘symptoms’ cease only after Hester restores the letter to its rightful place on her bosom.

Pearl is also constructed as a child of nature. As I have demonstrated, the Puritans regarded children as savage and wayward creatures in need of taming. The Puritan project of discipline and education was to bend that evil will into the semblance of rationality. In contrast, the Romantics believed that children’s education and discipline should liberate their innocent and free ‘wild’ natures, as in the exemplar of Rousseau’s Emile. In The Scarlet Letter, the image of the child as ‘wild/savage’ is played off against the image of the child as a ‘wild/innocent’, giving rise to very explicit tensions between Calvinism and Romanticism (Scutter, Displaced Fictions 244).
The narrator of *The Scarlet Letter* describes the discipline of the family, which he observes was of a far more rigid standard compared with his nineteenth century present, as follows: ‘The frown, the harsh rebuke, the frequent application of the rod, enjoined by Scriptural authority, were used, not merely in the way of punishment for actual offences, but as a wholesome regimen for the growth and promotion of all childish virtues’ (92–3). Mercifully, Hester spares her daughter such punishments, but she has to incur the consequences of not being able to control her daughter. On the contrary, she allows her child to run wild and free, ‘to be swayed by her own impulses’ (93), impulses which, it is intimated, have been inherited from her mother. (One wonders here whether George Eliot modelled Eppie in *Silas Marner* on Pearl, as a rewriting of her.) In this regard, Pearl is figured as daemonic as well as demonic: ‘There was a fire within and throughout her’ (102–3). She is passionate, capricious, amoral, incorrigible. For Hester, her nature ‘lacked reference and adaptation to the world into which she was born. The child could not be made amenable to rules’ (92). Thus Pearl has no place in Puritan society with its strict adherence to rules and laws. As a child conceived out of wedlock, out of a broken law, she is beyond moral and religious salvation. As an illegitimate or bastard child, she is ‘natural’ and therefore not ‘civilised’.

If Pearl doesn’t belong to civilisation, then she belongs to the wilderness. The child’s affinity with nature is deeply Romantic, in which the ‘mother-forest, and these wild-things which it nourished, all recognized a kindred wildness in the human child’ (216). She is likened to a ‘nymph-child, or an infant dryad, or whatever else was in closest sympathy with the antique wood’ (216). Evoking the Narcissus myth (a classical association, which further relates her to the daemonic), Pearl flirts with her reflection in a pool of water. Pearl, who is more than once shown engaged in gathering handfuls of wildflowers, violets, wood anemones, or scarlet columbines, is figured, like Wordsworth’s Lucy, ‘a lovely and immortal flower’ (90, emphasis added), which implies that she has a soul. She often seems more animal than human, and, as befits her wild and free nature, is likened on several occasions to a bird.

Pearl may also be seen as an example of Coleridge’s imaginative child. Hester, who thrives on needlework, turns Pearl by her luxuriant mode of dress into her little work of art, allowing ‘the gorgeous tendencies of her imagination their full play’ (103). The letter ‘A’ in this context stands for Artistic. Pearl, it seems, has inherited her mother’s imaginative tendencies. According to Coleridge, the essential quality of the child’s vision which transcended that of an adult’s was a freshness,
wonder, joy and spontaneous imagination that communicated itself to old and familiar objects (Coveney 87). In Pearl, the ‘spell of life went forth from her ever creative spirit, and communicated itself [in her play] to a thousand objects, as a torch kindles a flame wherever it may be applied. The unlikeliest materials, – a stick, a bunch of rags, a flower, – were the puppets of Pearl’s witchcraft’ (96).

The brightness of Pearl’s halo of innocence is such that she escapes the great forest’s engulfing shadows and darkness, unlike Hester or Dimmesdale. The images of light and sunshine associated with Pearl symbolise goodness, salvation and truth. Pearl may be seen as a representation of Wordsworth’s child uncontaminated by Puritan civilisation and hence equipped with a special inborn wisdom and insight into truth. It is a knowledge based on intuition rather than reason. This wisdom allows her to see into Hester’s and Dimmesdale’s hearts of darkness and guide them towards the ‘light’. Only that light/truth in a child can seemingly save Hester and Dimmesdale. In Christian Romantic terms, only a child can lead the way.

However, the relationship between knowledge and ignorance and innocence and corruption is problematic in light of Puritan theology. All children, according to the Puritans, were born not only evil, but also ignorant (Morgan 92). This ignorance made them more likely to follow their naturally wicked natures, which consequently made them more open to attack by Satan. Thus, if evil came naturally, goodness had to be taught. Oddly for a people who believed in the Calvinist doctrine of Predestination, which stipulates that those chosen for salvation (the elect) as well as damnation (the non-elect) have already been decreed by God, as based on His inscrutable will, the Puritans attached remarkable importance to knowledge, especially knowledge of God and the Scriptures, as the way to attain salvation (Morgan 89). Children had to be educated in the doctrines of Christianity. They also had to learn their catechism. In *The Scarlet Letter*, the old pastor Mr Wilson ascertains that Pearl has no knowledge of the Scriptures or of her Heavenly Father. Nor does she know her catechism. When Mr Wilson asks who made her, she perversely and heretically replies that she wasn’t made at all, but plucked from a rose bush (114). (This is another of Hawthorne’s references to Pearl’s illegitimacy. The term *sub rosa*, under the rose, was often used for bastard children.) This makes her soul infinitely damned and therefore lost in the astonished eyes of Governor Bellingham. ‘Here is a child of three years old, and she cannot tell who made her! Without question, she is equally in the dark as to her soul, its present depravity, and future destiny!’ (115).
Pearl is figured, by turns, as a redemptive and retributive force. She resembles ‘an infant pestilence, – the scarlet fever, or some such half-fledged angel of judgement, – whose mission was to punish the sins of the rising generation’ (104). She exists to keep her mother’s sin before her eyes, as well as to bring Dimmesdale to justice by having him confess his part in the adultery to the Puritans. At the same time, Pearl is cast as a saviour. She has the potential to redeem corrupted souls from sin, and, by implication, the world. When the Puritan authorities contrive to take Pearl away from her mother, Hester protests: ‘God gave me this child! ... She is my happiness! – she is my torture too, none the less! See ye not, she is the scarlet letter, only capable of being loved, and so endowed with a million-fold the power of retribution for my sin?’ (115). Dimmesdale agrees.

Whether Pearl manages to save her mother and Dimmesdale and, in the process, herself by the end is uncertain. A number of critics such as Hoffman (183) have suggested that it is only after Dimmesdale publicly acknowledges his daughter on the scaffold and asks her to kiss him that she becomes fully human for the first time, with finally a future among humankind. Thus if any claim can be made for Pearl as a realistic child it is here, where

A spell was broken. The great scene of grief, in which the wild infant bore a part, had developed all her sympathies; and as her tears fell upon her father’s cheek, they were the pledge that she would grow up amid human joy and sorrow, nor forever do battle with the world, but be a woman in it. Towards her mother, too, Pearl’s errand as a messenger of anguish was fulfilled. (269–70)

Thus it may be said here that Pearl has been found by God and Puritan society from which we can assume she was formerly lost. However, the question of Pearl’s fate is deeply problematic. For doesn’t Pearl’s affinity with nature, within the book’s Romantic ideology, align her closer to God and his Creation than to the religious hypocrisy of Puritan society?

Hawthorne believed in inherited evil. However, rather than subscribing to the doctrine of original sin, he believed in a more moral kind of evil based on inheritance. As he recorded in his notebook in 1836–7: ‘There is a fund of evil in every human heart, which may remain latent, perhaps throughout the whole of life; but circumstances may arouse it to activity ... The appetite [for evil] might be observed first in a child, and then traced upwards, manifesting itself in crimes suited to every
stage of life' (Hawthorne’s Lost Notebook, 1835–1841 35). Hawthorne also seems to have believed – as did the Puritans, among others – that no society can exist without knowledge of evil (Chase 72). If we are to read The Scarlet Letter merely as a Puritan allegory of sin and repentance, we would say that nature and not society is evil. This is generally true of the American Gothic. However, reading against the grain of the Puritan allegory, it is patent that society and not nature is the real evil. Hawthorne suggests that the Puritans, via the disavowing mechanisms of scapegoating and projection, have reassigned the evil and blame outward to the black forest, the abode of the Black-Man and the Indian-devil, both described by Mather. In the way the language and discourse of Puritanism orientalise her, rendering her wild, inscrutable and mysterious, Pearl symbolises here Other, what Puritan society refuses to acknowledge about itself.

However, it is fascinating to observe that when it comes to children, Hawthorne’s attitudes are thoroughly Romantic. He gives in to the nineteenth-century belief in the innocent child, free from the stain of sin. ‘Wouldst thou avenge oneself on the innocent babe?’ (73), Hester asks her estranged husband Chillingworth when he visits her in the prison cell. Somebody has apparently forgotten to tell Hester – or Hawthorne – that all human beings, including children, are, by the doctrine of Original Sin, inherently depraved in the eyes of the Puritans. This is clearly a nineteenth-century Romantic and not seventeenth-century Puritan sentiment (Baym 36). More incredible is how Dimmesdale manages to convince the so-called orthodox Mr Wilson and Governor Bellingham that Pearl is a holy child with redemptive powers on Hester’s soul – an idea that sounds suspiciously Wordsworthian, even Blakeian. Hawthorne’s crowning achievement in the book is the way he conflates two opposing ideologies in Pearl, which correspond to her ‘surface’ and ‘underlying’ meaning: the Calvinist/Puritan view, with its endorsement of original sin, and the Romantic view, with its endorsement of original innocence.

Henry James’s The Turn of the Screw

In The Scarlet Letter may be found the forerunner to both the possessed and satanic child. In The Turn of the Screw, which appeared in 1898, the possessed child makes its formal debut. Henry James’s conundrum of a tale is a prime example of the creative tension between Calvinist and Romantic ideologies of childhood. It is the great original work; nothing quite like it pre-dates it in English or American letters. Peter
G. Beidler takes great pains to demonstrate James's awareness of modern spiritualism and psychical research, as well as documented ghost cases, when he wrote the story. In any case, James was in constant communication with his brother William, a celebrated psychologist and philosopher and active member of both the American and English branches of the Society for Psychical Research (Beidler 38).

The title of the story refers primarily to literary technique, as revealed in the narrative frame to *The Turn of the Screw* when Douglas suggests that a ghost story employing a child as victim ‘gives the effect another turn of the screw’, while another exclaims that ‘two children give two turns’ (James, *The Turn of the Screw and Other Stories* 115). James knew how to obtain the maximum dramatic effect from the child as a figure of helplessness. Interestingly, he communicated his intention to F. W. H. Myers, one of the founders of the Society of Psychical Research, in a letter dated 19 December 1898: ‘The thing that, as I recall it, I wanted not to fail of doing, under penalty of extreme platitude, was to give the impression of the communication to the children of the most infernal imaginable evil and danger – the condition, on their part, of being as exposed as we can humanly conceive children to be’ (118). However, James gives his story yet another turn with the notion of youthful innocence masking terrifying evil which, as I have argued, can also be found in Hawthorne’s treatment of Pearl. James’s originality lies pre-eminently in his sophisticated treatment of the possessed child as innocent (victim) and/or corrupt (villain). Notions of guilt, innocence and agency are further blurred by the figuring of the child as possessed, although whether this is in fact the case or not remains highly ambiguous.

It is almost a commonplace in criticism to consider the relation between James and Hawthorne. In a 1918 essay, T. S. Eliot appraised James as ‘positively a continuator of the New England genius’ (859). ‘Both men,’ he observed, ‘had that sense of the past that is peculiarly American’ (861), yet both writers are extremely individual. For example, while the world of Hawthorne’s fiction is (with the exception of *The Marble Faun* (1860)) firmly American-based, the world of James’s fiction, while coloured by his unique New England sensibility, is international in scope. In *Daisy Miller*, *The Europeans* (both 1878) and *The Portrait of a Lady*, among others, he has Americans clash with European culture. It is possible, as Robert Emmet Long has done, to conceive of the effect of Hawthorne on James in terms of what Harold Bloom calls ‘the anxiety of influence’. Writing from a strong Freudian perspective, Bloom imagines poets or writers as in a kind of oedipal struggle with
their poet fathers, which is a battle to the death. In order to ‘live’, that is, clear their own imaginative space in literary history, poets have to figuratively slay the father through wilful revisionary ‘misreadings’ or ‘misinterpretations’, in a critical act of creative correction. Only then can they escape the potentially crippling anxiety of influence (The Anxiety of Influence 19–45). While James praised Hawthorne, he was also, as I noted earlier, deeply critical of the master. He was both his successor and rival. Viewed in this way, James’s misreading of Hawthorne was tantamount to a slaying of Hawthorne the literary ‘father’.

Not only does James misread Hawthorne, but in The Turn of the Screw as well as other works, such as The Portrait of a Lady, he misreads the Gothic. He successfully negotiates his own literary space by reconciling the Gothic with the realistic mode, the romance form with the novel. Although he penned many ghostly tales, The Turn of the Screw remains his most celebrated contribution to the Gothic, and justly so. Like Hawthorne in his ‘Custom House’ introduction to The Scarlet Letter, James, in the narrative frame to The Turn of the Screw, employs the Romantic/Gothic device of the discovered manuscript. The account given in the manuscript is by an English governess (the unnamed narrator) and forms the story proper of The Turn of the Screw. The governess plays the part of the traditional Gothic heroine, but the resemblance, in James’s rehandling of the Gothic, diminishes as the story progresses. She even perceives her experience at the possibly haunted English estate of Bly in terms of Gothic fiction. In a literary allusion to both Ann Radcliffe and Charlotte Brontë, she wonders, ‘Was there a “secret” at Bly – a mystery of Udolpho or an insane, an unmentionable relative kept in unsuspected confinement?’ (138).

Accordingly, James’s ghosts are modelled on the Gothic tradition. I shall read James’s tale primarily on the given that the ghosts are real, while suggesting other possibilities.

In The Turn of the Screw, the young and inexperienced governess becomes ‘the vehicle for James’s inquiry into the nature of “seeing” and “knowing”, of illusion and reality, of ambiguity and certainty’ (Shine 133), in acting as first-person narrator. The central dilemma in James’s novella is whether the governess is sane or insane. Much has been made of the fact that nobody besides the governess sees, or admits to seeing, the ghosts. Either way, it would be wrong not to question her reliability as a narrator. What she lacks in self-knowledge she makes up for with an exaggerated sense of self-importance, in so far as she comes to see her post at the English estate of Bly as her ‘calling’ to save Miles and
Flora, the orphaned niece and nephew of her employer. She is given full charge of the children, on the paramount condition that she deal with all matters herself and never trouble or appeal to her employer about her responsibilities. From the moment she beholds the children she is captivated by their beauty and purity. She describes eight-year-old Flora, the ‘flower-child’, as ‘the most beautiful child I had ever seen’ (124) and ten-year-old Miles, the ‘mild child’, as ‘incredibly beautiful’ (132). She repeatedly invests the brother and sister with angelic qualities, likening them ironically to ‘those cherubs of the anecdote who had – morally, at any rate – nothing to whack!’ (140). Here, James is obviously relishing the play between Romantic and Calvinist notions of childhood. She can barely find fault in the children, let alone reason to punish them. Any notion of wrongdoing on the part of Miles that might explain his dismissal from school, for instance, is treated by her as monstrous and absurd. When he purposely defies her authority by venturing out at night, he does so to make her ‘Think me – for a change – bad!’ (179). However, coloured by her Romantic preconceptions, the governess is incapable of perceiving Miles here as anything other than a Good Bad Boy (Fiedler 225): even when he is bad he is good. We would be forgiven for doubting the governess’s perceptual judgement, if it were not for the down-to-earth housekeeper Mrs Grose, who seems to share the governess’s appraisal of these two truly remarkable children. Either that, or Mrs Grose is being influenced by the governess, made a party to her hysteria.

Nevertheless, it is difficult to accept that the governess and Mrs Grose could both be swayed to the extent that they are by the mere appearance of Miles and Flora which, apparently, has created a halo of innocence over the children – unless perhaps we assume that diabolical forces are at work. It seems possible that this is what places the governess ‘under the spell’ (141) of her charges. In this regard, James’s treatment of the children is more symbolic than realistic. He uses their hallowed innocence as a foil for the corruption of Quint and Miss Jessel, setting up the story in Christian–Manichean terms as the battle between good and evil, God and Satan. However, their extraordinary beauty may merely conceal unimaginable evil, and this might stand metaphorically for the latent evil in the world, whether primal, social or moral – the devil in all of us. In The Turn of the Screw, the governess gradually forms doubts in her mind about the children’s seeming innocence. ‘Their more than earthly beauty, their absolutely unnatural goodness’ (181) begin to disturb her. ‘It’s a game …’ she declares to Mrs Grose; ‘it’s a policy and a fraud!’ (181).
As her story unfolds, the governess becomes convinced that the ghosts of Peter Quint, the one-time valet at Bly, and Miss Jessel, her ‘infamous’ predecessor, want to get ‘hold’ of Miles and Flora, respectively, in order to possess them. No reason for the possession is given other than to corrupt the children and ultimately destroy them. Central to the story is the Calvinist idea that the mind and body of the child are peculiarly susceptible to corrupt influences and invasion by spirits; they need to be protected. In their mortal incarnation, Quint and Miss Jessel contaminated the children with their evil. Now, in death, Quint and Miss Jessel want to contaminate them further. James never spells out the nature of that evil, but we know from Mrs Grose that Quint was too ‘free’ with the boy (150). However, it is ambiguous whether Mrs Grose is referring to evil or sexuality, or to class and manners. One possible sign of Flora’s and Miles’s corruption is their use of shocking language, the apparent reason for the latter’s dismissal from school. However, it is not clear whether the children are simply repeating things that they have heard from Quint and Miss Jessel, or whether they are being ‘forced’ to say those things by virtue of their possession. Also, it may be that Flora’s language is merely a symptom of the governess’s neurotic behaviour towards the children. However, the fact that Miles appears only vaguely to recall the unspeakable things he said at school, and to whom he said those things, may suggest that he was possessed at the time and cannot be held responsible for his actions – either that, or he is lying.

Beidler argues that any reading of *The Turn of the Screw* as a ghost story falls short unless it incorporates the notion of demonic possession (12). He compares the representation of Miles and Flora with purportedly factual cases of demon possession. He convincingly shows that James was very familiar with the possession phenomenon when he wrote the story. Indeed, James probably read his brother William’s account of a possessed fourteen-year-old Illinoisan girl named Lurancy Vennum in *The Principles of Psychology* (1890). A close reading of the scene where the governess again sights the apparitional figure of Miss Jessel with Flora by the lake serves to illustrate some of his points. First, how does Flora manage the prodigious feat of rowing a boat that is obviously too heavy for her? Let us be reminded that she is only eight years old. Second, why does Flora suddenly and grotesquely turn ‘common and almost ugly’ (214) in this scene? And third, why does Flora suddenly turn on her hitherto beloved governess and ask Mrs Grose to take her away from her? In each instance, Flora’s behaviour and transformation could be seen as evidence that
The nexus between ‘ignorance/innocence’ and ‘knowledge/corruption’ is highlighted in a key exchange between the governess and Mrs Grose. When the governess first witnesses Miss Jessel with Flora by the lake she senses that Flora is aware of her former governess’s presence but is feigning ignorance. An unnerved Mrs Grose wonders if Flora might not mind and even enjoy the presence of Miss Jessel’s spirit and that this might be proof of her ‘blest innocence’ (157). After all, why else would Flora not be perturbed by the spirit if she was not blissfully unaware of its evil nature? She is only a child, after all. The governess makes the shaky reply: ‘Oh, we must clutch at that – we must cling to it! If it isn’t a proof of what you say, it’s proof of – God knows what!’ (157–8). We could understand the governess’s last words to mean proof of corruption of Flora’s soul – that Flora is in league with the Devil and perfectly aware. Time and again the absence of evidence in James’s tale is used by the governess to establish proof for the apparitions (Schleifer 29). The apparitions themselves are constructed as ‘absence, a sort of blank page upon which meaning is inscribed’ (Schleifer 27). The same holds true for James’s treatment of the possessed children. Their unnatural goodness is inscribed through absence, which always threatens to evoke its opposite: the presence of evil. The children hence make for tempting vessels to be occupied by evil. Later, all confidence in the cause of Flora’s innocence is lost when the governess interprets the child’s silence to mean that Miss Jessel wants to get hold of her and that ‘That’s what Flora knows’ (158). The emptiness of child has thus been filled by knowledge of evil. The governess gives up on Flora, saying, ‘Of course I’ve lost you: I’ve interfered, and you’ve seen under her [Miss Jessel’s] dictation … the easy and perfect way to meet it’ (215).

Miles may also have knowledge of evil. He changes in the governess’s eyes from an ‘imperturbable little prodigy of delightful, lovable goodness’ (163), ‘knowing nothing in the world but love’ (132) to a ‘dark prodigy’ whose world has been opened by the ‘imagination of all evil’ (205). It may be that the children have sold their souls for knowledge and power (it is fitting, then, that the governess should call her charges ‘cherubs’, the second order of child-angels whose distinctive gift is knowledge). This again suggests that the children are consenting subjects of Quint and Miss Jessel. The governess reflects on the children’s compact with evil: ‘There were times of our being together when I would have been ready to swear that, literally, in my presence, but with my direct sense of it closed, they had visitors who were known and were welcome’ (186).
she is possessed: extraordinary strength, dramatic physical changes and verbal and even physical injury to loved ones have all been described in possession cases (187–93).

What of the fate of Miles and Flora by the end of the story? Are they indeed ‘lost’? In the case of Flora, it seems that the infiltration of her soul is complete and Miss Jessel has ‘won’. In the scene by the lake where Flora spurns the governess, we are told: ‘The wretched child had spoken exactly as if she had got from some outside source each of her stabbing little words’ (215, emphasis added). The governess dismisses her, saying: ‘I’ve done my best, but I’ve lost you. Goodbye’ (215). A morally fallen Flora apparently walks away in a state of delirium – lost to evil, maybe damned. And Miles? Is he also lost? At one point, the governess intimates to Mrs Grose that ‘I think he wants to give me an opening. I do believe that – poor little exquisite wretch! – he wants to speak’ (219), though something appears to be stopping him. It would seem that the evil spirit of Quint has not taken him over completely and that there is hope for him yet. In the internal struggle to free himself from Quint, he is crying out for help. In the finale, the governess takes on the role of priest-exorcist to save Miles’s soul from damnation, to draw from him a confession of his wickedness. But he is killed in the process, presumably by the trauma of exorcism: his ‘little heart, dispossessed, had stopped’ (236, emphasis added). Whether the governess’s exorcism is a victory or failure is open to debate. Has this been, in the Calvinist sense, a ‘good’ childhood death, in which Miles’s soul has been spared the torments of eternal hell and found its way to heaven? Or has it been a ‘bad’ childhood death – a terrible waste of an innocent’s life – an appalling price to pay for redemption?

If the children are indeed possessed by evil spirits, this would exonerate them of their wickedness. After all, they could not be held responsible for their actions (the ‘devil made them do it’). But it is also possible that the children might be a willing party to Quint’s and Miss Jessel’s wickedness. If innocence in James’s tale is to be constructed as the child’s lack of knowledge of evil, as Charles G. Hoffmann (84) suggests, the reader must decide how much the children know. If the reader accepts the governess’s account, then the children know more about the apparitions that haunt Bly than they reveal. The governess interprets the children’s ‘systematic silence’ (180) to mean that ‘while they pretend to be lost in their fairy-tale they’re steeped in their vision of the dead restored to them’ (181). This strongly suggests that the children are conspiring with those spirits of their own volition.
The way James plays off Calvinist against Romantic notions in the tale is deliberate and calculated to create indecision in readers: we hover between the two constructions of childhood, as well as Todorov’s neighbouring genres of the uncanny (the governess is hysterical: the ghosts are a product of her over-active imagination) and the marvellous (the governess is sane: the ghosts are threateningly real), as we try to ascertain the children’s true motivations. The governess momentarily considers her own perceptions of reality when she admits the possibility of Miles’s innocence, and with her flash of self-insight come feelings that can only be interpreted as guilt: ‘within a minute there had come to me out of my very pity the appalling alarm of his being perhaps innocent. It was for the instant confounding and bottomless, for if he were innocent what then on earth was I?’ (234). The issue of the reliability of the governess is of crucial importance because it positions the reader to read ambiguously and so be persuaded of the dual nature of these possessed child figures. This may also be true to a certain extent of Hester’s perceptions of Pearl in Hawthorne’s romance. As I have argued, Hester may be projecting her ingrained guilt and maternal anxieties onto an innocent, sinless child. However, to adopt one reading over the other is both to play the ‘game’ and to miss the point of what James once called his ‘irresponsible little fiction’ (‘Prefaces,’ xlvi): the tale is his ‘ultimate exercise in ambiguity’ (Shine 137).

The Turn of the Screw has formed the basis of several film and television adaptations, including a prequel, as well as a 1954 opera by Benjamin Britten. However, the best-known and most distinguished of these adaptations is Jack Clayton’s both cinematic and literary The Innocents (1961), based on William Archibald’s Broadway play. The film is notable for retaining much of James’s spirit and ambiguity. Yet the film, while leaving the question of whether the ghosts are real or imaginary open, tends more towards the Freudian reading of the governess as sexually repressed and therefore hysterical. According to such readings (beginning with Harold C. Goddard’s seminal essay), the sexually repressed and unseasoned governess is actually in love with the children’s uncle and is possibly identifying the handsome little gentleman Miles with his uncle. This is what Clayton’s film has us believe. Miss Giddens, as she is named in the film (essayed by Deborah Kerr with subtle psychological complexity), is almost seduced in the opening interview scene by the charm of her employer (Michael Redgrave) to take on the position, despite her lack of experience. Thus when she later receives a letter from him at Bly, Flora (Pamela Franklin)
observes, ‘You do look pleased,’ which momentarily catches her off guard. To Miss Giddens, Miles (Martin Stephens) appears at once innocent and childlike and experienced and adult, which both excites and disturbs her. Moreover, it is as if Miles himself senses his governess’s sexually ambivalent feelings towards him. This is rather boldly conveyed in the scene where he gives her a prolonged, unseemly ‘good-night’ kiss on the mouth (shot by Clayton in unflinching close-up). The governess is horror-stricken. Miles stares back at her knowingly, and we are not sure whether he is seeing her through his own eyes or his possessor Peter Quint’s. Thus the film amplifies the sexual tension between Miles and the governess only hinted at in James’s novella.

The impact of Puritanism on American culture has been enduring and pervasive. In Puritanism may be traced the possessed child’s essential roots, first suggested in a fictional context in Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter*, but later developed fully in Henry James’s groundbreaking *The Turn of the Screw*. In both writers we find the influence of the Gothic mode, whose peculiar intensity in the American literary tradition (which persists today in, for example, the horror fiction of Stephen King) may be traced to the Puritan heritage of the United States. Both narratives negotiate tensions between Calvinist and Romantic ideologies of childhood. In the following chapter, I trace these formative influences on the possessed child motif in William Friedkin’s film of William Peter Blatty’s novel *The Exorcist*, incontestably the most famous of possessed child representations.
‘No,’ she [Rosemary] said, ‘no,’ the knife hanging at her side. ‘No. It can’t be. No.’

‘Go look at His hands,’ Minnie said. ‘And His feet.’
‘And His tail,’ Laura-Louise said.
‘And the buds of His horns,’ Minnie said.
‘Oh God,’ Rosemary said.
‘God’s dead,’ Roman said.

She turned to the bassinet, let fall the knife, turned back to the watching coven. ‘Oh God!’ she said and covered her face. ‘Oh God!’ And raised her fists and screamed to the ceiling: ‘Oh God! Oh God! Oh God! Oh God!’

‘God is DEAD!’ Roman thundered. ‘God is dead and Satan lives! The year is One, the first year of our Lord! The year is One, God is done! The year is One, Adrian’s begun!’


‘What do you think really happened?’ he [Dyer] asked softly. ‘As a nonbeliever. Do you think she was really possessed?’

She [Chris] pondered, looking down, still toying with the rose. ‘Well, like you say ... as far as God goes, I am a nonbeliever. Still am. But when it comes to a devil – well, that’s something else. I could buy that. I do, in fact. I do. And it isn’t just what happened to Rags. I mean, generally.’ She shrugged. ‘You come to God and you have to figure if there is one, then he must need a million years’ sleep every night or else he tends to get irritable. Know what I mean? He never talks. But the devil keeps advertising, Father. The devil does lots of commercials.’
For a moment Dyer looked at her, and then said quietly, ‘But if all of the evil in the world makes you think that there might be a devil, then how do you account for all the good in the world?’

(William Peter Blatty, *The Exorcist*, 1971)

**William Peter Blatty’s and William Friedkin’s *The Exorcist***

‘Something almost beyond comprehension is happening to a little girl on this street, in this house,’ proclaimed the original 1973 advertising campaign for Warner Brothers’ *The Exorcist* ‘... and a man has been sent for as a last resort. This man is The Exorcist.’ William Peter Blatty both authored the screenplay (which won an Academy Award) and produced the blockbuster film from his bestselling 1971 novel. William Friedkin directed. The film’s release on Boxing Day was accompanied by now legendary reports of extreme audience reactions, from faintings and vomiting to other scenes of hysteria. ‘The whole country,’ as one reviewer noted at the time, ‘has gone Exorcist-crazy ... it is too important a phenomenon to dismiss lightly’ (Farber 4). *The Exorcist* remains controversial and potent today. It was only recently that the British Board of Film Censors saw fit to grant the film a video certificate. Twenty-seven years later, *The Exorcist* was re-released in a director’s cut that incorporated eleven minutes of additional footage, modifying the structure and meaning of the original film. The retitled film, *The Exorcist: The Version You’ve Never Seen* – which I will consider in the following discussion – did impressive business at the box office, proving not only that the film retains its power to shock, its status as a contemporary American horror classic, but also that the notion of the possessed child has not lost its popular appeal. A prequel is scheduled for release in 2004. In this chapter, I examine the influence of the interplay in American culture between historic Puritanism and modern Roman Catholicism on representations of the possessed child in the 1970s.

There is a more than 70-year hiatus between *The Turn of the Screw* and *The Exorcist*. As noted in the previous chapter, *The Turn of the Screw* inspired several adaptations and reworkings, from Jack Clayton’s fine 1961 film of William Archibald’s play *The Innocents* to Michael Winner’s not uninteresting prequel *The Nightcomers* (1972). Novelist Thomas Tryon’s *doppelganger* variation on the theme of juvenile possession, *The Other*, published in the same year as *The Exorcist*, is also comparable in effect and style to *The Turn of the Screw*, as is Theodous Carroll’s *Evil is a Quiet Word* (1975). In the box-office hit, *The Others*,
Nicole Kidman plays an overwrought mother trying to protect her two photosensitive children from ghosts in a Jersey mansion. However, in a shock ending which seems to have been borrowed from *The Sixth Sense*, the mother and children discover that they themselves are the ghosts. The film is clearly in the vein of *The Innocents* and *The Turn of the Screw*. Yet it may be said that *The Turn of the Screw* has not had the same impact on mass culture that *The Exorcist* has.

The latter’s influence on filmmaking and popular culture in both America and abroad has been considerable. It is doubtful whether horror films like *The Omen* and *The Amityville Horror* (1979) series would have been made with the same production values, let alone produced sequels, had *The Exorcist* not been made (Tudor 175). Although *The Turn of the Screw*’s originality as a work of literary art cannot be disputed, *The Exorcist* without doubt has been more *originary* than James’s tale, albeit spawning a legion of mostly cheap imitations from, notably, Italy (*Beyond the Door*, *The Night Child* (both 1974), *Naked Exorcism* (1975)) and Spain (*Demon Witch Child*, *Exorcism* (both 1974)).

While the majority of these imitations replace the possessed child with a possessed adult protagonist, the lives of the possessed girl-children in *The Night Child* and *Demon Witch Child* are most eagerly sacrificed in the struggle of good over evil. In their disturbing Calvinist emphasis, these children have been consigned to an afterlife in eternal hell. It is not necessary to enumerate these imitations at length, only to note that *The Exorcist*’s influence has been mostly negative. Indeed, in terms of the development of the possessed child motif, the film proved a blind alley for filmmakers and writers.

Yet it is also important to acknowledge the influence of the earlier *Rosemary’s Baby*, which marked this cultural shift from more traditional Hollywood depictions of God and religion to darker supernatural themes (Powers, Rothman and Rothman 131–2). Blatty has acknowledged the debt to Ira Levin’s book and Roman Polanski’s celebrated film adaptation. In the way the book and film situate the supernatural in a contemporary urban American setting, *The Exorcist* is indebted to *Rosemary’s Baby*, but *The Exorcist* bears little relation to that pioneering novel/film. *Rosemary’s Baby* is less about Rosemary’s devil-child than about Rosemary herself: we never actually set eyes on the monstrous newborn. Thus it is still *The Exorcist* which has stamped the possessed child indelibly in the American consciousness, as well as abroad.

However, to make the case that *The Exorcist* single-handedly begat the possessed children and/or teenagers of the 1970s and early 1980s is to explain too much by too little. We must look to other factors in
American culture, both historic and contemporary, to explain the possessed child’s ‘comeback’. Britton argues that we must look to the nineteenth-century American literary tradition – the American Gothic of writers such as Hawthorne, Poe and even Melville – for the origins of the American horror film, and the link is provided by Puritanism and its aftermath. The peculiar intensity of Puritanism in America consists of the fact that the eternal struggle of Good and Evil was, for the first settlers, not merely a matter of metaphysical conviction but, with an unparalleled immediacy, a condition of life and practice. The spiritual dualisms assumed a tangible material form in every fact of their experience, and the material presence of evil conditioned material remedies and struggles. The American Gothic is inconceivable without the specific historical conditions in which good and evil could be experienced in this way. (37–8)

The enormous popularity of both the novel and film of *The Exorcist* may thus be seen in terms of what be might called the contemporary Gothic revival (Geary 55).

As Catherine L. Albanese persuasively argues in *America: Religions and Religion*, early Puritanism has exerted a major influence on ‘public Protestantism’ as the dominant and public religion of the United States. Albanese cites almost 90 per cent of congregations in the early colonies as having a Calvinist orientation. This Calvinist orientation continues to characterise wider American culture today. For example, Albanese notes that, as ‘late as 1987, 57 percent of all Americans considered themselves Protestant, and again the churches of Calvinist heritage [e.g. Congregational, Presbyterian, Baptist] formed the largest block of the listing’ (399). In spreading the message of Calvinist Christianity, the influence of Puritanism can still be felt on modern education in the United States, as reflected in the founding of institutions such as Harvard. Moreover, Puritan notions of social justice (religious liberty and democratic equality) are reflected in America’s political system which, reinforced by the events of the American Revolution, has determined much of the character of religious nationalism in the United States.

Protestantism continues to be the dominant religious force in the United States. However, in the second half of the twentieth century, the Roman Catholic Church has moved increasingly into the mainstream of American life and culture, attaining more of a social and economic quality comparable to its Protestant neighbours (Albanese 95). In its following, Catholicism ranks second only to Protestantism in the
United States. Carey records that ‘Between 1945 and 1965 American Catholicism experienced a phenomenal growth, one significantly unmatched during the previous twenty years and one not repeated in the post-1965 period’ (93). This was shown by major increases in total Catholic membership, including the number of bishops and archbishops and clergy, as well as increases in the number of Catholic hospitals and Catholic elementary and high schools, universities and colleges (Carey 93–4). However, by the late 1960s and early 1970s, amid social and religious tensions and unrest (the Vietnam War, student revolt, changing sexual mores, Women’s Liberation) the Catholic Church entered into its so-called crises. The Church suffered a huge loss in overall membership, as well as a weakening of influence over Catholic moral life (Carey 119). In the struggle to regain its former authority the Catholic Church has been forced to adapt to changing times. For instance, in the Declaration on Non-Christian Religions Vatican II expressed its tolerance towards other religions and even encouraged some of its members to explore alternative forms of spirituality. This is in fact what a great many Americans (Catholic and non-Catholic) did in the 1960s and 1970s, as shown by the recourse to Eastern, pagan and occult religions. During this time the United States was also rife with fundamentalist sects and cults, as well as satanist groups, such as the Church of Satan, lying further on the fringes of society.

The Exorcist gave rise to an extremely mixed response from religious groups, theologians and film critics. It is said that the evangelist Billy Graham believed that evil was embodied within the celluloid of the film itself. That three Catholic priests were hired by Friedkin as technical advisers gave the impression that the Catholic Church gave its unqualified support to the film. Whether this was the case or not, it was on The Exorcist as a Catholic apologia that the heavyweight critic Pauline Kael (whose comments could make and break a film) launched her all-out attack. She could hardly restrain her moral indignation. At the time when the loss of Catholic membership was a cause for serious concern, she cynically called the film ‘the biggest recruiting poster the Catholic church has had since the sunnier days of “Going My Way” and “The Bells of St. Mary’s”’ (60). She delivered her heavy-handed sermon mainly to Catholics on why they should and could not accept The Exorcist (as if they were incapable of deciding for themselves):

Surely it is the religious people who should be most offended by this movie. Others can laugh it off as garbage, but are American Catholics willing to see their faith turned into a horror show? Are they willing to
accept anything just as long as their Church comes out in a good light? Aren’t those who accept the picture getting their heads screwed on backwards? (62)

As Kael acknowledges, not all members of the Catholic community were offended or embarrassed by the film. Some, like Father Kennet Jadoff in The Catholic News, found The Exorcist ‘a deeply spiritual film’ about the classic struggle between good and evil and the crisis of faith (quoted in Travers and Reiff 164), while Father Robert Boyle was ‘positively pleased with the way my Jesuit brothers were depicted’ (quoted in Travers and Reiff 178).

The struggle between good and evil is presented in The Exorcist within a fully developed Roman Catholic context, in which the Church’s age-old exorcism ritual is employed to identify the signs of diabolic possession in a young girl and, most dramatically, to drive the evil spirit from her body. The battle between good and evil is played out in familiar Manichean terms and fought in the ‘arena’ of Regan’s bedroom. As pointed out in the previous chapter, the Manichean split is also at the heart of Puritan theology. The medieval Roman Catholic Church strongly believed in the efficacy of exorcism, or the expulsion of evil spirits or demons by prayers, liturgies, holy water and the sign of the cross (Thomas 570). To formalise these practices the 20-odd-page Ritual Romanum or, in its English translation, Roman Ritual, was issued at the request of Pope Paul V in 1614. Interestingly, the document was revised in 1952, leaving its main features intact. However, the latest revision will determine whether the document retains its validity in the modern-day Catholic Church. Chapter 1 pertains to the qualities and conduct of the exorcist or priest, who must be of high moral character and of mature years. He must thoroughly research the background of the case. ‘Especially,’ it states, ‘he should not believe too readily that a person is possessed by an evil spirit’ (Roman Catholic Church, Roman Ritual 218). He should rigorously verify the signs of possession, which may include the ability to speak in strange tongues, or divulge future and hidden events. Chapter 2 is the actual rite of exorcism, which includes selections from the Gospels to expel and vanquish the evil spirit(s). Chapter 3 pertains to the exorcism of a community or locality. In concert with the traditional Catholic ritual, The Exorcist depicts exorcism as a vigorous tug-of-war between the possessing spirit and the possessed person’s body and soul. However, because the body, according to theologians, belongs to
God and the soul houses the Holy Spirit, the struggle is also between God and Satan, thus underscoring Manichean divisions between good and evil.

_The Exorcist_ benefited from an increasing—and quite irrational—fascination with evil and the supernatural. American Catholics, who continue to maintain strong ties with the Church in Rome, also continue to display a lively sense of the supernatural, as attested by the ongoing fascination with authenticating the Shroud of Turin (Lippy 208). In a controversial personal address to a General Audience delivered on 15 November 1972, Pope Paul IV categorically affirmed the existence of absolute supernatural evil and the Devil.

Evil is not merely a lack of something, but an effective agent, a living spiritual thing, perverted and perverting. A terrible reality. Mysterious and frightening. It is contrary to the teaching of the Bible and the Church to refuse to recognise the existence of such a reality, or to regard it as a principle in itself which does not draw its origin from God like every other creature; or to explain it as a pseudoreality ...

So we know that this dark and disturbing Spirit really exists, and that he still acts with treacherous cunning ...

This question of the Devil and the influence he can exert on individual persons as well as on communities, whole societies or events, is a very important chapter of Catholic doctrine which is given little attention today, though it should be studied again. People are afraid of falling into old Manichean theories again or divagations of fancy and superstition. (quoted in Travers and Reiff 91–2)

Not surprisingly, _The Exorcist_ was a major hit in Italy and Spain. That these countries also produced countless _Exorcist_ clones speaks volumes: both have national identities that are inseparable from Roman Catholicism. It is likewise significant that the two representations which, as both novel and film, have cemented the child as Devil’s spawn in the popular imagination also display a Roman Catholic bias. The first is _Rosemary’s Baby_, which unfolds during Pope Paul’s 1965 visit to New York City and concludes the following year, the ‘Year One’. Rosemary, Satan’s ‘chosen one’ in this inversion of the Christian nativity (Williams 99), harbours guilt fuelled by her lapsed Catholic beliefs, as conveyed in a surreal dream sequence in which nuns from her schooldays, the Pope and even the Catholic Kennedys appear. The other of these representations, _The Omen_, begins in Rome, home to the
Vatican, as well as satanists, aiding in the Second Coming of the Anti-Christ who has just been delivered in a Catholic hospital.4

The resurgence of interest in magic and the occult by the general American public also found expression in the hippie and New Age movements. America’s peculiar fascination with angels was helped by the appearance in 1975 of Billy Graham’s book *Angels: God’s Secret Agents*. Angels may be seen as the logical counterparts to demons or evil spirits. It is indeed curious to note the extraordinary extent to which Americans from the so-called God is Dead generation were willing to believe that the Devil was alive and well and causing evil and havoc in the world. Perhaps in the era of the Vietnam War, campus insurrections, Watergate and economic crises, the personification of a force of absolute Evil seemed more plausible then the existence of a loving and benevolent God. However, rather than removing the concept of God from the worldview altogether, it appears that God was decentred, marginalised, so that Satan or the Devil could assume privileged or central status. At least this is the deconstructivist religious worldview underpinning key horror presentations like *Rosemary’s Baby*, *The Exorcist* and *The Omen*.

In their treatment and style, *The Turn of the Screw* and *The Exorcist* would appear worlds apart. After all, James’s is a very subtle tale relying in crucial part on suggestion and allusion. Much of the ‘horror’ is left to the imagination. James achieves his ‘effects’ through the deliberate manipulation of ambiguity. In contrast, *The Exorcist* has often been dismissed as a ‘blood-and-thunder’ horror film, owing to its very loud soundtrack and graphic special effects. In its own way, however, *The Exorcist* is also subtle. The first half of the film in particular works a good deal by Jamesian suggestion and allusion (take the ominous prologue sequence in northern Iraq where Christian good clashes with pre-Christian evil).5 Friedkin takes his time to establish the scene, atmosphere and characters, to achieve an air of verisimilitude uncharacteristic of the horror film. Like *The Omen* a few years later, Friedkin takes his subject matter extremely seriously, which is perhaps what allows the film to succeed at all. Moreover, Friedkin and Blatty give us ambiguous shades of meaning. As in *The Turn of the Screw*, a major source of ambiguity is to be found in the portrayal of the possessed child, who might be either a vessel of good or evil, innocence or corruption, ignorance or knowledge, or both. Notions of guilt, innocence and agency in this highly calculated mass entertainment intertwine, as in James’s ghostly tale. This generates both sharp and subtle tensions between Calvinist and Romantic ideologies of childhood. I will be focusing on the film, but using the novel to supplement my reading.
The Turn of the Screw is an American author’s rendering of the possessed child in a Victorian setting. James’s cosmopolitan worldview further complicates the issue of cultural context. In contrast, the cultural context of The Exorcist is unmistakably American. In this contemporary version of the possessed child topos, pretty eleven-year-old Regan MacNeil (Linda Blair) is the seemingly happy and healthy all-American child of her famous movie actress mother, Chris (Ellen Burstyn), residing in the Georgetown section of Washington, DC. We never learn the circumstances surrounding Chris’s divorce. As with Miles and Flora in James’s novella, Regan is set up as the innocent and helpless victim of an alien invading intelligence, in this case the Assyrian demon Pazuzu. The film and particularly the novel frame the problem of evil in terms of the possessed child. That is, if there is a God and He is Good, how could He permit the violent and indecent possession of an innocent young girl? Within the film’s Romantic ideology, Regan is figured as closer to God than to Satan. She is the ‘angel’ in this Christian apocalyptic drama, the inspired vessel of beauty and purity (indeed, at one point, in Blatty’s novel, Regan is described by her mother as ‘That angel’ [15]). But what is she inspired by?

Kinder and Houston and others argue that the film fails to enlist empathy from the audience for Regan’s degeneration: ‘our only reactions [to her] are curiosity and a delicious terror, for which we are carefully trained’ (47). But this is perhaps missing the point. We care less for Regan as a given child than for Regan as the personification of Child. Her possession represents a gross violation of the cult (sacrosanct) innocence of the Child, and it is this that earns our sympathy for her predicament in the film. In these terms, Regan might be seen as a symbolic construction, in the manner of Miles and Flora. As in James’s novella, the child as innocence serves to set up the story as a morality play of good versus evil, God versus Satan.

Like The Turn of the Screw, The Exorcist appears to be arguing in Calvinist terms that the mind and body of the child are peculiarly susceptible to possession. There is, in particular, a sensational and unpleasant emphasis on the destruction of the body, and, in accord with both Catholic and Puritan ideology, the body as a temple of evil. We witness Regan’s shockingly sexual transformation, coinciding significantly with her incipient puberty, from angel to hellion, until she becomes a grotesque, monstrous version of her former self – the ‘bad child’ whose vile body urinates on the carpet and spews forth green bile, emasculates a psychiatrist, masturbates savagely with a crucifix (the ultimate violation of the body, as well as the crucifix),
performs 360-degree head turns on her shoulders, and bellows obscenities and blasphemies of a highly sexual content. Regan’s turbulent entry into adolescence corresponds to the stage of barbarism in G. Stanley Hall’s reformulation of recapitulation theory, as well as a gross exaggeration of his description of adolescence as a period of ‘storm and stress’. And why does the demon want to possess Regan? As in James’s tale, in order to destroy her. But again the emphasis is on the destruction of the body – to possess her ‘until she rots and lies stinking in the earth’ (the words of the demon). The welcome addition in the director’s cut of a scene of Karras listening to a tape of Regan recording a birthday message for her father jolts the viewer into awareness that this ‘thing’ strapped onto the bed was once an innocent child.

In *The Exorcist*, the erotic, or rather eroticised, object is the child. The paedophiliac male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure, here a budding girl-child’s body. The paedophiliac male gaze in *The Exorcist* is largely framed in terms of the probing medical gaze. Regan is most clearly subjected to the medical gaze in the gruesome arteriogram scene. Kermode argues that the sexual overtones of this scene spell a kind of deflowering for her. ‘It would be difficult,’ he asserts, ‘to present a more brutal, hopeless, even pornographic depiction of modern medicine’ (53). I agree. More troubling in this scene, though, is the way the mother (whose ‘look’ dominates much of the film) is subtly implicated in this voyeurism and paedophilia via the medical gaze. She is ‘made’ to watch, along with Dr Klein and an African-American laboratory technician, her daughter’s defilement by male doctors through an observation room (significantly, she is the only female present). The room creates the sense of voyeuristic separation between ‘watchers’ (Chris et al., and here we should add film spectators) and ‘watched’ (Regan). Throughout the film Friedkin’s camera eroticises Regan’s developing female form by framing her suggestively from high and low angles as Chris and doctors do their utmost to restrain Regan on her bed. The voyeuristic fantasy, along with the idea of the paedophiliac mother, is unhappily taken to its logical conclusion in Robert Wise’s reincarnation variation on the possession theme, *Audrey Rose*, discussed in the next chapter.

In subjecting her to intense clinical scrutiny, doctors at the Barringer Clinic try hard to pin down a lesion in the temporal lobe of Regan’s brain presumed to be the cause of her disturbance. In systematic fashion, she is subjected to a seemingly endless series of medical tests (spinals, arteriograms, pneumoencephalograms), in scenes that border-line on child abuse. Later, hypnotherapy is attempted to probe Regan’s
unconscious for a hidden personality, and here the child is psychologised rather than medicalised. In one scene, puzzled radiologist Dr Tanney looks for the lesion in X-rays of Regan’s skull and finds out that ‘there’s nothing there’. This could suffice as a definition of Regan, whose innocence is likewise constructed as a vacancy or blank. Not only does this vacancy allow the child to be filled with paedophiliac desire, it also enables her to be readily occupied or, rather, possessed by evil, where evil is constructed as presence. Tantalisingly, when a taped conversation between Regan and Karras is played backwards, Regan in the demon’s voice can be heard saying: ‘I am no one. I am no one.’ In other words, evil rests in no one person, but is a presence all of its own. Like ectoplasm, it can enter and leave human beings.7

Initially, doctors refuse to allow Chris to venture out of the rational bounds of medical discourse. When she tells Dr Klein how Regan’s bed was shaking with her and Regan on it, he, the trained rationalist-scientist, is dismissive: ‘Mrs MacNeil, the problem with your daughter is not her bed, it’s her brain.’ The implication here is that Chris, like James’s hysterical governess, only imagined that the bed was shaking, or was, at the least, mistaken. Dr Klein is clearly in control of the encounter. Later, when Doctors Klein and Tanney witness Regan’s eye-opening phenomena first-hand, Chris asks: ‘What was going on in there? How could she fly off the bed like that?’ Like Dr Klein, Dr Tanney refuses to allow Chris and, more importantly, himself, to concede the inadequacy of medical science. ‘Pathological states,’ he explains glibly (and unconvincingly), ‘can induce abnormal strength, accelerated motor performance.’ Fortunately, Chris has far too firm a grip on reality to allow herself to be duped by jargon and rhetoric: ‘Oh, what are you talking about, for Christ’s sake! Did you see her or not!’ It seems very odd that Chris, the lay person and woman/mother, should display greater inductive knowledge than these rational scientists.

Thus medical science, systematically eliminating all possibilities, meets a cul-de-sac. Fascinatingly, it is doctors and not Chris who are first to suggest a supernatural cure for Regan’s illness. Not without obvious embarrassment and discomfort, the clinic director suggests that exorcism, if purely by the ‘force of suggestion’ (their strained attempt to stay within the rational bounds of medical discourse by simply explaining the phenomena away) might be a way of curing Regan. This finally gives Chris enough latitude to ask, however incredulously, ‘Are you saying I should take my daughter to a witch doctor?’ Chris then turns to the tortured Jesuit/psychiatrist Father Karras (Jason Miller) for help. Yet it is he who reasons with Chris that it would be
better for Regan’s welfare that he acts in the capacity of psychiatrist (the witch doctor of the modern age) instead of priest. It remains ironic that the mother, who is set up as an atheist or agnostic, must convince a man of the cloth that her daughter is indeed possessed by an evil spirit.

When doctors recommend that Regan be institutionalised, Chris is adamant that ‘I am not going to lock up my daughter in some goddamn asylum.’ Yet, ironically, it is she who locks her daughter away in her second-storey bedroom in the manner of a nineteenth-century madwoman in the attic. In this way, Regan’s madness becomes a shameful secret, which is why Chris will not allow the prying Lieutenant Kinderman (Lee J. Cobb) to see the dangerous monster she has housed in confinement. But it can be seen that Regan’s confinement also serves perversely to draw our attention to Regan’s madness. Each time Chris and doctors bolt up to Regan’s bedroom that door opens (an effective and suspenseful visual motif in the film) to reveal her most recent horrific spectacle. There can be no denying that parts of the film (particularly the film’s infamous masturbation scene) appealed to the worst in its audience drawn to the visual pleasure and spectacle of a helpless child’s suffering. It seems that both Friedkin and Blatty want spectators to be turned on by the sex and the violence. As such, some viewers – like Max Von Sydow who plays the enigmatic Father Merrin in the film or John Boorman who directed the execrated Exorcist II: The Heretic (1977) – regard the film as little more than an exercise in child sadism.

The women’s movement was in full force when The Exorcist hit cinema screens in 1973. Prima facie Blatty appears to have responded to the times with a more politically correct representation of the ‘New Woman’ in divorcée Chris MacNeil. Although occasionally given to histrionic behaviour, Chris is a strong and thoroughly emancipated mother figure, with her own money and career. She is testimony that a woman can survive without a husband and even raise a child on her own. However, it is pertinent to ask whether Chris’s independent career status is being blamed for her divorce and for her ‘neglect’ of Regan. (The theme of neglect is mirrored in Karras’s relationship with his elderly mother, about whom he feels guilty for abandoning in a mental hospital.) Is this the underlying cause of Regan’s illness? At least this is the reading offered by both H. J. Gans and Molly Haskell, who see the film as a veiled attack on Women’s Liberation because of its conflict with the responsibilities of motherhood – except the badge of shame Chris wears is not Hester’s ‘A’ for Adultery but ‘A’ for Actress.
(Sinyard 70). Social critics held the women’s movement responsible for the breakdown of the family, culminating in the late 1970s in an anti-feminist backlash. The single-parent broken family in *The Exorcist* anticipates this backlash. Thus, on the surface, *The Exorcist* might be subverting gender role stereotypes, but underneath affirming woman’s more traditional role as wife/mother.

The bad Regan is the embodiment of the changeling of European folklore. Chris invokes the changeling belief when she tries desperately to convince Father Karras that Regan is ‘not herself’ anymore: ‘You show me Regan’s double – same face, same voice, everything – and I’d know it wasn’t Regan. I’d know in my gut. And I’m telling you that thing up there [in Regan’s bedroom] is not my daughter.’ According to the changeling belief the original or true child can be brought back by torturing the changeling (Leach 208). In *The Exorcist*, physical punishment of the developing female body (coded here as abject and monstrous) is used to ‘regress’ Regan’s sexual development and bring the ‘old’ Regan back. In this paedophiliac male fantasy of female sexuality, ‘Emergent female sexuality is equated with demonic possession, and the men in the picture – almost all of them celibate priests – unite to abuse and torture Regan, as John Boorman recognized, in their efforts to return her to presexual innocence’ (Biskind, *Easy Riders, Raging Bulls* 223). The child’s developing body in *The Exorcist* is thus figured as a sexual eruption and revolt. By way of religion as well as medicine a system of control of sexuality is established over the body of the child by corporal punishment. That body incurs a vigorous beating in the name of Calvinism, all in the quest to tame the child’s wild and animal nature. Indeed, Regan becomes more and more bestial in the film, and particularly in the novel: she howls; she barks; she mews; she neighs; she oinks; she grunts; she lows; she yelps; she hisses.

It has been noted that exorcisms adhere to a sexual logic: almost exclusively a priest is called on to perform the exorcism on a young ‘maid’ or ‘virgin’ (Roper 190). Thus the drama of exorcism is also a sexual script. When carried out on the bed the exorcism of a woman possessed by a male Devil carried powerful connotations of a woman ‘lost to the body and to lust’ (Roper 190). The sexual logic of exorcism and its attendant script underpin *The Exorcist*. There is an almost titillating sexual tension between Regan and her exorcists, Father Merrin (Max von Sydow) and Father Karras, and this is particularly strong in the novel. ‘Do you want to fuck her?’ the demon asks Karras whilst Regan is restrained to the bed; ‘Loose the straps and I will let you go at it!’ (Blatty 206). This is a gender reversal of the exorciser/exorcised
relationship between the governess and her ‘little gentleman’ Miles in
*The Turn of the Screw*, also tinged with sexual tension.

There is a suggestion that Regan’s body, her abject body, might not
be able to withstand the violence of possession/exorcism. At one point,
Father Karras listens to Regan’s failing heart with a stethoscope; she is
lying still, breathing with difficulty. Father Merrin, the aged exorcist of
the title, asks, ‘What is it?’ Karras replies, ‘Her heart,’ fearing that if she
doesn’t get any rest soon, she will die from cardiac exhaustion. ‘Can
you give her something?’ says the other. ‘She’ll go into a coma.’
However, moments later Chris asks Karras if Regan is going to die and
he replies with a firm ‘no’. Regan is more fortunate than Miles. She sur-
vives her exorcism ordeal because her heart – often identified with the
soul in primitive religions and seen in Christian theology to house the
spirit of God – is stronger than Miles’s. Ironically, Father Merrin dies
from heart failure while trying to drive the evil spirit from Regan’s
soul. Enraged by Merrin’s death, Karras pummels Regan’s body as he
incites the demon to enter his own body. Then, in a supreme act of
self-sacrifice, he hurls himself out of Regan’s bedroom window.8 Karras
thus realises James’s governess’s ‘ambition’ of becoming an ‘expiatory
victim’ (James 49). (Note how the body–heart–spirit triad is invoked
whereas the mind is, significantly, elided.)

Like Miles, Regan is ‘lost’ inside her own body. In one of the film’s
key sequences, the words ‘help me’ appear in welts on Regan’s stomach
as Karras and Chris’s personal secretary Sharon (Kitty Winn) watch,
transfixed. Here, the ‘real’ Regan is a prisoner trapped in her own body.
Like Miles, she is crying out to be saved. This sequence is important
because it shows that Regan has some degree of awareness of what is
happening to her. Her awareness is also intimated in the epilogue
when Chris tells Father Dyer (Reverend William O’Malley) that ‘Regan
doesn’t remember any of it,’ which is untrue (compare that with
Miles’s memory block about the unspeakable things he said at school).
Because when Regan fixes on the Roman collar of Dyer (shown in
close-up from her point of view), some vague memory, buried deep in
her psyche, is plainly being stirred up. In an almost impulsive gesture,
Regan reaches up to Dyer and plants a ‘thank you’ kiss on his cheek –
her way of thanking her spiritual fathers, Merrin and Karras, and, by
implication, God the Father. Regan remembers.

It is through the figure of the possessed child that *The Exorcist*
approaches the thorny problem of evil; or, rather, good in a world where
God is possibly dead (Briggs 13–14). Blatty, a self-professed ‘relaxed
Catholic’ (quoted in Winter 84), who read for his BA at the Jesuit-run
Georgetown University (later earning a Master’s degree in English Literature at George Washington University), previously explored this philosophical problem in *Twinkle, Twinkle, ‘Killer’ Kane* ([1966]; revised as *The Ninth Configuration* (1978)) and later attempted to resolve it in *Legion*, in which he presents a makeover of the doctrine of Original Sin. Blatty’s Roman Catholic background profoundly informs the worldview of his novels. On a crucial level, *The Exorcist* is about the problem of faith and this includes faith in ourselves. The director’s cut reinstates a key dialogue that suggests that the true target of the possession is not Regan but the people around her. ‘Why this girl?’ Karras asks Merrin on the stairs, during a break from the exorcism, ‘It makes no sense.’ Underpinning Merrin’s theological speculations is the concept of original sin, and his words smack of Calvinism: ‘I think the point is to make us despair. To see ourselves as animal and ugly. And to reject the possibility that God could love us.’ In other words, the point of possession is to make us believe that humanity is so wicked that it is beyond salvation. Despair here is the ultimate sin of pride.

The film’s controversial *deus ex machina* ending, in which Karras sacrifices himself for Regan, is highly ambiguous. On the one hand, it is possible to read it – as Father Kennet Jadoff did – as a triumph of good over evil. On the other, evil appears to have the upper hand. The ending has been a continuing source of dissatisfaction for Blatty. In Blatty’s view, if evil spirits exist in the world, then God must exist and therefore there is the chance for life everlasting. Hence he intended in his script that good wins out over evil. There was little ambiguity in his novel. But for the more agnostic Friedkin: ‘Most people take out of *The Exorcist* what they bring to it. If you believe that the world is a dark and evil place, then *The Exorcist* will reinforce that. But if you believe that there is a force for good that combats and eventually triumphs over evil, then you will be taking out of the film what we tried to put into it’ (*Introduction* to *The Exorcist: 25th Anniversary Edition*).

Nevertheless, the new ending of the director’s cut (which probably should be called the ‘writer’s cut’) appends an exchange between Father Dyer and Lieutenant Kinderman, in which it is implied that Karras lives on through his best friend Dyer.

On one level, Friedkin and Blatty go to great lengths to exonerate Regan from blame for her sociopathic behaviour. That is, viewers are meant to assume that it is the demon inside her forcing her to commit ghastly violent acts. In the course of the narrative, explanations from physiology, psychiatry and physics are sought, with no success. For a while viewers occupy Todorov’s ambiguous realm of the fantastic,
straddled between the uncanny and the marvellous. This is particularly the case in Blatty’s more subtle novel, where the unequivocal acceptance of the marvellous (that Regan is indeed possessed by a demon) occurs much later in the narrative. The director’s cut reinstates the first medical examination scene, in which Dr Klein diagnoses Regan’s condition as a ‘disorder of the nerves’, an ‘over-reaction to depression’, brought on by her mother’s separation from her father. Hence Regan shows symptoms of hyperactivity, quick temper and poor performance in mathematics, as well as other uncharacteristic behaviours such as lying and swearing. This points to a physiological and psychological cause for her condition. However, by peppering the film early on with ‘subliminal’ demonic imagery, the director’s cut cancels out any ambiguity that an explanation for Regan’s condition might be for the first few reels anything other than supernatural. In the original film, a rational explanation for Regan’s symptoms is seemingly out of the question when the film shows her head revolving for the first time, much too far for physical capability (Kinder and Houston 50). However, in the director’s cut we apparently arrive at this conclusion earlier when Regan is shown ‘spider-walking’ down the stairs, whereupon her mouth opens and spews forth blood in the semblance of a vampire. Either way, viewers must make the imaginative leap into the marvellous and conclude that Regan is possessed. From this it would seem to follow that the demon inside Regan is to blame. She is innocent.

However, there is an alternative reading of the possessed child in The Exorcist: that Regan is not innocent at all. This is borne out by her Shakespearean namesake, who, it is often noted, was the thankless, monstrous daughter of King Lear. Nicholls makes the point that stories ‘about possession are, to a degree, stories about moral responsibility’ (136). Even though the blame for terrible acts committed by victims of possession in narratives of this kind might be assigned to an evil spirit or demon, some of these acts represent what the victims might want to do anyway. This ties in with Freud’s demonological theory, in which the demons of possession are said to be ‘bad and reprehensible wishes, derivatives of instinctual impulses that have been repudiated or repressed’ (‘A Nineteenth-Century Demonological Neurosis’ 383–4). Herein lies the main attraction of the possession motif for writers and filmmakers: it allows them to explore in a less threatening or objectionable way highly taboo subjects such as incest between mother and daughter (The Exorcist), mother and son (Beyond the Door II (1977)), father and daughter (The Antichrist (1974)), or brother and sister (The Possession of Joel Delaney, Amityville II). To a certain extent the possession motif dilutes the
sensitive impact of this material. Under the camouflage of possession, protagonists may enact their darkest forbidden desires. After all, these unnatural impulses cannot possibly be ascribed to their free will – or can they? Possession just might be what is needed for protagonists to act on those impulses.

Following this line of argument, Barbara Creed argues that Regan’s possession stems from repressed sexual desires in the family home. She identifies the incestuously tinged relationship between mother and daughter as the main reason for Regan’s possession and ‘rebellion’ in the film (35). In this lesbian variation on the oedipal/Electral scenario, Regan’s wish is to remain (like Norman Bates and his crazy mother in Psycho) locked in an exclusive relationship with the mother (Creed 39). With her parents divorced, Regan’s father Howard (named in the book but not in the film) is conspicuously out of the picture, just as the dead father and indifferent uncle are out of the picture in The Turn of the Screw. In one scene, Chris becomes almost hysterically upset on the telephone while trying to contact Regan’s father in Rome on Regan’s twelfth birthday: ‘He doesn’t even call his daughter on her birthday, for Christ sake.’ Meanwhile, Regan is eavesdropping on the conversation, looking dejected. This is the first real sign that Regan might feel contempt for the father who, in the words of her mother, ‘doesn’t give a shit’. Rejection by her father can only serve to consolidate Regan’s relationship with her mother. In Burke Dennings (Jack MacGowran), her mother’s inebriate movie director, she sees a potential father-figure – and a threat to the mother–daughter dyad. Early on, in an exchange with her mother, Regan reveals that she is jealous of Burke, whom she has ‘heard’ her mother wants to marry. If only unconsciously, Regan harbours a death-wish for Burke. Later, in her evil incarnation, Regan’s wish is fulfilled: Burke is thrown from her bedroom window, his head turned completely round so that it faces backwards to literally ‘look the other way’ (Creed 40) (all this takes place off-screen).

Now that Burke has been eliminated, mother and daughter can carry on without anybody coming between them. Afterwards, when Regan the demon tries to force her mother to ‘lick me!’ by rubbing her face sensually in her bloody crotch, Regan says to her, in a wicked parody of Burke’s clipped British accent: ‘Do you know what she did, your cunting daughter?’ Thus, even though the film tries to place the blame for Burke’s murder on the demon, the demon it would appear has merely responded to a repressed desire on Regan’s part. This is what happens, it seems, when a young daughter does not have a strong male
role model in her life. She overcompensates by developing masculine characteristics (her voice deepens, her physical strength increases). Rather than accepting a new father-figure into her life, Regan usurps the role of her own father as well as her mother’s lover/husband. That Regan has been playing with an Ouija board (to talk to her spiritual friend ‘Captain Howdy’) is also very damning because it would seem to follow that she has opened up the gateway to evil herself. We can assume that it is from Captain Howdy (whose name is obviously derived from her father’s) that Regan has heard her mother wants to marry Burke.

It is widely believed that The Exorcist cynically tapped into parental fears and anxieties about youth alienation and rebellion. The turbulent period from 1960 to 1970 witnessed the most rapid growth in American youth (Conger and Petersen 192). Out of an increasing scepticism and distrust of the government and other institutions came the so-called counterculture, which exposed a division between adults and post-adolescents or ‘youth’. The movement was anti-establishment as well as anti-war (excepting revolution and civil disobedience) and was fuelled by an increasing decline in adult authority. Although this decline was not confined to the United States it was nowhere more strongly felt than in that country (Conger and Petersen 191). The cover term ‘alienation’ was used to explain anything from campus insurrections and inner-city riots to drug-taking and the rise of the hippie movement. By the post-Vietnam War and Watergate era the so-called generational gap began to lessen when adults also started to adopt this pessimistic nihilist outlook. In Danse Macabre, Stephen King cites The Exorcist as a quintessential social horror film and argues that the film is ‘about explosive social change, a finely honed focusing point for the entire youth explosion that took place in the late sixties and early seventies. It was a movie for all those parents who felt, in a kind of agony and terror, that they were losing their children and could not understand why or how it was happening’ (196–7). King wittily remarks that ‘the demon in Regan MacNeil would have responded enthusiastically to the Fish Cheer at Woodstock’ (197). (In case we missed the film’s subtext, Chris is in the process of shooting her latest film, Crash Course, which deals with campus insurrection.) The cautionary subtext for parents watching this desecration of wholesome middle-class American values (the home, the family, the Church and, above all, the child) might have been: ‘Lock up your sons but especially your daughters or else all hell will break loose.’
The popularity of Mervyn Leroy’s film *The Bad Seed* (1956) has been read in light of rising rates of juvenile delinquency in the 1950s (Merlock 112–14). The popularity of *The Exorcist* could be read in the same way. Rates of delinquency in the United States rose sharply between 1960 and 1976 and were a source for serious concern. For many years the ratio of boys’ to girls’ offences was four to five times higher for boys than girls (Conger and Petersen 613). But in the years 1967–73, the percentage increase in the arrests for girls in the United States for all offences was nearly three times that of boys (Conger and Petersen 615). Feminist readings of female delinquency have typically drawn attention to the fact that the juvenile justice system is more likely to punish girls for being delinquent on the grounds of their sexual (mis)behaviour than boys. Carrington refers to this sexist double-standard as the ‘sexualisation thesis’ (13). In this way, Regan may be seen as a female delinquent who is being punished for transgressing sexual boundaries and for defying parental (especially patriarchal) authority. (It is certainly apt that in the following year Linda Blair starred in the infamous television film *Born Innocent*, about an innocent teenager’s struggle to cope in a girls’ reformatory.) In primitive societies demonic possession was used to explain delinquent and criminal behaviour. The 1970s manifested almost a reversion to this primitive kind of thinking. However, this point needs major qualification. According to the findings of a 1967 report by the President’s Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice, ‘delinquents tend to come from backgrounds of social and economic deprivation. It is inescapable that juvenile delinquency is directly related to conditions bred by poverty’ (quoted in Empey 81). In tension with this official point of view, possessed child narratives do not speak for the impoverished or working classes. Rather, these narratives, as I have already indicated, speak predominantly for American middle-class anxieties about their offspring becoming delinquent or aberrant.

**Masculinity in crisis: Damiano Damiana’s *Amityville II: The Possession***

Possession narratives of the 1970s were much preoccupied with young girls, particularly those on the threshold of puberty. By the early 1980s, when the cycle of such narratives was coming to an end, the young girl became a young man (In *Amityville II; The Possession; The Beast Within* (1982); *The Demon Murder Case* (1983); *The Boy from Hell* (1987); in *Full
Moon High (1981) and Teen Wolf (1985) the lycanthropic possession of the young male protagonists is played for comedic effect, while Fear No Evil (1981) presents a more mature male variation on the satanic child theme.) In the made-for-television film The Demon Murder Case, demonised Kenny (Kevin Bacon) stabs to death his girlfriend’s boss who has been making advances towards her. Much of the film rests on the defence attorney trying to plead its unprecedented case for Kenny as a victim of demonic possession: the demons made him do it and therefore he cannot be charged with murder. However, as is so often the case in narratives of this type, Kenny’s actions represent what he would liked to have done anyway. A crime of possession turns out to be a crime of jealousy and passion after all. More interesting is Damiano Damiani’s Amityville II, which forgoes the sophisticated tensions of The Turn of the Screw and The Exorcist for a luridly Gothic account of ‘possession by Calvinism’. Conceived as a fictional prequel to the much-publicised ‘true story’ (later exposed as hoax), The Amityville Horror, the story is of an American family (the Lutzes) menaced by terrifying, supernatural forces in a haunted Dutch colonial house on New York’s Long Island. Amityville II is morally quite sick, sicker it must be said than The Exorcist, though hardly as graphic. In the film’s prologue we learn that the house was the scene of a family massacre just a year prior and Amityville II takes place before these events, which is less a prequel than a rip-off, not only of the original film but of The Exorcist. I do not have the space here to consider Amityville II at great length (a film which stretches this study’s definition of child), but I would like to make some pointed remarks about the cultural shift between a possessed young girl and a possessed young man. Here, we must briefly sketch sociopolitical developments in the United States influencing perceptions of the family between Regan and Ronald Reagan.

Much of the malaise in American culture in the 1970s and 1980s was fuelled by discussion of the decline of the American family. The dark underbelly of family life was exposed with the ‘discovery’ of domestic violence (Skolnick 130). Child abuse and wife battering became major topics for research as well as causes for public concern. For a great many Americans, ‘the discovery of family violence was taken to mean that abusive behaviour in the home was not only widespread but reaching epidemic proportions’ (Skolnick 130). The supposed decline of the modern family made Americans yearn for the ‘traditional’ family of the 1950s. Thus when Ronald Reagan was elected to office in 1980, he responded with a politics of nostalgia that promised to resuscitate
this ‘golden age’ in American culture with its breadwinner/homemaker family (Skolnick 183). His campaign was helped by the anti-feminist backlash allied with other ‘pro-family’ conservative movements in America (Skolnick 117). The dysfunctional Montellis in Amityville II are clearly from the Reagan era. In the film’s depiction of a borderline middle-class Italian-American family, Amityville II conflates the ethnic with the traditional, that is, patriarchal, as well as Catholic. Fatherhood/patriarchy is the real evil of Amityville II. Carried to the extreme, these patriarchal family relations are linked directly to family violence, including sibling incest. The film acts out a crisis of fatherhood/patriarchy, where the sins of the father are the sins of the son, rather thinly disguised as possession.

All the conflict and tension in the household emanate from the figure of the irreligious father, Mr Montelli (Burt Young). He is drawn most unsympathetically, as arrogant, humourless, cruel and authoritarian. He is the law that governs, or rather divides, the family. Relations between Mr Montelli and the son, Sonny (Jack Magner), are particularly strained. When Mr Montelli rebukes Sonny for failing to follow orders, he also reminds him that he is not too old for a whipping (he need not subscribe to any religious beliefs, but Mr Montelli’s approach to child rearing is most clearly of the Calvinist school). The father’s authority over the son is represented as castrating: ‘You gonna be a man by smoking cigarettes, now you’ve grown a little fuzz over here? Learn to follow orders. Do you hear me? I don’t hear you.’ ‘Yes, sir.’ Sonny, as his name implies, will always be his father’s son, never a man, always a boy.

The haunted Amityville house, which takes on a life and personality of its own, not only feeds but plays on repressed hatred for the father. The film labours this point. When Mr and Mrs Montelli (Rutanya Alda) are awoken by loud rappings on the front door, they rush downstairs to investigate. Mr Montelli, true to his violent nature, fetches a shotgun to ward off the ‘trespassers’. But these happenings are overshadowed by poltergeist disturbance in the two younger children’s bedroom. Paint brushes, as if guided by unseen hands, graffiti a ‘devil-pig’ on the walls of the bedroom with this travesty of the holy commandment: ‘Dishonour thy father … Pigs!’ This unequivocally states the film’s father-hatred theme: indeed, the writing is on the wall. Thus it comes as no surprise that the father, who is obviously threatened by the graffiti, resolves to punish this act of ‘disobedience’ with his belt. Scenes of child and spouse abuse follow. Events take a potentially lethal turn when Sonny turns the very same gun Mr Montelli uses to ward off the trespassers on the monstrous patriarch himself.
The focus shifts to Sonny and his possession by evil spirits in the house. Underlying Sonny’s possession is this fear and particularly hatred of the father. On the same night he turns the gun on Mr Montelli, Sonny receives ‘inspiration’ from a disembodied voice speaking through his headset. ‘Why didn’t you pull the trigger?’ it taunts, ‘Why didn’t you shoot that pig?’ On his birthday, Sonny beholds his family in a mocking pose of a family portrait, whereby the interior voice continues to turn Sonny’s mind against the family: ‘Look at those pathetic animals. They would be better if you killed them, don’t you think so?’ This sums up the film’s contemptuous and cynical stance towards its ‘pathetic’ characters and the ‘pathetic’ institution of family. Where is our audience identification meant to lie? One reviewer has the answer: ‘There probably isn’t a more unsympathetic bunch on screen this year. They’re sure to make audiences root for the house’ (‘Berg’ 18). When Sonny turns the shotgun on his family, he becomes the thing he reviles most: his father. Thus violent fathers beget violent sons. On the one hand, it is tempting to view this aggressive masculine streak as a reinforcement of patriarchal authority. On the other, by its nature as a patriarchal institution, the slaying of the traditional family in Amityville II ultimately pits patriarchy/fatherhood against itself.

Salvation for Sonny rests with a Catholic priest, Father Adamsky (James Olson), whose name possibly alludes to Adam, the first man. Strange and terrifying occult manifestations earlier convince the Father that the Amityville house is possessed and in need of exorcism. Following Sonny’s massacre of the family, however, the Father shifts his attention to the boy himself whose body has been made the house or temple of evil. He is also in need of exorcism. If Mr Montelli is the Bad Father, it is tempting to see Father Adamsky as the Good Father. Yet for all his good intentions, Father Adamsky, being much more human than divine, is necessarily an imperfect father-figure. It is he, after all, who fails to hear Sonny’s younger sister’s cries for help, resulting in her death as well as those of the rest of the family. This has disturbing gender implications: fathers, be they of the clerical or biological kind, can apparently save only ‘their own’. When he beholds the family’s destruction in a nightmare, Father Adamsky is galvanised into action – but his (and the Catholic Church’s) impotence has already cost the lives of Trish and the family. Thus a guilty conscience is behind Father Adamsky’s mission to save Sonny, for his own as well as Sonny’s sake. (Indeed, it may be seen that Amityville II is the perfect Catholic/anti-Catholic film driven by sex, guilt and confession.)
In the sensational finale, Father Adamsky attempts to exorcise Sonny by the *Roman Ritual*. When this fails he beckons to God in the manner of Father Karras in *The Exorcist* to ‘Let it be me. Not him.’ Happily, the evil spirits are shown to depart from Sonny’s body; the real Sonny returns. However, the spent priest has to face the full consequences of calling on the demons to enter his own body. Although Sonny finds salvation, the film’s ending is downbeat, with none of the sacrificial hope for redemption and regeneration that is hinted at with Father Karras’s fate in *The Exorcist*. If Sonny has been saved by the Good Father, then Father Adamsky has, ironically now, been abandoned by the Holy Father. ‘Lord of my life,’ he pleads, invoking that ultimate of sacrificial figures on the cross, ‘Do not forsake me.’ The sombre autumn setting evokes his and Sonny’s Fall from Grace. By the film’s close, fatherhood/patriarchy is in serious jeopardy.

Recently, Tanya Krzywinska has argued that the possession film, rather than being feminine in character (in which she places Creed’s argument) betrays an ‘awesome dread of a primal masculine anarchic force which is figured as the demonic’ (247). Thus, rather than speaking of the ‘monstrous feminine’, as Creed does, she reads the demon Pazuzu in *The Exorcist*, for example, as a manifestation of the monstrous masculine, as suggested by the figure’s serpent-like phallus. She contends that the agent of possession continues to be identified as ‘solidly masculine’ (247). (This is open to debate, given the gender ambiguity of Mercedes McCambridge’s demon’s voice in *The Exorcist*; other points of her reading of the film are somewhat strained.) In Krzywinska’s view, possession films such as *The Exorcist* call into question masculine identity, the precarious and unstable nature of which is highlighted by having these anxieties projected onto the possessed bodies of women (248). Although she declares a break with Creed’s thinking, Creed’s argument might still hold good alongside Krzywinska’s, in so far as Creed would concur that possession films are really projections of male anxieties about female sexuality and thus tell us nothing about feminine anxieties as such. In this way, the issue of masculinity versus femininity may be treated as two sides of the same problem. Thus, in reconciling Krzywinska with Creed, it might be said that, while *The Exorcist* circumvents the problem of masculinity by scapegoating femininity, *Amityville II* confronts the problem of masculinity head-on. Despite its deep-seated misogyny, *Amityville II* may be seen in this regard as a ‘progressive’ text.

The meaning and construction of the possessed child rests on key factors within American religion and culture. The first is historic: the
influence of Puritanism, to which may be traced the origins of modern American Protestantism. The other, contemporary, is Roman Catholicism, which only in the second half of the twentieth century moved into the mainstream of American life. Although seldom acknowledged, the beliefs and practices of Roman Catholicism have historically been important (from a positive as opposed to merely negative standpoint) to the development of Puritanism. Their similarities rather than differences may explain why the United States has such a rich tradition of possessed children in literature and film. When the two discourses merge we have a particularly compelling representation of the possessed child in The Exorcist, where the Puritan Gothic meets the Catholic. More generally, the rise of the possessed child in the 1970s may be linked to a fascination with evil and the occult. Along with cultural anxieties regarding youth waywardness and delinquency, possessed child narratives frequently betray patriarchal anxieties regarding female sexuality. Coincident with the late 1970s feminist backlash, female sexuality is figured as a threat to the status of masculinity itself. In the following chapter, I will offer further evidence of the possessed child’s cultural constructedness by examining the impact of Eastern religion and the New Age movement on the representation of the possessed child in Robert Wise’s film of Frank De Felitta’s novel Audrey Rose.
This life, the end? No. This is one act in a vast cosmic drama, that's all. Oh yes. Our bodies die, our aged vessels crack, releasing the ensnared soul on its vast journey homewards – through many lifetimes, many lifetimes. Improving with each new life. Not only do I believe this [reincarnation] beyond a shadow of a doubt, Mrs Templeton, but 700 million other people also believe in it.

(Anthony Hopkins as Elliot Hoover in Robert Wise’s 1977 film *Audrey Rose*)

**Frank De Felitta’s and Robert Wise’s *Audrey Rose***

In *The Exorcist*, the origins of the demon figure Pazuzu in northern Iraq serve to emphasise the otherness of Middle Eastern religion and culture, while also invoking a more ancient, pre-Christian, pagan evil. *Audrey Rose*, Robert Wise’s 1977 film of Frank De Felitta’s 1975 bestselling novel, moves on from this mode of representation and discourse, but draws its inspiration from the Far East in the religions of Hinduism and Buddhism. In the 1970s this found popular expression in the New Age movement. Along with the interplay between historic Puritanism and contemporary Roman Catholicism, which has powerfully determined the extent to which the possessed child is an American phenomenon, this Eastern/New Age intersection further demonstrates the extent to which the possessed child is subject to trends within American religion and culture. Specifically, the possessed child is being used to make a metaphysical statement.

An interest in Eastern religion and spiritual practice has been a feature of Western culture since the 1890s. However, from the late
1960s throughout the 1970s the exposure to Eastern influences became almost overwhelming. Spokespersons and religious bodies such as the Divine Light Mission, the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) and Osh International were making themselves visible across US cities and campuses, finding a receptive audience among a large section of young Americans disenchanted with the established Judeo-Christian traditions. For them the manifold forms of Eastern spirituality such as Buddhism and Hinduism seemed ‘purer than American religious institutions that now were perceived as hopelessly intertwined with a decadent, unjust culture and political order’ (Lippy 210). These Western truth-seekers were drawn first and foremost to the otherness of Eastern religion, which helped to satisfy a deep psychological need for transcendence and even liberation. Even if Americans were not ready to fully subscribe to this age-old truth, older than Christianity, they could still benefit from some form of yoga or Transcendental Meditation (TM), minus many of the religious trappings (by 1980 nearly a million Americans had enrolled in a course on TM, as promulgated by the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi and popularised by The Beatles in the 1960s).

The New Age (or Aquarian) movement of the 1970s emerged from the counterculture of the 1960s hippie era and drew on both Eastern mysticism and Western occultism. It encompassed wide-ranging interests, from astrology, crystal healing and reincarnation to ‘channelling’, altered states of consciousness and out-of-body experiences. As argued in chapter 2, an interest in magic and the occult was a major feature of Puritan New England culture. Witchcraft along with astrology thrived among the American colonists. Transcendentalism, spiritualism, theosophy and New Thought number among the precursors to the contemporary occult revival, which found renewed expression not only in the New Age movement but also in countless neo-pagan movements and was likewise heavily influenced by the hippie consciousness. New Age thinking and the pagan revival may be regarded as essentially versions of self-help, enabling believers to tap into a supernatural power, which can then be used to transform the self as well as the empirical world (Lippy 212). In the midst of this religious diversity, Americans could draw on whatever religious philosophy suited their needs best. As Lippy puts it: ‘Individuals were free to pick and chose aspects of Asian practice to add to whatever else they already did in their efforts to construct a world of meaning for themselves’ (Lippy 211). It is this highly syncretic ‘grab-bagging’ approach to religion that informs the treatment of the possessed child in Audrey Rose.
Made in the wake of The Exorcist and The Omen, Robert Wise’s neglected and underrated Audrey Rose treats reincarnation as a form of possession. Through the years, the film has attained a certain cult status. It is unfortunate, as one reviewer pointed out, that Audrey Rose should be ‘dismissed en masse by critics as “an Exorcist rip-off”, precisely what it isn’t’ (Everson 373–4). Although clearly indebted to Blatty’s novel and Friedkin’s film, Audrey Rose is more a reaction to and reworking of The Exorcist than a ‘rip-off’, minus the sensationalism, special effects and vulgarity. It is refreshingly subtle and ‘clean’. The weaknesses in De Felitta’s B-grade novel are inherent in his script for the film and it is Wise’s mostly intelligent and tasteful direction that transcends its potboiler source. Although the film’s possessed child theme places it firmly within the American cultural tradition, in mood and style Audrey Rose resembles a British film. Here, Wise’s restrained approach owes much to the Val Lewton school of filmmaking under whose influence he made his directorial debut.

Wise took over the reins from Gunther von Fritsch who died during filming of the Lewton-produced sequel, Curse of the Cat People (1944). This film is a fascinating and touching study of a little girl lost between the realms of fantasy and reality. Six-year-old Amy Reed (Ann Carter) is a sensitive, lonely but imaginative girl who believes that butterflies are her friends. Amy’s affinity with nature, her active imagination as well as her innocence, cast her clearly in the Romantic mould of other Hollywood screen children. That active imagination deeply disturbs her father (Kent Smith), especially Amy’s apparent failure to distinguish fact from fantasy. He fears that Amy’s fantasies might lead her into madness, which is what drove his first wife Irena (Simone Simon) to her death (the Cat Woman of the original Cat People). To escape loneliness and rejection, Amy uses her imagination to conjure up a friend and playmate, who later takes on the likeness of Irena. However, Mr Reed mistakes Amy’s ‘refusal’ to give up her fantasies for disobedience and so resorts to giving her a spanking (further testimony to the persistence of Calvinist ideologies of childhood). But Curse of the Cat People, with its portrait of innocence threatened by a world that is often as cruel and frightening as it is hypocritical, suggests that fantasy just might have adaptive value for young children by helping them overcome their basic fears and thus attain new levels of maturity (Telotte 58–9). Here we can discern the tensions between innocence and experience, which are represented in the simultaneously childlike and parental figure of Irena. The film plays ambiguously on the frontiers of Todorov’s realm of the fantastic, between the uncanny and the
marvellous: it is possible to read Irena either as a product of Amy’s childish imagination or as an actual ghost ‘haunting’ Amy. In fact, Curse of the Cat People may be counted as one of the few narratives to approach the fantastic in its pure state, which maintains the ambiguity to the very end. This blurring between childhood reality and fantasy is similarly implied in Audrey Rose.

In Audrey Rose, pretty eleven-year-old Ivy (played by newcomer Susan Swift) is the only child of well-to-do parents, high-flying Madison Avenue advertising executive Bill Templeton (John Beck) and his wife Janice (Marsha Mason). Ivy is lost between the permeable realms of her earthly existence and her recurrent nightmares of hell. This reveals the film’s clearly Puritan as well as Roman Catholic preoccupations. This is also the source of sharp tensions between Calvinist and Romantic ideologies. On a more subtle and sophisticated level, however, Audrey Rose, like The Turn of the Screw and The Exorcist, unveils tensions bound up with notions of guilt, innocence and agency. The possessed child is most fascinatingly written between Eastern and Western religion. Ivy is a child of the New Age. As with my reading of The Exorcist, I will be focusing on the film, but using the novel to supplement my reading.

Wise’s montage over the opening credits rather cloyingly conveys the loving and close-knit nature of the Templeton family. Bill and Janice are shown spending ‘quality time’ with their young daughter in New York’s Central Park. The message is clear: it is a happy and ‘central’ family and Ivy is a happy child, full of laughter. The next few reels elaborate on this tender family portrait, which shows a couple very much in love, and a model daughter who enjoys an especially close relationship with both her parents. Threatening this familial bliss, however, is the sinister, heavily bearded figure of Elliot Hoover (Anthony Hopkins), who has been keeping a close watch on the family, in particular, showing an unseemly interest in Ivy. Unnerved by his presence, Janice becomes convinced that ‘he’s after’ Ivy. Bill turns to the police for help and protection, but is told by a detective that the law can’t help him because Hoover hasn’t broken the law, so adding to the father’s sense of helplessness. The suspense heightens. Hoover’s watching becomes increasingly invasive. He phones the house to see if Ivy is ‘all right’ when she is absent from school one day; he sneaks Ivy a gift (a brocaded purse) into the shopping trolley while Bill is waiting in the supermarket queue; and he even escorts Ivy home from school after her mother fails to pick her up. In her first communication with Hoover, Janice asks what we – the viewers – have been anxious to know from the beginning: ‘Who are you? What do you want?’
All is revealed when a clean-shaven Hoover shares with the Templetons his profound mystical experiences in India; his conversion from scoffer and disbeliever to true believer; and his indoctrination into the ‘truth’ about the transmigration of souls. Acting on information given to him by psychics, he informs the Templetons that he believes Ivy to be the reincarnation of his dead daughter, Audrey Rose, who was tragically consumed by flames with her mother in a car crash one stormy day eleven years ago. Ivy was born, he points out, moments after Audrey Rose died (the herbaceous associations of ‘Rose’ and ‘Ivy’ link them). Bill won’t be swayed, but Janice becomes more and more convinced of his incredible claims, especially when it appears that Ivy is reliving the trauma of Audrey Rose’s fiery demise.

Ivy suffers from terrible nightmares which we are told have happened before, when Ivy was ten and six. These nightmares become more frequent and intense, until they are full-blown somnambulistic-type hysterical episodes, during which she lets out high-pitched screams, flails her arms and runs in circles, knocking over objects and furniture (she poses more of a danger to herself than to others). In one of the film’s most effective set-pieces, Ivy beats her hands on a cold window pane and *singes* them, just as Audrey Rose did on the hot car window trying to escape the inferno that fateful day (this is later replayed, with Wise filming from the outside ‘looking in’ from a storm, highlighting Ivy/Audrey Rose’s sense of entrapment). Though Bill tries to attribute these burns to the radiator, we are not so easily persuaded.

It appears that we have just crossed from Todorov’s realm of the uncanny to that of the marvellous – no rational explanation is forthcoming. Bill, as usual, is in denial about his daughter’s decline. Janice, by contrast, is the only one with enough sense to ask: ‘What’s going on? What’s happening to Ivy?’

It transpires that only Hoover can calm Ivy from one of her hysterical fits by calling her ‘Audrey Rose’. Hoover later kidnaps her and takes her to his apartment in the same hotel as the Templetons. He is subsequently put on trial, whereupon the defence pleads his case ‘unique in the annals of Anglo-Saxon jurisprudence’ for reincarnation as reality. To settle the matter, hypnotism is used to cause Ivy to regress into a former lifetime to find out whether or not she is the reincarnation of Audrey Rose. But in reliving Audrey Rose’s violent death, Ivy’s body (mirroring Miles’s fate in *The Turn of the Screw*) gives out and she dies from the ordeal, the hypnotism here a form of exorcism. The film seeks to reassure us with its ‘uplifting’ message that while Ivy’s body is gone, her soul continues to exist. At the end, Janice realises that children are
not possessions and herein lies the explicit moral to the story. The ideological agenda, however, is far more complex and needs unpacking.

_Audrey Rose_ is not unique in its treatment of reincarnation as a form of possession. John Blackburn’s _Nothing but the Night_ (1968), filmed in 1972, similarly has a little girl relive over and over again a traumatic incident that actually happened thirty years earlier to a woman now dead. _The Antichrist_, Alberto de Martino’s stylish imitation of _The Exorcist_, also merges reincarnation with possession. (The uncanny parallels between _Audrey Rose_ and _Cathy’s Curse_ (1976) are apparently coincidental. In the low-budget Canadian production, eight-year-old Cathy ventures into the attic of her new house and finds an old rag doll once belonging to a little girl who died in a fiery car crash many years before. The doll carries with it a curse and very soon Cathy is invaded by the spirit of the dead girl, which leads to the familiar _Exorcist_-type phenomena.) Though the concepts need not be considered contradictory, _Audrey Rose_ discloses a certain tension between reincarnation and possession. That is, it hovers uncertainly between these interpretations, as if they were interchangeable. Yet whether Ivy is the reincarnation of Audrey Rose or Ivy is possessed by the spirit of Audrey Rose – or both – is crucial to our understanding. Specifically, it raises questions about how many lost children we have here. That is, are Ivy and Audrey Rose two identities or one?

The tension, or confusion, exists in the two versions of Hoover’s biographical account of Ivy to the Templetons given in De Felitta’s novel. In the first version, Hoover is telling them how, according to information obtained from psychics, Ivy and Audrey Rose were combined so ‘dramatically that they were the same person, they were one and the same’ (82), and Audrey Rose ‘was my daughter, in your daughter, born again’ (83). This presents a clear case for reincarnation, which casts Ivy and Audrey Rose as a single identity. This is also the Templetons’ understanding. Yet in the second version – interrupted only by some twenty-odd pages – Hoover relates a story that now sounds suspiciously like possession. This time Hoover is telling the Templetons how, according to information drawn from the same psychics, ‘my daughter has returned to life, in the body of another person’, and ‘my daughter is living in the body of a child named Ivy’ (105). Accordingly, this casts Ivy and Audrey Rose as separate identities (although this renders Ivy little more than a receptor of a soul, an empty shell). This is reflected in the film’s insistent doubling of Ivy – an effect maintained to the very end not only through the motif of windows but mirrors (Combs 188). In the film version, Janice cries helplessly, ‘My daughter
is not possessed!’ and, though Hoover asserts that he is not talking about possession but reincarnation, Janice’s confusion is fully justified. Not even Hoover seems to know what he is talking about. The way both the novel and film weirdly combine the two propositions moots the possibility of the cycle of reincarnation entailing a continuing cycle of possessions and repossessions. Indeed, this is the premise of Frank De Felitta’s unnecessary sequel, *For Love of Audrey Rose* (1982).

Ivy is figured as a little girl lost in a nightmare, in limbo it seems between life and death. In medieval times, it was believed that children who died unbaptised were trapped in limbo, refused entry into the kingdom of God and doomed to suffer the pains of everlasting hell. Ivy, the novel indicates, has not been baptised. This consequently undermines her innocent status and also heightens her vulnerability to demoniacal and changeling attacks. Although she is in ‘mortal danger’ (that is, she could die), there is more at stake here, insists Hoover, than Ivy’s body, her physical welfare or well-being. It is her immortal soul crying out for help. He tells Janice: ‘We are dealing with a soul that is indestructible and yet is struggling to get free because it is in terrible pain and torment.’ In these terms Hoover carefully preserves the Eastern separation between body and soul. Yet this is where the Western tensions between Calvinist and Romantic ideologies are quite stark. The flames that consumed Audrey Rose signify the flames of damnation (a salient feature of the original publicity art for the book and film). Ivy is not so much born as she is reborn in ‘sin’. The intense Calvinist imagery of hellfire is played off against Ivy’s innocence and helplessness and suffering. In this way, Ivy recalls poor Flora in *The Turn of the Screw*, whose soul could be suffering the torments ‘Of the lost. Of the damned’ (James 198). Yet she is not literally damned: her tortured soul – Audrey Rose’s soul – has returned too soon and must ‘go back’. When she beats her hands on the windowpane, it can be seen that she is trying both to get out and get in, trying to escape the fires of hell and enter the gateway to heaven.4

*Audrey Rose* naively posits a unified theory of religion. Specifically, De Felitta’s script seeks to reconcile tenets of Christian religion with Eastern philosophy, by somehow recombining the notion of an afterlife in resurrection with multiple afterlives in reincarnation, forcing an uneasy reconfiguration of ideologies. Historic Puritan America meets Roman Catholic and New Age America of the 1960s and 1970s. But this is tantamount to doublethink. In most mainstream Christian accounts of resurrection, the continuance of a person’s spirit or soul is tied to the ‘rebirth’ of the *body* or flesh. Even then this is to occur
only with the coming of the Messiah and the Last Judgement. Resurrection of the body is a key article of the Catholic faith and ‘means not only that the immortal soul will live on after death, but that even our “mortal body” will come to life again’ (Roman Catholic Church, *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 258), albeit in new and glorified form. This is fundamentally at odds with Buddhist and Hindu accounts of reincarnation, the rebirth of the indestructible spirit or soul in a new or different body. By this reckoning, the two concepts are in fact irreconcilable.

There is a quite extraordinary moment in De Felitta’s novel which confronts the irreconcilable difference between reincarnation and resurrection, between Eastern and Western religion (the scene was significantly not filmed). Convinced that Hoover and Audrey Rose are God’s retribution, Janice turns desperately to religion for help, as does Regan’s mother in *The Exorcist*. But the priest offers her very little sympathy. Rather, he chastises her for abandoning her faith: ‘Do you think you would be in this trouble if you had held on to what you were given? To what God gave you?’ (164). As we can expect, the priest quickly dismisses Hoover’s theory about reincarnation, and this is where the book quietly unravels. ‘You must know the texts,’ he tells Janice, ‘The Gospels do not substantiate such a belief. We don’t hold with such beliefs. We believe in endings, and beginnings, and middles. A life doesn’t travel around in circles. There’s a movement, there’s a drive to our life, there are goals… we’re going somewhere!’ (164). After the encounter, however, the priest is left feeling ‘very confused and … useless’ (165). One wonders here whether his state of mind is a reflection of Frank De Felitta’s.

On the second occasion that Hoover subdued Ivy during one of her fits Janice rediscovers her Catholic faith and recites the Act of Contrition, which appropriately refers to the ‘dread of the loss of heaven’ and the ‘pains of hell’ in its plea for God’s forgiveness. We are then treated to a sermon by Hoover on the truth about reincarnation. Thus East confronts West. Later, Wise dissolves from a close-up of a pensive-looking Hoover seated in the court room to third world images of India’s true believers venerating the Hindu gods, cremating their dead and immersing themselves in the Ganges (water in this context symbolises not Ivy’s tears and destruction but rebirth and purification). At the same time chants of Hare Krishna dominate the soundtrack, which carries over to the dissolve back onto Hoover’s face. Wise then cuts to Ivy and her schoolmates at a Catholic parochial school enacting the primitive rite of driving the snowman away. They are walking
round and round the snowman under construction singing ‘hallelujah’ which, through Wise’s skilful juxtaposition of sound and image, connotes the cycle of reincarnation. Nor is this just an innocent child’s game. Later, when the snowman is burnt in effigy, the flames again invoke the flames of damnation, so this is Catholicism informed by Calvinism informed by paganism informed by Eastern mysticism. Jewish mysticism is also added to this weird cocktail of religions. There is a passing reference to the Dybbuk, the doomed soul in the folklore of the Kabbala that transmigrates into the body of a living person to inflict moral and spiritual torture, presumably to provide esoteric support for a Judaic belief in reincarnation. However, despite ambitious attempts by De Felitta and Wise to show how the tenets of these various religions are part of an overall discourse (what Huxley tried more persuasively in *The Perennial Philosophy* (1944)), what we have is a number of discourses vying with each other.

Equally spurious is the way the film transforms the courtroom into a lecture theatre in order to prime us on the ‘facts’ about reincarnation. Not content with proving that reincarnation is Hoover’s reality, the defence seeks to make its landmark case for reincarnation as reality. The defence rests on a nonsequitur: that because over 700 million people in the world subscribe to the belief in reincarnation, we should also subscribe to this belief. Hence, we are treated to testimony by so-called ‘experts’ on reincarnation. Once, while the Maharishi is delivering his lecture to the courtroom on the workings of reincarnation, the film makes its monumental digression into third world images of Indian life and spirituality. The viewer can be forgiven for forgetting that this is De Felitta’s reality, not mainstream America’s reality, and that one culture’s beliefs cannot simply imposed onto another. Yet, in completely downplaying the role of Christianity in Western culture, this is what the film in its total naiveté appears to be promising. Everman perhaps sums *Audrey Rose* up best in his highly entertaining anthology, *Cult Horror Films*: ‘[the film] is little more than propaganda for reincarnation, with endless lectures by Hoover on how it works and how true it is. The movie simply tells us what to think, as if we are incapable of thinking for ourselves. Whether reincarnation is really true or not is beside the point’ (25). Underneath this propaganda and mind control, *Audrey Rose* ideologically self-destructs.

As in *The Exorcist*, the child in *Audrey Rose* is reduced to erotic/eroticised object for the characters in the film story as well as viewers of the film. As in *The Exorcist*, the determining male gaze projects its paedophiliac fantasy onto a budding girl-child’s body. Significantly,
Ivy is only days away from her twelfth birthday. She is ‘growing up’, approaching womanhood, hence the almost obligatory early aside reference to puberty as Ivy marvels over her friend Jill’s premature menstruation (she is only nine years old). From the opening pages of De Felitta’s novel Ivy is sexualised, possessing ‘a feminine elegance that seemed out of place for her young age’ (11), and a ‘sensual mouth’ on which only a smile is able to restore ‘childhood to innocence’ (12).

And Janice’s fears about her attractive daughter’s emergent sexuality are, from what we can gather, justified. Her daughter’s effect on the grown men around her, including their family friend Russ, is far from subtle and this is rather tastelessly styled in terms of the male gaze. ‘“Hey, you’re really getting there kid,” he said, his eyes shifting fleetingly to her breasts, peeking impudently through the sheer material’ (19). The phrase ‘peeking impudently’ is a cunning play on words, which not only refers to the impudent male gaze but also gives Ivy sexual agency, which is itself a displacement of the male. Given this male attention, Janice wonders with pain and puzzlement and nostalgic regret ‘where the childhood had gone and why so fast’ (19), despite the fact that in the novel Ivy is only ten years old. (Tellingly, Brooke Shields, on the verge of being touted as ‘the World’s Sexiest Eleven-Year-Old’ (Sinclair 48), appeared on the paperback cover of De Felitta’s novel.)

Hoover’s obsessive watching behaviour outside Ivy’s school is an explicit articulation of the voyeuristic male gaze: he is the bearer of the ‘look’. In the novel, Janice tries to convince herself that there is nothing ‘sexual in his look, or depraved’ (14), but the sexual implications of that look cannot be avoided in light of contemporary discourses about paedophilia. According to Kincaid, the paedophile ‘is our most important citizen, so long as he stays behind the tree or over in the next yard: without him we would have no agreeable explanation for the attractions of the empty child. We must have the deformed monster in order to assure us that our own profiles are proportionate’ (Child-Loving 5). Audrey Rose specifically draws on the ‘gothic’ dirty-old-man-in-a-raincoat stereotype of the paedophile who ‘attacks innocent young children in isolated spots, rapes them and then leaves the child in a permanent state of shock and damage’ (Plummer 224, emphasis in original). This (mis)perception of the paedophile as a recognisably monstrous figure was particularly strong in the American consciousness in the 1970s and 1980s. In the film, Hoover, sporting a heavy beard and a trench coat, makes a particularly sinister dirty old man on whom to displace unacceptable
The sensational cover illustration of the 1975 American paperback edition of *Audrey Rose* by Frank De Felitta. The likeness of the young girl in the foreground is of Brooke Shields, about to be touted the ‘world’s sexiest eleven year old’. Oddly (but tellingly), this loaded image of childhood and femininity was retained in the marketing campaign for the film, despite the fact that Brooke Shields does not actually appear in the film (!)
That Ivy is a week short of her twelfth birthday fits in neatly with Erikson’s psychosocial stage. Her ‘lostness’ is represented most clearly as an identity crisis; she has lost touch with her sense of self. On a sub-textual level, this explains her temper tantrums, her delinquent behaviour: she is a distraught adolescent struggling to form an ego identity. To the end, Ivy is only very dimly aware of what is happening to her, even when Audrey Rose’s nightmare starts spilling into her waking thoughts. She cannot recall, for instance, burning her hands on the windowpane; or later, at her school, walking trance-like into a bonfire (read: hellfire), with a complete disregard for her welfare and safety. It would not be difficult to imagine how these gaps in her memory would create role confusion because memory, after all, establishes a crucial psychological need for a continuous consciousness over time and therefore a sense of stability of identity. When Janice patiently explains to her daughter that Hoover ‘sees’ something in Ivy belonging to Audrey Rose, Ivy responds self-protectingly: ‘But it can’t be true. I’m my own self – and I’m not somebody else.’ The following scene, where Ivy stares weirdly into the mirror and whispers, ‘Audrey Rose, Audrey Rose’, suggests however that she is not only attempting to contact the ‘other’ but also is trying on another self, as described by Erikson.

Ivy’s struggle to come to terms with her ‘split personality’ involves coming to terms with ‘repressed’ memories of her former self. In the film, Ivy’s growing concern about her diminishing sense of self and her overwhelming need to know who she ‘really’ is are heard in Ivy’s impassioned pleas to her mother to allow her to go through the regression-through-hypnosis experiment.

IVY: But I want to [go through with the hypnotism]. I want to know what’s wrong with me. I want to know who I am.
JANICE: Who you are? You are Ivy Templeton. My daughter.
IVY: But Hoover says I’m his daughter.
JANICE: You are my child.
IVY: I’m not sure any more who I am, mom, and [more emphatic] I wanna know, I’ve gotta know.

The above psychologising of the child has grave implications, in so far as Ivy’s overwhelming need to know is in tension with the Romantic conception of childhood innocence as a state of ignorance, a not knowing. It is this desire for knowledge and experience that threatens to make Ivy fall. Thus Ivy is complicit in her own downfall.
paedophiliac desires. His bearded countenance in the opening scenes makes him look much older than later when he shaves off his paedophile’s disguise, invoking Grimm-like images of a Big, Bad Wolf on the prowl.

*Audrey Rose* is predicated on a world that is dangerous and unsafe for children – a world populated by ‘depraved’ men like Hoover. As in Fritz Lang’s *M* (1931), there is a cautionary subtext about children needing our love, care and, above all, protection. Hence Ivy’s innocence, dependence and vulnerability are stressed. *The Exorcist* suggests that we should lock up our sons and especially our daughters or they might veer dangerously out of control. *Audrey Rose* suggests that we should lock up our sons and especially our daughters or somebody might molest or kill them. Thus standing among the throng of eager mothers, Janice waits for her daughter to be released from the prison-house of school. She then hurries home with Ivy to their lavish New York apartment (the famed Hotel Des Artistes with its wood nymph murals) where her first act on entering the apartment is to lock and chain bolt the door. She then mistakes her husband for an intruder. The film exploits her xenophobia to the point of hysteria (she *is* the hysterical woman). Although relieved that Ivy is safe and ‘untouched’ after being escorted home by Hoover, she very nearly shakes the life out of her daughter, screaming: ‘You are never NEVER to leave school without me, do you understand me?! Under no circumstances do you go away with strangers! You sit in that school office and even if you have to you just wait and you wait and you wait. Do you understand me Ivy?’ ‘Yes, Mummy,’ Ivy whimpers, ‘You’re hurting me.’ Judging from Janice’s behaviour in this scene, it seems that children also need to be protected from potentially harmful parental (especially maternal) paranoia.

*Audrey Rose* enacts a very phallocentric struggle, which is played out against the discourse of the child and childhood as property and territory. In contrast to the absent fathers in *The Turn of the Screw* and *The Exorcist*, Ivy curiously suffers from having too many father-figures. The film plays like a custody battle over Ivy but, above all, between the two father-figures, Bill and Hoover (significantly, her name is Ivy, from the Greek for ‘clinging’, which indeed sums up Bill’s and Hoover’s attentions towards her). No wonder then that Ivy is so tortured and confused – lost. In befriending the family, Hoover announces his intentions to become part of Ivy’s life, ‘to see Ivy occasionally, help where I can’. In other words, he wants to be a *second* father to Ivy. Hoover’s first encroachment on Bill’s fatherhood comes when Ivy mistakenly assumes
that the purse smuggled into the household by Hoover is from her father. An ecstatic Ivy declares that it is ‘the first grown-up present I’ve gotten’, in effect expressing her preference for the other father, Hoover (though she does not realise it).

Bill’s role as father to his little ‘Princess’ is more seriously challenged in the scene where Hoover first subdues Ivy after one of her uncontrollable episodes, the only one who can (Bill and Janice try but fail). Calling her by his dead daughter’s name he soothes and beckons her: ‘It’s me, Daddy … it’s Daddy.’ That Ivy goes to Hoover and not Bill and falls asleep in his arms again shows Ivy’s preference for the other father. Upstaged by Hoover, Ivy is no longer ‘daddy’s little girl’. No wonder that Bill – harbouring a deep resentment – lashes out at him, ‘Bastard! Damn you, Hoover, damn you!’ and physically assaults him. Hoover is not only intent on usurping Bill’s place as father to Ivy but also as husband to Janice. His ‘secret pact’ with Janice about mending Ivy/Audrey Rose’s soul by forming a tight bond between them pushes Bill conspicuously out of the picture. It also hints at a sexual bond between them. ‘We’re both a part of this child, Mrs Templeton,’ he tells her, ‘We both had to do with the making of her. You and I.’ Bill doesn’t figure here at all. Things become involved when the two fathers wrestle in the hallway of the apartment building, nearly throttling each other, each staking their ‘claim’ to Ivy. Thus, the film expands the theme of possession not only to include Ivy’s possession by Audrey Rose, but also Ivy’s possession by Bill and Janice and Hoover.

The family in *Audrey Rose* is threatened by forces without and within. How quickly it starts to break down once Hoover has infiltrated the family. Though in the early sequences Bill and Janice appear to be happy, secure and deeply in love, in no time Janice starts reproaching her husband for not being ‘here’ when she needs him most (after Ivy has had another of her fits). She even turns on him with her fists and warns him to ‘Stay away from me’. If Bill is more absent than present, the same charge cannot be made for Hoover. He seems to be always on hand, albeit more than is attributable to coincidence. And though Bill promises to be here for her from now on, the family is revealed in all its brittleness, its insecurity, its vulnerability: so much for love and solidarity. Thus Hoover is seen to cause the family to break down, which in turn causes the ‘broken’ child. Yet it appears that the family is solid only when the child is ‘together’. Thus the broken child (and in this case it is a child’s soul that has been broken, and needs to be mended), in turn, causes the broken family.
Husband and wife become completely estranged by the end of the film. Janice tries to dissuade her husband from allowing Ivy to go through with the regression-through-hypnosis experiment, and it is as if Bill is aware of some ‘conspiracy’ between her and Hoover when he says: ‘I know what you want, Janice, you want me to turn my child over to Elliot Hoover.’ ‘Don’t do this,’ she implores. ‘Don’t do what?’ he says and here misses Janice’s meaning entirely: ‘Don’t destroy the man who’s trying to rob me of my family?’ ‘Don’t destroy our child.’ In allowing Ivy to be hypnotised, Bill not only wants to prove that Ivy is not the reincarnation of Audrey Rose but also, more importantly, that Hoover is insane and should be certified. But, blinded by male ambition, Bill ends up striking the death knell for his own daughter.

With fatherhood reduced to a quite ludicrous Darwinian struggle where only the strong survive, love for Ivy cannot possibly compete with power. This power is situated in the active male; the female can do little more than be subject to this power. Male power derives symbolically from possession of a penis. The female’s lack of a penis is underestimated in the book and film. However, this ‘inferiority’ in the female mobilises an underlying fear in the male: her body, with its lack of a penis, always threatens to evoke male castration anxiety. For Freud the young daughter’s lack of a penis is accompanied by a sense of loss. The daughter blames her mother for her lack and consequently feels inferior, loving her mother less. Indeed, she may even develop feelings of hatred towards the mother (Schultz 65). This lack of a penis gives rise to penis envy, and so the girl transfers her attention from her mother as primary love-object to her father, who possesses the coveted and all-powerful penis.

The Electral/oedipal overtones of Ivy’s relationship with her father/father figures cannot be denied. For example, there is more than a hint of penis envy in Ivy’s poem to her father in De Felitta’s novel:

My dad is big, my dad is strong,  
He never does a thing that is wrong.  
His voice is firm, his laughter gay,  
I think of him throughout the day.  
Oh, how lucky ‘tis to be  
A part of such a man as he. (37)

With incest unmistakably in the air – the last two lines even allude to a sexual union between father and daughter – Bill promises Ivy he will try to live up to this masculine ideal (37). But later, in both the novel
and the film, Bill’s masculinity is seriously undermined when Ivy discovers the purse actually given to her by his rival Hoover. That Hoover gives Ivy a purse is itself significant: a Freudian symbol of the womb as well as common sexual obscenity (the notion is in fact pre-Freudian, at least as old as Shakespeare). (In case we miss its significance, the design on the purse is similar to the erotic Fragonard-style ceiling paintings in the Templetons’ apartment.) If for Hoover the gift signifies Ivy as castrated female figure, then for Bill it signifies something very different: Ivy as castrating female figure. The castrating female figure, or femme castratrice, is but one of the faces of the ‘monstrous feminine’ identified by Creed. In *The Exorcist*, Regan is transformed into a femme castratrice when she grips her hypnotist’s genitals with supernormal force and sends him reeling to the floor. The way the novel and film play off this shifting image of Ivy as castrated versus castrating female figure gives rise to tensions between Ivy as vulnerable and innocent versus predatory and corrupt. In other words, the ‘good’ child of Romantic ideology opposes and corrects the ‘bad’ child of Calvinist ideology.

Ivy’s ‘madness’ in the film is transformed into an object of spectacle by the courtroom, relayed by the media to the rest of the world in typical sensationalist fashion. However, Ivy’s madness is most clearly spectactularised (as well as specularised) in the hospital theatre scene where her ‘performance’ is watched by a roomful of jurors behind a one-way mirror. The film plays directly on a voyeuristic fantasy, and here Mulvey’s observations on the visual pleasures of cinema are extremely relevant. The ‘hermetically sealed world of cinema’, which unfolds intransitively, as it were, ‘indifferent to the presence of the audience’ (17), creates for them the impression of voyeuristic separation, as does the extreme contrast between the darkness of the auditorium and the light and shade of the cinema screen. In turn, this gives the audience the impression ‘of looking in on a private world’ (17). In *Audrey Rose*, this voyeuristic separation is articulated explicitly. The observation room, with its one-way mirror, offers the jurors front-row seats into a private world and functions as a virtual cinema screen. Yet we, the viewers, also become players in this voyeuristic fantasy, by watching a film of jurors watching a ‘film’ of Ivy. It is as if the cinema is drawing attention to itself as voyeurism, and this gives rise to shifting tensions on both sides of the screen. Given the strong voyeuristic implications, it is no surprise that Ivy is eroticised in the manner of Regan by the camera in this scene, reduced to the status of paedophiliac object under the curious and controlling male gaze.
As in *The Exorcist*, the medical gaze becomes subsumed under the male gaze, and Ivy is not only spectacularised but psychiatrised. In *Audrey Rose*, the medical gaze is concentrated in the impressive, earnest and learned figure of Dr Lipscomb (Norman Lloyd). His expert eye is seen to have the authority to bring the ‘truth’ to light, and his manifestly arrogant tone to the jurors during his briefing is sufficient to cement the link between power and medical knowledge. Yet in light of what follows it is difficult not to see Dr Lipscomb as a ‘fall guy’, where medical science ultimately fails Audrey Rose/Ivy. That eye is aided by modern technology: Ivy’s performance is being televised to a roomful of reporters. The overall effect is of a film within a film within a film. That Janice elects to watch the hypnotism from this vantage-point (and not with the others in the theatre) is significant and requires special commentary.

As with Chris in *The Exorcist* it is possible to see Janice as reduced to voyeur. However, *Audrey Rose* goes further by transmogrifying Janice into a paedophile. In this scene she is even dressed in a (blue) trench coat, in the style of Hoover in his wolf man/paedophile’s disguise. That she opts to watch the television screen subtly links her with her hobby: photography. She is the one shown, early on, in her makeshift dark-room developing shots of Ivy and of Ivy with her father, poring over images of childhood beauty and laughter and innocence. This alignment of childhood with happiness, the happy child or child as happiness, is deeply Romantic (Kincaid, *Erotic Innocence* 281). Unfortunately, the eye of Janice’s camera is closely connected with paedophilia and voyeurism, as well as nostalgia. The paedophiliac obsession with photographing children before they slip away, before the ‘bloom’, can no longer be captured, was shared by Lewis Carroll and J. M. Barrie (Kincaid, *Child-Loving* 227–8). It is sometimes said that analysing the beauty of the subject destroys or kills it, while for Susan Sontag to ‘photograph people is to violate them, by seeing them as they never see themselves, by having knowledge of them they can never have; it turns people into objects that can be symbolically possessed. Just as the camera is a sublimation of the gun, to photograph is a sublimated murder’ (14). In *Audrey Rose*, the child has been murdered, metaphorically speaking, by Janice’s photography. In her efforts to possess the child – to capture in a static image Ivy’s beauty and laughter and innocence – Janice has in a sense rendered Ivy static, lifeless, dead. It is fitting then that when Janice plays Scrabble with her daughter, Ivy adds an ‘s’ to Janice’s word ‘laughter’ (but one of the film’s insidious signifiers). That is, Ivy’s laughter becomes slaughter, slaughtered by
Janice. There is something quite morbid and crass about Janice’s photographs, which figure prominently in the *mise-en-scène*. If Janice is in fact transmogrified into a paedophile, then Wise and De Felitta are ascribing extraordinary intentions to the ‘good mother’. This has grim implications as far as motherhood/matriarchy and the safekeeping of the child and childhood are concerned. Chillingly, *Audrey Rose* draws the conclusion that there is a paedophile buried deep within all of us. Kincaid would concur.

Janice’s watching behaviour in the hypnotism scene is open to a further reading. Given that the female body represents castration for the male, what does it mean for a woman to ‘look’ at herself? Stephen Heath, supplying the other side of Mulvey’s theoretical formulation, suggests that the woman’s look can serve only to entrap her further within the patriarchal structures of the gaze (92). To behold herself is to behold her own castration – the state she so exclusively represents for the male – and in doing so she threatens, so to speak, to cut off her own Medusa’s head. This is why she ‘must not look’ (Heath 92). Thus when Janice watches her daughter’s hypnotism she symbolically watches the horror of her own castration. In so doing, she quite literally ‘turns her child into the signifier of her own desire to possess a penis’ (Mulvey 14). Janice as mother also participates in this castration of both herself and her child: her photography not only entraps her but Ivy further within these patriarchal structures of seeing. (It seems that Ivy herself has become embroiled in this conspiracy against femininity and childhood, for it is she who asks her father to buy a camera for her mother.)

*Audrey Rose* is a film fuelled by the late 1970s anti-feminist backlash, in which men belong to the privileged and powerful order, women to the suppressed and marginalised. Pleading with her husband not to let Ivy go through with the regression experiment, Janice discovers to her horror and amazement that Women’s Liberation is dead and it is still a man’s world: a woman has no say in what happens to her child. Janice’s characterisation is pre-feminist. However, her marginalisation is not confined to male authority (Bill and Hoover): Janice’s own daughter has a significant role to play. Freud maintained that the girl undergoing the Electra Complex has a desire to compete with her mother for the father’s attention, to replace and even destroy her mother. In the film Ivy increasingly threatens Janice’s status as love-object to Bill as well as Hoover. In the hypnotism scene, *all* male attention shifts to the figure of the eroticised girl-child. Janice can be said hardly to exist. Consequently, there is the vague sense that Janice has become not so much replaced but displaced.
by her daughter's implied sexuality. Thus, if mother castrates daughter, daughter also ‘castrates’ mother.

In keeping with the gender oppositions, Bill is represented as sceptical and rational. ‘I can’t believe it,’ he tells Janice, ‘I don’t believe it. When I die, it’s going to be the end of me. No wings, no harps, no pitchforks, nothing. It’s done, it’s the end, it’s finished.’ Janice is represented as irrational, more open to the possibility of the supernatural—and, almost necessarily, hysterical. (It is perhaps suggestive that the other believer, Hoover, projects a slightly effeminate quality, while Bill is pure machismo.) In the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*, Michel Foucault discusses briefly the hysterisation of women’s bodies in the nineteenth century. The female body was represented as saturated with sexuality, as intrinsically pathological (104). ‘The Mother,’ he writes, ‘with her negative image of “nervous woman” constituted the most visible form of this hysterization’ (104). The nervous woman was but one of a gallery of personages of ‘an alliance gone bad and an abnormal sexuality’ (110). In *Audrey Rose*, Janice personifies this nervous woman with her sexuality gone wrong. The novel abounds with references to Janice’s overwrought and often hysterical state: her ‘tears and hysteria’ (62), her ‘full torrent of hysteria’ (70), her ‘rising hysteria’ (135). In the film version, she is given little else to do but shed tears for her daughter. Interestingly, in the film she resorts increasingly to alcohol, maladaptive behaviour more usually inscribed as male. On the one hand, Ivy’s hysterical fits are seen to trigger Janice’s hysteria; on the other, Janice infects her daughter with her hysteria. This is crystallised in the sequence where Janice berates her daughter for going home with a stranger. Both are reduced to tears and hysteria. Within the patriarchal ideology of the film, it suggests that hysterical mothers make hysterical daughters make hysterical mothers.

American pop psychology of the 1970s was obsessed with issues of personal choice and problems of identity, as well as Freud. However, it was one of Freud’s adherents, Erik Erikson, who first described the identity crisis as part of a highly influential personality theory. According to his psychosocial stages of development, the anxiety-laden task of adolescence (between the ages of 12 and 18) is to form an ego-identity, or a stable self-image that provides continuity between the past and future (Schultz 295). In order for this to occur, adolescents must try different roles and ideologies to ascertain the best fit. Those who fail to achieve a cohesive role identity are said to experience an identity crisis, or role confusion about who they are and where they going. And role confusion may lead to delinquent behaviour (Schultz 295).
In *Curse of the Cat People*, six-year-old Amy has trouble distinguishing between fantasy and reality. She fashions an imaginary playmate from the likeness of a woman she has seen only briefly in a photograph. Ivy, it is similarly implied, has trouble distinguishing between fantasy and reality. This is evident in Ivy’s early aside remark to her mother about her friend Jill fibbing or lying about menstruation. ‘Mum, do you believe it?’ she asks her mother. ‘No, I think she’s a fibber,’ says Janice. ‘She’s a liar!’ declares Ivy. ‘I didn’t say that’ is the rejoinder, ‘Girls like Jill just like to fantasise.’ If – as her mother says – young girls like Jill like to fantasise then maybe Ivy is fantasising too. ‘It would be fantastic to live forever,’ Ivy muses later. Fantastic is the operative word. It is quite clear that she has taken romantically to the notion of multiple afterlives, despite the fact that earlier Ivy is shown safeguarding her identity. Thus the following scene, where Ivy tries on her other self in the mirror and repeats ‘Audrey Rose, Audrey Rose’, suggests that she is engaging in a childish fantasy. In *The Exorcist*, the possibility that Regan’s symptoms stem from autosuggestion explains Father Karras’s ‘disappointment’ with Regan when she reacts violently to having ordinary tap water sprinkled on her, after he tells her that it is holy water. Maybe she did pluck her disorder from a book on witchcraft after all (Blatty, *The Exorcist* 171). As with Regan or Amy, Ivy’s symptoms might stem from autosuggestion: Ivy’s role-playing behaviour significantly takes place directly after Ivy has been made fully aware of the nature of Hoover’s interest in her. Although she has had the nightmares before, she has been kept up to that point largely ignorant and therefore innocent of Audrey Rose.

Graver still, Ivy in the bathroom mirror scene might be willingly asking Audrey Rose in, or summoning her other self which, if true, would place her in the same league as Regan and her Ouija board in *The Exorcist*. As Janice tells the court in the novel: ‘I found Ivy in the bathroom, standing naked in front of the mirror, looking at herself and giggling and whispering, “Audrey Rose”, as if she were calling to her, as if Audrey Rose were hiding somewhere inside her body and Ivy were trying to reach her’ (402). The scene has subtle lesbian implications, but only in so far as the male gaze is being invoked by the sight of one girl-child confronting another girl-child. Although the scene appears in the film, the image in the novel is of a naked Ivy standing in front of the mirror with ‘her budding breasts pressed close to the glass’ (332), which amplifies the sexual nature of Audrey Rose’s presence inside her. Perhaps the answer lies in the name Audrey Rose, the double-edged symbol of virgin purity (innocence) and raw sexuality (experience).
any case, this does not bode well for the cult of innocence of the child. As with Regan, it sketches a picture of Ivy as complicit in a seduction.

If we deconstruct and transform the hierarchical oppositions between man as privileged and woman as marginalised, we discover that the strongest figure in the film’s female triumvirate is Audrey Rose. Although only glimpsed in the prologue, she is Creed’s monstrous feminine. To be sure, there is something diabolical – less than ‘innocent’ – about Ivy’s possession by Audrey Rose. Why else does Wise cut portentously to the gargoyle with demonic features hanging outside Ivy’s bedroom just before or as she is about to have one of her fits? What is made more explicit in the novel is that Audrey Rose wants to kill Ivy. In Hoover’s words in the novel: ‘Audrey Rose will continue to abuse Ivy’s body until her soul is set free’ (178), as when she makes Ivy walk into the bonfire, scorching her face and hands. The preoccupation in the 1970s with harming the body of the girl-child (as seen in the sensationally abject figure of Regan in The Exorcist) betrays a very real fear of as well as fascination with the developing female body. As in The Exorcist, the preoccupation has strong Calvinist implications and suggests a state of affairs of trying to attack puberty by attacking the body, in the effort to return the body to a state of pre-sexual innocence, or, at least, stave off sexual corruption. But abjection incites desire, and so the developing female body has also been coded for erotic and visual impact. In its patriarchal-sexist implications, the onset of puberty in Audrey Rose symbolises, as in The Exorcist and Carrie, the threat of burgeoning feminine power. Consequently, a fear of emasculation permeates the film. In patriarchal response, Audrey Rose emerges as a blunt refusal to acknowledge a world and future of feminine equality.

The image of Audrey Rose as literally hell-bent on Ivy’s destruction also helps to construct her as monstrous. Janice strenuously objects to her daughter’s hypnotism – she fears (rightly, as it happens) that she will lose Ivy to Audrey Rose – yet, as in tragedy, Janice realises that there is nothing she can do to alter the course of events. The sense of predetermination surrounding Ivy is more oppressively felt in the novel than in the film, as Janice realises just prior to Ivy’s hypnotism: ‘there was no help for Ivy, no possibility of mortal help left for her child … Audrey Rose was not to be stopped … her will would prevail’ (431). Most disturbing is Janice’s conviction that her daughter has ‘become a willing part of Audrey Rose’s conspiracy’ (428), even if Ivy is ‘innocent’ of Audrey Rose’s murderous intent. With this nearly masochistic image of one girl-child trying to harm and kill another
girl-child, femininity in a sense has been turned against itself. This summarises part of the masculine project of *Audrey Rose*.

The love of a mother and two fathers proves not enough to save Ivy from a premature death. Her soul might be free and immortal, but her death still registers as a tragedy, not a ‘victory’. Audrey Rose has ‘won’. Whether Ivy’s death could have been avoided or not is difficult to say but, as with Miles in *The Turn of the Screw*, it is a terrible price to pay for having one’s soul set free. In the film, Janice’s closing line in her letter to Hoover in India (heard in voiceover) about Ivy one day finding a new family in a new life with parents who will ‘love her as we all loved her’ carries with it a hidden irony because, as I have shown, *Audrey Rose* is not about love but sexuality and power.

In *Audrey Rose*, the death of the possessed child is ultimately linked to the need to possess the child. By the end, Ivy’s basic innocence has become, like one of Janice’s photographs, trapped in time. She may seen in this regard as a variation on what Fiedler calls the Good Good Girl: that holiest of icons of the cult innocence of the child whose death is not only contrived to arouse feelings of pathos, but is also essential if she is to remain pure and uncontaminated. Thus innocence can go nowhere but to death, because living inevitably corrupts it. Overshadowing the relief and bittersweet joy that the child is growing up is the nostalgic regret for the loss of innocence of childhood by encroaching sexuality. It is death which freezes Ivy’s puberty, intercepting the passage from childhood (innocence) to adulthood (experience).

Yet the problem of whether Ivy has truly ‘found herself’ or not by the end persists. When Hoover smashes the one-way mirror with a chair to get to Ivy who is no longer Ivy but Audrey Rose, the shots of broken mirror suggest fragmentation of identity. In the moments leading up to Ivy’s death Dr Lipscomb makes the fatal mistake of addressing this child as Ivy and not Audrey Rose, which further suggests that she is without an identity and Hoover knows it too. ‘She’s not Ivy! She’s Audrey Rose!’ he shouts from the observation room. This casts further doubt on whether Ivy’s soul has been finally mended – put to rest – or is still, as it were, broken. There’s a very real feeling here that Ivy has been annulled, *erased*. Ivy’s death might be a victory not a tragedy, but the real victory belongs to masculinity.

The possessed child is in its most crucial sense a religious cultural construction. Along with the historic influence of Puritanism and the modern ascendancy of Roman Catholicism in the United States, which have joined forces to make the possessed child a landmark feature of
the American landscape, we find in *Audrey Rose* evidence of a further Eastern/New Age intersection. This coincides with the Eastern ‘invasion’ of the West in the late 1960s and 1970s. Symbolically, the possessed child is being employed as a *via media* between East and West, as well as between masculinity and femininity. However, it is deeply ironic that the child should end up lost between two competing systems of thought. The cultural specificity of the possessed child phenomenon is perhaps best seen by an examination of narratives from outside of an American cultural context. In the next chapter, I discuss the viability of the possessed child in British Anglican culture.
What sort of women more than others are found to be superstitious and infected with witchcraft; it must be said ... that three general vices appear to have special dominion over wicked women, namely, infidelity, ambition, and lust. Therefore they are more than others inclined towards witchcraft, who are more than others given to these vices. Again, since of these three vices the last chiefly predominates, women being insatiable, etc., it follows that those among ambitious women are more deeply infected who are more hot to satisfy their filthy lusts; and such are adulteresses, fornicatresses, and the concubines of the Great.

(Heinrich Kramer and James Sprenger, *The Malleus Maleficarum*, 1484)

In modern times the Church of England’s lack of an official exorcism rite became so intolerable that it was effectively forced to issue its own version of the *Roman Ritual*. This was contained in a 1972 document entitled simply *Exorcism* convened by the Bishop of Exeter. The document did not disguise the fact that it was responding to a growing public demand for exorcism:

In Western countries today, the widespread apostasy from the Christian faith, accompanied by an increasing recourse to black magic and occult practice is revealing the presence and the power of evil forces and the contaminating influence of an evil atmosphere in particular places and environments. The need, therefore, for the restoration of the practice of exorcism to its proper place is becoming steadily more urgent and more evident. (Petitpierre 10)
Remarkably, the document advocates centres of training for would-be exorcists, ‘if possible in collaboration with our Roman Catholic brethren’ (Petitpierre 26). The well-known Reverend Christopher Neil-Smith of Hampstead, London would value this ecumenical approach. Ordained in 1944, he is one of a handful of clerics to be given special permission by the Bishop of London to conduct exorcisms. In the 1970s he appeared on television and radio in various countries as an authority on exorcism, gaining a certain celebrity status. He has conducted a record number of 5,000 exorcisms, many of them by employing the laying-on of hands on the possessed. He related his experiences in a 1974 book entitled The Exorcist and the Possessed, where he declared that the ancient practice of ‘Exorcism is not just fiction with novelistic embellishment – it is a fact of human experience – an answer to human need in the present age’ (10). No doubt profiting from the moral panic generated by The Exorcist, his services were sought by parents of wayward – that is, possessed – teenagers (Marshall 45). Thus, as in the United States, old treatments for abnormal behaviour became current again.

However, alarmed by the growing practice of exorcism, and its wider acceptance by authorities in many English dioceses, an open letter signed by 65 theologians was sent in 1975 to the Archbishops of Canterbury and York and members of the General Synod of the Church of England urging them to disown the rite of exorcism. Carefully distancing themselves from their Roman Catholic ‘brethren’, they maintained that the exorcism rite was ‘at variance with the entire history and tradition of the Church of England’ (‘Academics Say Church Must Disown Exorcism’ 4). (The ruling of Canon 72 in 1604, which stipulates that exorcism could only be given with the authorisation of a bishop, effectively ended exorcism in the national Church; Thomas 579.) Hence their judgement that ‘exorcism should have no official status in the church at all’ (‘Academics Say Church Must Disown Exorcism’ 4). Although the Church of England retains much of the ceremonial framework of medieval Roman Catholicism (the Anglo-Catholic or High Church particularly is closer to the Catholic tradition than the Evangelical or Low Church or the Liberal or Modernist), it has historically been removed from the Catholic Church’s brand of ‘counter-magic’ and particularly the rite of exorcism. That is, while the Church of England upholds the belief in possession it makes no real provision for exorcism. Keith Thomas elucidates this crucial difference between Anglican and Catholic theology in his acclaimed history of

The Anglican Church had rejected holy water, the sign of the cross, and all the paraphernalia of the Roman Catholic exorcists, but had nothing to put in their place, save a general injunction to prayer and repentance. The church thus maintained the traditional view of the potency of witchcraft, although it had abandoned the ecclesiastical counter-magic which made such a nation tolerable. The sufferer who invoked a magical remedy ran the risk of finding himself prosecuted before the ecclesiastical courts … Better that a bewitched child should die, thought the clergy, than his life saved by a cunning man [village sorcerer or wizard]. (315–16)

According to Thomas’s thesis, the Protestant Reformation, along with the growth in the seventeenth century of the natural and social sciences, robbed religion of much of its magic. Today, in this increasingly secular age, the Church of England has espoused a far more morally construed kind of evil than the Roman Catholic Church’s concept of absolute supernatural evil.

It has been suggested that Puritanism emerged as an alternative to the Church of England. However, because of systematic repression and internal strife Puritanism’s influence was short-lived, never as marked in England as it was in Puritan New England. Some of the Church of England’s defendants, such as British theologian Richard Hooker who wrote the influential *The Laws of Ecclesiastical Piety* (1593–97), saw it as a compromise between the extremes of Catholicism and Puritanism (Green 191). As I have argued, the peculiar intensity of Calvinist ideologies of childhood in contemporary American culture is traceable to its Puritan New England heritage. These enduring Puritan strains combined with Roman Catholic beliefs played a major role in generating a plethora of representations of possessed and satanic children in the 1970s, more than in any other country. The American bias of the possessed child phenomenon is perhaps best illumined by an examination of narratives outside of an American cultural context. Henceforth I shall concentrate on the English cultural scene, where the precedence of Anglican religious discourses over Catholic discourses, and indeed a general antipathy for Catholic material, have made it very difficult for a possessed child narrative to be written in that country. A short literature review of the few exceptional cases that may be found seems warranted.
It seems that the possessed child in English culture is more likely to be treated within a science-fiction context, sans the religious overtones, as in John Wyndham’s *Chocky*, published in 1968. The novel in many ways represents an inversion of key themes and ideas of the possessed child topos. The most radical inversion is the possession of a child by a *benign* alien intelligence from outer space. Eleven-year-old Matthew, the adopted child of Mary and David Gore, is the child in question. He is an innocent Romantic child. The story, interestingly taken from the point of view of the concerned father, presents the first signs of Matthew’s possession as both harmless, yet vaguely disturbing. Matthew is overheard holding conversations with himself. Then there are the very ‘un-Matthew-like’ questions he asks of his parents, like ‘Why are there two sexes?’ or ‘Why is it a cow stops?’ ‘It’s more as if he’d somehow switched to a different track,’ Matthew’s mother is led to observe, ‘It’s a sudden change in quality – quality and approach’ (22). Particularly strange are the things he starts to do things that he could not do before – like counting in binary code mathematics. When the Gores’ finally seek help from psychologist/psychiatrist Landis (Wyndham seems to be unsure about which) for Matthew’s unhealthy Chocky fantasy, it is ironically the trained rationalist-scientist who must convince the parents that their son is indeed possessed by a disembodied alien intelligence. Actually, this possession, Landis helps to clarify, is less a form of domination than a ‘working arrangement’ (64). Above all, it is possession on Matthew’s terms, where co-operation is the key. In the course of the novel, Matthew’s working arrangement with Chocky progresses from mere tolerance to real affection. As well as serving as his teacher and mentor, there’s something very protective and *motherly* about Chocky and it is clearly significant that she is feminised in the story.

In the book’s dramatic highpoint, Chocky rescues Matthew and his sister Polly from drowning by taking over his body and showing him how to swim. Chocky’s deed is not surprising, given her passionate stance on the sanctity of intelligent life. Loosely underpinning Matthew’s possession here is the notion of the guardian angel. In traditional Roman Catholic doctrine, every human being has a guardian angel. However, the Roman Catholic Church (which in 1986 reasserted the existence of angels) has subscribed more readily to this belief than the Church of England and this is accordingly reflected in *Chocky*. Amusingly, Mrs Gore recounts to her husband how a dotty old clergyman, on learning about Matthew’s reported rescue by a so-called guardian angel, came to the family’s house to correct a serious theological error: “[for] the idea of a
guardian angel is not truly a Christian conception. It was one of those pagan beliefs which the early church had neglected to suppress so that it, along with a number of erroneous beliefs, had mistakenly and temporarily been incorporated into the true faith” (103). Tellingly, this is the extent of religious discourses informing Wyndham’s novel. In 1984, in association with the John Wyndham estate, the novel was faithfully adapted into a six-part children’s television series by Thames, which topped the children’s ratings and spawned two sequels. I reserve discussion of possessed child narratives addressed specifically to a child audience for the next chapter.

Published in the same year as Chocky, John Blackburn’s mystery-thriller Nothing but the Night also incorporates science-fiction elements in its treatment of the possessed child figure. In a bizarre hybrid of reincarnation and possession plots, some distinguished but ageing trustees of a charitable organisation called the Van Traylen Fellowship, which runs an orphanage located on the small Isle of Bala off the north-west coast of Scotland, are employing advanced physiological techniques to transplant their memories and personalities (or ‘souls’) into the minds and bodies of young children. (It is difficult to envisage a more complete way the child’s tabula rasa state has been colonised.) In the case of Mary Valley, aged seven, she is possessed by the Fellowship’s founder, Mrs Helen Van Traylen. There are superficial similarities between Mary Valley and her sister-in-possession Ivy Templeton in Audrey Rose. Like Ivy, Mary Valley suffers the torments of the lost, of the damned; and, like Ivy, she is reliving a fiery trauma that happened to her former guardian thirty years earlier. As in Audrey Rose, the possibility of eternal damnation is underscored by this melding of reincarnation with possession, which predicates a continuing cycle of possessions and repossessions. However, the possessed child in Blackburn’s novel serves little more than as a pretext for the plot. Like Damien in The Omen, Mary Valley is almost a complete cipher. Like Ivy/Audrey Rose, she and her fiendish companions belong to the order of dual personality figures that not only includes the invaded subject but the split personality. (Incidentally, the ‘abuse’ of the children by the trustees, particularly the torture killing of a little boy ritual-style, vaguely foreshadows the alleged satanic ritual abuse of children in the Scottish Isles in the 1990s.)

If the Catholic Church holds the monopoly on counter-magic and particularly exorcism, how does the possessed child in English/Anglican culture fare when it comes to dispossession and salvation? Can the possessed child indeed be dispossessed/saved? Perhaps significantly, the
book ends on the commemoration of Guy Fawkes night, which historically has been the focus of anti-Catholic sentiment. In the sudden and unexpected conclusion, Mary Valley/Helen Van Traylen throws herself off a cliff. The other children, realising their lost fate as freaks of science, follow her. Although the book specifically draws a parallel between the children’s fates and lemmings, the rodents of Norway hurling themselves into the sea, this offbeat ending makes more sense with its Biblical allusions to the famous Legion story, where Jesus casts the demons out of a man into the herd of Gadarene swine, which rush over the precipice and drown in a lake (Luke 8: 30–3).

The Exorcist presents the possessed child in a fully-developed Roman Catholic context, and dispossesses the child by the Roman Ritual. The child is saved. But without the Roman Ritual or equivalent in the Anglican arsenal to cast out invading spirits, Blackburn circumvents the problem by his subtle invoking of Jesus’ exorcism – except the children here are not so much dispossessed as they have been disposed of by Blackburn. It can hardly be said that the children have been saved. In terms of my religious/cultural hypothesis, the novel perfectly illustrates the effect of the absence of certain key religious discourses on the writing of the possessed child.

In 1975, Graham Masterton published his first horror novel The Manitou, which had a young white woman possessed by a 300-year-old Indian medicine man seeking to reincarnate itself via a foetal growth on the back of her neck. Four years later the Edinburgh-born writer, now living in Ireland, penned the sequel, Revenge of the Manitou, which dealt with a group of children possessed by the manitous or spirits of 22 medicine men bent on revenge on the white man for past injustices to Native Americans. Eight-year-old Toby is possessed by one of the greatest of Indian wonder-workers, Misquamacus. The boy’s father enlists the services of dubious mystic Harry Erskine and a modern-day medicine man named Singing Rock to help the children. The medicine men are eventually defeated by summoning up the manitous of white colonists. The lives of Toby and other children are saved. Tellingly, Masterton writes first and foremost for the American market, usually employing American settings, characters and dialogue. He also writes very much in the American tradition of horror, drawing freely on Lovecraft and his Cthulhu mythos for literary inspiration. Says Masterton in his special introduction to the 25th anniversary edition of The Manitou: ‘What I like about Lovecraft’s creations were that they were completely American, and not borrowed from the Old World’ (10). Thus it would seem ultimately problematic to discuss Revenge of the Manitou as a ‘legitimate’ British possessed child narrative. In drawing on Native American
mystical traditions rather than Roman Catholicism as its primary religious source, Masterton’s novel marks an interesting point of departure for possessed child representations. In later novels such as Mirror, Spirit (1995) and The Chosen Child (1997), Masterton attempts (with varying degrees of success) to remix the evil child formula.

More usually, however, writers and filmmakers, whether British or American, seem unable to imagine the possessed child without recourse to a Roman Catholic discourse, as in Peter Sasdy’s film I Don’t Want To Be Born (1975). (Sasdy also directed the possession films Hands of the Ripper (1971) and Nothing but the Night (1972), adapted from John Blackburn’s novel.) The film’s premise of a murderous baby, which Ray Bradbury managed to make almost plausible in his 1947 short story ‘The Small Assassin’, is given a ludicrous demonic treatment under Sasdy’s hammy direction. Joan Collins plays stripper Lucy, who decides to give up her sordid profession for marital bliss with Italian husband, Gino Carlesi (unconvincingly played by Ralph Bates). The opening scene shows her giving birth to an oversized baby boy, whom Dr Finch (Donald Pleasance) promptly announces ‘doesn’t want to be born’. It seems that the baby might belong to her one-time manager and not Gino. Either way, Lucy is being punished for her sexual transgressions. In a flashback sequence, we learn that she rejected the advances of a dwarf named Hercules. Not to be toyed with, he lays the following curse on her: ‘You will have a baby – a monster, an evil monster – conceived in your womb, as big as I am small and possessed by the Devil himself.’ The baby, it seems, is simultaneously possessed by the Devil and the dwarf and, in the course of the film, ‘Little Nicky’ kills a nurse, a doctor and both his parents. Given that the baby is possessed by the Devil, it is no trifling plot detail that the husband is Italian. As befits the story’s Catholic logic, his sister happens to be a nun visiting from Rome and it is she who, in the film’s finale, performs the obligatory exorcism. When the baby is exorcised, the dwarf dies. I Don’t Want to be Born represents the exception to the rule. However, rather than simply passing over such exceptions, I shall now examine the English novelist James Herbert’s ‘Mariological’ horror story Shrine (1983) in closer detail, and attempt to place it within the context of my religious/cultural hypothesis.

James Herbert’s Shrine

The Roman Catholic faith has a lively tradition of sightings of the Virgin Mary throughout the world. However, as can be expected, nearly all these sightings have taken place in Catholic countries – Spain, Italy,
Poland and France. Many of these places have since become holy
shrines visited by scores of pilgrims each year, such as those founded at
Guadalupe (1531), Lourdes (1858) and, most famously in the modern
world, Fatima (1917). Some of these shrines, like Lourdes, have become
the site of alleged miracles. Most of the great shrines in England were
destroyed during the Reformation when Henry VIII, in breaking from
the Catholic Church in Rome in 1534, established the Church of
England. Two of the best-known Catholic shrines in pre-Reformation
England (precious few have been founded in the post-Reformation
period) are those at Walsingham (1061) in Norfolk and Our Lady of
Mount Carmel (1251) in Aylseford. The shrine in Walsingham was once
one of the greatest in all of England and indeed Europe, visited by many
English kings, including ironically Henry VIII. After almost four cen-
turies, there have been concerted efforts on the part of both Catholics
and Anglicans to restore the shrine to its former prestige and glory. The
restored Slipper Chapel, situated near the site of the original shrine and
remarkably spared the vandalism of the Reformation, was, in 1897, the
site of a Roman Catholic pilgrimage, becoming in 1934 the Roman
Catholic National Shrine of Our Lady. The Slipper Chapel was visited by
the Archbishop of Canterbury in 1980. In the 1920s, the shrine at
Walsingham was rebuilt at the direction of an Anglican priest named
Alfred Hope Patten, preparing the way in 1927 for the first organised
Anglican pilgrimage to Walsingham. However, this almost ecumenical
spirit between Catholics and Anglicans in seeing Walsingham restored
as a site of pilgrimage is far from commonplace.2

Since the 1960s, there has been an increase in alleged sightings of the
Virgin Mary throughout the world. The theology of Mary, or Mariology,
remains a cornerstone of the Roman Catholic faith. As the chief symbol
of Christian piety the Virgin Mary, or Blessed Virgin, or Our Lady, is
venerated more highly than the other saints, such that in 1964 Pope
Paul VI proclaimed her ‘Mother of the Church’. She has been variously
represented as a ‘passively obedient handmaid, a woman of unparal-leled
holiness and purity, a submissive and subjugated sorrowful mother, and
the male projection of idealised femininity both as an asexual virgin and
as a domestically all-absorbed mother in a patriarchal family’ (McCarthy
346). In contrast, the role of Mary is given relatively little attention in
the Protestant Churches, including the Church of England (whose
Evangelical or Low Church preserves much of its Protestant character).
McCarthy suggests that devotion to Mary poses an ‘ecumenical liability’
for Protestant Christians who refuse to accord her the same status as
Christ or the Holy Spirit and who believe that there is insufficient
Scriptural support for such idolatry (356–7). Gardiner and Wenborn record that ‘only in the latter half of the 20th century has the Roman Catholic Church fully emerged into the mainstream of English life’ (138). As for the American cultural scene, it may be argued that the rise of Catholicism in England would make it more likely for a possessed child narrative to be written in that country. However, it is still very unusual to find a possessed child narrative from England, particularly one founded on Roman Catholic/Mariological discourses. However, this is exactly what we are given in *Shrine*.

It would not be inaccurate to describe Herbert as England’s counterpart to Stephen King. Both came to literary prominence in 1974. Both have firmly established themselves with a succession of bestsellers of horror and the fantastic that have also enjoyed an impressive number of reprints over a relatively short time (Grixti 29). According to his publicity department, ‘James Herbert is not just Britain’s No.1 best-selling writer of thriller/horror fiction … but is one of our greatest popular novelists, whose books are sold in thirty-three foreign languages, including Russian and Chinese. Widely imitated and hugely influential, his twenty novels [which include *The Rats* (1974), *The Fog* (1975), *Haunted* (1988), *Creed* (1990), *Once* (2001) and *Nobody True* (2003), to name just a few] have sold more than forty-eight million copies worldwide.’ But, like King, Herbert is held in less esteem by his critics than by his numerous fans. His over-reliance on cliché, repetition, gore and kinky sex places Herbert’s fiction firmly in the pulp tradition. In *Danse Macabre*, Stephen King openly defends Herbert along with the pulp tradition, declaring him ‘probably the best writer of pulp horror to come along since the death of Robert E. Howard [Conan the Barbarian’s Creator]’ (404). If King’s New England heritage flavours his distinctively American Gothic brand of horror fiction, then Herbert’s working-class Catholic origins (he grew up in London’s East End) inform *Shrine* as well as his other novels. He told Douglas E. Winter:

> I am a Catholic … And I am – in a funny way – very, very religious. But I don’t go to church, because I can’t stand it – it drives me mad. There is something higher than us. There is a God, there is an Immaculate Conception, there is a Virgin Mary. It’s good to have that faith, because it actually works, and overall, it is true. (‘Doing it with Style’ 61)

While preserving much of its originality, *Shrine* has been written quite self-consciously in the post-*Exorcist* era. It is a pretentious novel, with aspirations to the literary (hence the gratuitous and high-flown inclusion
of epigraphs which quote from Blake, Wordsworth and especially Carroll). Unfortunately, Herbert is never able to transcend his melodramatic B-grade imagination, which is perhaps what allows the book to succeed at all. Fascinatingly, the possessed child in Shrine is written, or rather overwritten, in terms of the Madonna/Eve dichotomy. Herein lie some very pronounced tensions between Calvinist and Romantic ideologies of childhood.

At the centre of the novel stands eleven-year old Alice Pagett, who, because of a childhood illness, is a deaf-mute. As in Mayne’s IT (discussed in the next chapter), the opening chapter of Shrine casually links Herbert’s Alice to Carroll’s Alice. Hurrying from grave to grave, this blonde blue-eyed child notices some molehills, which ‘looked as though the dead were pushing their way back into the living world’ (3). Confronted with mortality, Alice imagines the burrowing mole ‘snuffling its way through solid darkness, hunting food, searching for its own death. Digging its own grave’ (3). The mole’s burrow is dark and threatening compared with the rabbit hole that leads Carroll’s Alice into Wonderland. The thought draws from Alice a giggle; however, being a deaf-mute, she ‘couldn’t hear her giggle’ (3). Later, this other Alice removes some dead flowers from the headstone of an old lady she knew in life, whose ‘living corpse [was] more frightening than the dead one’ (3–4). The third-person narrator reveals that the idea of old age is incomprehensible to the young girl. But the distinction between Alice’s voice and the narrator’s is blurred in this very ‘adult’ reflection on death and dying: ‘It was hard to imagine your own flesh dried and wrinkled, your brain shrunk by years of use so that instead of becoming wise and all-knowing you became a baby. A hunched, brittle-stick baby’ (4). From the outset we are made to bear witness to Alice’s fall. The Blakeian passage from innocence to experience is eclipsed by Alice’s final destruction and damnation.

In a dreary field, adjacent to St Joseph’s Church and the cemetery, Alice has the first of her many visions. Beneath a centuries-old oak tree, she encounters ‘a blinding white light’, an ‘unblemished whiteness’, a ‘holy radiance’ (6). The tree is rich in symbolism. Like Jacob’s Ladder, it permits a doorway into heaven, but, like the world-tree of Norse myth, Yggdrasil, it spans both heaven and hell. The oak tree further evokes the tree of knowledge of good and evil, as well as the door in the tree that Alice enters in Wonderland. Driving through the small West Sussex village of Banefield in pitch-black darkness, Gerry Fenn, a reporter for the Brighton Evening Courier, nearly runs Alice down with his company van. He pursues her on foot through the church and cemetery, her small figure reminding him of the evil dwarf in Daphne
Du Maurier’s 1971 short story, *Don’t Look Now* (12). He finds her kneeling at the base of the old tree. She is in a mysterious trance. Fenn touches her on the shoulder, whereupon the girl says, ‘She’s so beautiful’ (14), then faints. When Fenn carries the child’s unconscious body to the church, he meets a slightly eccentric Catholic priest named Father Hagan, who informs Fenn that Alice is a deaf-mute. Alice’s sudden speech recovery is the first of the miracles.

*Shrine* draws its main inspiration not from Walsingham or Aylesford, but from Lourdes. In the famous pre-Fatima sighting of 1858, the Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception was said to have appeared to a fourteen-year-old peasant girl named Bernadette Soubirous in the southwestern town of Lourdes. She appeared to the girl some eighteen times. *Shrine* recreates these events in the southeastern English countryside. Inside St Joseph’s church, Fenn is intrigued by the ‘look of happiness in her [Alice’s] face, a faraway joy in those vivid blue eyes. She seemed to see nothing, only what was beyond her physical vision, and the notion disturbed Fenn. Could she be in a trance?’ (43). Presently, children as young as six begin to follow Alice out of the church into the field to the oak tree. At first, we are told, ‘there was nothing trance-like about these children’ (44), just an air of playfulness and excitement. However, once the children reach the tree they too are seduced by Alice and her vision, which Alice tells Father Hagan to be the Immaculate Conception. Thus, for these children, believing becomes tantamount to seeing and is testimony to the awesome power of Romantic innocence to perceive what adults because of their entry into knowledge and experience cannot. The excitement generated by these visions shortly reaches mass hysterical proportions. And for those unable to make the phenomenological leap of faith comes this leap from the uncanny to the marvellous: in full view of hundreds of witnesses (among them Fenn and his girlfriend, Sue) Alice levitates. Then she miraculously heals the sick and afflicted. Virtually overnight the parish of St Joseph’s becomes, like Lourdes, a Catholic shrine, even if the Church authorities have yet to proclaim it as such. Alice rapidly acquires the reputation of a miracle worker.

Herbert’s Banfield is set up as a small, nondescript, predominantly Catholic borderline village/town in West Sussex. However, there is nothing nondescript about a predominantly Catholic village/town in England, particularly one situated in the southeastern English countryside. As has often been noted, Catholics in the second half of the twentieth century have tended to gravitate towards the north of England, for example, Durham, Lancashire, Cumberland and particularly

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Liverpool. Also, the areas chosen by Catholics to settle have been largely urban (Norman 109). Although Catholics have been known to settle in southeastern England, particularly in Middlesex and London proper, ‘Only in Lancashire and Durham was there an established rural Catholic population’ (Norman 109). Intriguingly, Herbert indicated to Kathryn Bailey in the *Brighton Evening Argus* (28 January 1983) that Banfield was based on a real village in West Sussex called Henfield: ‘The churches all exist, in fact, all the locations exist ... I suppose evil in Sussex is the same as anywhere else’ (quoted in Jones 139).

Although Henfield falls today under the Roman Catholic diocese of Arundel and Brighton, which serves the small community of Catholics in Sussex and Surrey, it is interesting to note that, according to Henry de Candole’s *The Story of Henfield*, Henfield has been predominantly Church of England in its religious affinities (174). Furthermore, ‘the number of Nonconformists – that is to say, all who whether on the Papal or the Puritan side did not conform to the Church of England – is small’ (175). Thus it seems that Henfield, like other villages in West Sussex, was not spared the anti-Catholic campaign of the Reformation. That said, *The Victoria History of the Counties of England* records that the ‘size of parishes and the remoteness of some settlements favoured the survival of Roman Catholicism and the growth of protestant nonconformity in the 17th and 18th centuries. West Wolves farm in Ashington, Bentons Place in Shipley, and West Grinstead manor house were centers of Catholicism’ (Erlington 4).

In sum, while we cannot rule out the geographic possibility of the existence of an English rural Catholic locale such as Banfield, it seems more of a cultural oddity. More likely Herbert has taken certain factual liberties in order that his setting may serve his storytelling purposes. Although references are made to the Reformation in Banfield’s history, the Established Church is conveniently elided in this strategic cultural reconstruction.

In Herbert’s novel discourses of Catholic religion intersect most clearly with discourses of class in the representation of the possessed child. However, more subtle is the further intersection of a race discourse constituting ‘Irishness’. In contrast to the prevailing middle-class ethos of the Church of England, the Roman Catholic Church in England has historically been defined by working-class and Irish membership, which have often amounted to the same thing. In nineteenth-century England, this meant that ‘Catholicism was to quite a large extent a religion of the slums, because the Irish were heavily over-represented in the poorest sections of the English working class’ (McLeod 40). Indeed, the Roman Catholic Church skilfully capitalised
on the Irishness as much as the Catholicism of their congregations (Matthew 487). The growth of Roman Catholicism in England in the latter half of the twentieth century has been mainly attributed to movements in Irish immigration which saw the Catholic population increase by over two million between 1950 and 1970 (McKibbin 285–6). Given that religion is classed in England and that poor working-class families (especially Irish) are more likely to be Catholic, it might be speculated that this would lead to a more frequent representation of working-class/Irish children as demonically possessed. It might also be speculated whether Irish Catholic fictions feature a plethora of possessed child narratives. (A full testing of these hypotheses is beyond the scope of this book.)

In the case of Shrine, these markers of Irish working-class Catholicism are highly suggestive, but are never stated as such. (This perhaps says something about a general antipathy in English literature and culture towards anything Irish as well as Catholic.) Banfield appears to be of largely working-class composition. Indeed, it is struggling economically, which is why Fenn is approached by two local businessmen (Tucker and Southworth) with a cynical scheme to exploit Banfield commercially for its newfound tourism potential. Alice, as poor working-class child, lives on a small council estate. She is inextricably linked to St Joseph’s, whose relative poverty distinguishes it, like many other Catholic parishes, from its more privileged Anglican counterparts. Alice’s devout Catholic mother is also linked to St Joseph’s, where she works as a cleaner for minimal wages. It is therefore highly significant that Alice’s mother’s name is Molly: a most stereotypically Irish name. This incorporation of an Irish Catholic working-class subtext in the writing of the possessed child illustrates the possessed child’s indebtedness to Roman Catholic discourses.

More usually, Christianity treats possession as the work of the Evil One or one of his minions. However, in Roman Catholic accounts of human encounters with the Virgin Mary which are deemed to be miraculous, the recipient of such visions is almost treated as possessed by the Holy Spirit. Forms of divine possession are a noted feature of the charismatic movement, such as in classic Pentecostalism, in which the ‘gift of tongues’ (glossolalia), along with faith healing and the involuntary writhing of the body, are seen to be manifestations of the Holy Spirit (Dictionary of the Occult 180), recalling the spiritual reawakening of the Northampton girls in post-Salem described in chapter 2. From the late 1960s onwards, the charismatic movement also exerted an influence on the Roman Catholic Church, particularly in the United States.
States (Albanese 96). Christianity, on the one hand, treats the body as the temple of God whose Holy Spirit resides in man’s spirit. In the words of 1 Corinthians 3: 16: ‘Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the spirit of God dwelleth in you?’ On the other hand, Christianity also treats the body as a temple of evil. For example, the central assumption of the ancient ceremony of baptism (formalised by the Christian Church from the third century onwards) is, even in its modern practice, that the ‘candidate, be it he or she, new-born baby, child or adult, was in the hands of Satan [that is, possessed] and hence needed to be exorcised’ (Stanford 108). These parallel notions of possession underpin Alice’s transformation from good to evil child in the book.

*Shrine* is divided into three parts. Part One, which quotes from the prefatory verses of *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* (the ‘golden summer’ of childhood), evokes Alice’s innocence (1). Part Two, which quotes from the same source (‘I wonder if I’ve changed in the night?’) evokes Alice’s transformation (121). And Part 3, which quotes from the prefatory verses of *Through the Looking Glass* (‘We are but older children, dear / Who fret to find our bedtime near’) evokes Alice’s entry into experience – or fall (223). The problem with Herbert’s self-indulgent use of epigraphs, however, is that the quotes themselves often only cursorily suggest the theme of the book, part or chapter.

Father Hagan is the first to have misgivings about Alice (whom he comes to fear) and her visions, and Herbert carefully prepares us with some early ominous signs that these visions might not be as divinely inspired as they appear to be (livestock begin to die inexplicably, a statue of the Virgin Mary decays at an unnatural rate). Father Hagan confesses to his colleagues of a certain coldness and particularly emptiness in the atmosphere of St Joseph’s, beyond that of the physical: ‘It seems to me the church has become spiritually devoid’ (182). Fenn, though reluctant to admit it in his rationalist mind-set, experiences the same empty and cold feeling in the church. The father is eventually struck down by the same debilitating illness in the field experienced by Fenn, which drains him of his ‘life force’, his strength and vitality. Monsignor Delgard speculates that this is what has been happening to the church: it is being drained of its spiritual essence (197). ‘If Alice truly had a Visitation,’ he reasons, ‘then the presence of the Holy Spirit would be overwhelming inside this place’ (197). The presence, by implication, would be overwhelming in Alice. In metaphysical terms, this implies that evil exists in a vacuum left by a lack of good, which is also the thesis of Bradbury’s *Something Wicked this Way Comes*. It is
interesting that Herbert’s aligning here of good with presence and evil with absence, seems to conflict with the parallel notions of innocence and experience in the child, as it does in Something Wicked This Way Comes. Father Hagan’s heart (read: soul) condition, like that of Father Merrin’s in The Exorcist (or indeed Mr Halloway’s in Bradbury’s dark fantasy) becomes a metaphor for the troubled human condition, leading by the end to some hollow philosophising by Herbert on the true nature of ‘Man’.

Alice Pagett is, like the empty space inside St Joseph’s, even more of a cipher than Mary Valley. She is most strikingly inscribed through absence (indeed, as announced by her name, she is a blank page waiting to be written on). She is also figured as clearly lost, ‘lost in a world of silence’ (33). That inner world – or private domain – is an obviously rich one. Alice loves to draw. Although no artist, her drawings become an important means for her to communicate her obsession with the Virgin Mary. She also plays video games. Yet we are seldom made privy to that inner world – she ‘smiles’, she ‘giggles’, she ‘stares’, she ‘frowns’. Occasionally, she looks ‘puzzled’ or ‘surprised’ or ‘confused’, but more often than not we are left to infer underlying thought processes. The way Herbert blurs Alice’s thoughts and reflections with those of the third-person narrator (as noted previously in relation to the book’s opening chapter) does not get us any closer to the true Alice either. The point where Alice fully regains her voice in the novel is also the point where she recedes into the background of the novel; thus, her voice is effectively silenced. Father Hagan perhaps offers the reader the most penetrating insight into Alice’s impenetrable psychology:

Alice. A good child, a curious child. Her disability had made her a solitary one. She was frail, yet seemed to carry an inner strength within that small body. She was happy at the church, helpful to her mother, respectful of her surroundings. Alice didn’t appear to have many friends but, of course, her silence was frustrating to other children who had little pity for such things. She appeared to be as intelligent as any other child of her age despite the cruel affliction, although she was often lost in her own world, in her own dreams, an obvious result of her disability. (35–6)

Nevertheless, the reader is given the distinct impression that this is merely touching on Alice’s psychology. Moreover, there is little to indicate that Alice’s mother understands her child any better. Part of
Herbert’s effectiveness is arguably this refusal to make Alice a fully realised child figure, recalling Fenn’s telling observation to a fellow reporter that ‘she didn’t have much personality’ (244). Alice disturbs because she mystifies.

Fenn is typical of Herbert’s male protagonists: young, disillusioned and individualistic. Underneath the years of cynicism, however, he is ‘still waiting for the big one, the story that would make world headlines, the scoop that would transport him from the seaside town’s rag to the heart of the journalistic world: FLEET STREET!’ (8). He immediately sees in Alice a journalistic opportunity. To his credit he can see the newsworthiness of Alice’s story even if his news editor cannot. Generally speaking, Fenn has no illusions that he is in the business of exploitation: anything to sell more copies of the Brighton Courier. That exploitation revolves as much around the child as it does around religion. The opportunity to exploit Alice’s celebrity for personal gain is quickly seized on by the town. Indeed, even Alice’s own father is not above selling his exclusive story to the highest bidder.

Like Audrey Rose, Shrine reinforces stereotypical gender oppositions between man as intellectual and rational and woman as intuitive and irrational. Fenn has a troubled relationship with Sue Gates, who is divorced with a son called Ben. She professes to being a Catholic, even if ‘I’m not sure if I still am; the Catholic Church doesn’t actually approve of divorce’ (28). Although early on she dismisses Fenn’s late-night encounter with Alice as hallucination, the strange and captivating scene of religious idolatry at St Joseph’s effects in Sue a renewal of faith, and Fenn is alarmed by the swiftness of her ‘conversion’. ‘Whether or not it was some kind of miracle,’ she appeals to Fenn, ‘isn’t important; it was just something good. Didn’t you feel that? Didn’t you feel something warm, something peaceful washing over you?’ (64). Fenn professes to not having felt anything. He summarily rejects Sue’s feminine brand of intuition for his own ‘hardboiled’ brand of journalistic reason, attributing the undeniably mysterious events at the parish to mass hysteria. He even cites Alice as a suitable case for a psychiatrist. Later, Fenn is dumbfounded to learn that Sue has been taking Ben with her to Banfield, now being overrun by pilgrims. He duly reacts against her attempts to mould or convert him. When Fenn reminds her that he is not a Catholic, Sue replies with characteristic intuitive logic: ‘You don’t have to be, that’s the joy of it. You only have to feel to know it’s a holy place’ (94). Feel is the operative word here. But feeling is not Fenn’s forte; he thinks, reasons, questions, doubts. At the very least, Sue would like to pierce some of Fenn’s
cynicism, and it seems that seeing is believing is seeing: ‘If you could just see for yourself the effect the place has on people, I know you’ll begin to have some beliefs yourself’ (95). Sue worries that Fenn’s coverage of the events at St Joseph’s will cheapen the experience, rob it of its piety and significance. When she accuses Fenn of building up those events to be something else, he has this exceedingly cynical reply: ‘That’s journalism, babe’ (66). Sue admits to being sickened by Fenn’s loose, self-serving journalistic ‘ethic’, as well as sometimes ashamed to be in the media business herself (65). In this way, Sue acts as an important foil for Fenn’s deeply ingrained cynicism. However, in fairness to Fenn, his religious views, while laced with contempt, tend more towards agnosticism than atheism.

It is therefore not surprising that seeing Alice levitate provokes in Fenn a crisis of perception, as well as crisis in his worldview. Within the Romantic construct of the book, Fenn has been contaminated by years of education and knowledge and experience and as such almost cannot accept what his sensory apparatus is revealing to him: ‘He was mesmerised by the girl, not sure if he were hallucinating, still refusing to accept the evidence before his eyes … The dream, the hallucination, the telepathic illusion, was still there in front of him, refusing to obey that part of his brain that insisted it was all unreal’ (116). The adage about seeing is believing scarcely applies. Ironically, Fenn invokes religion in his desperate attempts to cope with the inexplicable or marvelous: ‘Jesus Christ, what happened here? It just wasn’t possible!’ (118). But it would be a mistake to think that the incredible demonstration in the field leads, for Fenn, to a religious conversion on a par with Sue’s. Even after seeing Alice levitate, Fenn retains his cynicism, leading to a head-on clash between him and Sue. Sue is shocked by Fenn’s suggestion that the Roman Catholic Church – in the midst of its so-called crises, its loss of membership and outdated views on birth control and divorce, and so on – is also exploiting the situation for its own benefit. But it would be equally wrong to say that Fenn does not develop in the course of the novel.

Fenn’s objectivity – his role as dispassionate observer – becomes increasingly difficult to maintain. It can be seen that he relies increasingly (though he would be perhaps loath to admit it) on intuition, on ‘gut feeling’, in the book. However, that feeling is telling him something very different from Sue’s. In the field, for instance, he is assailed by the strange debilitating illness that struck down Father Hagan and Monsignor Delgard: ‘it was as though his body were being drained of energy. He felt so numb, so cold’ (116). Clearly, Fenn is sensing, feeling
or intuiting that something is not quite right here, not as it appears to be. Fenn’s fears and anxieties emanating from St Joseph’s lie just below the threshold of conscious awareness, it seems, culminating in a bad dream that is obviously meant to be read as a premonition of the apocalyptic fiery finale. Clearly in his novels Herbert likes his leading characters to redeem themselves. Thus, in the epilogue, Herbert has a pensive Fenn (who has quit the *Brighton Courier*) follow Sue and Ben into the church of Our Lady of Assumption. This suggests in Fenn’s character some process of development or change, but, as stated earlier, conversion would be stating it too strongly.

In *Shrine*, opposing discourses of childhood intersect with opposing discourses of gender. As David Grylls points out, the Christian religion contains the seeds for both child-demonisation (thanks to the doctrine of Original Sin) and child-idealisation (29). This reflects the shift between Old Testament and New Testament understandings of the child. Likewise, it may be said that the Christian religion also contains the seeds for both female-demonisation (the Eve/Whore of Babylon archetype) and female-idealisation (the Madonna archetype). Grasping the Madonna/Eve opposition in *Shrine* is crucial because it corresponds to the ideological opposition between original innocence and original sin, respectively, yielding sharp tensions between Calvinist and Romantic formulations of childhood. Alice is linked by analogy with the Virgin Mary, whereby Romantic ideology becomes couched in Mariology. According to the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, expounded in 1854, the Virgin Mary was conceived without the stain of Original Sin. In *Shrine*, the Virgin Mary’s perfectly sinless state overlaps with Alice’s perfectly sinless state. Innocence in this context becomes intertwined with theological notions of sexual purity and virtue. The doctrine of the Assumption states that the Virgin Mary’s body was assumed body and soul into heaven at the end of her earthly life. There is a definite sense in the novel that Alice will one day ascend to a higher plane, as suggested by her feat of levitation. Bishop Caines, when questioned by the media about whether Alice will be – like St Bernadette before her – canonised, wittily remarks that she will have to be dead for some time before she is proclaimed a saint (161). By this reckoning, Alice is a suitable candidate for entry into heaven at the end of her earthly life.

After Herbert analogously links the Virgin Mary with Alice, he then sets out to undo (somewhat parodically) Marian doctrines. In a late-coming revelation, Molly confesses a dark secret to Bishop Caines that she was unable to tell Father Hagan while he was alive: that Alice was
conceived in the field next to St Joseph’s, on the very spot that has become sacred ground, a holy shrine. That she was conceived out of wedlock and in an act of lust seems to cast an even greater shadow over Alice’s innocence. Alice’s mother here is demonised by her carnal nature, which threatens to incite men to lust. (Her daughter’s status as the Immaculate Conception is subtly undermined by her own name: the gangster’s ‘moll’ derives from Molly, the familiar form of Mary, reaffirming the book’s Madonna/Whore dichotomy.) More heavily demonised is Alice’s estranged father, an irreligious, irredeemable, and foul-mouthed alcoholic (in Father Hagan’s judgement ‘there was something, well, not good about the man’ (35)). This begs the question of how somebody so bad could produce a child so good – if Alice is good, that is. Molly, in looking upon Alice with Divine Awe, believes that her child is a godsend. Yet, like Pearl in The Scarlet Letter, Alice is the product as well as embodiment of the original sin of fleshly desire. Only Monsignor Delgard fully grasps ‘the irony of the less-than-immaculate conception that had happened here [on the sacred ground]’ (313). Add to that the irony that this so-called sacred ground is in fact the same place where a nun/sorceress named Elnor was butchered then burnt to death almost 500 years before. Alice is thus infinitely damned, a curse from hell rather than a gift from heaven, and so we radically depart from the Romantic idealisation of the child.

Alice’s possession in Shrine is firmly rooted in the distant past of St Joseph’s. That past comes back to haunt the living with vengeful destructive results, whereby the return of history is tantamount to a return of the repressed. Only some journalistic research can uncover the facts. Fenn discovers that St Joseph’s was built over a pagan place of worship. (Interestingly, Sussex was the last stronghold of paganism in Great Britain.) But this is only the beginning of his investigation. From the church Fenn obtains a notebook belonging to Monsignor Delgard, which contains a working translation of an old document (originally in Latin) left by a guilt-ridden sixteenth-century cleric named Thomas Woolgar who served at St Joseph’s. Woolgar describes how he succumbed to the sinful pleasures of the flesh with Elnor, for which he is ‘already lost’ (364). Elnor as Madonna and Eve personifies the opposing impulses of womanhood. She’s childlike, innocent and virginal, but also corrupt, stained and sexual. This itself represents a male fantasy of female sexuality. As Krzywinska discusses, the idea of the possessed nun was a major preoccupation of European exploitation cinema in the 1970s, initiated by Ken Russell’s The Devils (based on the famous case of fake possession in a convent of nuns in seventeenth-
century Loudun, here explained away as sexual hysteria). Krzywinska suggests that the ‘nun-ploitation’ film afforded filmmakers an opportunity to communicate a libertarian message. ‘But, perhaps,’ she writes, ‘its primary lure is the indulgence of prurient, and delicious, curiosities about the imagined secret life of sequestered, sex-starved nuns’, inevitably leading to explorations of lesbianism, sado-masochism and extreme licentiousness (Krzywinska 249–59). What Krzywinska fails to realise, however, is that, like that construct called the child, the nun is an ideal empty vessel capable of being filled with desire. In Shrine, the conflation of child and nun is almost like having a double vacuum being filled.

The idea that the witch entered into pact with the Devil largely stems from the Roman Catholic Church and its literature of demonology. Thomas Woolgar’s account more than echoes the misogynist sentiments of the Malleus Maleficarum, an inquisitors’ manual on the identification and practice of witches written by two Dominicans and commissioned by the Roman Catholic Church in 1484. ‘The major reason given,’ as Creed observes, ‘for woman’s “otherness” [in the book] is her carnal nature’ (75; for the ‘natural’ connection between women and witchcraft see quote which introduces this chapter). As sorceress or witch Elnor is clearly a figure of Creed’s monstrous feminine, whose voracious sexuality threatens to make sinners of men. That sexuality is pathologised, then overwritten onto the child. Alice is seen to be possessed by or, alternatively, the reincarnation of, the witch Elnor. Although she is referred to once as ‘prepubescent’ (77), the transformation from good Alice to bad Alice is clearly a sexual one. Evidence mounts in the last part of the book that Alice has become the agent of something sexually corrupt. Her Mary idolatry transforms into outright blasphemy. She desecrates the Virgin Mary in her paintings with obscene images of phalluses and breasts. She also wickedly mocks the sexual purity of the Virgin Mary with her night-time ravings to ‘let thy passion fill me’ (263) or ‘aye, good Thomas, fill me with thy seed’ (310). But the most alarming piece of evidence against Alice is located on her body in the shape of a supernumerary or extra nipple. According to The Malleus Maleficarum, this was a physical mark of the witch, at which familiars (most often a dog or cat, but even the devil himself) might suck. When a nun walks into Alice’s convent room, she is shocked and horrified to find a cat suckling at Alice’s extra nipple. The sexual overtones of the scene suggest a collaboration between Alice and Elnor and the forces of darkness.
At the book’s end, Alice, in front of a multitude of pilgrims, is assassinated by a lunatic (aptly named Wilkes) seeking instant fame. Hers is a bloody and violent death, of which Herbert mercilessly does not spare us the details. The crowd is overwhelmed by grief, including Fenn. Reneging on his cynicism, he even starts to surrender to the Romantic vision of childhood innocence: ‘It was impossible to believe that evil could exist in that tiny body, prone body, in a child that had brought so much happiness and renewed faith’ (404–5). Alice’s death is shown to negate all of the miracles: the sick and afflicted suddenly revert to their former state, rendering them ‘betrayed, lost. Defeated’ (403). But this is not the end of Alice – not quite. Alice then rises from the dead but, in contrast to Lazarus, this is a most ‘ unholy resurrection’ (412). The Alice/Elnor duality is foregrounded to dramatic effect. Alice’s aura of wickedness is juxtaposed with repetitive statements like, ‘Yet it was a child’s sweet smile,’ ‘Yet it was a child standing there’ and ‘Yet it was a child too young to know evil’ (400). But upon her resurrection, her ‘face no longer resembled any earthly child’s, who looked around with malevolent intent and smiled. And grinned. And chuckled’ (405). In contrast, Herbert emphasises Alice’s frailness and vulnerability, as well as diminutive stature, in this description of a resurrected Alice: ‘Confused, lost, a small child who had experienced death’s advent and could not understand why she did not lie dying’ (407). She is neither quite dead nor undead, but, as announced by the voice of Elnor speaking through Alice now, lost in ‘between this place and the underworld’ (417), evoking Ivy’s limbo state in Audrey Rose. Herbert obviously revels in this ability to command our perceptions of Alice, who alternates (almost at whim) between the extremes of innocence and corruption. The overall effect is highly dualistic.

The final carnage and destruction unleashed by Alice/Elnor is truly apocalyptic and terrifying, showcasing Herbert’s recognised talent for manipulating scenes of mass hysteria. Thunder rages overhead while the ground starts rumbling and opening up and engulfing the ‘sinners’ (the apocalyptic imagery recalls the phenomena witnessed by the pilgrims of Fatima, where the sun was said to have danced in the sky before plunging towards the earth). The field is consumed by fire. Thousands are crushed to death while trying to escape ‘retribution’. In the midst of this pandemonium Bishop Caines ineffectually recites passages from the Roman Ritual. Meanwhile, Herbert chooses to burden irredeemable businessman Southworth with the awesome knowledge that the Alice/Elnor creature was the
manifestation of their own evil, that she existed on the power she
drew from their own blackened souls. The awareness had struck him
because she willed it so. That instigation was the creature’s torment:
the realisation of one’s own infinite vileness. The guilt that the Church
taught all men to suffer was founded on actuality: the culpability was
real because the wickedness had always been there in each and every
person. Even the innocent, the children. Children like Alice. (412)

As in The Exorcist, Shrine presents the doctrine of original sin in a fully
developed Roman Catholic context. In effect, the empty/full child is
made to bear the weight of the sins of mankind. However, rather than
being profound here Herbert taps sensationallly and melodramatically
into cultural anxieties about the appalling state of human nature
which, as Grixti points out, is ‘very much a home-baked philosophy of
life whose recipe and ingredients comes wholesale from popularized
litanies of human depravity and helplessness [...where] society is
ultimately irredeemable’ (37).

The seemingly indestructible Alice/Elnor creature suffers a similar
fate to Mary Valley or Audrey Rose. She, or rather it, is burnt alive – or
is that dead? What Fenn beholds is something horrible and monstrous
and, above all, abject: a smouldering, blistering, bloody, misshapen
‘hideous doll-like figure’ (406). However, when confronted by the
beautiful illusion of Elnor, he immediately succumbs to the nun/
witch’s awesome sexual power, foregrounding the male fantasy of
female sexuality: ‘He sensed the pleasing suppleness of her body, its
liteness, its vitality, and the firmness of young breasts which the
nun’s simple costume could not disguise’ (423). Her startling transfor-
mation from evil temptress to unsightly monster a moment later
clearly reinforces the association between aberrant female sexuality
and extreme abjection identified by Creed:

And her eyes were no longer soft and brown, but were darkly hollow,
deep pits that held him [Fenn] fascinated. Her skin was no longer soft
and white, but was charred and torn, the lips burnt away to reveal
stumps of blackened teeth and weeping gums. Her body was no longer
supple and straight, but was twisted, bent, a warped scarred figure that
in some curious way resembled the malformed tree which towered
over her. Her stench clawed at him in putrefying waves ... (423)

In the epilogue, Fenn (serving as Herbert’s mouthpiece) problemat-
ises notions of good and evil. Perhaps, with the assassination of Alice
by Wilkes, he speculates, ‘evil had defeated evil’ (430). Herbert has said that he preaches goodness in his fiction: ‘In all these battles of good against evil, good always comes out on top. Although there’s usually a twist at the end of the novel, to say you haven’t completely won’ (Herbert quoted in Neilson 208). In *Shrine*, good triumphs very tentatively over evil. Herbert – apparently departing from his earlier account of innate human depravity – attempts to preserve some of the Romantic ideal of childhood innocence. He makes Sue’s son Ben his exemplar, whose all-powerful innocence is seen to be his own as well as Sue and Fenn’s salvation. When Fenn, in the finale, is assailed again by his earlier debilitating illness, he almost cannot go on, but it’s Ben’s ‘magical touch’, which restores his strength and vitality. Significantly, Ben’s vision differs radically from Fenn’s vision. For example, when Fenn sees a horrible, burnt Elnor, Ben instead sees an innocent Alice with blood on her dress (423). It seems that in *Shrine* children not only see more but less as well. Fenn ponders the mysterious nature of Ben’s power: ‘Was it his total innocence that had protected him, that had not let him see what the others thought they saw, not let him hear what others thought they heard’ (431). That innocence becomes synonymous with ignorance, which, paradoxically, gives the seer a clarity of vision: ‘Only Ben, who could see clearly, for he stood while the others knelt, could not understand what was happening’ (297).

Judging by the number of people who die early by supernatural causes because they know too much (Father Hagan, Monsignor Delgard, the Reverend Mother), ignorance is truly bliss, knowledge a curse. Ben is not the only one blessed with this selective vision, ‘for other children in the field that night had not shared their parents’ and guardians’ terror. Yet [the inevitable yet] there were other young ones who had’ (431). The last sentence appears to be a restatement of Herbert’s thesis on Original Sin. By the end, *Shrine* raises more questions than it seeks to answer (perhaps too many) and the degree of Alice’s innocence versus corruption is left open-ended, unresolved, deadlocked.

In determining the nature and form of the cultural gap, which separates English from American possessed child narratives, it repays to be aware that possessed child narratives are almost nonexistent in England. Because of the dominance of Anglican religious discourses, the possessed child has not been a viable narrative or trope in that country. Novels such as *Chocky* develop the possessed child along science fiction lines and because of this largely ignore religion. For the most part, though, the possessed child only emerges when a religious discourse, namely Catholic, moves to centre stage. It is hence significant that the
setting of Herbert's *Shrine*, which revolves around a predominantly Catholic locale seemingly shut off from Anglican influences, can probably be dismissed as 'poetic license' on the author's part. Together with religious discourses that are used to fill, empty and refill the vacuous child figure, there is also in *Shrine* the presence of an Irish working-class Catholic subtext. Although this is implicit, it is by no means trivial. In fact, it seems that Herbert, in writing the possessed child, has felt that its insertion was necessary. *Shrine*, far from being representative, is one of a few isolated cases. While the United States could lay claim to being home to the possessed child, in England the possessed child is little more than a cultural curiosity.
They changed their mind about leaving at once when Steve saw the carving on the seat bottom, still lying on the table.

‘That’s a fancy bit,’ he said. ‘I didn’t know they had it in those days.’

‘Oh, aye, it’s St Cuthbert Parade,’ said Barney. ‘Who’s old hookey-nose in the middle?’

‘That’s a piece of superstitious nonsense,’ said Grandpa. ‘I don’t know what it is completely, but it’s worse than superstitious, because you might have Christian superstition, but that is pagan dressed up to look Christian.’

(William Mayne, *IT*, 1977)

‘I won’t budge on this one,’ Mum warned her [Gran] in the same quiet way. ‘We’re done with witch-doctors and gurus. Those are outdated remedies for a bygone age. These are modern times, and somehow we’ll find a modern means of coping with Sam’s problem.’

(Victor Kelleher, *Del-Del*, 1991)

Thus far, I have discussed possessed child narratives addressed to an adult or ‘mature’ audience. It is instructive now to turn our attention to the child audience. In 1963, Madeleine L’Engle’s classic *A Wrinkle in Time*, with its singular blend of science fiction and fantasy, science and religion, was awarded the Newbery medal (named after Englishman John Newbery, a pioneering eighteenth-century publisher of children’s literature) by the American Library Association for the most distinguished children’s book of the year. In the book, eight-year-old Charles Wallace’s will is controlled by *IT*: ‘A disembodied brain. An oversized
brain, just enough larger than normal to be completely revolting and terrifying. A living brain. A brain that pulsed and quivered, that seized and commanded’ (158). This giant, living, disembodied brain rules the planet of Camazotz, where freedom and individuality have been stamped out. It is up to Charles Wallace’s older sister Meg to free him from IT’s malevolent control. However, rather than emphasising tensions between Calvinist and Romantic ideologies of childhood, L’Engle here attempts to reconcile Romanticism with certain intellectual tenets of the Enlightenment and Neoclassicism. Specifically, possessed Charles Wallace is written between Reason and Sensibility (or Feeling). However, despite the American award, the possessed child has not figured commonly as a theme in American children’s literature. It is a curious and little known fact that more examples are to be found in British than American children’s literature. Two possible explanations may be given for this reversal between the American and British cultural scene and the child as opposed to adult audience. (Here, I am grateful to children’s literature specialist Heather Scutter for her understandings.)

First, American children’s literature has never enjoyed a strong fantasy tradition. While British children’s literature is infused with a sense of time and a need to explore new worlds, the sense of ‘newness’ of the United States’ heritage has rendered somewhat redundant the exploration of other worlds in children’s literature. The United States already occupies, as it were, other worlds. The point is important because the fantasy mode seems to have served British writers of children’s literature amazingly well with the presentation of subversive material such as teenage sexuality. Felicity Hughes exposes a widespread prejudice against fantasy that is somehow appraised as less serious or worthy in literary terms than its ‘rival’ realist fiction. She argues that British writers have turned this prejudice into an advantage, by employing fantasy ‘as a protective cover to save the work from prying adult eyes ... extend[ing] considerably the range of subjects dealt with in children’s literature’ (Hughes 244). We may add possession to the range of subjects dealt with by British writers of children’s literature. Examples include Alan Garner’s *The Owl Service* (1967), Penelope Lively’s *The House in Norham Gardens* (1974), William Mayne’s *IT* (1977), Ann Pilling’s *Black Harvest* (1983) and Nicholas Wilde’s *Eye of the Storm* (1995), to name but a few. Yet, tellingly, the agent of possession in these examples is not the Devil or one of his minions, while the notion of possession – often indistinguishable from obsession, where the ‘possession’ is from without – is construed in
more subtle or vague terms. Second, it is perhaps because this material is so subversive that certain conservative elements in American culture (not the least strong religious constraints stemming largely from fundamentalism) have made it more difficult, though not impossible – as in the case of *A Wrinkle in Time*–for a possession narrative to be written about children for children. In the Australian context, possessed child narratives, whether directed towards a mainstream adult or child audience, are even fewer. However, in the field of children’s literature, this has less to do with conservatism than with the highly secular nature of Australian society. In this chapter, I examine two possessed child narratives for older children. Mayne’s *IT* (1977) from England and Victor Kelleher’s *Del-Del* (1991) from Australia. Consideration will be given to how these treatments differ from those directed towards adults.¹

John Stephens has stated that literature written for children ‘is radically intertextual because it has no special discourse of its own … Rather, writing for children exists at the intersection of a number of other discourses’ (*Language and Ideology in Children’s Fiction* 86). He identifies three main types of discourse also functioning as intertexts in literature written for children: traditional narrative forms and genres, for example, the folktale or romance; ‘specialised contents’, which overlap with the previous discourse, but which also include materials such as mythology or the biblical story; and a more ideologically-based discourse that includes, for example, religion or ethics (86–7). This borrowing Stephens has elsewhere likened to ‘a process of cannibalising other narrative forms’ (‘Post-Disaster Fiction: the Problematics of a Genre’ 126). Despite the merits of Stephens’s discourse approach to understanding children’s texts, it could well be argued that the intersection of these different discourses has indeed resulted in a discourse all of its own. That is, the whole of these discourses is different from the sum of their parts. Moreover, by his emphasis on linguistic structures, Stephens pays insufficient attention to the relationship between language and power structures. The crucial role that social institutions such as school and family play is deeply embedded within discourses of children’s literature.

**William Mayne’s *IT***

Social institutions indeed play a crucial role in Mayne’s wonderfully literary and original contribution to the possessed child subgenre, *IT*. Discourse analysis demonstrates what a superior writer Mayne is and
how he understands the nature of discourse and deconstructs some of its premises. ‘The theme [of IT],’ writes David Rees, ‘is serious: diabolic possession [...] but Mayne doesn’t handle his idea very seriously: if he did the result would probably not be a children’s book’ (98). To imply (as Rees does) that children’s literature is incapable of dealing seriously with serious themes is as patronising to Mayne as it is to children’s literature. (One wonders how such remarks were aired in a children’s literary journal.) Even though Mayne has appropriated a theme normally the domain of adult fiction, he handles his idea very seriously, but very differently. Although the Yorkshire-born writer seems to have been influenced by Alan Garner, his prodigious talent is such that he is as incapable of imitation as he is of cliché. Although he is undoubtedly one of England’s most important writers for children, and particularly young people, it has become a commonplace with Mayne’s critics to say that he is liked more by adults than by children. His fiction, it is argued, alienates the child reader with its complex style, language and plotting.

A survey of Mayne’s prolific output reveals a preoccupation with the themes of lostness and lost children. In Earthfasts (1966), for example, a little drummer boy from the year 1742 ventures into a dark passage in search of King Arthur’s legendary gold. He re-emerges two hundred years later, still drumming. In his first foray into fantasy, Mayne explores the mildly comic as well as tragic aspects of a boy lost in time. Nine-year-old Colin of ‘Boy to Island’ (one of the trio of short stories which comprise Mayne’s delightful All the King’s Men (1982)) is also lost in time. He spends a day on the mysterious Faransay Island, which is inhabited by fairies and dwarfs. But his day on the island turns out to be seven years away from the mainland. Colin’s mother can only remark on her boy’s return (typical of Mayne’s tendency towards understatement): ‘We have all been sore for the sight of you’ (128). A Year and a Day (1976) is the touching tale of a foundling. In the wood, Sara and Becca stumble on a waif, ‘with dark hair and dark eyes and skin like milk’ (5). The boy, whom they name Adam because of his naked and therefore ‘scared’ (6) state, is the representation of Rousseau’s Noble Savage. Strangely, the boy does not know how to speak or eat or walk properly, yet he has no trouble endearing himself to the family. The local witch tells them that the boy is a fairy-child and that his stay is only temporary: a year and a day. It is noteworthy that in the opening chapter the mother is shown tending the grave of a child born prior to her two daughters. This loss seems to prepare the way for the foundling/changeling, recalling the ‘recent loss’ trope of
the European fairytale. Significantly, when Adam dies at the end of the book, another child is born.

However, *IT* is the first of Mayne’s narratives to conflate lostness with supernatural possession. Lostness and possession in these terms mean something very different from the terms of the other narratives hitherto examined. Eschewing reductive Calvinist and Romantic formulations of childhood, Mayne gives us a rare possessed child indeed: not empty but full, not absent but fully present, not symbolic or abstract but *realistic*. In the handful of English possessed child narratives addressed to an adult audience, lesser writers and filmmakers have seemed not to have been able to accomplish their aims without resorting to a Roman Catholic discourse, bringing these narratives more or less in line with those of the United States. However, in the hands of a high literary intelligence like William Mayne, who writes the possessed child between the Celtic/pagan and modern-day religion, bypassing Roman Catholic discourses, and also giving his story a unique child’s point of view, the meaning of the possessed child on this side of the Atlantic is transformed into something very different.

Even though the child is written in the context of the fantastic, the fantastic is couched firmly in the everyday or familiar, that is, real world. That world – Mayne’s world – is, as Frank Eyre perceptively notes, one

which children and their parents inhabit equally and this is the second distinguishing mark of his books – that no part of them is ever included cursorily. Everything that is in them is there for a purpose and each part is handled with the same kind of observation and affection. The world of school, the world of home, the world of play are indivisible to him, they are all part of the world of childhood and that is the world he writes about. (140–1)

The theme of growing up, with its patterns and processes, its trials and tribulations, is virtually a *sine qua non* of children’s literature. How children cope with the pressures, hassles and demands of daily life and learn to make their way in the ‘real world’ is the focal concern. Children are seen to have the capacity to *choose* to regress or progress developmentally, even if these choices are often represented as limited. An ideology is already implicit here: that children somehow must live in an ‘unreal world’. Therefore, children – though not all children – are somehow driven by a need to *transcend* the limitations of the real world, by mental distraction, fantasy or
even role-play. Whether adaptive or maladaptive, this offers the growing child a means of escape. In Mayne’s quite extraordinary oedipal novel, *A Game of Dark* (1971), lonely teenager Donald Jackson retreats into the realm of fantasy because the demands of reality, chiefly stemming from the troubled relationship between him and his ailing, but oppressively religious minister father, are too great. He fantasises that he is a squire in Saxon times fighting a giant phallic worm. In the real world this healthy fantasising steers Donald towards resolving his oedipal conflict with his father. Mayne thus implies that fantasy might have adaptive value for young children, by helping them meet challenges and surmount obstacles.

In *IT*, Alice Dyson, who is nearly twelve, has a very vivid and lively imagination. Like Donald, she often resorts to fantasy as a way of escaping the demands of reality. Generally speaking, she is not lost between these realms, at least not in the way that Amy is lost, for instance, in *Curse of the Cat People*. Furthermore, this tendency to fantasise – like Donald’s, and indeed Amy’s – just might have adaptive value for young Alice. Yet this tendency towards fantasy also interferes with Alice’s daily life and therefore development. Mayne’s novel is primarily concerned with Alice’s movement towards personal wholeness and integration (what Carl Jung, founder of analytical psychology, termed ‘individuation’), and how this is a necessarily ongoing and unfinished process. The central issue of Alice’s development – her struggle to form an identity of her own – must be considered in relation to this problematical relationship between fantasy and reality.

The opening chapters of *IT* sensitively convey the different dimensions of a child’s alienation from herself as well as her family. When we meet Alice Dyson, she is waiting in the car for her parents and her clergyman-cum-anthropologist grandfather. She is in a state of discontent. She cannot seem to please anybody or do anything right. While folding up Grandpa’s robes and putting them in a suitcase, she ‘had gone into a dream’ (7) and put a crease in his surplice. Back at the house she was sent out by Mum for forgetting to wipe her feet on the doormat. Consequently, Grandpa ‘had dropped her down in his opinion again. And this year, this time of it, in fact this very month, there was not a great distance for his opinion to fall, so she was down at nothing again’ (7). Grandpa’s lowly opinion is not improved later when she fails to unlock the car door for him, so self-absorbed is she in her daydreaming. Grandpa gives preferential treatment to her brother Matthew, who is visiting from boarding school. In the car she
notices a special rapport between Matthew and Grandpa that is severely lacking in her own relationship with him. When Grandpa speaks, Matthew (who is unable to speak) listens – and nods. The difference in their treatment is movingly highlighted when Mayne places Alice in Matthew’s position: ‘If Alice had nodded instead of speaking up there would have been trouble, unless she had not said the wrong things; but Grandpa understood and forgave Matthew’ (13). It is painfully obvious that Alice earnestly desires the approval of her learned and well-travelled grandfather. When she allows her imagination to take the tour of Grandpa’s room, she tragically realises how hopeless it was to expect to achieve anything for herself because he had already done it all, and there on his walls and shelves were the signs of it: the relics of foreign lands, the row of books he had written, and the signed picture of him holding hands with the queen; the things of a complete person who had completed everything. (8)

Alice admires but is daunted by Grandpa, and Mayne highlights her sense of impotence as well as despair: how can she ever hope to compete with a grandfather who has ‘done it all’? Her problem is akin to Harold Bloom’s anxiety of influence. Ironically, it seems that not even in the dream world can she clear some imaginative space for herself.

As I have argued, the possessed child’s empty or cipher state has enabled writers and filmmakers to invest it with a range of signification that is both highly unstable and contradictory. In contrast to the oddly flat and ‘dislocated’ representations of the child in *The Exorcist* and *Audrey Rose* and Damien in *The Omen*, Mayne in *IT* gives us a well-rounded child who is believably portrayed as undervalued, misunderstood and sometimes even ignored by her significant others. However, unlike the demonised parents of *The Exorcist*, *Audrey Rose* or *Amityville II*, Mayne refuses to demonise Alice’s grandfather or parents. Nor is Mayne content with making them mere caricatures. Mum and Dad are endowed with their own recognisable traits and personalities. Mum tirelessly spends her time correcting her daughter’s English, but particularly her husband’s broad Yorkshire. Thus when Dad says ‘summat’, she says ‘something’ (82); or when he says ‘back end’, she says ‘autumn’ (189). As previously noted, issues of class are more important to British than American possessed child narratives. This is no exception in *IT*, where language is used to underscore some very real class
differences between Alice’s well-bred, socially aspiring mother and her unpretentious worker father:

‘You’re acting disagreeably,’ said Mum.
‘I’m not acting,’ said Alice. ‘I’m realling.’
‘I doubt you are,’ said Mum, and Dad said ‘I doubt you aren’t,’ but they both meant exactly the same thing, only Dad used his town language and Mum used vicarage language that she had been brought up with. (17)

Mum’s need to improve her husband’s social rank is, however, bound to fail. Dad declares: ‘I’m too set in my ways to learn English now’ (156). Their arguing, while apparently innocuous, is potentially destructive to a young and impressionable mind like Alice’s. For example, when Alice lapses into another of her daydreams and accidentally burns the gravy in the baking dish, Dad tells her she will clean the ‘drip-tin’, whereupon ‘there was another little argument about that with Dad using one name for the thing, Mum the other and Alice not being allowed to be on either side’ (15). Alice thus feels torn in the class struggle. It is not difficult to see how the behaviour of her parents would contribute to her growing sense of confusion and therefore alienation.

It is inevitable that parents will have expectations of their children. It is during adolescence that children begin to understand fully what is expected of them. In IT, Alice has to wrestle with the knowledge that her treatment by the family rests in large measure on her ability, or rather willingness, to meet those expectations. As a consequence, she retreats into her inner world, keeping to herself thoughts and opinions that she might have otherwise expressed. When the novel opens, Alice experiences anxiety when the car passes by St Hilda’s School for Girls, at which point she tries to shun reality: ‘At sight of it Alice resolved to have no thoughts at all for a few minutes. She allowed her throat to form the words “I was right”’ (12). Right, that is, deliberately to fail the entrance examination for St Hilda’s. On one level, Alice’s brother serves as a foil for what Alice should be, based on her parents’ standards of achievement. But she is not jealous of her more ‘successful’ sibling. Rather, she ‘was pleased because she loved him, which meant that if he was doing what he wanted to do then she was glad and proud. But perhaps it was better not to love him’ (16). Alice’s act of self-sabotage of her own potential represents a fear of success, with its inevitable threat of change – what Alice fears the most. She perceives all too well...
the changes that have resulted when her brother passed the exam: he was sent to boarding school, upsetting the family dynamics at home. She clearly misses her brother, even the fights. So long has he been away in fact that he strikes Alice as ‘quite like a stranger’ (15).

Mayne is careful to emphasise that this is what Alice has chosen to do, even if she has to live with the consequences of her unpopular decision: ‘But she knew she was right. Matthew had wanted to go to his school and he had gone; Alice had not wanted to go to hers and she had not gone. What she had done was what Matthew had done, chosen for herself; but Matthew was praised and she was not’ (20). This encapsulates the nature of Alice’s alienation from herself as well as the family. Her task, therefore, is to reconcile what others think and expect of her with her self-concept, so that she can be a whole and integrated person again, instead of ‘wrong way out for everybody else’ (15), or, the ‘odd one out’ (20). In a sense, Alice refuses to partake in this institutionalisation of the child and childhood, with its attendant rules and codes and conforming influences on a young, intelligent and original mind like Alice’s: ‘The only difficult thing was how to tell Mum or Dad or anybody that she did not want to go there, didn’t want to live in a dormitory, didn’t want to walk about the town only on Sunday afternoons in pairs with another St Hilda girl’ (19).

However, Alice’s failure not only concerns her immediate family and the school, but the church and community: ‘A great deal of sad disappointment had been about, however, at home, and up in Sarrow vicarage’ (19). This is quite a burden to place on the shoulders of a child. Alice is most clearly written by institutions, whether it be family, school, church or the community. It can be seen that her development in the course of the novel hinges on her ability to ‘reconnect’ with these institutions, instead of being at odds with them, while at the same time maintaining some level of resistance so that she doesn’t compromise herself completely. This proves extremely difficult given Alice’s generally nihilistic outlook on life. It is difficult not to read Alice’s daydream of the Minster falling into ruins as wishful thinking: ‘She was applauding the ruin of the Minster because it was an exciting thing to see suddenly’ (9). The Minster is not only affiliated with Grandpa and his stifling religion, but also with stifling St Hilda’s, sister school to Matthew’s Minster school for boys. The naughty rhyme, ‘St HildAH’s, lah-di-dahs, Wear green knickers and green bras’ (23), with its last unmentionable two lines, is wonderfully irreverent, hence its appeal for Alice. However, the rich metaphor of the Minster – which takes on manifold significance in
the novel – also becomes identified with Alice’s ruined (and *fallen*) state: ‘I’m in ruins too, Alice thought. The whole sky is the colour of my mind’ (11).

Like James Herbert in *Shrine*, Mayne casually links his Alice with Carroll’s Alice; indeed Mayne’s and Herbert’s child share the same name. When Alice finds the reft on the Eyell – and so unwittingly releases the wandering spirit she later comes to think of as ‘IT’ – this evokes Carroll’s Alice’s path down the rabbit-hole. While exploring the reft, she encounters what first appears to be a snake, and then ‘something less than a snake, a slow-worm’ (24), but which turns out to be in fact a hand grasping her hand and belonging to the wandering spirit’s. When Alice revisits the Eyell, she starts ‘digging like a rabbit’ (50), thereby reaffirming the connection with Carroll’s Alice.2 At the same time, Mayne’s realistic child is an altogether different proposition from Carroll’s beloved Romantic child of the Victorian age.

Alice is, like *IT*, lost; the suffering spirit becomes a metaphor for her alienation. Significantly, her first intuition of *IT* coincides with her depressed emotional state. It is as if *IT* is responding to her private pain, and that Alice is responding to *IT*’s pain. Like Elliot and his interplanetary companion in *E.T.*, Alice and the creature are in tune with one another: what one feels, the other feels. Thus when she is on the threshold of the Minster – and *IT* resists – she has difficulty ‘trying to work out what her feeling was. It was dread, she thought, dread of going to church in the Minster, dread and sadness and misery’ (94). There is a dangerous merging between Alice and the creature, betokening a gradual progression from obsession to possession, yet Mayne, in breaking from other possessed child narratives, refuses to allow Alice to be colonised: ‘At the same time she knew that the feelings were not really her own but were being put very close to her so that she thought they were hers’ (94). When Alice leaves *IT* outside there is no more sadness and misery. Later, when she tries to enter the Minster again – and feels *IT* wanting to go on but being frightened – her empathic response seems to intensify: ‘Alice felt a strong sensation of another’s loneliness and despairing sadness and resignation’ (141)). It becomes incumbent on her to put an end to *IT*’s suffering and, by implication, her own. Intriguingly, Mayne equates Alice’s possession with a ‘weightless heaviness’ (134), such that later, when she experiences respite from *IT*, while ‘she hardly felt the weight [of *IT*] she knew the lightness of its going’ (136). This oxymoron suggests that Alice sees *IT* as more or less a complement to her self rather than a ‘supplement’ (weight or burden).
When she puts her hand in the reft on the Eyell, she is grabbed by another hand, ‘dry and rough, and with a ring on one of the fingers’ (24). She screams in terror – then flees (amusingly, she ponders whether Eyell means ‘I yell’ (25)). Matthew also encounters a hand in the vestry, but only she is haunted by IT and only she is showered with the rings. The weird sensation of the hand grabbing her persists long after she has left the Eyell. In contrast to the demon which infests Regan in *The Exorcist*, IT’s presence is more disturbing than terrifying, but very hard to ignore. Thus IT has a quite literal ‘hold’ on Alice. Yet the realness of the hand becomes so real to Alice that she must retreat into fantasy. Thus she vividly imagines herself drowning in a river, watched by an amused (and annoyed) Raddy, Alice’s best friend. (The direct and down-to-earth Raddy, who comes from a large family, is an obvious foil for the more introverted and imaginative Alice, who has been made effectively an ‘only child’.) Unfortunately, ‘her imagination had dried up with the water’ (31); and ‘the hand she wanted to think of as fancy insisted on staying real, like day and night or porridge or the wood in the yard at home, or arithmetic’ (33). But this recourse into fantasy is a short-term and ineffective response to the problem of IT, who will not simply ‘go away’. She finds herself increasingly incapable of dispelling the presence of IT. She becomes alienated from her body, and this culminates in her dropping Raddy in gym class after she fails to distinguish IT’s hand from her own. Mayne obviously enjoys playing off reality against fantasy, the real against the unreal. When Alice’s mother observes that she has never seen Raddy and declares her a figment of her daughter’s imagination, Alice finds her mother’s remark strangely reassuring: ‘she was pleased with the thought that someone so real could be so imaginary. Perhaps the hand could be imaginary too’ (37). It should be remembered that Alice has a keen sense of what is real and what unreal. That is, we can trust her perceptual judgement.

IT also serves as a kind of barometer of Alice’s increasingly volatile moods. As with Regan in *The Exorcist*, Alice is at the centre of some strange poltergeist phenomena – chairs fall over, book shelves topple, eggs ‘misbehave’, records go flying. Alice’s mother treats the phenomena very casually, which is part of Mayne’s strategy of familiarising the unfamiliar. (When Mum was Alice’s age, it is revealed that she and Grandpa encountered wandering spirits during their travels in New Guinea, hence their amazing readiness to accept Alice’s experience.) These outbursts of ghostly activity are always triggered by her ‘destructive thoughts’ (88). Thus it is through IT that Alice vents her anger and
frustration. As with Regan, this poltergeist phenomenon is linked to an eruption in Alice’s sexuality. In concert with popular ghost lore, poltergeists typically manifest themselves around pubescent children, particularly girls. It is clear these impulses need to be curbed or controlled. No wonder then that Raddy asks of her: ‘Are you practising for a witch?’ (92). Later, Alice accumulates quite a collection of rings, while the pressure of the hand recedes and is eclipsed by an invisible incomplete ring forming on her finger. ‘I think it wants to marry me’ (114), muses Alice, which has disturbing implications. The ring – that ultimate symbol of male domination over the female – signifies IT’s final hold on Alice. (Thankfully, there is no real suggestion that IT’s designs on Alice are carnal in nature; this is partly because IT is not gendered.) If IT behaves beyond her control – manifesting itself through her temper tantrums and repressed desires – then it can be seen that Alice and IT are able to work together, albeit up to a point. Alice is able to harness IT’s power for her own ends, as when she cheats in ‘Monopoly’ with the Bishop and wins every time. In this way, Alice colludes in her possession, even if Mayne refuses to have her colonised by IT.

In *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, Alice’s size (much to her dismay) is constantly changing. She feels as though her identity is fast diminishing: ‘I wonder if I changed in the night? Let me think: Was I the same when I got up this morning? I can almost remember feeling a little different. But if I am not the same, the question is, Who in the world am I?’ (Carroll 37). In *IT*, Alice struggles to hold on to her sense of identity as she tries to form her own identity. She is dismayed by Raddy’s remark that ‘You’ve changed, Alice’ (90). ‘No, I haven’t,’ she insists self-protectingly, ‘I’m not a changing sort of person’ (90). Yet Mayne’s point seems to be that she *is* changing, evolving, becoming in the book. Thus she ‘wondered, all the same, which of the selves she was at any one time, because every time you think of something you are changed’ (64). Her identity is not fixed once and for all: it is forever in a state of transition. A major part of Alice’s development necessitates that she face up to the inevitability of this change. Here, notions of history as always incomplete, never fully written, function as a metaphor for Alice’s unfixed, dynamic identity. This warrants an examination of Mayne’s historical sources.

In her informative account of the origins of Christianity, Vivian Green notes that the ‘triumph of Christianity did not mean the sudden extinction of paganism which was an unconscionably long time before dying’ (25). On the contrary, pagan concepts and customs continued to be assimilated into Christian thought provided that these ways
could be sufficiently Christianised. Hence for many of its unsophisticated followers, the distinction between the Christian and pagan must have seemed blurred (Green 27). Celtic pagan religion was swiftly absorbed into the new English Church. Historically, the first monasteries in Anglo-Saxon England were Celtic in type before being converted to the Roman form of Christianity (Green 55). For the most part the conversion was embraced by the Celts, and indeed the Celts themselves aided in the conversion (Joyce 18–32). However, relations between the Celtic and Roman were strained by the historic decision of the Synod of Whitby in 664, which resolved in favour of the Roman the dispute over the date of Easter. This signalled the decline of Celtic influence in England and elsewhere, whereby Celtic Christianity lost its stronghold (Joyce 66).

In *IT*, the book’s Ripon setting (integral to the development of character, action and theme) is firmly linked with its pagan and particularly Celtic heritage. Ripon Cathedral or Minster (which Mayne interestingly refrains from mentioning by name, but which is immediately identifiable by the references to the unique misericords in Ripon Minster), renowned for its eclectic style of architecture from different periods, continues to be the city’s main tourist attraction. Ripon’s rich and eventful religious history dates back over 1,300 years. It was the site of a Celtic place of worship, before St Wilfrid converted it in the seventh century into a Benedictine monastery. St Wilfrid was known for his anti-Celtic sentiments and was a leading figure on the Roman side in the Synod of Whitby in 664 (significantly, one of the town’s boundary crosses in the book is called Easter Cross). It took St Cuthbert – torn between the Roman and his Celtic ways – to strive for unity in the Church (Joyce 66). As befits Mayne’s ecumenical sentiments, he lends his name to the parade that takes place towards the end of the book. St Wilfrid’s Church was devastated in the tenth century, although the crypt survives more or less intact in the present-day structure – the fourth or fifth to appear on the sight. Ripon Minster was finally designated a cathedral in 1836 (Hearn 1), thus standing as a monument of the old and new, the past and present.

In so far as religion writes the child in *IT* Alice takes on the role of mediator and even ‘healer’ between the Celtic/pagan and the Christian. A vague sense of guilt infuses the text pertaining to the defeat of pagan and Celtic beliefs by Christianity. When Alice and Raddy find the wooden carving of *IT* in the Minster, Grandpa denounces it as ‘pagan dressed up to look Christian’ (153), which suggests that *IT* too is torn between two belief systems. To heal *IT* and, by
implication, herself Alice must find a way to bridge this gap between past and present. In the process she is grounded in history, or *histori-cised*: it as if she – and because of her, the rest of the town – are reasserting their pagan/Celtic roots. But before she can do this she must recognise that history is not – as she seems to think – a closed system, or ‘something already completely done’ (55–6). She understands this when she reads from missing (censored) pages of the book written by Grandpa on the town. In Mayne’s circular or non-linear book, time and space are apprehended in such a way that past and present intertwine, so that the print of the old is revealed through the print of the new (Scutter, ‘Between the Hither and Farther Shore’ 210). Mayne deconstructs religion by overturning the hierarchy of Christianity as central and Celtic/pagan beliefs as marginal, to reveal what is underneath. Mayne is trying to force modern-day religion to own parts of itself it has hitherto disowned. That religion, Mayne suggests, is at its most truthful when it acknowledges that it is part-Christian, part-pagan and part-Celtic. Mayne’s approach to history is almost Foucauldian in that he is using history as a way of diagnosing the present. Mayne’s histories – in accord with Foucault – are necessarily incomplete, and so never stop.

It is from Grandpa’s book of local history that Alice equips herself with factual knowledge that could possibly help her understand *IT’s* predicament and lay the wandering spirit to rest. She learns that a sorceress from Anglo-Saxon times ventured into the town accompanied by the hideous-looking creature. The townspeople were so fearful of the creature that no one dared to approach her. Nor could they make her and the creature leave the town. But finally – and mysteriously – a ‘great knife’ thrust out from one of the city crosses and killed her (76). (The pram axle which Alice finds and uses to dig with on the Eyell doubles as the murderous knife.) This was the Deed of Blood which released the creature on the town. It is never explained what became of *IT*. All that is known is that *IT* is a spirit from Anglo-Saxon times lost – like the drummer boy in *Earthfasts* – in modern times.

The discourse of an unfinished, ongoing and forever incomplete history (that is, historicity) needs to be reconciled with Alice’s movement towards wholeness and integration in the book. Here, *IT* is most provocatively read in Jungian terms. A major theme in Jung’s theory is the reconciliation of opposites within the psyche, the bringing together of the different facets of personality into a fully integrated whole. Jung labels this process individuation, which means ‘becoming an “in-dividual,” and, in so far as “individuality” embraces our
innermost, last, and incomparable uniqueness, it also implies becoming one’s own self. We could therefore translate individuation as “coming to selfhood” or “self-realization” (‘The Function of the Unconscious’ 173). In *IT*, Alice is on the threshold of puberty. When we meet her she does not possess what could be termed a developed sense of self or fully formed identity. A case could even be made that, like the missing pages of Grandpa’s book, she is also missing a part of her self. In accordance with Jung’s conception of puberty, her psyche is only just beginning to take shape. Jung regards this as a difficult time for the adolescent, accompanied by powerful physiological (including sexual) changes, as well as changes that need to be made to social life (Hall and Lindzey 129). This perfectly summarises Alice’s predicament in *IT*. Although, strictly speaking, Jung’s theory of personality suggests that a twelve year old would not be capable of realising individuation, it is nevertheless enlightening to read Alice’s development in the novel in these terms.

The key to the laying of *IT* is embedded in ancient ritual. Alice knows that Christian counter-magic and remedies (exorcism, prayer) will not work and will only harm *IT*. Her remedy is part pagan, part Celtic and part Jungian. *IT* is very dense with Jungian imagery of the mandala or magic circle, which specifically takes on the form of the Celtic wheel cross in the novel. For Jung, the mandala, which may be represented as a circle or square or quarternity (for example, a flower, cross or wheel) was the ultimate symbol of the totality of the self. The mandala thus represents the goal of individuation. Alice’s crucial realisation in the novel (which is also a form of self-realisation) is when she makes the connection between the three parts of the ring she wears on her finger and the three parts of the circle she has traversed around the city’s ancient boundary crosses. (This amounts to an almost instinctive knowledge on her part, passed down from the generations via the collective unconscious.) In *Psychology and Religion*, Jung explicitly draws a nexus between psychic dream images, religion and the self. In one dream image, he records, the mandala or ‘circle is represented by rotation, four children, for instance, carry a “dark ring” and walk in a circle’ (79). Not only do the rings Alice acquires in the course of novel carry Jungian significance, but the boundary crosses, as Scutter points out, resemble Celtic wheel crosses, ‘combining the forms of the circle and the cross, the two great symbols of the ancient world’ (‘Between the Hither and Farther Shore’ 209). In the case of the quarternity, Jung defined a three-plus-one structure, ‘in that one of the terms composing it occupies an exceptional position or has a
nature unlike that of the others’ (Jaffé 398). In Mayne’s novel, Alice’s discovers that Venwath cross is that missing link with special transforming properties: the “fourth” which, added to the other three makes them “One,” symbolising totality’ (Jaffé 398).

The dilemma Alice faces in the novel is whether to become one with IT or at one with herself. IT’s individuation is bound up with Alice’s individuation. There is a dangerous merging between her and the creature, which threatens to consume Alice. This is not the kind of individuation she seeks. She must figure a way of mastering IT before IT masters her. First she must return the piece of stone to Venwath Cross. Significantly, stones (precious or otherwise) are frequent symbols of the Jungian self, perhaps because of their lasting, complete, ‘just-so-ness’ quality (Franz 221). Then she must enlist the help of the town or community, which proves more challenging. We have to commend the way Alice singlehandedly reorganises St Cuthbert’s parade by leading them round the boundary of the crosses to complete the truly magic circle. Grandpa is understandably against it: ‘That’s no Saint Cuthbert’s parade ... that’s a pagan procession’ (163). Significantly, though, he doesn’t stand in her way. On the contrary, he is proud of the mature, active way she is handling the problem of IT; no longer is she is retreating into fantasy, but facing reality. His estimation of her increases accordingly, and he marvels at the way she’s finally ‘spoken up like an honest [that is, true] person’ (154).

When Alice leads the community round the boundary crosses the overall effect is of a merging between the Christian and pagan. In Audrey Rose, De Felitta was seen to propose (however naively) a unified theory of religion, by employing the possessed child as a via media between Eastern and Western religion. In IT, Mayne employs the possessed child as a via media between the pagan past, represented by IT, and the Christian present, represented by Alice’s grandfather. However, Mayne is far too intelligent a writer to attempt such a simplistic unification. If Mayne deliberately obscures the differences between the Christian and the Celtic/pagan in the novel, then he still allows for their philosophical differences to remain. At the least, Mayne suggests a co-operation: not only between the Celtic/pagan and Christian but also between the different offshoots of Christianity – Catholic, Anglican, Baptist. All significantly participate in the very unusual parade, putting aside historical and philosophical differences.

However, Alice cannot complete the circle round the boundary crosses too soon. She has to wait for the larger circle to be formed by the town, ‘the circle that would bind the thing down, not the one that
would bind her’ (183). Now she is able to exercise her free will fully: she can choose to be master of IT and so ‘keep power’ or be rid of IT and so ‘keep right’ (186). To keep power is to regress in her development; to keep right is to progress. She eventually removes the ring – the ‘centre of all’ (186) – and so is free and right. Free will proves to be its own empowerment; she doesn’t need IT. Significantly, the laying of IT coincides with Alice’s repeat examination at St Hilda’s School for Girls. Earlier, Alice is praised by St Hilda’s headmistress for her originality and intelligence, although the headmistress cannot understand why she does not want to attend the school. This is presumably the reassurance she needs to pass the exam: that she will be her own unique self, with her own thoughts, opinions and perceptions. When she passes the exam, she earns the approval she desires from her parents. But this is about more than earning approval from others – although, it may be seen, this plays a major role in her development. When she receives Grandpa’s approval, ‘she said to herself she didn’t care what Grandpa thought, but she did, and half, or more, of her caring was from knowing that he was not in fact standing in her way, that she could know and do things he had not already done’ (155). Earlier, Alice vows to write the biography of IT because it hasn’t already been done by Grandpa. In so doing she clears imaginative space for herself. She is no longer handicapped by the anxiety of influence. And so Alice is also ready to write the biography of her ‘coming to selfhood’. Yet the lesson from history is that this autobiography will never be, as it were, a closed book, but rather, open and subject to endless rewriting. That is, Alice’s identity is history in the making. There’s a genuine warmth and closeness between Alice and her family in their closing dialogue:

Mum and Dad found Alice at last, taking over from the bishop and Father Lewis. ‘And is it all right?’ said Mum. ‘You look a bit pale. Grandpa’s just coming along too.’

‘Grand,’ said Alice, giving her a kiss, holding Grandpa’s hand, and leaning on Dad.

‘Now,’ said Dad, because he wasn’t able to be quiet.

‘We had that strapping lass from Hilda’s round saying they’d take you next back end.’

‘Autumn,’ said Mum.

‘Happen,’ said Dad. ‘but no more common talk like “grand.” Say “excellent” or summat.’

‘I’ll think on,’ said Alice. ‘I’ve sweated cobwebs enough for today.’

(188)
Thus it would appear that Alice has truly found herself by the end. She now belongs to the family, the school, the church and the community (uncharacteristically, and therefore significantly, she lapses into her father’s ‘town language’ here, suggesting perhaps a narrowing of the class divide).

**Victor Kelleher’s *Del-Del***

In contrast to Britain, stories about possessed children/adolescents have not been a staple of children’s literature in the Australasian cultural scene. It is not unusual for subjects and themes broached by adult narratives to take their time (sometimes as long as a generation or so) to make the crossover into children’s literature. This appears to be the case for such very different possession-type narratives as Victor Kelleher’s *Del-Del*, Gary Crew’s *Strange Objects* and Caroline Macdonald’s *Speaking to Miranda* (both 1990), all of which were published in Australia. Special mention must also be made of New Zealand writer Margaret Mahy, whose Carnegie award-winning books for older children, *The Haunting* (1982) and *The Changeover* (1984), both centre on the possession of a pre-adolescent boy. *Del-Del* is quite transparently a reworking of *The Exorcist*, as well as a host of other possession narratives. Hence we may discern the familiar, calculated tensions between Calvinism and Romanticism. Kelleher had already flirted with the idea in the unmemorable *Baily’s Bones* (1988), in which an intellectually disabled seventeen-year-old boy is possessed by a convict from Australian colonial times. Here the indigenous Aboriginal past comes back to haunt the living and is re-enacted with vengeful potentially destructive results.3

Although influenced by *The Exorcist* and, perhaps not surprisingly, rather Americanised in its treatment, *Del-Del* uniquely rewrites the possessed child in a postmodern Australian cultural context defined by secularism. Australia has never been profoundly religious in its attitudes and traditions in the way the United States is. While religion shaped the colonial state, the ‘1960s saw the beginning of the collapse of Christian morality in an increasingly secular Australian society … Not until the 1960s did Australia become a post-Christian society, where religion no longer has the same degree of power it once enjoyed to influence political events’ (Thompson 140). Given the nexus between the possessed child and religion, it is no surprise to find a dearth of possessed child narratives in Australian fictions for both adults and children. In *Del-Del* and other novels, Kelleher alludes to
the lack of the spiritual in modern society that is not to be identified with any particular religion. Rather, he wants us to tap into the essential spirit of the child. In this regard, Kelleher’s worldview is best described as liberal humanist. As John Stephens and Robyn McCallum note, children’s literature, with its emphasis on human freedom and experience, is deeply informed by humanist ideology (15), particularly seen in children’s fiction which involves, in some sense, a retelling of a known story, as in Del-Del. According to the Oxford Companion to Australian Children’s Literature, ‘Kelleher writes strong, spare prose and has the ability to elicit a powerful emotional response. His well-sustained stories are concerned with the violence of modern society, the creative and destructive impulses of the human heart, and the issue of individual freedom in an increasingly restricted world’ (Lees and Macintyre 242).

As in A Wrinkle in Time and The Changeover, a big sister must do battle with the forces of evil to save her possessed little brother from a fate possibly worse than death. Kelleher wastes little time in destroying the peace and security of a contemporary middle-class family from Sydney, not without its hardships and problems, by the mysterious possession of the young son. He is seven-year-old Sam who, like Charles Wallace in A Wrinkle in Time, is a child prodigy. Narrated from the point of view of Sam’s older sister Beth, the record is her determined attempt to piece together the events of the past and trace the causes of Sam’s ‘possession’. As with the governess in The Turn of the Screw, Beth’s first-person account contributes to the ambiguity the reader experiences. She frequently vacillates in her judgements about Sam, the extent of his guilt or innocence, sometimes (most disconcertingly) from one sentence to the next. She is insistent that her story is not a story, but ‘truth’. For her own as well as her brother’s sake this truth, as implied by her name, must be brought to light. However, she is also quick to remind us that everything we are about to read is a reconstruction – and thus necessarily an interpretation – of events: ‘Where did it all start then? When Laura died? Earlier? Later? Only Sam can answer that for sure, and he won’t talk about it any more’ (1). Her self-effacing tone – she is by her own admission the ‘quiet’ one in the family, less than ‘brainy’, unlike her gifted brother (32) – contrasts sharply with the governess’s frequent self-importance. Although this does not vindicate her for any distortions or inaccuracies in her narrative, she at least acknowledges her unreliability as a narrator.

Like Regan and Miles and Flora, Sam could be seen as the innocent and defenceless victim of a malevolent invading intelligence, by what
is first taken to be the devil and then an alien from outer space – or so it seems. PART 1: THE BEAST describes Sam’s possession by the Beast, otherwise known as the Devil. In so far as it is necessary to his project of rewriting *The Exorcist*, Kelleher here presents good and evil, innocence and corruption, in a broadly Christian context. Like James and Friedkin/Blatty, Kelleher casts the innocence of the child (Sam) as a foil for the corruption of the Beast, setting up the story as an antagonistic play between good and evil, God and Satan. Thus like Regan and Miles and Flora, Sam could be seen in his innocence as a symbolic Romantic child figure – at least initially.

The novel opens with Sam and the family getting ready to visit the gravesite of Laura, the beloved middle child whose life was tragically taken by leukaemia exactly one year earlier. It is on this anniversary of her death that Sam starts behaving bizarrely. In the cupboard of his bedroom, Beth is faced with a Sam quite unlike the Sam she has hitherto known. Like Regan, he is the embodiment of a changeling – the same, yet very different: ‘His face, like the rest of the room, was somehow changed. Not physically. He was still the same skinny little kid as before, but with something different about him. And I mean really different, like looking at something you think and know and seeing a stranger. Someone who shouldn’t be there’ (5). Now no longer Sam, he is somebody with a tell-tale lisp who answers to the name of ‘Del-Del’. Could this be Sam’s childish gibberish for Devil? (Interestingly, there are also shades of the pidgin Aboriginal term ‘debil/debil’.)

At first, Del-Del is, quite understandably, mistaken by Dad for an imaginary friend; then, less understandably, for misbehaviour, lack of discipline. As usual, it is Mum – the lawyer in the family – who has a better grasp of the facts: ‘He’s not just being disobedient. You can’t make everything right by punishing him. It’s gone past that’ (22). She persuades her husband to send Sam to a psychiatrist. The diagnosis: that the real problem with Sam is a problem with the parents who, failing to deal with his giftedness and difference from other kids, have been projecting that failure onto him (27). Thus the psychiatrist locates the cause of Sam’s disturbance somewhere in the home. Even Mum earlier concedes: ‘Sam’s always been too much for us. Des. Be honest. We’re none of us exactly stupid people, but Sam’s in a different league altogether. We’ve never quite known how to deal with his kind of brilliance’ (22).

It pays to look briefly at the way Kelleher sets up the nuclear family in the novel. Mum is quite a strong and level-headed figure, as is her
daughter, Beth. Yet it is Mum’s strength that is represented as castrating of the male, as Scutter has recently argued in *Displaced Fictions* (222). Dad, feckless and wimpish, has little more to do than to give in to his wife’s decisions. In all fairness he relies on her to make those decisions. On the few occasions he does act on his own initiative, it is with negative results. For example, when he tries to take matters into his own hands by putting a lock on the cupboard where Sam has been consorting with Del-Del, he is unprepared for the sheer terror of Sam’s agonised response. Thrown into a panic, he flees the house, leaving Mum and Beth to deal with the problem. Thus, if there is an absence of father or father-figures in *The Turn of the Screw* and *The Exorcist*, then the father in *Del-Del* might as well be absent. Apparently real strength emanates from the female. While Kelleher, on the surface, undermines traditional gender stereotypes (for example, the familiar oppositions of husband as ‘rational’ and wife as ‘irrational’ are reversed), ‘it’s touch and go whether the possessed child has caused the disintegration of the family or whether the reconstructed family has caused the disintegration of the child’ (Scutter, *Displaced Fictions* 216). Dad, it is implied, is impotent, but only after he loses his job and is forced to become a househusband. However, it is the mother who is being covertly blamed for the disintegration of the family (Scutter 222). This sadly suggests that there hasn’t been much progression in the representations of the mother and motherhood between *The Exorcist* and *Del-Del*.

As Sam’s *Exorcist*-type symptoms snowball – he too rolls his eyes back in their sockets and speaks English backwards – a rational explanation drawn from psychiatry for those symptoms is called into question, or at least it seems that way. This is part of Kelleher’s cunning. That is, we must entertain a hypothesis based on the acceptance of the marvellous: that Sam is possessed. In the course of the book Sam becomes more and more like his *doppelganger* Miles, a ‘dark prodigy’, as Beth recounts: ‘[it was as] if the person standing close to my bed wasn’t a person any more, but a piece of the darkness that had somehow learned to think’ (51). In drawing on Calvinist and neo-Darwinian discourses of childhood, Sam is cast as a ‘wild animal’ (21) in need of taming. Just like Regan (indeed, like many little boys in Victorian literature) he becomes increasingly savage: he howls, he growls, he snarls, he spits, he fights, he bites, he claws. In words which could have come straight from the mouth of Regan’s mother Chris, Dad is led to observe of his changeling son’s transformation: ‘Whatever that is in the back room, it is not our Sam’ (61).
The battle between good and evil is perhaps crystallised in the scene where the fanatically religious Gran takes Sam to church to have the spirit banished from him, recalling not only *The Exorcist* but a similar scene from *The Omen*. A stunned and horrified Sam cries in backwards English to an approaching priest, ‘Yats kcab! Evas em morf eht rewop fo thgil! Evas em!’ and ‘Evas em! Ekat yawa siht regnessem fo thgil’ (43), before having a fit. Devil or no Devil, Gran is not blind to the signs; this is not Laura’s wandering spirit, but something far more sinister. Eventually, at Gran’s recommendation, outside help in the form of a holy man named Hardcastle is called on to perform the obligatory exorcism. It is telling that, in this so-called age of secularism, the church is called on as a last resort, with the same authority as a holy man or guru given to handing out business cards advertising his services. Hardcastle’s brand of magic and healing aligns him with New Age influences. He is far removed from Father Merrin or Karras, but where they all agree is on the ‘real’ reason for the Beast’s possession of Sam. As he tantalisingly remarks to Mum: ‘these things happen in the best of families ... He [the Beast] wouldn’t have bothered otherwise’ (57). As in *The Exorcist*, this suggests that the real target of the Devil or demon is not the possessed but the possessed’s family.

There’s a reprieve for the family when it is believed that Hardcastle has succeeded in expelling the Beast from Sam. But rather than disappearing the Beast has changed its form. In PART II: THE VOYAGER Beth describes Sam’s possession by an alien from the constellation Delphinus. It comes to light that the alien is the survivor of a race on the brink of extinction, whose ice-cold planet was catastrophically hit by a meteor. To escape extinction, the ‘essences’ of the best minds – among them Del-Del’s – were sent ‘voyaging’ into the far reaches of space, without destination. Desperate to find a place to ‘rest’ from voyaging, Del-Del found Sam’s mind with – like his/her home planet – a ‘coolness at its centre, an icy core’ (125), a place where he/she was able to survive. This paints a picture of Del-Del as no less than a parasite looking for a host. There are similarities here with Wyndham’s *Chocky*. Like Del-Del, Chocky – the feminised alien entity who inhabits adopted Matthew’s eleven-year-old mind-body – is on a quest for survival. In order to survive, she confides to Matthew’s father, ‘We [Chocky’s race] must colonise’ (140–1) and, as a scout-teacher-explorer-missionary, she and others like her have been sent via their ‘minds’ into the far reaches of space to search for a suitable planet for colonisation. But whereas Wyndham’s mother-alien is benevolent, a friend and ‘guardian angel’ to Matthew, Kelleher’s is undeniably malevolent,
ruthless, willing to do whatever it takes for self-preservation, even if this means putting Sam’s life in danger.

PART III: THE CHILD, which turns on a psychoanalytic narrative, assigns a disturbing rational explanation to Sam’s disturbance. In the ‘shocking’ dénouement, we learn that Sam has never been possessed, either by the Beast or an extra-terrestrial. In Todorov’s scheme, we have moved from the uncanny to the marvellous, back to the uncanny, the supernatural having been completely explained away. The effect is unexpected – and jarring. It is almost as if Kelleher has cheated us. It transpires that Del-Del has been Sam’s elaborate coping strategy to spare him the pain and grief of Laura’s death. This is to say, Del-Del is Sam’s ‘cold, hard self’ (186), the self that doesn’t care, who refuses to mourn, get hurt or cry. Salvation for Sam consists of rescuing Beth from her fall down a precipice and proving, once and for all, that he really cares. Free now to mourn his beloved sister, he can move – in the Elizabeth Kübler-Ross model of death and dying – to a stage of acceptance, where the internal struggle with death is resolved. Sam, ‘the little boy who does not cry’, can now learn to cry again. In this way, Sam becomes more of a realistic than symbolic figure by the novel’s close.

As with Regan and Miles, Sam is a little boy who is lost and crying out to be found. According to Del-Del: ‘It is useless appealing to the child ... He dwells where you will never reach him’ (161). Sam’s lost-ness is in the nature of a coma, a state which has rendered him inactive – almost catatonic – for the time being. Says Del-Del: ‘he is dormant ... You may think of him as sleeping; as someone lost to your world temporarily’ (123). And: ‘he is locked in a deep and dream-less sleep, and I alone hold the key to his waking’ (128). Sam’s lost state is analogous to that of the pod people in Don Siegel’s famous sci-fi film of alien possession, Invasion of the Body Snatchers, from Jack Finney’s novel. Here, aliens spawned from seed-pods replace the inhabitants of a small American town with ‘carbon-copies’ who, while physically nearly perfect, are emotionally barren, dormant in their subservience. It transpires that the inhabitants of the town are being snatched by the aliens while they sleep. The image of Sam as victim to an alien invasion by a body snatcher fits in remarkably with Del-Del’s account of Sam’s possession: ‘Deftly I cut the links that bound him to his waking state. As he drifted away, I stepped into his place, took over his poor body which enclosed him’ (128). It would difficult to give a more unsettling picture of a little boy who has been stolen. Not only is Sam – like Regan or Miles – a prisoner inside his own body, but
also a prisoner outside his own body. When Del-Del informs Beth that the ‘child has left us’ (180) and that ‘Del-Del has replaced him’ (181), we are again reminded of those alien changelings from Siegel’s film. There is a sense that Sam has been cast out, exiled, from his own body; he has lost touch with his own being.

At first, it would seem to follow that while Sam is possessed, he is lost; that while he is not possessed, he ceases to be lost. But there are indications that, even after Del-Del has departed from Sam’s body, Sam might still be irretrievably lost. This is hinted at in Del-Del’s broken promise to the family: ‘In time the child will be restored to you, though not exactly as he was. Never as he once was’ (137, emphasis added). Whether she realises it or not, these words come to play in Beth’s troubled mind as she prepares for her showdown with Del-Del in the mountains. She entertains the possibility that Sam’s lostness might be permanent; that, even after Del-Del has been banished into the far reaches of space, he might be unrecallable from his dormant state, ‘gone forever, lost somewhere in the void’ (176), lost in space. Sam is no Prodigal Son: that which is lost may not necessarily be found. He may never return to Beth and the family. This is Beth’s ‘worst nightmare’ (176).

A strand running through The Turn of the Screw and The Exorcist, which is also powerfully present in Del-Del, is the Calvinist notion of the mind and body of the child being peculiarly susceptible to possession. As in The Exorcist, there are repeated references to the body, and the destruction of the body. When Beth notices Sam engaging in self-mutilatory behaviour, she hears him in his Beast incarnation muttering: ‘The uses of this flesh ... To feel pleasure, to feel pain, and to rot. Don’t forget the rotting part’ (26). This echoes the demon’s line about possessing Regan ‘until she rots and lies stinking in the earth’. Later, Beth and her father are shocked to find Sam with cuts on his arms and legs and palms (stigmata), bloodstained and filthy (64). Sam is weakened physically in the story. Without proper sustenance, Mum worries that, not only his mind, but ‘His body will get sick too’ (60). There is also the suggestion that Sam’s body might not be able to survive his exorcism ordeal. As Beth recounts: ‘Now he was breathing in rapid gasps, and where his shirt had been torn away you could see his heart fluttering against his rib cage’ (71–2, emphasis added). As with Regan or Miles, we would not want to rule out the possibility of death by heart failure – we need only consider Miles. If exorcism is the child’s only way to salvation, we may well ask ourselves, which is better: a possessed child or a dead child? Judging by the sign ‘SAM IS DEAD’ (61), the writing is on the wall anyway: the Beast wants to destroy Sam.
Compared with *The Exorcist*, however, the emphasis in *Del-Del* is on the possession of the *mind* rather than the body, on the mind as a temple of evil. Let us not forget the reason why Del-Del the alien chose to infiltrate Sam in the first place: because of the ‘cold space’ in Sam’s mind, where Del-Del is able to survive. Although he doesn’t know what he is dealing with, Hardcastle has the right idea when he attempts to drive Del-Del the Beast from Sam’s mind and not his body. ‘Once we drive it from there,’ Hardcastle explains, ‘[the Beast] will vanish and become the no-thing that it is’ (69). As in *The Exorcist*, this may suggest that evil has a ‘negative’ existence. In breaking from the age-old Roman ritual, Hardcastle’s style of exorcism involves himself, Beth and Dad, joined later by Pops, collectively willing Sam’s ‘mind to be free’ (69).

It is significant that Del-Del is drawn to the ‘cold space’ in Sam’s mind, the seat of cool, unsympathetic intellect, and not his heart, the seat of emotion and compassion. Gran’s seemingly throwaway remarks about Sam being a genius in his head, but in his heart a baby (10), speak volumes about Sam: that he is mentally advanced, but emotionally backward; that his heart still has a long way to go to catch up with his mind. Del-Del makes known that: ‘In the beginning ... there were two minds. The child’s [Sam’s] and another one, belonging to the girl Laura. While she was present the beacon signal was faint, unclear. But after her departure it gained in strength’ (124). This opens up the text to some interesting interpretation: when Laura was alive, the beacon signal from Sam’s cold mind (different from Laura’s mind (125)) was weak because Laura’s *warm* heart was enough for both of them. When she died, Sam’s mind became even colder. Without Laura’s (warm) heart to balance his (cold) mind, or a heart to call his own, the beacon signal from Sam’s mind became perceptibly stronger to Del-Del. In these terms, Sam, the boy who does not cry, could be understood as needing a heart, in the manner of the Tin Man in the Land of Oz. Early on, he is likened by Beth to a ‘kind of mechanical person, with nothing inside except cogs and wheels and things’ (25). Later, his ‘Tin Man’ status is unmistakable in the episode where Sam ‘looks’ for his own heart and finds out that there’s ‘nothing’ (no-thing?) there. This follows Sam and Mum’s return from Brisbane after their stay with the other grandparents:

‘Home!’ he crowed delightedly. ‘Home!’
‘That’s it, son,’ Dad chimed in. ‘Home is where the heart is.’
Sam swivelled towards him. ‘The heart?’ he queried sharply.
‘Where? Where’d it go?’ Chuckling to himself, he conducted a
frantic search of the lounge room, peering under the coffee table, behind the couch, even up the chimney. Next, he began exploring his own body, pushing his hands up his clothes. ‘No,’ he said decisively. ‘No sign of a heart.’ Finally he tapped his chest to show it was hollow. ‘Nothing in here either,’ he declared, and broke into a peal of wild laughter which was so contagious that we all joined in.

Sam’s ‘heart condition’, like Regan’s, accommodates a psychoanalytic interpretation. His ‘possession’ is related to emotional repression, just as Regan’s is related to sexual repression. It is through emotional release, or catharsis, that Sam’s heart is healed, restored. He regains his heart and so is no longer lost, free now to return to the nuclear family. It seems that Dorothy Gale was right: there is no place like home.

Interestingly, the idea that the mind is potentially dangerous if not mediated by the heart also forms the moral centre of another possessed child narrative, L’Engle’s *A Wrinkle in Time*, mentioned earlier. When child prodigy Charles Wallace succumbs to the disembodied brain IT, he becomes, like Sam, all brain and no heart. In L’Engle’s emphasis on feeling over thinking, only love is able to rescue Charles from his darkness (which is allied with the dangers of self-obsession) and guide him towards the path of light. As in *Del-Del*, feeling is gendered feminine: it is Charles’s older sister Meg who emerges as the child’s saviour and shows him the path to love and not hate. L’Engle is an unashamedly religious writer who has espoused a radical view of spirituality that seeks a balance between contemporary science and fundamentalist religion. Here the mind is aligned with the sciences; the heart or spirit with religion. Consequently, the absence of a heart implies an absence of the spirit, which L’Engle sees as a bankrupt state of human existence. Likewise, in *Del-Del*, the absence of a heart also implies the absence of the spirit/spiritual in our modern lives, which is more clearly seen in light of Kelleher’s *oeuvre*. In *The Power of Myth*, Joseph Campbell suggests that myth provides ‘clues to the spiritual potentialities of the human life’ (5), helping to realise a feeling of rapture from being alive. However, according to Campbell, one of our problems today is that modern society has lost its mythic understanding which is necessary for an awareness that is profoundly humanly spiritual. As a result we live in a ‘demythologized world’ (9). This is the world of *Del-Del*. Kelleher, whose novels *Forbidden Paths of Thual* (1979), *Master of the Grove* (1982) and *Brother Night* (1990) closely follow the mythic quest structures described by Campbell in his classic *The Hero with a
Thousand Faces (1949), seems to agree with Campbell that myth helps to put one back in touch with the experience of the spiritual. In Del-Del, Kelleher's liberal humanist preoccupations find their most clear expression in his concern with developing young Sam’s essential ‘humanness’. While Kelleher’s notion of spirituality is not religious in the sense that L’Engle’s is, where they both agree is on the child’s intrinsic need to become (re)acquainted with the human spirit.

Like the corpus of adult possession narratives previously discussed, Del-Del places the Romantic belief in childhood innocence in doubt. Whether possessed by the Beast or an extraterrestrial, it would seem to follow that Sam, like Regan and Miles and Flora, is free from blame; his own will is, after all, under control by a strange and powerful force. He is innocent – or is he? As in The Turn of the Screw, innocence in Del-Del is directly related to the child’s lack of knowledge of evil which, as before, begs the question: how much does the child know? From the very outset, there are intimations from Beth that Sam is not completely innocent. We are again and again reminded of his cleverness which, according to Beth in her prologue, is ‘what got everything started’ (1). Even when she hastily changes her mind – ‘No, that’s not right either. Sam didn’t start anything. He was a victim, like the rest of us’ (1) – she doesn’t sound very convinced. The implication is hard to escape: that Sam knows too much for his own good. In case we missed it though, the relationship between ignorance and knowledge, innocence and corruption, is brought home in her uneasy epilogue. Here, Beth expresses a lack of faith in the myth of childhood innocence, whose ‘games’ may not be so harmless: ‘I know I promised him that Del-Del was gone forever, and I’m sure he believed me. Even so, I sometimes have my doubts. Especially when people go on and on about how clever Sam is, as though cleverness is the only thing that matters, and he gets that distant cold look in his eyes’ (195). Here, Sam’s cold look recalls his cold mind.

More to the point: how much does Sam know about evil and Del-Del? According to Del-Del: ‘Even the child’s mind needed time to grasp the whole truth’ (124), which implies that Sam has nearly always had some degree of awareness of Del-Del’s presence and what is happening to him, his memory lapses notwithstanding. A growing and disturbing picture emerges of Sam as less than a passive victim. Most incriminatory is Del-Del’s revelation to the family that ‘I was able to sense the child’s mind beckoning to me from the warm darkness … “Come,” the child called to me. “Come, come, come, come, come, come, come ...”’ (124). Like Flora’s unholy alliance with Miss Jessel, it would seem that Sam has seen the ‘perfect and easy way’ to meet Del-Del’s evil.
we have, then, amounts to a case of possession by consent. The speaker is Del-Del again: ‘He [Sam] welcomed me. Opened his mind for me to plunder’ (128). While Beth acknowledges that there is a part of Sam that fears and opposes Del-Del, there’s another part that feels, just like Miles and Flora, ‘sort of chosen. Special. Separate from the rest of us. Ready to welcome Del-Del with open arms’ (131). Like those partners in crime, Sam appears to have sold himself to the temptation of evil.

The other revelation by Del-Del that the Beast was entirely Sam’s invention, created by material deep in his subconscious mind, presents more damning evidence against the cult innocence of the child. The suggestion is planted very early on in the book when Gran tries to convince Mum, the ‘complete unbeliever’ (39), that Sam is indeed possessed by a spirit. An immovable Mum insists that: ‘This isn’t the age of witchcraft ... People don’t get sick because of devils and spirits’ (49). Gran replies: ‘You are telling me this Beast is Sam? ... You, the mother, are thinking this?’ (49). Unable to answer, Mum does not want to explore the disquieting implications of Gran’s statement: that Sam is corrupt. Later, when Del-Del the alien indicates that the Beast inside Sam was a product of autosuggestion, ‘already in his mind, lodged from some book he’d read’ (126), she engages in denial. She doesn’t really want the truth because she can’t handle the truth. Much the same might be said of Dad. Either way, the mysterious Beast in Sam’s mind bears a close resemblance to the beast in Lord of the Flies. If we are to read Del-Del and Lord of the Flies as treatises of human nature, then evil in the world which has been given form in the beast is really an evil within all of us. This is the real beast, the beast within. Thus it would appear that Kelleher has finally endorsed Calvinist ideologies of childhood over and above Romantic ideologies. However, Kelleher’s real point is that that evil is part of our biological makeup and not bound up with the original sin, the Devil or the supernatural.

Does this spell the death knell for the cult innocence of the child? Yes and no. In her epilogue, Beth is quick to redeem Sam, to salvage some of his innocence: ‘There was certainly nothing evil about him. If you ask me, we all have a Del-Del locked away in a cupboard somewhere; a hidden self we’d rather not acknowledge’ (194). It is here that Kelleher’s arguments about human nature are most fully developed: the ‘hidden self’ sounds suspiciously like Jung’s shadow archetype, the so-called dark half of personality that has its roots in our ancestral past and contains, for example, our repressed desires and destructive tendencies. According to Jung, the person must fully acknowledge his/her shadow in order to be fully individuated (integrated and healthy). For this to
occur, the ego (the seat of conscious awareness) and the shadow must work to together. When they do not, there is a kind of ‘splinter personality’. If the shadow is totally suppressed, then the person risks revolt from his/her shadow. This will occur, for example, if there is some crisis or weakness in the ego (Schultz 101). In Sam’s case, the ego crisis has been brought on by Laura’s untimely death, resulting in a revolt from his shadow, ‘personified’ in Del-Del. The purpose of Beth’s record is to help Sam acknowledge his shadow, to remind him of who he really is deep inside (1, 195), so that Del-Del may never rear its ugly head again. But that Sam acts ‘almost as if Del-Del was never a threat’ (195) troubles Beth and makes us wonder if Sam has really learned anything about his shadow? Is that evil still lurking about somewhere in the dark recesses of his mind, waiting to burst forth one day, with even more horrifying consequences?

Somehow, the fact that Sam has never been possessed is a more disturbing state of affairs than if he was possessed. Even if we allow for the fact that Sam’s ‘possession’ was not a conscious, deliberate act of manipulation or calculation, one cannot help thinking that he has just delivered a tour-de-force performance: not only has he duped his family, but a psychiatrist, a holy man, and a university astronomer. Although only seven-years old, Sam, by the formidable intelligence beneath his ‘innocent mask’ (118), is well and truly a force to be reckoned with, more than a match for an adult’s mind. We are reminded of threatening words to Beth: ‘Temper, temper ... After all, consider what you’re dealing with?’ (25). Yes: what or whom are we dealing with? Del-Del or, perhaps more terrifyingly, Sam? In the final analysis, Kelleher’s stand on the extent of Sam’s innocence or corruption is, like James and Friedkin’s/Blatty’s, highly ambiguous and dualistic.

Mayne’s IT from England appropriates the normally ‘adult’ theme of possession to explore the unique problems of identity faced in childhood. Rather than writing the possessed child between the oppositions of Calvinism and Romanticism, Mayne writes the possessed child by social institutions. The upshot is a possessed child figure that is, in many significant ways, more realistic and full and satisfying than anything that has been attempted before or since. Mayne’s Alice is no cipher: she lives and breathes. While Mayne replays some of the familiar themes and situations of other possessed child narratives, he also radically reacts against them. In freeing the possessed child from Roman Catholic discourses, he employs the possessed child as a mediator between the Celtic/pagan past and modern-day religion. It may be speculated that the presence of a primitive religious intersection, as
also found in *The Exorcist, Audrey Rose* and *Shrine*, is linked to the idea of the child as a cultural primitive, as discussed by George Boas in *The Cult of Childhood*. In contrast, the increased secularisation of religion in post-Christian Australian society in the 1990s informs the writing of Victor Kelleher’s both symbolic and realistic possessed child figure in *Del-Del*. Although organised and New Age religion prove inadequate in helping the sick child, Kelleher still believes that the child needs to be brought into an awareness of the spiritual. In its widest implications, this may be read as a commentary on modern culture, which Kelleher sees as vitally lacking this spiritual awareness.
Conclusion

While Britain was reeling from the vicious murder of toddler James Bolger by two ten-year-old boys in Liverpool, the feminist critic Rosalind Coward speculated in *The Observer* on ‘Why Little Angels Become Monsters’ (28 March 1993). In contemporary culture she diagnoses a highly ‘schizophrenic’ attitude towards children who, as babies and toddlers, are perceived as angels but, within the passage of a few short years, are somehow thought of as demons and monsters. ‘But at what point,’ Coward rightly asks, ‘do the innocent babes – currently seen as the victims of murder, bullying, abuse – become the unruly perpetrators of juvenile crime?’ (55). According to Coward, most people have replaced the idea of original sin with original innocence, seeing ‘evil’ in the child as the result of worldly corruptions and not inherited wickedness. However, when a child has committed an inexplicably violent or anti-social act we are all too willing, she points out, to label that child as evil and even demonic, as happened in the case of the two boys involved in the Bolger killing. And yet the idea of the child as evil incarnate does not marry well with its aura of vulnerability. The child cannot know what it does. And how do we account for such highly conflicting, vacillatory attitudes? Could it be that we are projecting our own fears and insecurities onto our children?

All the evidence is that the crisis around children is really a crisis about ourselves. We slide from extolling childhood innocence to calling for the devils to be incarcerated in sin bins because that’s how we feel about our ourselves. We are anxious about our capacity to create and sustain a ‘good’ society. We want the best but we feel we are failing. (Coward 55)
In *Erotic Innocence*, Kincaid echoes and extends some of Coward’s sentiments. He argues that our worship of the child, with its bitter-sweet nostalgia, is interlaced with feelings of pain, guilt and, above all, resentment. As Coward would concur, these feelings say more about ourselves than our children. Hence the need to demonise the child, and even recast it literally as demon or devil; this is the ‘other side’ to child worship. Thus it may be seen that the rash of diabolical child representations of the 1970s and early 1980s was almost a form of ‘revenge’ on the child (as if a large section of the audience had grown weary of the sentimental Romantic models of children and childhood, which frequently reduced children to vessels of wholesome lovable goodness). However, these two types of children (cherub and monster), notes Kincaid, are, in fact, one and the same, the one the logical extension of the other (*Erotic Innocence* 141). Reading *The Omen* and *The Exorcist* as adult tales of resentment against children, Kincaid believes that this demonising is not healthy and can mean anything but good for our children. In the media frenzy to satisfy our unwholesome appetites for images of delinquent and evil children, we have become almost inured to news reports of children killing their parents and of school shootings in small-town America (proof that teen violence is not restricted to America’s inner city areas). This has provoked questions from the media, particularly sensationalised in American talk shows like *Sally Jesse Raphael*: ‘Why do these children kill?’ ‘Are these children evil?’ and ‘Can children in fact be considered evil?’ Perhaps, with all the media attention, the idea of the child as a cold-blooded killer is losing some of its shock value.

Indeed, in 1986, when Kathy Merlock Jackson published her sociocultural analysis of the child in the American cinema, she predicted that the image of the child-as-monster would ‘run its course and diminish’, given that ‘this portrayal [of the child] depends on shock value for its impact, and, after several films, becomes trite and loses its effect’ (187). Now that fifteen years have elapsed since she made these comments we can assuredly say that the image of the monster-as-child, including the possessed and satanic child, has run its course. Consequently, we are in a better position to judge the phenomenon of the possessed child, which enjoyed unprecedented popularity with *The Exorcist* and continued throughout the 1970s and early 1980s. The attraction of this image with moviegoers and readers alike, however, was not merely sensationalist. In addressing the link between culture/society and text, it has been a common practice to diagnose repeated literary or film representations/tropes/images of children in terms of cultural anxieties. For
example, Peter Pierce in *The Country of Lost Children* profitably reads representations of the ‘lost child in the bush’ in terms of a specifically ‘Australian anxiety’ about its colonial past; while Patricia Holland in *What is a Child?* perceives in images of children in the popular media anxieties to do with the persistent blurring of the boundaries between the states of childhood and adulthood. The possessed child figure can likewise be read as a repository for cultural anxieties present in American culture and abroad. Three major types of anxiety may be identified.

First, many possessed child narratives may be read as cautionary tales of childhood unbound, of what happens when parents fail to discipline their children. *The Exorcist* here is an exemplar, which was just as much a revenge of the child as it was a revenge on the child. These were times of very fraught notions of children and childhood. While parents worried that their children would change overnight and become rebellious teenagers or alienated youths, younger audiences could revel in the knowledge that the daughter who turns on her mother was ‘getting some of her own back for a change’. The only solace for parents, it seems, was seeing the offspring tortured into obedience. I have shown how the possessed child may be read as a metaphor for juvenile delinquency, which was a topical issue in the United States when *The Exorcist* opened. However, in deviation from the professional legal understanding that juvenile delinquency is chiefly a lower-class problem, the delinquent or wayward behaviour displayed by possessed children is almost without exception a product of the middle to upper classes, as located in that most virtuous of American institutions, the nuclear family. Thus the types of anxieties being reflected or reproduced in possessed child narratives are principally American middle-class anxieties about children becoming delinquent. This is consistent with Skolnick’s observation that American anxiety over its youth from the late 1960s onwards ‘shifted from the problems of those outside of the mainstream of society – juvenile delinquents, the exploited and neglected, the children of the poor – to insider youth, the offspring of the middle class’ (85). That these narratives speak for the middle to upper classes about the status of childhood is almost certainly historically linked to the fact that the concept of childhood, as well as family, is largely a product of middle- to upper-class values and experiences.

Neil Sinyard notes that horror films of the 1970s and 1980s have swung back and forth in their attitudes towards children between the poles of protectiveness and paedophobia (58). *The Exorcist* falls in particular into
the latter category; *Audrey Rose* may be cited as an example of the former. If in *The Turn of the Screw* and *The Exorcist* the possessed child must be protected from sexual development, then in *Audrey Rose* the possessed/reincarnated child must be protected from sexual molestation. Underlying many possessed child narratives is a fear and anguish, laden also with nostalgia and regret, of the disappearance of the so-called sacrosanct state of childhood, as discussed by social critics such as Neil Postman and C. John Sommerville. Yet, paradoxically, while seeking to safeguard childhood purity and ‘innocence’, these narratives seem all too eager to defile the child, rob it off its innocence. In so doing, they turn the child into an object of desire as well as resentment, often accompanied by Oedipal/Electral overtones.

Second, the possessed child is frequently employed as a vehicle for voicing cultural anxieties about human nature. This suggests that some of the functions of the child in fiction have not changed much since the nineteenth century. In *The Scarlet Letter*, it is largely through the possessed and satanic child that Hawthorne delivers his critique on Puritan religion, particularly notions of original sin and salvation, while also advancing his own (confused) theory of inherited evil and childhood innocence. Over a century later, it is through the possessed child that William Peter Blatty in *The Exorcist* discusses the age-old philosophical problem of good (or evil) in the world, while in *Shrine* James Herbert similarly uses the image to speak fashionably of humankind’s ‘infinite vileness’. In *Del-Del*, by contrast, Victor Kelleher evokes the Jungian shadow in his exploration of the dark impulses of the human heart. The way the child is being employed here may be securely linked to lingering Calvinist conceptions of the child as fallen and corrupt. In the likewise fallen, corrupt world of the 1960s and 1970s, which in the United States saw the Kennedy assassinations, the Vietnam War, student riots and the Watergate scandal, many films of the diabolical genre, including those dealing with possessed and satanic children, were calling on a traditional enemy – Satan – to account for the pervasive evil in the world (Williams 107). In the case of *The Exorcist*, which seems to be predicated on a world that has sold itself to the Devil, the corruption of an innocent could symbolise the corruption of society. Thus it is society which must be exorcised of human evil. This fits with Jackson’s speculations that the symbolism of the child as futurity changed with key historical and cultural events of the post-war era, giving rise to more dark and bleak visions of childhood that, by implication, reflected the dark side of human nature.
Third, the possessed child is frequently being used to communicate male anxieties about female sexuality. It is possible to detect an anti-female undercurrent in narratives from *The Exorcist* to *Del-Del*. It is the ideological project of narratives like *The Exorcist*, *Audrey Rose* and *Amityville II* to repress femininity within their patriarchal structures and sometimes even turn femininity against itself. This is often achieved by the pathologising, within the discourses of medicine, of the sexuality of the possessed girl child and also, by association, its mother, as in *Audrey Rose* (and also *Nothing but the Night*). The repression of woman as Other here speaks volumes about male fears and concerns towards what is sometimes very derogatorily referred to as the ‘superwoman syndrome’. The above-mentioned narratives suggest ways of trying to put woman ‘back in her place’ so as to uphold the patriarchal status quo. As I have emphasised, these anxieties are merely displacements of masculine desire. That is, they speak not so much of female pathology, but of male pathology related specifically to castration fears, recalling Barbara Creed’s proviso regarding the figure of the monstrous feminine in the horror cinema that ‘the feminine is not a monstrous sign *per se*; rather, it is constructed as such within patriarchal discourse that reveals a great deal about male desires and fears but tells us nothing about feminine desire in relation to the horrific’ (‘Horror and the Monstrous Feminine: an Imaginary Abjection’ 63). Only *Amityville II* dares to confront the ‘crisis’ of masculinity head-on. Hence it is telling that female writers and filmmakers are seldom represented in the bad or evil child subgenre.1

As a particular type of lost child, the figure of the possessed child in literature and film is a *fin-de-siècle* phenomenon that found its first sustained expression in James’s *The Turn of the Screw*, although an important precursor may be found in Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter*. After a long absence, the figure makes a spectacular return in the early 1970s with *The Exorcist*, which was a literary, cinematic, cultural and social phenomenon. *The Exorcist*’s influence has been such that it has served as a powerful ur-text for many writers and filmmakers on the possessed child. Because of the way the possession motif plays with notions of guilt, innocence and agency, possessed child narratives frequently engage in creative tensions between Calvinist and Romantic ideologies of childhood, arising centrally from radically opposing readings of the child as both innocent (‘victim’) and evil (‘villain’), as revealed in *The Scarlet Letter, The Turn of the Screw, The Exorcist, Audrey Rose, Nothing but The Night, Shrine* and *Del-Del*. Only William Mayne’s *IT* manages to liberate the possessed child from these radically opposing and ultimately
reductive readings. Whether we adopt the victim or villain hypothesis, the possessed child is represented as lost, which may mean a Calvinist state of damnation where the child is ‘fallen’, as in *The Turn of the Screw* and *Audrey Rose*; a state where the child is unable to find its way ‘home’ to the family (which might also say something about adult anxieties regarding home and belonging), as in *IT* and *Del-Del*; and/or a state where the child has become dissociated from its mind and/or body, as in *The Exorcist* and *IT*. Although this book was specifically restricted in its focus on the possessed child, the conclusions it draws equally apply to that different, yet related, figure, the satanic child.

In order that they may negotiate tensions between Calvinist and Romantic ideologies, writers and filmmakers have deliberately refused to grant the child more than the vague outline of a personality. In its empty or cipher state the possessed child becomes a repository of multiple meanings that are highly unstable and capable of being erased at any time so that new meanings may be imposed (Kincaid, *Child-Loving* 78–9). Not surprisingly, the possessed child in these representations is more often absent than present. In fully grasping the nature of these tensions we must think in terms of an unresolved dialectic between Calvinist and Romantic oppositions, which finally emerge as mutually exclusive. In other words, there is no relation of ‘progression’ between these two ‘contrary states’ of childhood (to borrow Blake’s terminology). In its cipher state the child is being used to write different types of anxieties; that is, its loss represents other losses. However, in refusing to partake in these tensions and anxieties, Mayne in *IT* gives us a realistic and three-dimensional portrait of a possessed child that sets it clearly apart from these other representations. In contrast, the possessed child of Kelleher’s *Del-Del* operates on both symbolic and realistic levels.

The possessed child is best understood as an artefact of American religion and culture. Its formative influences are to be found in the Calvinist predisposition of the United States as a nation founded on Puritanism, whose legacy endures in modern American Protestantism. Puritanism, in its Manichean assumptions about human nature and good and evil, its more open acceptance of possession and exorcism, owes its origins to medieval Roman Catholicism. In fact, it may be speculated that they form part of a common discourse. Thus the rise of the possessed child in the 1970s may also be linked to the rise of American Catholicism in the second half of the twentieth century. This Roman Catholic bias is manifest in *Rosemary’s Baby*, *The Exorcist* and *The Omen* as well as, more recently, Cathy Cash Spellman’s *Bless
the Child (1993) and The Others. In terms of opposing ideologies of childhood, Calvinism/Puritanism and Roman Catholicism stand to one side of the equation; Romanticism to the other. In English literature and culture, the pre-eminence of Anglicanism, with its subtler moral and metaphorical construction of good and evil, its resistance to the notion of possession and particularly exorcism, effectively prevents such narratives from the possibility of representation. When a religious discourse does assume importance in an English narrative, it seems that the possessed child cannot be imagined without recourse to Roman Catholicism, as in I Don’t Want to Be Born and Shrine. Either that, or the possessed child in England may be treated within a science fiction context, provided that religion is largely bypassed in that treatment, as in Chocky. However, an important qualification to the above argument needs to be made: in the field of children’s literature, the possessed child emerges more frequently as a theme in the British rather than American cultural scene, as in the example of IT. An explanation for this may lie in the ability of British writers of children’s literature to employ the fantasy mode as a cover to explore such taboo themes as teenage sexuality or possession, as well as a certain religious conservatism determining the range of themes dealt with in American children’s literature. Amid the growing secularisation of Australian religion and culture, possessed child narratives, whether directed at a mainstream adult or child audience, are even more sparse. Written for older children, Kelleher’s Del-Del is such an exception and a belated entry in the possessed child cycle which owes its very existence to The Exorcist (hence its distinctly American flavour). Kelleher employs the possessed child image to make a statement about the need for a more human form of spirituality that is not to be confused with organised religion.

By the early 1980s, the popularity of the possessed child had waned, but special mention must be made of wunderkind Steven Spielberg’s phenomenally successful E.T. The Extra-Terrestrial which may be loosely read as a possession narrative. Spielberg has probably been responsible more than anyone else for reinventing the Romantic child in contemporary culture. Fascinatingly, he directed in 1972 a little-known telefilm about the diabolical possession of a young boy entitled Something Evil. Here, a happy middle-class family moves into a haunted Pennsylvanian farmhouse, where the devil eventually takes possession of son Stevie (Johnny Whitaker). In a foretaste of Regan’s demonic screen antics, Stevie tells his mother (Sandy Dennis) to ‘Be damned’, whereupon his behaviour degenerates into that of a wild animal.
Fortunately, he is exorcised by his mother’s declarations of love (as we have seen, the sheer power of love in healing the possessed child’s soul is also a theme expressed in Del-Del). Although Spielberg seems to reinforce stereotypical gender oppositions of man as rational animal and woman as raving hysterical, it is the uncomprehending father (Darren McGavin) who proves inadequate in rescuing Stevie from the clutches of evil, while it is the mother, interestingly, who finally emerges as emotionally equipped to take charge of the situation. By the end, she redeems her son and, by implication, herself. Something Evil presages the 1970s cycle of possessed and satanic child films.

When E.T. was released into theatres a decade later audiences were fully ready to embrace the return of the cult of the innocence of the child. Spielberg’s children are very Romantic because the Spielbergsian vision is at the heart Romantic, informed by Wordsworth and Rousseau, as well as Disney. In Close Encounters of the Third Kind (1977), which seems almost like a dress rehearsal for E.T., Spielberg evokes Wordsworth’s sentiment that ‘The Child is father of the Man’ (Brode 67–8). The midget-sized alien beings, or Small Greys, which receive everyman Roy Nedry (Richard Dreyfuss) into the spaceship and show him the path to spiritual fulfilment are clearly meant to resemble children in the strongest Romantic sense. It seems that when you wish upon a star all your childhood dreams do come true. The story of Pinocchio, particularly the Disney animated film of 1940, forms an important intertext for Close Encounters, as it would for Spielberg’s A.I.: Artificial Intelligence (2001) over twenty years later. E.T. does not disguise the fact that is a reworking of the Peter Pan myth, which Spielberg was to reattempt, less successfully this time, in Hook (1991). Like Mayne’s IT, E.T. conflates the notion of the lostness in the child with the otherness of the alien, E.T. The name E.T. is an obvious contraction of Elliott (Henry Thomas), the little boy who finds and befriends him. Both are lonely: E.T. has been left behind by a spaceship carrying his fellow travellers after being ambushed by scientists, while his alter-ego Elliott is trying to adjust to life without his father recently separated from his mother, which offers a continuation of the theme of absent fathers found in a number of possessed child narratives. A unique, almost symbiotic, relationship exists between Elliott and the alien: when Elliott feels tired, E.T. feels tired; when E.T. becomes drunk, Elliott becomes drunk; and when E.T. becomes sick, so does Elliott. When a psychiatrist in the film tries to fathom the nature of this relationship, in which E.T. seems to ‘possess’ Elliott and vice versa, he asks the boy’s older brother (Robert MacNaughton) whether Elliott
thinks E.T.’s thoughts. ‘No,’ he clarifies, ‘Elliott feels his feelings.’ In Spielberg’s Romantic emphasis on feeling over reason, the two are joined in body and spirit or heart but not, significantly, in mind.

The film, governed throughout by an utmost affection and respect for the child, never panders to its audience. Spielberg’s camera is not voyeuristic; rather, it adopts the child’s point of view, in large part by the strategic positioning of the camera at a low level. In this regard, Spielberg has exerted a by-and-large positive social impact on representations of the child in the cinema and literature. It is worth pointing out that scenes of ‘blasphemy’ against the cult innocence of the child in Friedkin’s *The Exorcist*, and particularly in Louis Malle’s controversial film *Pretty Baby* (1978) about a child prostitute (starring Brooke Shields), would be almost unthinkable today, particularly in the United States. Feelings of resentment towards the child have been largely replaced with zealous protectiveness over the rights of the child. Lyne’s recent remake of *Lolita* (1997) is proof.

Stanley Kubrick encountered his fair share of opposition with his 1962 screen version of the infamous nymphette. Lyne’s version was met with almost as much opposition as Nabokov’s novel, from children’s rights groups as well as government censors. (During post-production of *Lolita* the United States introduced the 1996 Child Pornography Prevention Act, making it illegal to show a minor engaging in sexual acts even if doubles are used (Lawrenson 26)). Although paedophilia as a theme has crept into mainstream films, such as Clint Eastwood’s *Mystic River* (2003), the explicit depiction of a ‘consenting’ sexual relationship between an adult and child is one of cinema’s last taboos. Censorship laws and sensibilities in the current neo-conservative climate have certainly undergone a radical change since the liberal attitude to children of the 1970s.

In the 1980s and 1990s there was sporadic possessed child activity with the publication of such novels as *Shrine*, John Saul’s *Brainchild* (1985) and Spellman’s *Bless the Child*. In the popular *Child’s Play* film series (1988, 1990, 1991), a doll named Chucky is animated by the spirit of a serial killer. Because the doll is also a child, these films may be seen as a variation on the possessed child theme. Two more recent films made by foreign hands which traffic with the possessed child image are Hideo Nakata’s follow-up to his Japanese box office hit, *Ring 2* (2000), and *The Others* (a Spanish-US production). However, the possessed child/youth belongs first and foremost to a particular period in American history: the 1970s. In the passage of a few short years there were, for example, *Brotherhood of Satan*, *The Exorcist*, *The Other,*
Something Evil, Audrey Rose, Ruby, Exorcist II: The Heretic, to name but a few. Along with the possessed child, its close relation, the satanic child, enjoyed unprecedented popularity during this period in films like The Omen and its sequel, Damien: Omen II. Both these types of children may be seen as descendants of the American Puritan tradition’s satanic and possessed child. Perhaps because Puritanism is indebted to it, the growth in Roman Catholicism in the American post-war years, coincident with a revival of interest in pagan beliefs and practices as well as magic and the occult in the late 1960s and early 1970s, conspired to unleash a whole generation of possessed and satanic children. No other country has been nearly as adept at producing such narratives. The possessed child has been, and remains, above all, an American phenomenon.
Notes

1 Introduction

1. It may be noted that, while the child is a relatively recent construction, the phase of life we think of as adolescence is even more recent. ‘It is as if,’ writes Ariès, ‘to every period in history, there corresponded a privileged age and a particular division of human life: “youth” is the privileged age of the seventeenth century, childhood of the nineteenth, adolescence of the twentieth’ (29). Marcel Danesi prefers to distinguish adolescence (a psychosocial and biological category) from teenagerhood (a socially constructed category having its origins in 1950s consumerism and the media) (3–6).

2. This is what Derrida would refer to as the ‘free play’ between Romanticism and Calvinism. In a key essay, ‘Structure, Sign and Play’, Derrida argues that the whole of Western thought is structured on the principle of a centre whose function ‘was not only to orient, balance, and organize the structure ... but above all to make sure that the organizing principle of the structure would limit what we might call the play of the structure’ (278). In giving rise to binary oppositions, this centre operates to deny, repress or marginalise other meanings, readings and possibilities. For example, Romantic views of the child in the nineteenth-century were privileged while Calvinist views of the child were repressed, marginalised. In deconstruction, Derrida seeks to reverse or decentralise these oppositions to show how the term that is central may just as easily be marginal, and to demonstrate how the hierarchy is highly unstable, even arbitrary. However, rather than simply adopting this other term as the new centre Derrida urges us to surrender to the free play of opposites, so that we may see all possibilities. To varying degrees, this is what is being attempted in possessed child narratives, namely The Turn of the Screw which may be cited as a ‘postmodern’ text that, on more than one level, deconstructs itself. Thus this free play seems akin to an unresolved dialectic, yet Derrida, himself refusing to be centred, has perplexingly stated that this free play ‘determines in a manner that is still too antidialectical, hence too dialectical, that which resists binarity or even triplicity’ (Limited Inc 116).

3. Damien: Omen II, like The Good Son, John Farris’s The Fury (1976), Thomas Tryon's The Other, and John Saul's Suffer The Children (1977), plays out its struggle of good versus evil by employing the tried-and-tested doppelganger device of pairing a good with an evil child.

4. Although De Palma’s family background is Italian Catholic, he was baptised a Presbyterian and even attended a Quaker school. The fusion of these formative Catholic and Calvinist influences in De Palma’s colourful upbringing are accordingly reflected (consciously or otherwise) in Carrie. For an analysis of the specific influence of Catholicism in De Palma’s work, see Jesuit Richard A. Blake’s interesting chapter in Afterimage: The Incredible Catholic Imagination of Six American Filmmakers (2000). For Blake, ‘De Palma borrows
heavily from the Catholic tradition, even when he uses it for his own purposes, criticizes it, mocks it, and at times tries to destroy it. However, when one reads the images in *Carrie*, it is quite clear that De Palma cannot escape it despite his best efforts’ (235).

5. A variation on this theme is the child supernaturally gifted – or cursed – with preternatural insight or knowledge. In Stephen King’s *The Shining* (1977), for example, five-year-old Danny, who is psychically charged, is haunted by a big brother figure named Tony, who ‘shows’ him future and hidden events. When Danny and his parents move to the haunted Overlook Hotel, his visions become increasingly intense and terrifying, portending his possessed father’s descent into cabin fever madness. In M. Night Shyamalan’s more recent *The Sixth Sense*, young Cole makes the terrifying admission, ‘I see dead people.’


7. I am using the term discourse in the Foucauldian sense to refer to the ‘social processes of making and reproducing meanings; not simply language, but meaning systems invested with power that circulate in society and constitute subjectivities [that is, subject positions]’ (Brook 159). For Foucault, power, which ‘excludes’, ‘censors’, ‘abstracts’, ‘conceals’ as well as ‘represses’, ‘produces domains of knowledge and rituals of truth’ (*Discipline and Punish* 194). In other words, power produces knowledge produces discourse. In its analysis of the historic cultural, as well as contemporary, underpinnings of the possessed and satanic child it may be seen that this book follows the Foucauldian discourse approach by using ‘history as a way of diagnosing the present’ (Kendall and Wickham 4).

8. In the American post-war years, between 1945 and 1965, ‘the total Catholic population increased by 90 percent, from 23.9 million to 45.6 million. The number of bishops and archbishops increased by 58 percent, clergy by 52 percent, women religious by 30 percent, and seminarians by 127 percent. One hundred and twenty-three new hospitals, 3,005 new Catholic elementary and high schools, and 94 new colleges were built. Enrollments in Catholic elementary and secondary schools increased by 3.1 million – more than 120 percent – and in Catholic colleges and universities ... by a whopping 300 percent’ (Carey 93–4).

### 2 The New England Connection


2. We might want to compare Flora with the child protagonist of the title in James’s *What Maisie Knew* (1897), likewise constructed in her innocence as an empty vessel. Caught between her divorced parents’ bickering, the only link binding Maisie to her parents, we are told, is ‘the lamentable fact of her being a ready vessel for bitterness, a deep little porcelain cup in which biting acids could be mixed’ (14). Similarly, the evil which Maisie’s parents ‘had the gift of thinking or pretending to think of each other they poured into her...
little gravely-gazing soul as into a boundless receptacle’ (20). Here, exposure to knowledge of harsh reality, not demonic influences, is the source of evil, which threatens the preservation of childhood innocence.

3. In his exemplary reading of *The Turn of the Screw*, Todorov notes that James’s novella sustains the ambiguity between the uncanny and the marvellous to the very end, that is, ‘even beyond the narrative itself’ (43).

4. Michael Winner’s *The Nightcomers* (1972), which details the moral corruption of Miles and Flora by Peter Quint (Marlon Brando) and Miss Jessel (Stephanie Beacham) prior to their becoming ghosts. It transpires that the children are in fact responsible for the deaths of the manservant and governess. When the new governess arrives at her post (the point in the story where James’s begins), Mrs Grose declares ironically: ‘You could not hope to meet in all your life more exquisite angels as our Miles and Flora.’ This adds yet another turn to James’s tale.

### 3 God is Dead

1. The twin brothers Holland and Niles in this highly subtle and literate tale are a study in good and evil. Holland the ‘other’ is dark, brooding and withdrawn, a Pandora’s box of secrets, while Niles is blond, affectionate and open. Niles is a ‘child of the air’; Holland a ‘child of the earth’ (46). When a series of mysterious murders occur in a small New England town in the 1930s it appears that Niles’s evil brother Holland is to blame. But in a plot twist that comes about two-thirds into the novel, we learn that Holland has been dead for all this time. It is difficult to ascertain whether the explanation for the events in the story is supernatural (that Niles is possessed by his dead brother or his brother has risen from the dead to haunt him) or psychological (that Niles has a split personality). Like *The Turn of the Screw*, *The Other* (which was filmed effectively by Robert Mulligan a year later) negotiates subtle tensions between Calvinist and Romantic ideologies which derive, in crucial part, from the tension between Todorov’s adjacent genres of the fantastic, the uncanny and the marvellous. In fact, *The Other* is a remarkably pure example of the fantastic, which sustains this tension between the uncanny and the marvellous to the very end, that is, beyond the narrative itself. In its composite representation of the principles of good and evil, innocence and corruption, in twin brothers, as well as its dark depiction of Americana, *The Other* is also indebted to Ray Bradbury’s *Something Wicked This Way Comes* (1962).

2. Post-war Italian genre cinema has a particularly notorious reputation for making cheap imitations of commercial hits in America and Britain, from the James Bond films to Hammer horror to *The Exorcist* (Hunt 325).

3. ‘Contrary to some reports,’ reports journalist Gerard McManus, ‘the Vatican has never condemned the film despite many factual inaccuracies and exaggerations, as well as mistakes about religious rituals used’ (6). Incredibly, he also reports that the Vatican has in its possession copies of *The Exorcist*, which it employs as a teaching aid.

4. Both *The Omen* and *Rosemary’s Baby* contain a further Irish Catholic intersection. While New England saw a small number of Irish Catholics, it was only
in the second half of the nineteenth century that the influx of significant numbers of Irish Catholic immigrants led to Catholicism’s ascendancy in the United States (a state of affairs mirrored in England). Thus by the middle of the twentieth century American Catholicism had a distinctively Irish face (Albanese 87). By 1960, America was able to elect its first Irish Catholic president, which forms part of the backdrop of Rosemary’s Baby. Not only is Rosemary herself of Irish stock, but Father Brennan of The Omen, the priest who comes to warn Ambassador Thorn of Damien’s true identity, is also clearly Irish, as is Damien’s diabolical nanny, Mrs Baylock.

5. In a personal communication, Blatty kindly intimated that ‘In 1949, while an undergraduate at Georgetown University, our theology professor, a Jesuit named Eugene Gallegher, made mention in class about a case of alleged “demonic possession” and exorcism then taking place in the nearby vicinity of Cottage City, Maryland. It was this moment that in fact inspired the eventual writing of my novel [The Exorcist]. At the time I had not yet read The Turn of the Screw, though I finally did catch up with it in graduate school’ (‘Response to query’). (More details about the 1949 case may be found in his lively personal account of the making of the film, William Peter Blatty on The Exorcist: From Novel to Film.) At a special screening of Sorcerer (1977), Friedkin likewise told me that he was familiar with James’s classic possession tale when he directed the film. Suffice to say, in both the novel and film, there is no real sense that The Turn of the Screw influenced the concept of The Exorcist in any way.

6. It should be pointed out that there is some ambiguity in the novel and film as to whether Regan is possessed by a devil, the Devil, or devils. Blatty has elsewhere expressed his uncertainty on the subject: ‘But is Satan a single personal intelligence? Or Legion, a horde of evil entities? Or even, as has been conjectured, the stuff of the universe … I surely do not know, nor can I even make a prudent judgement … Even in terms of my novel, I have never known the demon’s identity. I strongly doubt that he … is Satan … If I had to guess, I would say he is Pazuzu, the Assyrian demon of the southwest wind. But I’m not really sure’ (William Peter Blatty on The Exorcist 37).

7. Although this contradicts Pope Paul IV’s statement that evil is ‘not merely the lack of something’, this could also possibly suggest that we should understand evil as having a ‘negative existence’. However, there are strong markers in the film that we should read evil in terms of presence rather than absence, as in, for example, the metaphor of Regan’s bedroom as a temple of evil. There is no mistaking those strange noises in the attic: the MacNeil residence is essentially a haunted house. It appears that evil has entered the house via Regan’s bedroom window, which Chris tries vainly to keep closed. In accordance with ghost lore, Regan’s room becomes unnaturally cold, signifying a growing malevolent presence. It is fitting then that when Karras takes the demon into himself (see below) he hurls himself out of the window. From whence evil came it must go.

8. Karras’s fate evokes Jesus giving his permission to ‘Legion’ to enter the herd of Gadarene swine: ‘Then went the devils out of the man, and entered into the swine: and the herd ran violently down a steep place into the lake, and were choked’ (Luke 8: 33). That Blatty invokes the famous Biblical account in one of the epigraphs to his novel is obviously significant. Karras is resurrected
by Blatty in the belated sequel *Legion* (1983). In that novel Lieutenant Kinderman, like Jesus Christ, asks the man with Karras’s face and body in Cell 12 of the Disturbed Ward to identify himself, which elicits the following reply: ‘Call me “Legion”, for we are many’ (Blatty 201). Taken together this suggests that the literary parallels between *The Exorcist* and the Biblical account are more than just coincidental.

9. ‘For the Italians,’ Albanese notes, ‘perhaps more than for most other immigrant groups, [Catholic] religion and culture were interfused, always returning to their source and center in the extended family’ (89).

10. The Amityville house itself is pure American Gothic, identified in true Gothic style with Sonny’s disturbed psyche. For example, it is while in the basement that Sonny ventures into the hidden room, the evil heart of the house, or gateway to hell. In symbolic terms, he unleashes his own inner demons, which are pure id. In contrast, it is at the top of the house (which corresponds to the superego) that Sonny wrestles with the dictates of his conscience for violating the incest taboo with his sister. ‘What’s the matter with you?’ Trish confronts Sonny in his attic bedroom, ‘Are you feeling guilty? I’m not.’ In the single mention made to the estate’s history, we learn that the house was built on sacred Indian burial ground. It emerges that a woman cast out of Salem for witchcraft transgressed the Indians’ laws of building on the burial ground, thus invoking a Puritan New England connection. Several horror films from the late 1970s to the early 1980s feature haunted houses or structures built on sacred Indian burial grounds, including the Overlook Hotel in Kubrick’s *The Shining* (1980) and *Poltergeist*. It is difficult to know what to make of this. Fiedler points out that American gothic fiction harbours certain special guilts about its colonial past: ‘A dream of innocence had sent Europeans across the ocean to build a new society immune to the past from which no one in Europe could ever feel himself free. But the slaughter of the Indians … provided new evidence that evil did not remain with the world that had been left behind’ (*Love and Death* 134). Thus are we to read *Amityville II*, *Poltergeist* and *The Shining* as American Gothic projections of guilt about the past mistreatment of Native Americans by colonial whites? In his account of seventeen-year-old Mary Short’s possession and exorcism Cotton Mather invokes the Puritan nightmare of Indian captivity. As Slotkin shows, the Puritan struggle against evil is transformed by Mather into the struggle against the devil as personified by the Indian (128–45). Perhaps, then, we are to read Sonny as struggling with a Puritan religious possession fuelled by guilt combined with a primitive Native American possession fuelled by resentment.

4 East Meets West

1. It is notable that the marketing campaign for De Felitta’s novel invites comparison with *The Exorcist*: ‘Not since *The Exorcist*,’ touts the front cover to the 1977 British Pan edition, ‘a novel so haunting so credible so utterly frightening.’ (Note: all page numbers in the main text refer to the 1975 paperback edition.)
2. Here, Ivy evokes the ghost of Catherine as a child lost on in the moor in *Wuthering Heights*. However, unlike Ivy/Audrey Rose, who is trying to break free, Catherine’s mournful cries to Lockwood are to ‘Let me in – Let me in!’ (25). This drives him in horror to slash her wrist on the broken windowpane.

3. Hollywood had previously dealt with the idea of hypnotic regression into a former lifetime in *The Search for Bridey Murphy* (1956; based on a famous so-called factual case) and the Vincente Minnelli musical *On a Clear Day You Can See Forever* (1970). In Poe’s ‘The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar’ (1845), the unfortunate title character is mesmerised while verging on death. This experiment eventually transforms him into the living dead.

4. The flames of damnation also connote the flames of passion. The nexus between fire and feminine desire is very old and can be found, for example, in the sexually frustrated ‘madwomen in the attic’ figures of Bertha in *Jane Eyre* (1847) and Miss Havisham of *Great Expectations* (1861). In *Audrey Rose*, Ivy’s fits are significantly brought on by Hoover’s close proximity (a fact only revealed in the novel). That is, his presence is seen to ignite within her ‘burning desire’. That desire is thinly veiled in the case of Hoover. As Janice makes known: ‘For some reason, he wants our child. With all his sweet, poetic, religious talk, he’s got a fire burning inside him that won’t let him quit till he gets what he wants’ (De Felitta 118–19). For Bertha and Miss Havisham the flames of passion end up consuming them. It is as if these flames cannot be extinguished; or at least only when it ends up consuming, ‘burning up’, the self. This is indeed what happens to Ivy when she relives for the last time Audrey Rose’s death by fire and smoke.

5. According to Patricia White, Wise explores the theme of lesbian desire in his 1963 horror classic *The Haunting*, which likewise represents lesbianism in terms of the supernatural.

6. The almost definite insertion of a ‘subliminal’ image of the gargoyle’s head on the back of one of Janice’s photographs during the credit sequence is an early ominous sign of the demonic. This is another of the film’s insidious signifiers.

5 Culture Shock

1. The novel was filmed quite faithfully by Christopher Lee and Anthony Nelson Keys’s newly formed production company Charlemagne in 1972, directed by Peter Sasdy and released just before *The Exorcist* burst onto cinema screens and turned the possessed child into a major box-office draw (Hardy 262). Starring Peter Cushing as well as Lee, the film’s critical and box-office failure spelled the death knell for Charlemagne. The film is poorly directed, scripted and acted. Compared with the all-out sensationalism of *The Exorcist*, *Nothing but the Night* suffers from an overdose of British restraint. However, Andy Boot has a different view: ‘Quite why Nothing but the Night flopped is somewhat of a mystery. While no stone classic, it is certainly no worse than many films that were thrown into the British horror melting pot during that period. In many ways, it is a tightly constructed thriller with moments that are genuinely chilling’ (230).

2. For historical information on Walsingham I am indebted to the following website: <http://www.walsingham.org.uk/romancatholic/home1/home1.htm>
3. It seems that a deaf-mute child makes for a doubly tempting a vacuum to be occupied by the supernatural. In Curtis Harrington’s film *Ruby*, the deaf-mute condition of a teenage girl seems to enable the avenging spirit of her long-dead gangster father to freely take over her mind and body in order that he may exact revenge on his betayers. Similarly, the autistic condition of the young girl-child in Chuck Russell’s film *Bless the Child* (2000) seems to make her more receptive, just like Alice, to Marian phenomena.

4. The oak tree is accorded special significance in Druidry. The name Druid itself is believed to have derived from a word meaning ‘knowledge of the oak’. Interestingly, ‘in both Irish and Welsh the words for “tree” and “knowledge” are etymologically connected’ (Barret 219). Consequently, this knowledge of evil does not bode well for Alice’s ‘innocence’.

5. Herbert revisits this scenario in his 1988 short story, ‘Hallowe’en’s Child’. En route to the hospital to witness his wife giving birth, the unnamed narrator accidentally runs into what he first takes to be a small child. The cloaked figure resembles Du Maurier’s dwarf, but in fact turns out to be a hobgoblin, which the narrator destroys. However, he is later horrified to find that his wife has just given birth to the hideous creature.

6. Despite its going against the teachings of the Catholic Church, Delgard himself entertains the hypothesis that Alice is the reincarnation of Elnor. His related hypothesis – retrogression – is compatible with Jungian notions of a race memory. The latter links in with Fenn’s theory that Molly Pagett was possibly a descendant of one of the nuns that Elnor corrupted (Rosamund). However, these possibilities are introduced by Herbert rather too late and without sufficient development. Alice is best understood as being a victim of possession.

6 For Children Only?

1. In the medium of cinema it is extremely rare a find a possession narrative about children for children, irrespective of cultural context. *The Care Bears Movie* (1985), which deals with a friendless boy named Nicholas who is taken over by an evil spirit, is a notable exception.

2. The Carroll connection is further suggested by the book’s Ripon setting, located in Mayne’s native North Yorkshire. This is where Lewis Carroll’s father was appointed chaplain to the Bishop of Ripon and then archdeacon of Richmond and a canon of the famed Ripon Minster or Cathedral, which plays a central role in the book (Pudney 24). Thus Carroll was deeply familiar with Ripon and the Minster, having spent his childhood there.

3. In *The Country of Lost Children*, Peter Pierce traces the development of the lost child motif in Australian culture. He details in the latter half of the nineteenth century a concentration of narratives about children lost in the bush (almost an indigenous Australian myth), beginning with Henry Kingsley’s groundbreaking Romantic treatment in *The Recollections of Geoffry Hamlyn* (1859). Pierce argues that these lost bush children stood principally for the unresolved anxieties of early Europeans trying to settle and understand the Australian land (xii). That land is not so much depicted as hostile or evil as alluring, ‘so that children strayed contentedly into it, only to lose
themselves, perhaps forever’ (Pierce xii). The role of Aborigines in these nar-
ratives – most often as trackers enlisted by Europeans to find the lost child –
hints at a possible reconciliation between black and white. Regrettably,
Pierce says, the moral and cultural significance of this conjunction was
overlooked (11). As the symbol of the next generation, the lost child figure
of the colonial period also afforded ‘an opportunity to develop a discourse
of “young Australia”, that is, to speculate on the nature of the coming race
in this country, and the future of the nation soon to be’ (Pierce 8). Of
course, the lost child in the bush is far removed from the lost and possessed
child. One has been made the object of anxieties about colonisation; the
other has been made the object of colonisation itself.

7 Conclusion

1. Exceptions include L’Engle’s A Wrinkle in Time, Spellman’s Bless the Child,
Lessing’s The Fifth Child and Margaret Bingley’s The Gateway to Hell (1991).
Although the source material is Bernard Taylor’s novel, The Godsend (1980),
directed and produced by Gabrielle Beaumont, concerns a girl child of
unknown evil origin. In Peter Nicholls’s appraisal, a ‘Nasty but efficient film,
made by a woman (unusual in this genre), and apparently about the
irrationality of the maternal instinct’ (195).

2. Precursors to Chucky may be found in the episode ‘Living Doll’ from Rod
Serling’s celebrated series The Twilight Zone (1959–64), first screened 1
November 1963, as well as the 1969 short story ‘Prey’ by Richard Matheson.
An analogous figure is the ventriloquist dummy, featured in such films as
Dead of Night (1945) and Richard Attenborough’s Magic (1978), which treats
ventriloquist Anthony Hopkins’s ‘possession’ by his dummy in psychological
terms. In another episode of The Twilight Zone, ‘The Dummy’, first screened
4 May 1962, the dummy takes possession of the ventriloquist by literally
switching places with him. The evil doll and ventriloquist dummy are
almost like recalcitrant children run dangerously amok.
Filmography

The Amityville Horror (Stuart Rosenberg, 1979, US).
The Antichrist a.k.a. L’Anticristo a.k.a. The Tempter (Alberto De Martino, 1974, Italy).
The Bad Seed (Mervyn Leroy, 1956, US).
Beyond the Door a.k.a. Chi Sei? a.k.a. The Devil Within Her (Oliver Hellman, 1974, Italy).
Beyond the Door II a.k.a. Shock (Mario Bava, 1977, Italy).
Bless the Child (Chuck Russell, 2000, US).
Born Innocent (Donald Wrye, 1974, US).
The Brain Eaters (Bruno Ve Sota, 1958, US).
The Brain from Planet Arous (Nathan Hertz, 1958, US).
Burn, Witch, Burn (Sidney Hayers, 1962, UK).
The Care Bears Movie (Arna Selznick, 1985, Canada).
Carrie (Brian De Palma, 1976, US).
Cathy’s Curse a.k.a. Cauchemars (Eddy Matalon, 1976, Canada).
Cat People (Jacques Tourneur, 1942, US).
Children of the Damned (Anton Leader, 1964, UK).
Close Encounters of the Third Kind (Steven Spielberg, 1977, US).
Curse of the Cat People (Gunther von Fritschi and Robert Wise, 1944, US).
Dead of Night (Alberto Cavalcanti, Charles Crichton, Basil Deardon, Robert Hamen, 1945, UK).
The Devils (Ken Russell, 1971, UK).
Donovan’s Brain (Felix Feist, 1953, US).
Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde (Victor Fleming, 1941, US).


The Dybbuk (Michael Waszynski, Poland, 1937).


Exorcism a.k.a. Exorcismo (Juan Bosch, 1974, Spain).


The Exorcist: The Version You’ve Never Seen (William Friedkin, 2000, US)


Going to Glory, Come to Jesus (1947, director unknown, US? [apparently lost film]).


Hands of the Ripper (Peter Sasdy, 1971, UK).


Haxan a.k.a. Witchcraft Through the Ages (Benjamin Christensen, 1922, Denmark).


House of Exorcism a.k.a. Lisa and the Devil (Mario Bava, 1972, Italy).

I Don’t Want to Be Born a.k.a. The Devil Within Her a.k.a. Monster (Peter Sasdy, 1975, UK).

I Married a Monster from Outer Space (Gene Fowler Jr., 1958, US).

The Innocents (Jack Clayton, 1961, UK).

Invaders from Mars (William Cameron, 1953, US).

Invasion of the Body Snatchers (Don Siegel, 1956, US).

It Came From Outer Space (Jack Arnold, 1953, US).

It’s Alive (Larry Cohen, 1974, US).

I Was a Teenage Werewolf (Gene Fowler Jr., 1957, US).


The Kid (Charlie Chaplin, 1921, US).

The Lady and the Monster (George Sherman, 1944, US).


The Life of an American Fireman (Edwin S. Porter, 1902, US).


Lolita (Stanley Kubrick, 1962, UK).


M (Fritz Lang, 1931, Germany).


Naked Exorcism (Elo Pannaccio, 1975, Italy).
National Velvet (Clarence Brown, 1944, US).
The Nightcomers (Michael Winner, 1972, UK).
Night of the Living Dead (George A. Romero, 1968, US).
Nothing But the Night (Peter Sasdy, 1972, UK).
The Other (Robert Mulligan, 1972, US).
The Others (Alejandro Amenábar, 2001, Spain/US).
Pinocchio (Ben Sharpsteen, 1940, US).
The Ring (Gore Verbinski, 2002, US).
Ring 2 (Hideo Nakata, 2000, Japan).
The Search for Bridey Murphy (Noel Langley, 1956, US).
Sorcerer (William Friedkin, 1977, US)
Village of the Damned (Wolf Rilla, 1960, UK).
The Visitors (Michael J. Paradise, 1979, Italy).
The Wolf Man (George Waggner, 1941, US).
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