The last two decades have seen an enormous growth in the critical study of two very different genres, the Gothic and children’s literature. The Gothic, concerned with the perverse and the forbidden, with adult sexuality and religious or metaphysical doubts and heresies, seems to represent everything that children’s literature, as a genre, might be designed to keep out. Indeed, this does seem to be very much the way children’s literature was marketed in the late eighteenth century, at exactly the time the Gothic genre was developing, often written by the same women novelists who were responsible for the promotion of a safe and segregated children’s literature. Yet this early children’s literature was written in reaction, too, to the fairy tales and fantasy literature children were reading and encountering, and Gothic elements can in fact be traced in children’s literature for as long as children have been reading.

While the Gothic genre has received much critical attention, and the popularity of Gothic narratives at the turn of the millennium has been analyzed in studies such as Mark Edmundson’s *Nightmare on Main Street*, *The Gothic in Children’s Literature* is the first book-length study on the Gothic as a mode within the genre of children’s literature.

Anna Jackson lectures in children’s fantasy, contemporary fiction and the American Gothic at Victoria University of Wellington.


Roderick McGillis is Professor of English at the University of Calgary.
The Gothic in Children’s Literature
Children's Literature and Culture

JACK ZIPES, SERIES EDITOR

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The Gothic in Children’s Literature

HAUNTING THE BORDERS

EDITED BY

ANNA JACKSON, KAREN COATS,
AND RODERICK McGILLIS
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SERIES EDITOR’S FOREWORD

Dedicated to furthering original research in children's literature and culture, the Children's Literature and Culture series includes monographs on individual authors and illustrators, historical examinations of different periods, literary analyses of genres, and comparative studies on literature and the mass media. The series is international in scope and is intended to encourage innovative research in children's literature with a focus on interdisciplinary methodology.

Children's literature and culture are understood in the broadest sense of the term children to encompass the period of childhood up through adolescence. Owing to the fact that the notion of childhood has changed so much since the origination of children's literature, this Routledge series is particularly concerned with transformations in children's culture and how they have affected the representation and socialization of children. While the emphasis of the series is on children's literature, all types of studies that deal with children's radio, film, television, and art are included in an endeavor to grasp the aesthetics and values of children's culture. Not only have there been momentous changes in children's culture in the last fifty years, but there have been radical shifts in the scholarship that deals with these changes. In this regard, the goal of the Children's Literature and Culture series is to enhance research in this field and, at the same time, point to new directions that bring together the best scholarly work throughout the world.

Jack Zipes
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INTRODUCTION

Walk into any children’s bookstore and you will note a decidedly Gothic flavor to many of the titles on display. From creepy picture books to Harry Potter to Lemony Snicket to the Spiderwick Chronicles to countless vampire series for young adult readers, fear or the pretence of fear has become a dominant mode of enjoyment in literature for young people.

The essays in this volume represent a critical response to this publishing trend in children’s literature. They seek to understand its history, to thematize its expressions, and to theorize its presence and importance in children’s literature.

While adult Gothic has received much critical attention, and the popularity of Gothic narratives at the turn of the millennium has been analysed in studies such as Mark Edmundson’s *Nightmare on Main Street*, surprisingly little critical attention has been paid so far to Gothic children’s literature. Yet in children’s literature today, the Gothic is mainstream.

This movement toward children’s Gothic is an extraordinary development, given that, as Dale Townshend argues in *The Haunted Nursery*, children’s literature emerged as a genre largely in reaction to the popularity of the adult Gothic romance. What could be more unsuitable for child readers than Gothic romances like *The Castle of Otranto*, *The Monk*, or *The Italian*, with their focus on the perverse and the forbidden, on adult sexuality and religious doubts and heresies? Instead, the eighteenth-century child reader was directed towards educational and improving texts, such as Mary Wollstonecraft’s *Original Stories from Real Life: with Conversations Calculated to Regulate the Affections and*
Form the Mind to Truth and Goodness. Children were expected to covet books that seasoned sound instruction with the tame delights that came from light whimsy rather than the more piquant pleasures of a good shiver.

It is difficult to see the appeal today. Children today would be more likely to enjoy the chapbook romances children used to read before a literature specifically created for children was developed, stories such as "Jack the Giant Killer," "Robin Hood," "Children in the Wood," or "Whuppity Storie." Indeed it is the stories that Enlightenment philosophers warned children against reading, such as the stories of Raw Head and Bloody Bones, that are likely to be the ones that children today would pick up first. Of course, the mere fact that Locke and others were so concerned about the prevalence of these grisly tales indicates that the children of the eighteenth century were no less likely to prefer these stories. Children, it seems, have always had a predilection for what we now categorize as the Gothic, for ghosts and goblins, hauntings and horrors, fear and the pretense of fear. As Townshend argues, this appetite was fed by their nursemaids, in part because fear effectively secures docile behaviour, and in part because the nursemaids themselves enjoyed the titillations of a good horror story. Perhaps the really strange development of the eighteenth century was the transformation of the Gothic narrative into an adult genre, when it had really belonged to children's literature all along.

Nonetheless, transformed it was, and the Gothic was soundly suppressed in children's literature in favour of morally uplifting texts that suited the desires of adults to construct an innocent child that could be trained up into a rational adult of Enlightened values. While there might always have been stories children particularly liked to read, it is usual today to recognise the marketing of books for children in the eighteenth century, usually dated back to the publication of John Newbery's A Little Pretty Pocket Book in 1744, as the beginnings of children's literature as a genre. This view of the modern origins of children's literature fits with an understanding that the eighteenth century saw the shift in thinking about childhood that made such literature seem necessary, with Locke and Rousseau among the first to thematize the different needs and psychology of children and make recommendations based on these beliefs. Despite their pronouncements and recommendations, however, we would do well to remember what Shavit terms the "literary polysystem" (1986: ix) in which children's literature from the beginning has existed in two forms: the acceptable and the unacceptable, or the literary and the popular. The Gothic has had a place for much of this time in the popular. It forms
part of what Wordsworth called “gross and violent stimulants.” It is not polite or decorous or even sophisticated in that high culture way, nor does it serve the publicly sanctioned aims of education that have always been considered an important role of children’s literature.

While our understanding of childhood today can still, to some extent, be understood as infected by Enlightenment and Romantic ideas of childhood, children’s literature has changed so dramatically since the eighteenth century it is arguably a different genre altogether. Children’s literature today, as a distinct genre distinguished not only by its intended audience but by stylistic and formal features, might be better dated back to the Golden Age of children’s literature in the Victorian period. *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, originally published in 1865, arguably represents the first children’s book that children today still recognise as children’s literature and do in fact continue to read. Curiously, Alice disappears down a hole into a world which seems to invite exactly the same kind of psychoanalytic reading that the Gothic genre as a whole insistently calls for. All the same, *Alice in Wonderland* is not a Gothic text. Instead, the logic that is so displaced in this world, the morals and manners that are overturned, belong to the didactic texts that had been designed to take the Gothic story’s place. When the genre of didactic narrative is turned back on itself, and indeed turned upside down and inside out, the result is not a return to the Gothic stories children used to read before children’s literature was invented, but the beginning of a new children’s literature tradition, the tradition to which all subsequent children’s literature belongs. Just as the first Gothic novel, *The Castle of Otranto*, was already a pastiche and self-consciously parodic send-up of the genre that it itself established, modern children’s literature too arguably begins with a pastiche of its own generic conventions. Both the Gothic and children’s literature begin as genres haunted by both the future and the past.

However much the pedagogues of the day sought to expunge the Gothic from the literary imagination of children’s books, it continued to seep in. The nineteenth century, for instance, saw the Gothic for young readers surface in books influenced by *Jane Eyre*. The most obvious example is Burnett’s *The Secret Garden* with its haunted house and grounds. L. M. Montgomery also plays with Gothic conventions in her Emily series and some of her stand-alone novels and short stories; indeed, there are many examples of Gothic influence along the byways of writing for the young particularly by women in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Mary Molesworth, for example, domesticates this tradition, and L. T. Meade transforms the school into a haunted place.
By the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, the books children are reading are, as the essayists in this volume demonstrate, haunted once again by the Gothic. As Nadia Crandall and Julie Cross argue in their chapters, many contemporary texts for children are resolutely Gothic in form and substance; they invoke and parody specifically Victorian settings. Crandall locates Gothic contexts and subtexts as the controlling motifs in cyberfiction, demonstrating the similarities between the labyrinthine structures of Gothic castles and computer games, and revealing the common thematics of double consciousness, metafiction, and moral disintegration that plague both nineteenth century narratives and ultra-contemporary speculative fictions. Cross focuses her attention on the varieties of humour at play in child Gothic, from the exaggerated grotesqueries of the villains to the subtle play of parody that has been at the heart of Gothic since its inception. While few young readers can be versed in the Victorian melodrama that these texts parody, Cross argues that they nevertheless know the codes well through their familiarity with other pop-Gothic texts, including comic book narratives, television series, and films. She argues further that, rather than going over the heads of their readership, comic Gothic's use of irony and parody continues to stretch children's literary competencies.

Part of the reason for the persistence of the Gothic across centuries of children's literature must be due to the ease with which the typical Gothic chronotope can be allegorized as the mind. Though askew from the point of view of an historical present, Gothic tales often offer a sort of free-floating setting. The Gothic chronotope is often a place, very often a house, haunted by a past that remains present. As a child grows, more and more experiences, good and bad, displace into memory, forming the intricate passages where bits of his or her past get lost, only to re-emerge at unexpected times. The child's mind becomes a crowded, sometimes frustratingly inaccessible place at the same time as his or her body morphs in uncomfortable ways. As Anna Jackson and Anna Smith argue in their essays, Gothic motifs of the uncanny are particularly apt for the metaphorical exploration of the vicissitudes of adolescent identity. The uncanny emerges in the adolescent novels they explore to both highlight change and trigger it. It becomes a complex metaphor for the transition the characters undergo with respect to their place in their families and their family history. But, as Smith notes, the Gothic also offers fertile ground to explore beyond the conventions of the family to the adolescent's place in larger social and cultural constellations of identity. The results can affirm psychological models of development or they can open those models of development up to scrutiny.
and critique, as is evidenced in Alice Mill’s reading of Garth Nix’s *Seventh Tower* series. The female adolescent in particular, as explored by June Cummins, undergoes what might be referred to as “Gothic moments” in an otherwise rational life. Key moments of feminine transition—menarche, marriage, childbirth, etc., marked as they are by blood, submission, loss of a firm sense of one’s former identity, and loss of control—are potentially moments that are best represented with Gothic motifs. That is, they are moments when symbols of dark labyrinthine tunnels, monstrous trolls, ghosts, wayward fluids, murder, etc. are the best symbols we have for the bodily and social changes wrought by menstruation and the possibilities it closes and opens for women’s subjectivity. Contemporary heroines in otherwise non-Gothic texts do not devolve into drippy Gothic heroines after their moment, but that is part of the persistence of the Gothic through cultural change. That is, in the time when the Gothic was emerging as an important genre, medical science was just starting to replace the mystery of the female body with scientific facts; hysteria was the dominant response to sexual confusion and abuse; cultural codes were still writing marriage as a loss of power and autonomous identity for women; and pregnancy and childbirth were just downright dangerous, messy, and awful; so the losses these women suffered were more or less entrees into a more or less permanent Gothic subjectivity. In modernity, all of that has been re-scripted, but despite frontier pragmatism, the transparency of today’s medically understood body, the replacement of hysteria by depression, and the new approach to having it all in the revised feminist pop culture fairy tales, there are still those fear-enshrouded moments where the archaic body reasserts itself—those moments when our new scripts fail us in the face of the mute mystery of embodiment. We are quick to regain our footing these days, though, and to respond more often than not with the laughter that mitigates Gothic horror, but the Gothic landscapes and conventions remain familiar to us because they are, to some extent, inside us.

While Gothic conventions are readily familiar to child readers who find mental analogues in their formulaic landscapes and often humorous approach to psychic horrors, children are kept interested through the constant changes made to the conventions, the new twists and surprises that are always introduced. While the chapbook romances children were reading before (and during and beyond) the eighteenth century are remarkable from today’s perspective partly for how very little the stories and even the renditions of them change over time, Gothic conventions and motifs are remarkable for how rapidly and consistently they change, in form and in significance. Its landscapes and conventions
change in response to cultural shifts in the fears, values, and technologies that inscribe themselves into our subjectivities. This makes it a genre, as a number of critics have commented, particularly responsive to its historical moment and cultural location.

Rose Lovell-Smith’s essay on the Gothic beach in New Zealand literature discusses the importance of history in determining the significance of local landscape. The haunted history of the beach, she argues, makes it possible for the beach to take the place of Europe’s ruined castles or America’s haunted houses as a Gothic site in New Zealand literature. This shift in the location of the Gothic is then responsible for another whole set of changes to, and antipodean reversals of, Gothic conventions: trapdoors lead upward, not downward, houses extend into the landscape rather than open up with inner chambers, the family is not withdrawn and suspicious of strangers but dangerously free with its hospitality, the common motif of incestuous inbreeding is reversed with the family secret having to do with adultery—sexual relations inappropriately external to the family. And the cultural relocation of the Gothic genre Lovell-Smith argues is what enables Mahy to transform a genre in which “the realm of the Gothic house is the realm of the patriarch,” so that the Gothic house in Mahy’s The Tricksters is ultimately identified with, and as the possession of, the central character Harry, one of Mahy’s many astonishingly powerful young heroines.

The three novels that Karen Sands-O’Connor looks at similarly relocate the Gothic away from the traditional European setting in a ruined past, and give it a colonial setting. The difference is that these novels are all written from a British perspective. Sands-O’Connor suggests that the Gothic conventions in these novels reflect cultural anxieties that remain unresolved, and that this lack of resolution is reflected in a failure on the part of these texts to satisfactorily resolve the narratives, with the best option presented to the child characters, she argues, being “to retreat, leaving destruction in their wake.” Offering “little escape for these children from the hauntings of history,” these novels, she argues, fail to offer the sorts of resolution offered by “traditional Gothic novels.” Perhaps because the Gothic conventions are not sufficiently transformed and appropriated by a new, local tradition, the Gothic in these novels can only serve to indicate historical fault-lines and failures, but in doing so brings those fault-lines and failures into the narratives themselves.

Children’s and young adult texts have become veritable playgrounds for revising and expanding the Gothic chronotope. Indeed the children’s book itself becomes a new location for the Gothic, with its intricate architecture of intertextuality and labyrinthine reference, as Rebecca-Anne Do Rozario cleverly points out. Children’s Gothic thus innovates in ways...
other than setting and family sexual dynamics. While traditional Gothic narratives introduced the ambiguously attractive character of the hero-villain, the moral lines have always been clearly drawn. That is, the Gothic maintains that evil is undeniably evil, no matter how attractive it may be, and its corruption must be as forcefully and completely expelled as possible. Nowhere is there any suggestion that evil might simply be misunderstood, or forgivable, or in any way assimilable to everyday life as a positive force. Nor is there a suggestion that the victims of the Gothic hero-villain are in any way complicit in their fate. Though no one essay in this collection takes on the challenge of articulating an ethics of children's Gothic, several show ways in which the Gothic is managed within the texts they discuss, and in so doing reveal a range of ethical responses. One would expect that in the most traditional scenario of children's Gothic, the child characters would mimic their female counterparts in adult Gothic as the innocent, unwitting victims of an external malevolence. Their rescuers would also come from outside their ranks, and the narrative arc would produce a climactic encounter between the forces of evil and the forces of good whose denouement would include the sound expulsion of the evil that threatened them. Indeed this is the way some children's Gothic plays out, even when it has its tongue in its cheek. Most children's authors, however, such as Roald Dahl and Lemony Snicket, while preserving the child's innocence and the utter externality of the evil that threatens, innovate by giving the child some clever weapon with which to fight their attackers. James' Giant Peach, Matilda's psychic energies, and Sunny Baudelaire's efficacious bite, for instance, enable the children to put up a good fight and sometimes even roundly defeat their enemies.

Recent children's Gothic, however, reflects our culture's changing attitude toward the innocence of children, as well as what seems to be a cultural shift in our willingness to unilaterally assign blame. When ten-year-olds kill two-year-olds for kicks, when children take weapons to school and rain down death on their classmates, when they post sexy pictures of themselves on myspace.com, when they enthusiastically join in their culture's jihad, we have to revise our sense of what they know and who they are. Sure we blame the adults who shamelessly exploit them, but we also begin to experience a sense of unease about the degree to which they are complicit in their own exploitation. In keeping with a more general trend to complicate victim/abuser status, we begin, in a strange way, to dignify the child by granting him or her complex motivations that are not the results of a bland innocence. Perhaps they are not blank slates after all, or, if they are, all the protection in the world can't keep them from the tangled web of what we once located as a teratology, but might have to revise into a more
nuanced understanding of what it means to be human. Laurie N. Taylor argues that these ambiguities of childhood innocence, children's need for protection, their ability to be resilient and competent in the face of adult corruption, and the relocation of the monstrous find a ready home in Goth comics, which directly challenge traditional paradigms of a neglectful and often oppressive patriarchal adult culture.

The ethical innovations of some recent children's Gothic, then, seem to hinge on children assuming at least some responsibility for the irruption of the Gothic in their worlds, and/or actively working to find a way to either ameliorate or assimilate it. Rather than seeing the Gothic as an anomalous intrusion into their lives from some external and alien force, the children in many contemporary Gothic novels court their dark side, and own it as an aspect of the self. They don't nurse any illusion that they are innocent victims in the drama in which they find themselves. Mahy's Harry, for instance, realizes that the evil and dangerous Trickster brothers are as much her creation as the gentle, good brother, and that anger and fear are useful tools in crafting a life worth living. This is a very different response to haunting than that proposed in the texts Sands-O'Connor analyzes; rather than retreat from the uncomfortable knowledge she has gained, Harry acknowledges her responsibility for bringing the evil into the world and asserts her agency in the face of it. A similar stance is taken in the texts by Neil Gaiman that Karen Coats examines. In each text, the child is in some way implicated in the appearance of the evil in her world—it is not a purely external foe. Knowing that, the characters turn to face the evil for which they are partly responsible, and work to expel it from their world. How unlike their innocent Gothic foremothers, whose stock response was flight, and whose only hope lay in rescue.

The inrushing of the Gothic into children's culture, then, speaks among other things to our social order's sense of unease with the knowingness of children and the ambiguity of victimization; were it a purely reactionary or conservative trend, however, it would respond with calls for ease or social stability, with the simple if violent expulsion of evil and the restoration of the status quo. On the other hand, by allowing for the return of the repressed, children's Gothic just might be a site for recalculation, reassessment of how things are, and hence even the disestablishment, dismantling, or at least a questioning of the status quo. The most radical texts in recent literature seek not to expulse or contain the Gothic, but rather to make a viable space for it in the topology of the human. The main character in M. T. Anderson's *Thirsty*, which Rod McGillis treats in his chapter, can't join in his culture's hatred of the monstrous, for he has discovered it within himself; either to kill himself or to accept his fate would be reactionary, whereas to find a way between those two...
alternatives will change his culture. Finding this middle ground is the imperative that informs the new ethics of children's Gothic.

Where, then, do we find ourselves with respect to contemporary children's Gothic? It is a genre that presents us with structural consistencies that accommodate historical change, innovations and appropriations that suit it to new anxieties, and an ethics that boldly challenges our cherished beliefs about childhood. Perhaps it is time to assess children's Gothic on its own terms, as a pure form destined for a decidedly knowing audience, who hears its parody and excess as a call to know ever more about what really haunts us. A closer look at what might be called a pure irruption of the Gothic into children's literature might help us locate its cultural and personal importance for contemporary child readers. Consider the following poem:

THE GHOUL
The gruesome ghoul, the grisly ghoul,
without the slightest noise
waits patiently beside the school
to feast on girls and boys.

He lunges fiercely through the air
as they come out to play,
then grabs a couple by the hair
and drags them far away.

He cracks their bones and snaps their backs
and squeezes out their lungs,
he chews their thumbs like candy snacks
and pulls apart their tongues.

He slices their stomachs and bites their hearts
and tears their flesh to shreds,
he swallows their toes like toasted tarts
and gobbles down their heads.
Fingers, elbows, hands and knees
and arms and legs and feet—
he eats them with delight and ease,
for every part’s a treat.

And when the gruesome, grisly ghoul
has nothing left to chew,
he hurries to another school
and waits . . . perhaps for you.

(Jack Prelutsky 1976)

“The Ghoul” is one poem in a collection of Gothic poems in Jack Prelutsky’s Nightmares: Poems to Trouble Your Sleep (illus. Arnold Lobel). This book contains a dozen poems that deal with a haunted house, a vampire, a werewolf, an ogre, a witch, a troll, a bogeyman, and other creatures that terrify. The audience for “The Ghoul” and the other poems is undoubtedly children of primary school age, say 6 to 12 years of age. In other words, both Prelutsky and his publisher assume that a poem such as “The Ghoul” will appeal to a young readership, and that it contains something purposeful for that audience. And indeed, the poem does offer an accomplished example of form, nicely capturing the familiar 4/3 beat lines of nursery rhyme, using monosyllables and two syllable words carefully, shaping alliterative lines, and rounding the poem structurally to echo the beginning in the ending. Extended paratactic sentences give the impression of anaphora—seven of the 24 lines begin with “he,” and another eight begin with “and.” In effect, the poem is a long list of items the ghoul will find tasty: bones, back, lungs, thumbs, tongues, stomachs, hearts, flesh, toes, heads, fingers, elbows, hands, knees, arms, legs, and feet. Seventeen items for the ghoul to chew, and then he’s off to find another meal. Clearly, this poem is not intended to traumatize its young readers, but it does offer a brutal vision of little children eaten outside their school. Just as clearly, this poem indicates the connection between children and the Gothic. It takes the second most familiar place for many children—school—and posits a malevolent creature waiting just outside the doors to snag unwary children on their way outside. To put this another way, we might note that school in this poem is an uncanny place. That which
is familiar now has a haunting presence. As in familiar Gothic narratives, the innocent are victims of insensitive violence. They are prey to a Gothic villain of monstrous proportions.

And without a doubt, this poem is dramatic in its delight in the ghoul’s cannibalism. Whatever dreams this ghoul comes from, he haunts the schoolyard the way the bogeyman might haunt a dark wood. He is a presence that disturbs with the very sense that he is somehow real, even as we know he is a fiction. He is real because he represents something—just what this something might be is the mystery. What does he represent? Why is he lurking about the school? Where has he come from? And from what dread hand has he taken his existence? And what dread heart can withstand his presence? The ghoul is a Gothic monster because he frightens and because he transforms the familiar into the strange and threatening. The school and its yard become castle and forest of traditional Gothic, and the ghoul is the fearsome figure who just might be as close to us as our own family. The haunting here might remind us that schools can, indeed, be dangerous places.

But what makes this poem and its Gothic posturing appealing and purposeful? The appeal, of course, rests in the safe distance of reader from text. The reader or listener can experience a frisson, the pleasure of a good shiver, confident that he or she does not live in the world the poem evokes. Everyone likes a good shiver because it shakes us free of security while leaving our security intact. The appeal is the appeal of danger, beckoning us to be just a bit more daring, a bit more wild than our normal lives might allow for. The Gothic world of “The Ghoul” gives us a space for safe fear. We can safely indulge our instinct for death. “The Ghoul,” too, is funny, as the Gothic often is. Typically, it achieves its humour through excess; it presents a vision ridiculous in its extremes. Just as the labyrinthine corridors, dark forests, rampant escapades of Gothic deliver location and action beyond the familiar and the contained, so too does this short poem deliver a content that spills over its 24 lines. The Gothic releases forces usually repressed; mere anarchy is loosed and contained at the same time. In Gothic, we have the return of the repressed. Our enjoyment is visceral: the cracking of bones and the snapping of backs. Parts of the body are delicious morsels, tasty tarts, and candy snacks. The appeal of the Gothic has something to do with unrestraint, transgression, and the overturning of normalcy. In “The Ghoul,” the creature is a cannibal; he breaks a taboo as surely as the famous Gothic villains break various taboos. Here the delicacy, innocence, and even sanctity of little children are vulnerable to the worst abuse imaginable, and the poem ends with a turn directly to the reader. The reader too may be next. The force of this turn is not dissimilar to
the force of the “jump” at the end of a jump tale. The appeal is directly to the reader.

Now, part of the poem’s success has to do with its form and language. It moves along nicely, tripping off the tongue as easily as the ghoul might chew on a thumb or pull apart a tongue. In some way, the Gothic always relies on sound, even if this is the sound of silence, the silence that forces us to guess, to imagine, and to worry. Something waits, and waits patiently, without the slightest noise. The alliteration and the openness of the accents accentuate the silence. The only sounds this poem offers are the sounds of a body crunched and wrenched apart. Form carries the force of the Gothic horror while at the same time it deflects this force. For example, in a literary move familiar since Homer, the poem delivers a figure just when we might be overwhelmed with the horrific nature of what we are reading. In the midst of a stanza describing cracking bones, snapping backs, and squeezing lungs, we read that the ghoul chews thumbs like candy snacks, and in the next stanza while the ghoul slices stomachs, bites hearts, and shreds flesh, we read that he swallows toes like toasted tarts. The similes shift register; we might recall a story such as “Hansel and Gretel,” in which two children find a cottage of candy and gingerbread and also a cannibalistic witch who intends to eat them as one of her treats. The connection between children and sweets seems appropriate, even perhaps natural. Remember what little girls are made of—sugar and spice and everything nice. Children are sweet things. Suddenly, we might notice how this poem challenges the implications of our association of children and candy. Perhaps this poem surveys territory more recently travelled by James Kincaid.

Once we establish the appeal of the poem, we might reasonably see the purpose the poem might serve. If the Gothic has any direct connection to children’s literature and its history, then this is most likely to the cautionary tale, as Dale Townshend’s survey of late eighteenth-century children’s literature and the Gothic suggests. Whereas the appeal of the poem may be psychoanalytic, the purpose is social. Little children beware; dangers lurk in the large world, right outside your school. The poem ultimately serves to caution children against strangers; it serves to remind them of the dangers they may encounter right in their own familiar spaces. The narrator ends the poem with a direct warning. Why this warning is socially important is because it warns readers to be vigilant, to stay close to home, to remain with their friends, to avoid straying even a short way. The Gothic has this effect. It warns of the dangers mysteriously close to even the most familiar places. It reminds us that the world is not safe. It challenges the pastoral myths of childhood, replacing these with myths of darkness drawing down, creatures
in the forests of the night. Reading a poem such as “The Ghoul,” we might be reminded of the potential for Gothic fear and darkness in just about every story we have. For example, think of Sarah Moon’s version of “Little Red Riding Hood” (2002) in which the wolf drives a large sleek black automobile, Red Riding Hood travels wet noirish city streets, and grandma’s house is a sleazy hotel room. The empty bed and dishevelled sheets that confront us in the final picture of this book are a challenge. They challenge us to look boldly into this world’s underbelly, to know that the underworld is not simply a metaphor, to take the hauntedness of our lives as an opportunity for strength—the strength to dream strong dreams, to capture the energy of the Gothic villain and put it to positive use. The Gothic is a paranoid mode, but only if we succumb to its fears, fears exacerbated by the violent eruptions of and against children that have so dominated the media’s imagination in recent decades.

We might succumb to fear when we read “The Ghoul”; however, the parodic force of the poem works to undermine fear. The poem is overcharged, its language exaggerated to the point of humour. It might make you squirm. Arnold Lobel’s illustration situates the ghoul on top of the monkey bars. He stares down at the school from the bars that are almost as high as the school itself. Three small faces peer anxiously from a window. The texture of this illustration invokes the work of Edward Gorey, and like Gorey’s work, this illustration is wry. Its humour is sophisticated. The monkey bars are just inches away from the school’s front steps. The compression works both to render the picture unreal and also to evoke the Gothic’s Freudian work of condensation. The focus in the illustration is on eye contact between the children and the monster. He is the center of their attention and they are of his. This monster has something fascinating about him with his concentrated stare, his pointy ears, long chin, bald head, sharp nose, and devilish eyes. The ghoul is very much the Gothic villain.

Gothic villains, from Victor Frankenstein and Montrose to Count Olaf and Chet the Celestial Being, attract us because they are flamboyant and irrepressible. Their desire refuses to be contained. They are audacious, living with sublimity as a common occurrence of the everyday. They are, in that psychoanalytical sense, both ourselves and our “other.” We have been thinking through a Blakean language that might see the Gothic villain as, potentially, either the Prolific or the Devourer. This figure might turn destructive and chaotic or it might offer energy for creative and constructive action. In other words, the Gothic may either deliver subversive possibility or demand the safety of conformity. In either case, it presents us with a fantasy of desire, and desire, we know, is out of reach. We can never fully conform and remain active
and engaged in life unless we become automatons, and we can never fully subvert the social order without destroying our own foundation. The Gothic is a form that examines our fear of desire. In children’s fiction, it often takes the form of a fantasy, as in the fantasy of the lurking ghoul. As Slavoj Žižek (2002) asserts, fantasy teaches us how to desire, and perhaps this is true of Gothic fantasies. Reading “The Ghoul” just might result in a readjustment in our desire for escape from the confines of the educational institution.

REFERENCES
Nothing, in my opinion, can be more reprehensible than the too common practice in nurses and servants, of alarming the tender minds of children with the idle tales of hobgoblins, haunted houses, &c. the effects of which are to impress them with that timidity, which is afterwards removed with the greatest difficulty, even when advanced in life, and with minds naturally superior to such little things. Sporting with the passions is always a dangerous project, for by such imprudence the mind may be so deranged as to be incapable of ever acting again with regularity and composure. [...] Many from the sudden impulse of terror, have, from such wanton frolics, lost their lives; whilst others again have had their intellects so much impaired, as to be rendered miserable, and altogether disqualified for the occupations of life ever after. (Dr. Churchill, Genuine Guide to Health, as cited by James Plumptre in a footnote to The Truth of the Popular Notion of Apparitions, or Ghosts, Considered by the Light of Scripture: A Sermon [1818])

It is late 1764. The London Chronicle or, Universal Evening Post for December 27–29 announces the publication of a book for children entitled The History of Little Goody Two-Shoes by a certain Mr. Newbery. As the history of children’s literature so frequently rehearses, writer, publisher, and book merchant John Newbery had opened up the market for children’s fiction twenty years earlier with the publication of A Little
Pretty Pocket Book. But late 1764 demands attention in another respect: Horace Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto* was published in a modest edition of 500 copies on Christmas Eve of that year. For all their temporal coincidence, the differences between these two texts are salient, and not only in terms of the ages of their respective intended readerships: while Walpole had succeeded in introducing to the world of narrative fiction what the second edition of *Otranto* would term a “Gothic” taste for the supernatural (Clery 1995), Newbery subjected the apparition in *Goody Two-Shoes* to a spectacular act of exorcism.

In the inset tale, an orphaned Margery, the eponymous Goody Two-Shoes herself, attends the funeral of Lady Ducklington in the Parish Church. Long after midnight on the day of the service, the parishioners are awoken by a chilling sound of the bell inexplicably tolling in the church steeple. Unsurprisingly, their susceptible imaginations conjure up thoughts of the spectral return of the recently buried woman, for “all thought it was Lady Ducklington’s Ghost dancing among the Bellropes” (Newbery 1977: 48). But of an instance of supernatural haunting, Mr. Long, the Rector, remains unconvinced, and returning to the darkened church to confirm his scepticism, he throws open its doors to reveal no ghost but the figure of Goody Two-Shoes herself. Having fallen asleep on the pew during the funeral service, she had accidentally been locked in the church, remaining there for much of the night until it occurred to her to ring the church-bells in order to alert the parishioners to her whereabouts.

Although such a version of the “explained supernatural” would not be out of place in Ann Radcliffe, *Goody Two-Shoes* takes off in a direction quite different from that of the emergent Gothic tradition in refusing, from the outset, to countenance the ghost as anything other than the figment of a foolish, irrational mind. The second section of the book undertakes a similar dismissal of superstition when the now married heroine stands fallaciously accused of witchcraft: “Mercy upon me!” the narrative voice cries out, “People stuff Children’s Heads with Stories of Ghosts, Faries, Witches, and such Nonsense when they are young, and so they continue Fools all their Days” (1977: 119); “After this, my dear Children,” the narrator continues, “I hope you will not believe any foolish Stories that ignorant, weak, or designing People may tell you about Ghosts; for the Tales of Ghosts, Witches, and Fairies, are the Frolicks of a distempered Brain. No wise Man ever saw either of them” (1765: 56). The same month in late 1764 which saw, with *Otranto*, the hard-earned admission of the ghost to the pages of popular adult romance, the spectre—or, more accurately, the mere ghost of a ghost—was expelled from the realms of respectable literature for children.
Newbery’s endeavor here was informed by at least two things. First, *Goody Two-Shoes* self-consciously signals its aims to counteract the perceived effects of a particular brand of storytelling for children, pitting the virtues of print culture over the antediluvian trappings of orality in the process. At least since the early modern period, British culture had consistently associated ghosts and children with the oral tradition in storytelling, and this primarily through that most maligned and misunderstood of cultural personae: the Old Wife. Although, as Mary Chamberlain (1981) has argued, the Old Wife had originally dispensed such crucial services to her society as advice concerning pregnancy, childbirth and the administering of herbal remedies and cures, the rise of science during the early modern period served severely to de-legitimize the modes of knowledge in which she traditionally dealt. This denigration of feminine forms of knowledge fused seamlessly with a growing cultural prejudice against the belief in the existence of ghosts (Nashe 1594). Re-enacting the scientific devaluation of her medical practices, the Old Wife’s orally transmitted tales of supernatural activity would become a particular object of cultural derision in Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*, *The Winter’s Tale*, and *The Tempest*. Lady Macbeth, for instance, dismisses her husband’s horrified, somewhat feminized reactions to the appearance of Banquo’s ghost as analogous to the ridiculous effects of an old woman’s story of ghouls told to impressionable child-listeners at a fireside: “O, these flaws and starts / (Impostors to true fear) would well become / A woman’s story at a winter’s fire, / Authoris’d by her grandam” (III.iv.164–167). Indeed, so pervasive had these associations between women, orality, and ghost stories become that, in 1595, George Peele would produce and publish *The Old Wife’s Tale*, a short dramatic entertainment in which Madge, the eponymous old wife herself, resolves to “drive away the time with an old wife’s winter’s tale” (1595: 89–90). What follows is a dramatised story replete with atmospherically suggestive thunder and lightning, spirit possession, a disembodied head that rises from a well, and the unburied corpse of one Jack which issues forth a ghost.

The female storyteller recurs in contexts of closer temporal proximity to the rise of the Gothic aesthetic too, and in the *Spectator* on March 14, 1711, Joseph Addison invoked the scenario of the Old Wife, the fireside, and the child-listener as a means of launching a familiar Enlightenment critique of superstition.

I remember last Winter there were several young Girls of the Neighbourhood sitting about the Fire with my Landlady’s Daughters, and telling Stories of Spirits and Apparitions. […] pretending
to read a Book that I took out of my Pocket, [I] heard several dreadful Stories of Ghosts as pale as Ashes that had stood at the Feet of a Bed, or walked over a Church-yard by Moon-light. (Clery & Miles 2000: 14–15)

Strictly speaking, of course, there is nothing inherently “Gothic” about these and other such cultural representations of the Old Wife and her dealings in terrifying tales for children, and we might only approach the back-dating of what appears to us now to be their characteristically “Gothic” concerns with scenes of horror and terror, ghosts and ghouls, death and haunting with extreme caution. As Alfred E. Longueil has pointed out, only in the late 1790s did “Gothic” assume some of the senses in which we most frequently employ it today, that is, as “a mere synonym for that grotesque, ghastly, and violently superhuman” strain in fiction (1923: 459). Even so, this oral tradition of supernatural storytelling is central to the history of the Gothic in children’s literature because it assists in the reconstruction of the historical context in which the devoutly anti-oral, anti-supernatural impulses of a book like Little Goody Two-Shoes could play themselves out.

The philosophical underpinnings of Newbery’s fiction are no less salient, for in asserting that children, having been exposed to tales of spectral activity in their youth, were likely to “continue Fools all their Days,” Goody Two Shoes disclosed its affinities with the education theories of John Locke as outlined in Some Thoughts Concerning Education (1693).

The first Step to get this noble, and manly steadiness, is, what I have above mentioned, carefully to keep Children from frights of all kinds; when they are young. Let not any fearful Apprehensions be talked into them, nor terrible Objects surprize them. This often so shatters, and discomposes the Spirits; that they never recover it again; but during their whole Life, upon the first suggestion, or appearance of any terrifying Idea, are scatter’d and confounded [. . .]. (1693: 176)

As it turns out, Locke’s account of the permanent and irreversible effects of fear would enjoy a particularly extended cultural afterlife, and almost one hundred years later, the same reservations would be expressed by the radical Catharine Macaulay in her Letters on Education (1790). Here too, the tales of the haunted nursery are said to leave their indelible traces upon even the least craven of grown men: “Many men…have confessed to me … that they could not go through a church yard in the dusk of the evening, without feeling the full weight of the stories of the nursery” (1790: 72).
Setting in place another image that would recur throughout the educational tracts of the next century, Locke anxiously sketched a scenario in which nursemaids and other servant-girls terrify into subjection the children placed in their care through horrific tales of *Raw-Head* and *Bloody Bones*, and such other Names, as carry with them the Idea’s [sic] of some thing terrible and hurtful, which they have reason to be afraid of, when alone, especially in the dark” (Locke 1693: 196). As Locke’s characteristic concern with acts of writing and inscription phrases it, the servant girl’s tales of horror imprint upon the tabula rasa of infancy a series of unfortunate yet indelible inscriptions. Conceptualized here as a faulty mechanism of discipline, the ghost is likely to engender in the child nothing more than an irrational fear of the dark, the haunted child being as far removed from the Lockean ideal of the rational Enlightened gentleman as conceivably possible. Not even Ann Radcliffe’s politics of radical dissent would sufficiently dislocate the Lockean links between ghosts, superstition, and female members of the lower orders in her Gothic romances of the 1790s. In *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, for instance, the bourgeois heroine Emily St Aubert continuously disavows her own foolish predisposition towards superstition by projecting it onto her servant girl, Annette (Radcliffe 1794: 301).

Given that Locke’s *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* predated Newbery and the formal rise of children’s literature by approximately fifty years, the philosopher’s critique of fear-inducing tales for children is aimed largely at the chapbook or penny history, a particular form of street literature that succeeded the black-letter broadside ballads of earlier periods. A mere glance at some popular titles reveals the extent to which these fictions served Enlightenment culture as the primary repository of the maligned tales of the older, unapologetically supernatural oral tradition in storytelling: *The Witch of the Woodlands*, *The History of Dr John Faustus*, *The Portsmouth Ghost*, *The Guildford Ghost*, and so on (Ashton 1992). Wordsworth’s musings on chapbook illustrations in “The Excursion” (1814) provide further insight into this fictional form’s almost characteristic leaning towards the horrific, the dreadful and the ghostly.

Profuse in garniture of wooden cuts
Strange and uncouth; dire faces, figures dire,
Sharp-knee’d, sharp-elbowed, and lean-ankled too,
With long and ghostly shanks – forms which once seen
Could never be forgotten! (Book I, ii, 181–44)
Again, though not Gothic in the strictest sense of the term—chapbook renditions of the supernatural, after all, lacked as an aesthetic base the frisson of terror imported into the Gothic through the discourse of the sublime—they nonetheless served as host to the spectre, the phantom or the apparition, one of the Gothic’s most definitive elements. And despite the fact that such esteemed men of letters as Boswell, Johnson, Carlyle, Goethe, Lamb, Wordsworth, and Coleridge would all document their voracious appetite for chapbooks as children (Neuburg 1968), there is much to suggest that these flimsy fictions, together with oral tales of the supernatural, constituted an unofficial vein in children’s literature of the period.

Although Andrew O’Malley (2003: 17) has usefully described the “residue” of the chapbook that persists in respectable forms of children’s literature of the late eighteenth century, we might remember the frequency with which this residue became, like the ghost in Goody Two-Shoes, the object of a concerted expulsion. One such chapbook, An Account of Some Imaginary Apparitions, the Effects of Fear or Fraud, printed and sold in Dunbar, Scotland, in 1792, went so far as to include as an epigraph an anonymously penned sonnet which powerfully encapsulates the Locke-inspired resistance to the “Gothic” elements of the chapbook during the 1790s.

Would you your tender offspring rear
With minds well-form’d, devoid of fear,
Ne’er let the nurse with idle tale
Of Ghost their infant ears assail,
Or Bug-a-boo! Or Chimney Sweep!
To Terrify them into Sleep.
Thus, when matur’d by rip’ning age,
And brought up n [sic] the world’s great stage,
No midnight horrors vex the Soul
Of howling dog, or hooting owl!
But on they move with manly tread,
Across the mansions of the dead;
Or pass the ruin’d tower, where
Tradition says Goblins appear. (1792: n.p.)
A distinctive pattern within eighteenth-century children’s literature is beginning to reveal itself: Locke urged the reading of certain morally uplifting tracts over others of a more gruesome nature; Newbery published Goody Two-Shoes partly in order to counteract the effects of orally transmitted ghost stories for children; certain writers of chapbooks, such as Hannah More in her Cheap Repository Tracts, sought to retrieve the form from the abuses it had suffered at the hands of popular horror (More 1795–1797). Each gesture of what we would in today’s critical terms identify as the “Gothic” occasions, if only negatively through the process of Kristevan abjection, was followed by the production of more respectable, culturally approved forms of literature for children. Simply put, culturally approved forms of children’s literature become everything that the Gothic is not. In a ceaseless dialectic of action and reaction, the ghost is vigorously stamped out of children’s literature in the same decades that witnessed the consolidation of not only the Gothic aesthetic, but a firm sense of what constituted the middle-class child, his education, and his books too.

The pattern repeats itself in clearer, more startling terms when we consider the work of three eighteenth-century women writers—Mary Wollstonecraft, Anna Laetitia Barbauld, and Maria Edgeworth—each of whom took up the pen partly in order to combat what they took to be certain worrying trends in contemporary children’s fiction. In each instance, Gothic would be written out of respectable literature for children even while each writer would deem it appropriate at other points in her career to put Gothic convention to considered, distinctly adult use. Mary Wollstonecraft’s Thoughts on the Education of Daughters (1787) had expressed its affiliations with the educational practices of Locke from the outset, railing against a childish penchant for fanciful tales of the supernatural in no uncertain terms: “They [children] are mostly fond of stories, and proper ones would improve them even while they are amused. Instead of these, their heads are filled with improbable tales, and superstitious accounts of invisible beings, which breed strange prejudices and vain fears in their minds” (10). Consequently, when Wollstonecraft turns to the writing of children’s fiction in her Original Stories from Real Life: With Conversations Calculated to Regulate the Affections and Form the Mind to Truth and Goodness (1788), she advocates the use of Reason as a firm corrective to those superstitious faults which “ought never to have taken root in the infant mind” in the first place (359).

While these stories might occasionally be said to entertain a form of muted Gothic potential—some, more than others, include scenes of absent maternity, crumbling battlements, ruined dwellings, and horrid
descriptions of French modes of imprisonment—they qualify as Gothic only in a very limited sense. Strictly speaking, they are not Gothic at all, for perhaps most tellingly, the collection is utterly devoid of a ghost: the closest Wollstonecraft's child reader gets to the spectre is in the tale of the assassin who is "haunted," and not in any supernatural sense, but merely by the mental recall of his victim's physical image (427). But when Wollstonecraft later in her career writes for young adults, Gothic conventions seem to serve her well. Having included in her anthology of appropriate reading matter for young women *The Female Reader* (1789) some of the darker moments of graveyard verse as well as John Aikin's seminal Gothic tale *Sir Bertrand, a Fragment*, Wollstonecraft would later, with the publication of *The Wrongs of Woman: or, Maria* in 1798, confidently enlist such distinctly Gothic conventions as rape, insanity, incarceration, and live burial in her exploration of the contemporary condition of women.

A similar tendency is identifiable within Anna Laetitia Barbauld's oeuvre. Although Barbauld's works for children prolifically span the period 1778–1796, her *Hymns in Prose for Children* (1781) is the best known today. In claiming that "The peculiar design of this publication is, to impress devotional feelings as early as possible on the infant mind" (Preface, v), Barbauld discloses her affinities with Locke's conceptualization of the child as tabula rasa, an impressionable wax-like surface upon which certain experiences, both positive and negative, leave their mark. Somewhat predictably, then, Gothic fear and suspense, horror and terror do not present themselves to Barbauld as plausible aesthetic alternatives, for as the writer's Lockean frame of reference had spelled out, a child, once terrified, was likely to remain irrationally susceptible to fear throughout later life. But when Barbauld writes for adults, terror is relocated from the margins of her children's fiction to assume centre stage. Though herself no writer of Gothic romance—*Sir Bertrand* constitutes an almost certain case of authorial misattribution—her essay "On the Pleasure Derived from Objects of Terror" (1773) rendered Anna Laetitia a key figure in the discourse of Gothic sublimity that runs from Edmund Burke, through James Beattie, to Ann Radcliffe and beyond. More significantly, though, Barbauld's essay turns upon a telling distinction between mature and immature, adult- and child-like experiences of sublime enjoyment: while the young might be yoked with "pale and mute attention to the frightful stories of apparitions" only through the mechanism of curiosity, it is only the imagination of the adult reader that is capable of taking its full, sublime pleasures in the enjoyment of the marvelous, the novel, and the new (Norton 2000: 283). The Gothic imagination, in these terms, becomes the sole prerogative of the adult reader.
The same may be said of Maria Edgeworth: although, in a canny transgression of paternal authority, Maria had given expression to the darker, Gothic sides to her imagination in *Castle Rackrent: An Hibernian Tale* (1800), there is nothing in, say, *The Parent’s Assistant* (1796), a collection of children’s stories co-written with her father Richard Lovell, that convincingly answers to either horror, terror, or Gothic supernaturanism. Like Wollstonecraft, the closest Edgeworth’s representation of dead mothers, tyrannous landlords, witch-like women, and the ruined castles ever gets to the Gothic is through a form of muted, never-to-be-realized potential. Even more telling is the fact that *The Parent’s Assistant* is utterly devoid of a ghost, for as the Preface assures the parent reader, “care has been taken to avoid inflaming the imagination.” Instead, these stories read today like the bourgeois ideological apparatuses that they are, particularly in the emphasis they bring to bear upon industry, the dangers of an over-familiarity with servants, and the abuses to which the older, aristocratic model of entitlement lent itself.2

In all three writers, Gothic is excluded from children’s fiction, but unproblematically engaged in the works and aesthetic essays they wrote specifically for adults. As Clara Reeve, the author of the seminal supernatural fiction *The Old English Baron* (1778), put it in *The Progress of Romance* (1785), only certain books might be “put into the hands of children with safety, and also with advantage” (101). Consequently, her list of recommended reading for children comprises the resolutely anti-supernatural impulses of writers such as Newbery, Marshal, Mrs. Barbauld, and Mrs. Trimmer, alongside the sobering precepts of juvenile history, geography, and morality (102–103).3 Writers of Gothic romance for adults could not bring the same conventions to bear when contemplating the case of literature for children.

And yet, what seems to us now to be a perplexing case of literary double standards really serves as indisputable evidence of the shift that was occurring, in the work of Rousseau, Blake, Wordsworth, and others, in the conceptualization of childhood from the end of the eighteenth century onward: the absence of Gothic from children’s literature of the period reflects childhood’s recently discovered discursive and ontological peculiarity. Childhood, of course, is not without a complex discursive history of its own. As Philippe Ariès has famously and somewhat controversially argued, medieval European culture lacked a sense of childhood as a separate and distinct phase of human existence.4 More recent studies of the history of childhood repeatedly stress that modern conceptualizations of the child locate their origins only in so recent a past as the Romantic movement of the late eighteenth century.5
Under the broad cultural influence of writers such as Rousseau, Blake and Wordsworth, childhood, though once a time barely distinguishable from adolescence and even adulthood, had by the beginning of the nineteenth century generally come to be perceived as a unique and distinctive phase in human existence. As Rousseau put it in *Emile, or On Education* (1762), “Nature wants children to be children before being men. [. . .] Childhood has its ways of seeing, thinking, and feeling which are proper to it” (90). The child, it was clear, could under no circumstances be fed on the rich Gothic diet of the adult reader—in Macaulay’s terms, the writer, the aesthete, and the educationalist alike ought to be particularly clear about “the difference in point of taste between the child and the adult” (1790: 51).

When, in 1798, Maria Edgeworth and Richard Lovell put forward their Locke- and Rousseau-informed views on child-rearing in *Practical Education*, their removal of Gothic from the fiction they wrote for children was given careful rationalization. If, for the Edgeworths as for others, the Associationist paradigm meant that even books of the most spotless moral intent could conceivably serve as the first chain in a metonymic slide into destruction, the sublime, the full experience of which relied on the reader’s powers of unlimited associations, presented the writer of children’s books with a particular difficulty. Terror, too, was for the Edgeworths an inappropriate mode for children, for if, as father and daughter reasoned, the child was indeed that Rousseauean entity of original innocence, the terror-based catharsis of negative emotion was rendered entirely redundant. Consequently, it is not long before they turn their attention in *Practical Education* to the sublime terrors of the orally transmitted ghost story: “The early associations which we perhaps have formed of terror, with the ideas of apparitions, and winding sheets, and sable shrouds, should be unknown to children” (Vol. I, 140–141).

Unsurprisingly, the Edgeworths express their admiration for at least one prudent mother who scrupulously policed, and then removed with a sharp pair of scissors every offending word, line, or passage from a book prior to making it available for the perusal of her young children (Vol. II, 87). Of all such offending scenes, it was the Gothic that presented the most urgent case, and citing *verbatim* Akenside’s celebration of the ghostly imagination in his poem (“Hence, finally by night / The village-matron, round the blazing hearth, / Suspends the infant-audience with her tales” *et cetera*), the Edgeworths opine that “we hear [here] only of the pleasures of the imagination, we do not recollect how dearly these pleasures must be purchased by their votaries” (Vol. I, 141). Literary expurgation, then, presents itself as the only possible alternative,
for “No prudent mother,” they insist, “will ever imitate this eloquent village matron, nor will she permit any beldame in the nursery to conjure up these sublime shapes, and to quell the hearts of her children with these grateful terrors” (Vol. I, 142). Exorcism of the ghost, though, depends for the Edgeworths upon a far more complex process than it did for Newbery in *Goody Two-Shoes*, and citing the examples of Perreault’s Blue Beard and the story of the Hobgoblin in Berquin’s *Children’s Friend*, they advocate the bathetic conversion of horror into the liberating effects of humorous laughter (Vol. II, 94).

To this disqualification of the Gothic for children, Sarah Trimmer would lend her support. Trimmer’s place in the history of children’s literature in Britain cannot be over-emphasised, for in her attempts at confronting, sorting and taming the somewhat monstrous proliferation of books for children ever since Newbery’s endeavours in the 1740s, her regular reviews of children’s literature constituted much of the official Christian line on education and child-rearing in the first few decades of the nineteenth century. As the self-appointed “Guardian of Education” to Georgian culture, Trimmer ran her regular journal of that name between 1802 and 1806. Although she strongly disapproved of the Edgeworths’ Rousseauean leanings, Trimmer would reiterate many of the reservations they had expressed with what was, by now, the distinctly “Gothic” elements in contemporary children’s fiction. In her review of *Youthful Recreations; containing the Amusements of a Day*, for instance, her distaste for the Gothic mode is clear: “In one particular only we find ourselves at a loss to form a decided judgment. – We mean in respect to the account which is introduced of a supposed haunted house. To our apprehension it is advisable to omit from children’s books every thing that has a tendency to excite or revive the idea of ghosts” (Vol. I, 267). The ghost, however, is nothing that a physical act of excision cannot cure, and in sympathy with the advice offered by the Edgeworths, Trimmer proposes that “a pair of scissars [sic] will easily rectify this error [. . .] without spoiling the book, as the story can be spared” (Vol. I, 267).

When it comes to ghosts, Trimmer is equally humorless, and not even Newbery’s expulsion of the mere spectre of a spectre in *Goody Two-Shoes* was executed to her complete satisfaction. As her later review of the story put it, “We have also a very great objection to the Story of Lady Ducklington’s Ghost (though extremely well told, and as well applied) for reasons we have repeatedly given” (Vol. I, 431). Within the context of Trimmer’s frequently articulated repugnance to Gothic in *The Guardian of Education*, those reasons hardly needed spelling out. Once again, textual expurgation was the route to literary redemption.
Needless to say, Trimmer’s own foray into children’s fiction in, say, her *Fabulous Histories: Designs for the Instruction of Children, Respecting Their Treatment of Animals* (1786), leaves no space for the delights of ghostly superstition.

As the maligned objects of these and other reviews attest, there were, of course, a number of marked exceptions to this official censuring of the Gothic in children’s literature of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The Preface to Marshall’s *The Wisdom of Crop the Conjurer*, for instance, flew flagrantly in the face of contemporary educational theories by insisting that the effects of ghastly fictions upon the child’s mind were neither permanent nor irrevocable, but likely to be outgrown with the onset of maturity: “that which seems more injurious (the representing of hobgoblins, monsters, &c.) is as soon confuted as the other, (not ill-meant) but ill-judged opinion” (quoted in O’Malley 2003: 32).

Another such instance is Horace Walpole’s own *Hieroglyphic Tales*, the collection of short narrative pieces posthumously published in *The Works of Horatio Walpole, Earl of Orford* (1798) which has hitherto barely featured in critical discussions of either “adult” versions of the Gothic or of children’s literature of the period. At least two of the six stories in Walpole’s collection were written, possibly as early as 1757, for a nine-year-old child by the name of Miss Caroline Campbell, the eldest daughter of Lord William Campbell who lived with her aunt the Countess of Ailesbury. Horror drips darkly from Walpole’s pen, and what follows is an unsettling blend of fairytale and Gothic fictional elements, a hybrid form not unlike the famous blending in *Otranto* of the ancient romance and the modern novel. Ever-faithful to the anti-Catholic sentiments of the Gothic, one of the stories in *Hieroglyphic Tales* concerns an Archbishop who, having mistaken it for a brandied peach, cannibalizes a human fetus preserved in a jar, and who later, having been promoted to the office of Pope, bears a son through an incestuous relationship with his own sister. When Walpole writes Gothic for children, he does so in terms that would make Monk Lewis blush.

More disturbing, though, is the Evangelical tradition in children’s writing epitomised by Isaac Watts’s *Divine Songs, Attempted in Easy Language for the Use of Children* (1715), a form of religious writing for young readers in which excruciating scenes of horror and terror, often more graphic than those utilised in self-consciously Gothic fictions, received frequent—though not entirely uncontested—utilisation. Although Watts, following Locke, had later criticised horror and terror as appropriate modes for children in his educational tract *The Improvement of the Mind* (1782), his *Divine Songs* sternly delivered a form of hell and brimfire
theology informed by a sense of the child’s innate wickedness. Indeed, Watts’s identification with the tradition of religious dissent implied, in part, his subscription to what Colin Heywood (2001: 33) and others have referred to as an Augustinian conceptualization of childhood: the child as heir to the doctrine of Original Sin, or childhood as the utterly depraved receptacle to the transgressions of countless former generations. Already, the Gothic overtones to Augustinian theology are striking: as the bogus editor of *Otranto* put it, Walpole’s tale was based upon the moral that “the sins of the fathers are visited on their children to the third and fourth generation” (Walpole 1764: 41). In Isaac Watts, consequently, the Gospel of Mark’s divine injunction to “Suffer the little children” becomes disturbingly literal. Infant mortality, in fact, is celebrated in Watts’s *Songs* far more frequently than life, and within the context of repeatedly recurring images of graves, shade, darkness, hell fire, torture, punishment, and eternal damnation, the resurrection of the Christ figures more as a vampiric return of the undead than any triumphant vanquishing of sin: “Behold him rising from the grave; / Behold him raised on high: / He pleads his merit there to save / Transgression doom’d to die” (Song III).

If the ghost was to be admitted to children’s literature at all, it had to be Holy in origin, intention and effect, for following Locke (1693: 246), Watts had been keen in his educational tracts to discriminate between positive and negative manifestations of supernatural activity.

Mrs. Sherwood’s *Fairchild Family* in three parts (1818–1847), too, enlisted Augustinian conceptualisations of childhood in the work of Evangelical moralising, making use of Gothic conventions as poignant as those of a Lewis or a Maturin in the process. In one famous episode, the three young Fairchild children are made to sit beneath a gibbet containing the putrefying corpse of a fratricide in order to underline the father’s lesson concerning the importance of amicable sibling relations. Gothic horror as poignant as that evoked in the description of the rotting corpse of Agnes’s baby in *The Monk* is employed as a technique of moral instruction. Indeed, so close did these moral writers stray to the Gothic mode that subsequent editions of *The Fairchild Family*, in what appears to be an application of Edgeworthian advice, elided this particular scene, replacing it with a rewritten ending and an altogether less punitive morality. Sarah Trimmer too, in characteristic fashion, would protest against the manifold “horrors” depicted in much religious children’s literature of her day, citing an extract about a mischievous boy whose buried corpse was worried by birds from Mr. Pratt’s *Pity’s Gift* (1802: 305–306) as the epitome of misguided fictional convention. While British culture officially barred the Gothic from literature for children, the Evangelical
tradition had employed tropes and techniques remarkably Gothic in nature in the production of tracts and fictions for the young.\(^7\)

In the final decades of the eighteenth century, though, the anti-Gothic sentiments expressed by the Edgeworths, Sarah Trimmer, and Catharine Macaulay would be interrogated, resisted, and thoroughly revised. Although Rousseau was no champion of the childhood reading—Rousseauean educational ideals involve more the child’s muscular, sensuous engagement with the natural world than any disciplined appreciation of the printed word—the philosopher’s emphasis in *Emile* upon childhood as the “sleep of reason” unwittingly did much work in the Gothic’s favor. And while Locke had cautioned against the effects of the child’s exposure to the nursemaid’s ghostly tales, Rousseau had advocated the child’s gradual and deliberate exposure to all objects of fear. Rousseau undertakes a strategic inversion of Locke’s argument in order to claim that it is parental failure to expose the infant to objects of terror that renders the individual fearful throughout later adult life. The program of systematic desensitization that ensues pertains for Rousseau no less to the gradual exposure of the child to threatening creatures of the natural world than it does to his fear of the dark, an irrational terror which, for Locke, was largely instilled in him through the harrowing tales of the haunted nursery. Rousseau’s point in *Emile* (1762) is the very opposite.

Accustomed to having a good footing in darkness, practiced at handling with ease all surrounding bodies, his feet and hands will lead him without difficulty in the deepest darkness. His imagination, full of the nocturnal games of his youth, will be loath to turn to frightening objects. If he believes he hears bursts of laughter, instead of belonging to sprites they will be those of his old comrades. If an assemblage appears, it will not be for him the witches’ sabbath but his governor’s room. The night, recalling to him only gay ideas, will never be frightening for him. Instead of fearing it, he will like it. (137)

With the educational impact of Rousseau, the door of the haunted nursery had been prized open on rusty hinges. To these philosophical murmurings, British Romantic writers, essayists, and poets would be quick to respond. Wordsworth’s defense of imaginative, even ghostly stories for children in book five of *The Prelude* (1799–1805) is well known. In the 1850 version of the poem, Wordsworth would at once disclose his voracious appetite for chapbooks as a child, while nostalgically recalling a lost era of reading in which the energy of the imagination was given unlimited, somewhat
magical reign: “Oh! give us once again the wishing cap / Of Fortunatus, and the invisible coat / Of Jack the Giant-killer, Robin Hood, / And Sabra in the forest with St. George!” (Book V, 341–344). Although Alan Richardson has argued that these lines mask Wordsworth’s inherently conservative aim to nurture the minds of children upon fanciful tales of innocuous political content (1994: 123), they also serve as testament to the definite shift in educational priorities occasioned by the rise of high poetic Romanticism. Indeed, echoing Rousseau, Wordsworth argued that his youthful unrestrained wanderings in the dark forests of romance had enabled him to withstand the potentially annihilating effects of horror when confronted with the corpse of the drowned man on the shores of Esthwaite’s lake (Book V, 448–455).

As Summerfield (1984: 200) has argued, William Godwin provides a defense of the unfettered, ghostly imagination under the nom de plume of William Scolfield. While railing against the Gothic trash of the circulating libraries in his stinging review of The Monk in the Critical Review (1797), or later in that damming footnote in Biographia Literaria (1817), Coleridge would variously document his support for imaginative, even sublime forms of fictional entertainment for children across his letters and public lectures. In a lecture delivered at Bristol in 1795, for instance, Coleridge criticized the heavy, unimaginative moralizing of a children’s writer such as Maria Edgeworth, and promoted, like Wordsworth, the highly imaginative forays of popular chapbooks and romances. Clearly, the earlier terms established in the work of Wollstonecraft, Barbauld and Edgeworth have been fundamentally reversed: with Romanticism, the Gothic is abjected from the poetic realm of high art, but hastily reconfigured, even in the work of the Romantic poets themselves, as the stuff of juvenilia.8

Always the sure sign of intense imaginative engagement, Gothic curiously becomes with Romanticism an appropriate mode for children while being denounced as a dangerous and aesthetically inferior form for adults. Wordsworth, in the 1802 Preface to Lyrical Ballads, is perhaps the best example of this paradox: while celebrating the ghastly reading matter of his own boyhood, he also inveighs against the “thirst after outrageous stimulation” occasioned by “frantic novels, sickly and stupid German tragedies, and deluges of idle and extravagant stories in verse” written in the Gothic mode (cited in Wu 1998: 359).

Shelley had similarly expressed his childish self’s passionate invocation of the ghost, in all the ecstasies of terror, during his celebration of the powers of the sublime and the beautiful in the “Hymn to Intellectual Beauty” (1816): “While yet a boy I sought for ghosts, and sped / Through many a listening chamber, cave and ruin / And starlight wood,
with fearful steps pursuing / Hopes of high talk with the departed dead” (V, 49–52). The haunted boyhood, in fact, becomes a central preoccupation in the work of Coleridge, Wordsworth, Byron, Shelley, Scott, and others, but unlike the negative connotations it had received in Locke, the haunted child serves the Romantics as the epitome of imaginative engagement, the nostalgic recollection of the young poet’s heightened sensitivity to both the natural and supernatural worlds.

Arguing against Locke’s sense of the child as tabula rasa negligently inscribed upon by the servant girl’s ghostly tales, Charles Lamb in his 1821 essay, “Witches, and Other Night Fears,” would assert the Romantic notion of the child as a labyrinth of spectral terror even at its pre-linguistic origins. If the child is always, already haunted, it is of little or no consequence whether he is exposed to the tales of the haunted nursery or not. Rather, and as Lamb argues, all that these books might provide is a particular focus for the child’s innate reserve of terror: “It is not book, or picture, or the stories of foolish servants, which create these terrors in children. They can at most but give them a direction” (Vol. II, 68). In this sense, the effects of ghostly tales are more positive than negative, and as in Wordsworth and Coleridge, and later Mary Shelley, Lamb turns the intense imaginative engagement of his own haunted childhood into the object of extreme Romantic nostalgia (Vol. II, 67). Contrasting his experience as a six-year-old child of a pantomime entitled Lun’s Ghost with his later, adult experience of the same piece, he mourns the loss of his intense, somewhat enchanted responses to the dramatic procession of “grotesque Gothic heads” (Vol II, 99).

The views advanced by Lamb in 1821 had already informed the siblings’ collaborative literary endeavors for children as early as Tales from Shakespear [sic] of 1807. With Mary producing renditions of comedies such as The Tempest and A Midsummer Night’s Dream, Charles’s attentions were devoted to the more masculine challenges of tragedy: King Lear, Macbeth and Hamlet. When taken as a whole, the collection proves to be a radical intervention into the field of children’s fiction: within a context characterized by the extreme censuring of supernatural fiction for the young, Tales from Shakespear [sic] succeeded in introducing to children’s literature the two strands of Gothic that had been delineated by Nathan Drake in his Literary Hours; Or Sketches Critical, Narrative, and Poetical (1804): the fairies, sprites, witches, and goblins of the so-called “sportive Gothic,” and the ghostly hauntings and spectral visitations of the “terrible Gothic” (Kliger 1952: 235–236). Seemingly, the Lambs well understood that, if the ghost was to be admitted to the pages of children’s literature, this could only be achieved through the employment of Shakespeare as its medium. In Lamb’s version of
Hamlet, Horatio and the soldiers' account of the spectre's appearance upon the castle's battlements is said to be “too consistent and agreeing with itself to disbelieve” (Vol. III, 173), and far from banishing, as Newbery had done, their accounts as the stuff of superstitious nonsense, the young prince engages the ghost of his murdered father in the most spine-chilling of encounters. Supernatural terror is the aesthetic response that Lamb most wishes to elicit: “The terror which the sight of the ghost had left upon the senses of Hamlet, he being weak and dispirited before, almost unhinged his mind, and drove him beside his reason” (Vol. III, 175).

A similar sense applies to The Family Shakespeare, the selection of Shakespeare plays intended for “young readers” and their parents and expurgated by the siblings Harriet and Thomas Bowdler in 1807 (Preface, vii). The Preface to the anonymous first edition of 1807 recalls the language of expurgation or even literal defacement employed by Trimmer and the Edgeworths: while some original passages are described as being “wholly omitted,” others are “rendered unexceptionable by a very little alteration” (vi). However, what makes this edition so different from the work of contemporary expurgators is the Bowdlers' refusal to subject Shakespeare's supernaturalism to any process of revision, elision, or excision; as in the Lambs' Tales, The Family Shakespeare radically conserves the role and provenance of Ariel in The Tempest, the fairies in A Midsummer Night's Dream, Caesar's spirit in Julius Caesar, the witches and the ghost of Banquo in Macbeth, and the spectre of the old King in Hamlet.

Drake's “sportive” and the “terrible” Gothic come into their own across selected aspects of the Shakespearean oeuvre. Here, too, it is the armor-like protection afforded by the emergent myth of Bardology that protects the ghost from any likely act of expurgation. The Preface to The Family Shakespeare even makes an oblique attempt at justifying its bold inclusion of the spectre in a work specifically intended for young readers by invoking the authority of Elizabeth Montagu, the “author of that elegant essay, in which SHAKESPEARE is vindicated from the illiberal attacks of VOLTAIRE” (Preface, vi). This constitutes more than just a respectful acknowledgment of the famous blue-stocking and Thomas Bowdler's long-time friend, for in her well-known essay “On the Praeternatural Beings” (1769), Montagu had argued, against the tide of cultural prejudice, for the centrality of the supernatural to Shakespeare, “our Gothic bard”: “Ghosts, fairies, goblins, elves, were as propitious, were as assistant to Shakespear [sic], and gave as much of the sublime, and of the marvellous, to his fictions, as nymphs, satyrs, fawns, and even triple Geryon, to the works of ancient bards” (Clery & Miles 2000: 34).
Tales from Shakespear [sic] was an immediate success; responses to The Family Shakespeare were far more mixed and guarded: while one admirer regarded such a “castrated version” of Shakespeare’s plays as desirable, others felt that the “mutilations” effected upon the Bard were both inappropriate and unnecessary (Perrin 1970: 75). A review of the first edition in The Christian Observer of 1808 felt that the expurgation was not thorough enough—a sentiment echoed amidst great equivocation and ambivalence by the Reverend James Plumptre in his Four Discourses on Subjects Relating to the Amusement of the Stage (1809). James Plumptre’s own views, expressed later in one of his published sermons, The Truth of the Popular Notion of Apparitions, or Ghosts, Considered by the Light of Scripture (1818), provide insight into why several contemporaries, including Plumptre himself, curiously regarded Bowdler’s Shakespeare as insufficiently bowdlerized. Somewhat predictably, Plumptre’s attempts at refuting the popular belief in ghosts in this sermon turns to the case of Shakespeare, and the vogue that the Bard is enjoying currently in British culture. Conceding, on the one hand, that “There is much less belief in Apparitions, in this enlightened age and country, than when our great dramatic poet (Shakespeare) wrote,” he also regretfully observes that “yet I cannot but think, that much of the belief which at present prevails, is owing to his representations which still keep possession of the stage” (1818: 14). Plumptre’s attention turns directly to the case of children, and he rehearses the Lockean terms of the debate: “Much of this belief [in ghosts] too is kept up by the ignorance and superstition of those who are appointed to the care of children; and a belief in the fearful tales of the nursery is with much difficulty, if at all, to be rooted out in the minds of most by reason and revelation in their riper years” (1818: 14–15). It would seem that, with regards to the Gothic in children’s literature, old habits die hard.

Despite the climate of attenuated but ongoing resistance to ghost stories for children in the first two decades of the nineteenth century, Eleanor Sleath published Glenowen, Or The Fairy Palace in 1815. This highly imaginative fiction for children vacillates deftly between Gothic in its lighter and darker, sportive and terrible manifestations; suggestions of ghosts and hauntings effortlessly combine with a celebration of the fanciful powers of the unfettered imagination. The point to be made, though, is that, with Sleath, the earlier tendency in Wollstonecraft, Barbauld, and Edgeworth to reserve the Gothic exclusively for adult readers is no longer in operation: as the writer of three-volume Gothic romances such as The Orphan of the Rhine (1798), the Gothic mode informs those aspects of Sleath’s oeuvre...
intended for adult and child reader alike. Still, the Gothic in children’s literature would long remain the object of extreme cultural concern.

At the instigation of Lord Brougham, the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge was founded in London in 1826, an institution which sought to control the reading habits of the working classes through mediating between publishers, writers, and readers themselves. While commissioning works deemed “useful” by the growing utilitarian spirit of the age (encyclopedia, maps, agricultural information, and so forth), the Secretary Thomas Coates, in his opening address to the other members of the committee on 28 May 1829, made it quite clear that the eradication of the Gothic in children’s literature constituted one of the Society’s most important aims: “The tales of horror so constantly taught,” Coates emphasized, “belong to a worse class—their bad effects upon individual happiness and character can hardly be exaggerated. To remedy this serious evil, and greatly to multiply the few good and wholesome books now in use for children—amongst which Mrs. Barbauld’s, Dr. Aikins and especially Miss Edgeworth’s occupy the first rank—is one of the objects to which the attention of the Committee is directed” (1829: 37). In seeking to revive the fictional tradition of Barbauld, Aikins, and Edgeworth, the Society’s anti-Gothic imperatives are clear.9

In the Edinburgh Review for January–May 1828, too, an anonymous reviewer quoted the Society’s objectives regarding Gothic tales for children, deeming them to be “the soundest doctrines, clearly and strongly stated” (1829: 129). But the Society collapsed in 1848, and if this was not enough to signal its ultimate failure, a pantomime version of Otranto entitled Harlequin and the Giant Helmet had opened on 26 December 1840 at the Theatre Royal, Convent Garden, to the delight of child and adult audiences alike. Though the script for the piece was never printed, what does survive is Gilbert Abbott A’Beckett’s cognate drama The Castle of Otranto: A Romantic Extravaganza, a theatrical adaptation of Walpole’s fiction that was first performed in April 1848, the same year of the Society’s dissolution. Dancing on the grave of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, the pantomime softened the Walpolean blows of incestuous horror and supernatural terror through the humor-inducing effects of rhyming doggerel verse. A mere 80 minutes in duration, this theatrical piece was eminently suited to a young audience. Hereafter, though, the restless spirit of the haunted nursery would have to lie silently in wait for later and so occasional a writer of ghostly stories for children as Charles Dickens for the renewal of its dark energies and the reinvigoration of its powers and effects.
ENDNOTES


2. For a sustained reading of the middle-class affiliations of much late eighteenth-century children’s literature, see Andrew O’Malley’s argument in The Making of the Modern Child (2003).

3. If Reeve’s list of recommended reading for children in The Progress of Romance (1785) implies a stark divide between pure entertainment and heavy moralising, it is important to remember that, as Alan Richardson has argued in “Wordsworth, Fairy Tales, and the Politics of Children’s Reading” (1991), the distinction between delight and instruction, entertainment and moral didacticism is hardly absolute in children’s literature of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. For a similar argument, see Mitzi Myers’s essay “Romancing the Moral Tale: Maria Edgeworth and the Problems of Pedagogy” (1991).

4. For a critique of Ariès’s account of the absence of childhood in medieval culture, see Shulamith Shahar’s argument in Childhood in the Middle Ages (1990).

5. See, for example, Hugh Cunningham’s argument in Children and Childhood in Western Society Since 1500 (1995), Colin Heywood’s A History of Childhood: Children and Childhood in the West from Medieval to Modern Times (2001), and Lawrence Stone’s The Family, Sex and Marriage in England, 1500–1800 (1977).

6. For an account of Associationist thought and its relations to the Gothic aesthetic, see Robert Miles’s chapter “The Hygienic Self: Gender in the Gothic” in Gothic Writing 1750–1820: A Genealogy (1993). For an account of how these anxieties would play themselves out in the critical reception of Gothic romance during the 1790s, see Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s response to Lewis’s The Monk in Clery and Miles’ Gothic Documents: A Sourcebook, 1700–1820 (2000), pages 185–189.


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Dale Townshend

