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Reaching the Age of Anxiety

The 1950s and the Horror of Youth

THREATS TO THE IDEA OF THE innocent and vulnerable child were perceived and denounced at various points in the first half of the twentieth century. However, in the years following World War II childhood became increasingly visible as a distinct and potentially troubling category. Youth culture was permitted to flourish after the Great Depression disconnected young people from their traditional economic roles, and enrollment in high school became normalized. The popularization of automobiles also gave teenagers increased mobility and freedom to congregate outside of a supervisory adult gaze. Concerns were raised particularly in light of an unprecedented national concern over youth crime. The actual increase of juvenile crime in the years following the war is uncertain (see James Gilbert's *A Cycle of Outrage* for detailed discussion of its uncertainties), but the public was easily drawn into the narrative of a dramatic increase with a number of cultural culprits. Centralized in the panic over wayward youth were the spread of mass media, namely television, an increasingly distinct youth culture (including rock and roll), and the popularity of comic books. Senator Estes Kefauver's 1955–56 report on comic books and juvenile delinquency (which preceded a similar inquiry into television) nervously observed the new ubiquity of the mass media:

> The child today in the process of growing up is constantly
> exposed to sights and sounds of a kind and quality undreamed
> of in previous generations. As these sights and sounds can
> be a powerful force for good, so too can they be a powerful
> counterpoise working evil. Their very quantity makes them
> a factor to be reckoned with in determining the total climate
> encountered by today's children during their formative years.
> ("Comic Books and Juvenile Delinquency")

Providing expert testimony on the relationship between comic books and
juvenile crime before Kefauver's Senate Subcommittee on Juvenile Delin-
quency was Dr. Fredric Wertham, author of *Seduction of the Innocent*, an
excoriating explanation of the effect of comics on the educational, social,
criminal, and sexual trajectories of their young readers. In reference to
the popular crime comics of the era, Wertham wrote that while "almost
all good children's reading has some educational value, crime comics
by their very nature are anti-educational. They fail to teach anything
that might be useful to a child; they do suggest many things that are
harmful" (90). For Wertham, censorship of comics was urgently needed
for children's mental and social health and thus the health of society as
a whole. For example, Wertham outlined what he called the *comic-book
syndrome*, which occurs "in all children in all walks of life who are in
no way psychologically predisposed" (114). The "syndrome" provided a
direct narrative in which the process of reading and acquiring comics
led to juvenile delinquency: the comic books' antisocial subject mat-
ter aroused in the child antisocial impulses for which he or she felt
guilty—consequently, as Wertham saw it, further comics were obtained
clandestinely through dishonesty or theft.

 Having infiltrated all the way into the "safe" domestic sphere, tele-
vision was considered a threat through the sexual or violent content of
its programs as well as through its ability to address children directly,
bypassing the adult as caretaker of children's "appropriate" knowledge.
While the new medium was seen as a potentially useful domestic tool
through its ability to promote family values, moral panic over its uncer-
tainties achieved a powerful foothold in the cultural imagination. Joe
Kincheloe observes that

> [t]he popular press circulated stories about a six-year-old who
> asked his father for real bullets because his sister didn't die
> when he shot her with his toy gun, a seven-year-old who put
> ground glass in the family's lamb stew, a nine-year-old who
> proposed killing his teacher with a box of poison chocolates,

an eleven-year-old who shot his television set with his B. B. gun, a thirteen-year-old who stabbed her mother with a kitchen knife, and a sixteen-year-old who strangled a sleeping child to death—all, of course, after witnessing similar murders on television. (117)

Following (and in many cases contributing to) the public concern with delinquency, cinematic representations of youth changed dramatically, providing for children's passage into horror cinema as villains. Not that the horrifying child was entirely new; it is certainly true that prototypes of horror's child villain predate this era. In William Blake's poem "The Mental Traveller," the narrator conveys an immense but elusive dread at the spectacle of a frowning baby who parallels the infant Jesus. In Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw*, a well-meaning governess struggles with the veiled truth of her ward's delinquency, a trait strikingly posed against his idealized appearance. Similarly, it would be a mistake to view pre–World War II cinematic representations of children as entirely one-note in their affirmation of innocence; as Timothy Shary points out, "[t]he very association of children with innocence had been challenged throughout many films of the 1930s and 1940s, especially as studios developed films about social problems during the Depression" (15). However, it was in the 1950s that the cinematic questioning of childhood innocence attained new force with a plethora of films of greater and lesser repute focusing on juvenile delinquency. It was in this period, and via these concerns, that child villainy achieved the currency and force that allowed it to solidify into an enduring horror theme. The year 1956 saw the release of the archetypal child villain film, *The Bad Seed*. While it clearly drew on the moral panic juvenile delinquency sparked, *The Bad Seed* also strikingly decontextualized the deviance it depicted, shifting the discourse that surrounded the troubled child: a social problem interwoven with complex cultural developments became a problem of inherent evil. This chapter traces horror's child villains to the cycle of juvenile delinquent films of the 1950s, highlighting the cultural changes of the time that rocked categories of childhood. It also identifies *The Bad Seed* as a watershed film that transferred cinematic questioning of innocence from social commentary to horror, directing representations of transgressive children into new and more volatile forms.

Troubled Teens: The Juvenile Delinquent on Film

As Shary points out, "There was no moment when the [juvenile delinquent] fixation of the 1950s begins in earnest. Certainly movies like *Knock*

on Any Door were harbingers, yet not many delinquency tales were made before the mid-1950s" (50). Yet by the decade's close, a multitude of pictures of greater and lesser quality had been produced. Most influential and noteworthy in the cycle were certainly *The Wild One* (1953), *Blackboard Jungle* (1955), and *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955). In *The Wild One*, the delinquent was portrayed with fundamental sympathy, his rebellious appeal and redemptive possibilities combined in the leader of the Black Rebels Motorcycle Club, Johnny Strabler (Marlon Brando in possibly his most iconic role, and in a performance of standoffish naturalism that sent waves of influence through the world of young male actors). Upon arriving with his goons in the town that will be subject to their mayhem, and despite his status as leader to whom club members consistently defer, Johnny swiftly and sulkily distances himself from his gang, taking refuge in the local tavern. He carries through the film like a fetish a trophy stolen from a motorcycle race, a token of his disaffection; Johnny claims to be the legitimate owner of the prize yet makes no attempt to conceal its stolen origin, flaunting it as a genuine token of his social worth as well as an obnoxious parody of his desire for acceptance. In *The Wild One*, we can see a number of changes to youth's conceptualization that are characteristic of the era. Aggressively foregrounded is the visibility of a youth subculture (in the form of motorcycle gangs) as well as a young man's ambivalent desire to be accepted by an increasingly self-absorbed adult culture, a self-absorption elaborated most memorably in *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955). More than mere anxiety over an increasingly autonomous youth culture, the gang's thunderous arrival—swarming into the town like black leather hornets—also gestures to the mobility granted by a surge in youth consumer power. In Western Europe and the United States, the 1950s firmly established young people as a crucial consumer demographic. Shary writes that teenagers' acquisition of cars "gave them new senses of independence and mobility. Now teens no longer had to stay within the confines of their hometown and congregate around a single hangout" (17). The new youth consumer power is troublingly articulated upon the gang's arrival in town: in the tavern, they drink rowdily and to excess, their patronage encouraged by the bar owner, although we know very well what it will lead to. The paternalistic townsfolk's moral panic eventually fixates on Johnny, who is engaged in shedding his tough-guy affectations through his relationship to doe-eyed bartender Kathy (Mary Murphy), who sees in Johnny's mobility the chance to escape her dreary, small-town life.

Structuring the audience's identification more closely around adult authority, one of the most significant films to engage with the unease and increasing visibility of juvenile delinquency was Richard Brooks's adapta-

tion of Evan Hunter's novel *Blackboard Jungle*, which follows the struggle of soft-spoken English teacher Richard Dadier (Glenn Ford) to engage the volatile teenagers of North Manual, an inner-city boys' school. The film opens with an intertitle that makes explicit reference to the public concern over juvenile delinquency, noting its disturbing extension into an otherwise admirably well-meaning school system. However, the film was also denounced from some quarters as part of the problem, partly because of MGM's own marketing, which sensationalized its treatment of delinquency, capitalizing on its shock value (see Golub 25–26). *Blackboard Jungle* opened with Bill Haley and his Comets' "Rock around the Clock," propelling the track to popularity and signaling the cultural ascendance of rock and roll as emblematic of a distinctive and troubling youth culture, imbued with sexuality and rebellion. Comics, too, are part of the problem in the film: Dadier expresses his support for anything that will "get [the students'] minds out of comic books," his role as an English teacher well positioned to counter this apparently toxic non-literature. Ultimately, Dadier is able to get through to his class—including such young talents as Sidney Poitier, Rafael Campos, and Paul Mazursky—after the isolation of bad apple Artie West (Vic Morrow), a villain who epitomizes the insidious influence of gang culture.

Despite its flattering appraisal of a school system that pays tribute to American communities and belief in its young people, *Blackboard Jungle* paints a rather bleaker picture of the state of the American education system in the postwar years. North Manual's teachers are scared, careless, or aggressively cynical (the shop teacher [David Alpert] contemplates assembling a disguised electric chair with which he will immolate his whole class). Adam Golub writes that "Dadier is frustrated by unmotivated students, burned-out colleagues, an unsupportive administration, inadequate school facilities, and an ineffective teacher education program, which he feels did not prepare him to deal with low-achieving students or classroom discipline" (21). In an assembly at the start of the film, the students are barked at via microphone by Mr. Halloran (Emile Meyer), whose manner immediately signals North Manual's pedagogical inferiority in having bred and supported an educator in whom the new teachers struggle to imagine any nurturing or pedagogical spirit: "What does *he* teach?" one questions. In his address, Halloran oscillates between the sarcastic humor of a penal officer and imperatives that clarify his power. Dadier's uncomfortable recollection that Halloran teaches "public speaking or something" contrasts tellingly with the man's frothily indecorous greeting: presumably Halloran has surveyed and quantified his audience and determined that they do not qualify for even a snippet of his elocutionary skill. Childhood, in Brooks's film, is under cynical review. Golub

has also persuasively demonstrated that *Blackboard Jungle*, rather than a film merely reflecting the terror of postwar juvenile delinquency, is also symptomatic of what was widely perceived to be a crisis in the education sector: "The idea that schools were in "crisis" first became conventional wisdom in the media in the late 1940s and continued throughout the 1950s" (22). As he points out, a large number of newspapers and magazines had taken to critiquing aspects of the nation's public school system, including its outdated curricula, inadequate infrastructure, and underqualified teachers, along with a worrying surplus of unfilled positions and teachers with low morale (22).

Blackboard Jungle also communicates a cultural questioning of children's value that accompanied the baby boom. This notion is perhaps most potently evoked by Richard Dadier's as yet unborn child, carried by his wife, Anne (Anne Francis). Given a recent miscarriage, Anne and Richard are meticulously careful to avoid subjecting Anne to any undue stress. Ostensibly, Anne's forever-endangered body evokes the preciousness and vulnerability of the child—their particular child and the figure of the child more generally. It also helps cements the villainy of problem child Artie, a gang youth who takes to phoning Anne anonymously in order to falsely inform her that her husband is having an affair, behavior that produces in her precisely the kind of mental unbalance that will endanger her child. However, in the context of a film about juvenile delinquency, Anne's pregnancy also encourages us to speculate anxiously on how this precious child might actually turn out. Early in the film, Richard optimistically comments to Anne (and with sexism endorsed at the time) that their child will "have [her] looks and [his] brains and take care of us when we're old." Yet everything to which he bears witness suggests a rude contradiction to their hopes. So troublesome are the film's teenagers, so pervasive is the delinquent subculture they inhabit, that one wonders at the risk involved in even having children. This connection between the delinquent youths and Dadier's unborn child is further evoked by the students' pet name for Dadier: "Daddy-O"—a name spat at him during his final showdown with the villainous Artie.

Brooks's film also gestures with a subtle yet discernable venom to a postwar economy transformed by the employment of women, the kind of workforce change that, as we shall see, became acutely relevant to a number of horror films featuring child villains, from *The Bad Seed* to *The Ring* (2002). "Do I look alright?" opens Lois Hammond (Margaret Hayes), the elegantly dressed teacher beginning the term with Dadier. "Ravishing," replies a colleague who speaks his every remark with a retiring cynicism. "They may even fight over *you*." In her sexual advances on Dadier later in the film, not only does Lois inappropriately infuse the

professional sphere with sexuality, but she almost compulsively illustrates her indifference for her job: "Tell me, Richard, don't you ever get fed up with this place? Don't you ever get tired of teaching; don't you feel that you want to throw your briefcase away and take a flyer someplace?— anyplace? With me maybe . . . Don't you? Don't you, Rick?" Dadier's refusal symbolizes not only his dedication to his wife and unborn child but also his thorough passion for teaching. To embrace this woman would be to embrace her defeatist, indifferent attitude to the problems the film depicts. Additionally, Lois's indifference to her work insults the trials of a postwar economy in which male jobs are increasingly occupied by women (the start of the film shows Dadier waiting anxiously among a row of eager applicants).

The students' delinquency is most powerfully illustrated by the attempted rape of Lois in the library after school. Having first flirted mildly with Dadier, to whom she offers a ride home, Lois proceeds down the staircase to wait for him to formally clock out. On the stairs, however, and with a self-conscious glance behind her, she surreptitiously raises her skirt and draws her stockings tighter. Not surreptitiously enough, however, to avoid the voyeuristic gaze of a student (Peter Miller) who lurks at the bottom of the staircase and who—speedily roused by this erotic display—drags her into the deserted library, where she will shortly after be rescued by her desired suitor. In Erving Goffman's terms, Lois's apparently backstage behavior in fixing her stocking has, with worrisome recklessness, been exhibited as front-stage behavior (indeed, a veritable exhibition) for the horny student who lurks in the extreme foreground (see *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*). At the moment Lois glances behind her in order to ensure that she is properly outside of Dadier's hopefully admiring gaze, her attacker also pivots self-consciously, ensuring *he* is not under scrutiny. We can see, however, that situated over the railing, the attacker is hardly invisible from Lois's perspective should she choose to actually look. In her preoccupation with her romantic life, this teacher is insufficiently mindful of her audience: a violent boy occupying the central foreground of the shot (just as he and his delinquent buddies should be foremost in any truly professional teacher's awareness in this place). The student is expelled and incarcerated; however, the encounter is framed by a sexist culture that assumes to some extent Lois's complicity in her own attack. The suggestion that Lois somehow asked for what she got is explicitly raised by Dadier's jealous wife but implied more subtly by Lois's preoccupation with her own appearance, carried on against all warnings ("they may even fight over you"), as well as by her continued intermingling of the romantic with the professional in her pursuit of Dadier.

Released the same year that its iconic star, James Dean, would be killed, Nicholas Ray's *Rebel Without a Cause* remains almost certainly the most enduring and influential juvenile delinquent film, exploring with poignancy and uncommon perspective many of the issues that troubled American society about the delinquency scare. *Rebel* begins at the police station's juvenile division, where we are introduced to young trouble-makers Judy (Natalie Wood), Plato (Sal Mineo), and Jim (Dean). On the one hand, Plato's crime of killing puppies represents delinquency's corruption of the innocence and fragility of youth; on the other hand, it prefigures the tragic death of Plato, who is such a tender innocent himself. As Murray Pomerance points out, puppies, rather like Plato, are "soft, big-eyed, emotionally evocative, and in a more or less constant bubble of maternal protection" (59).

Ray's film swiftly traces youth unrest to its social context, including (as in *Blackboard Jungle*) women's new mobility and financial power. The fastidiously social existence of Jim's mother (Ann Doran) is thrust into view when his parents arrive on the scene: white gloved, fur coated, and trailing her own equally gussied-up mother (Virginia Brissac) with her, she rushes toward her son with a concern invested primarily in keeping up appearances. Shary points out that "[Jim's] father is so brow-beaten by Mom that he is effectively emasculated, a domestic crisis born from post-war fears of women's economic liberation" (22). For all his ineptitude, there remains something touching about Jim's father (Jim Backus) in his attempt to connect with the son who is growing up at such a seem-ingly unbridgeable cultural remove; at the police station, he downplays Jim's drinking and fabricates vague narratives of his own youthful jaunts. However, what comes to the fore in the film's first scene (expressed so famously in Dean's eruption, "You're tearing me apart!") is that Jim's parents have no coherent plan for approaching him, but rather vacillate incoherently from one tactic to another. His father pointedly cannot establish for himself an identity apart from his wife's, let alone allow that identity to stand as a model for his son. The juvenile officer fatalistically identifies a broader social problem that lies outside Jim's own negativity, thereby sympathetically normalizing his teenage angst. "How can anyone grow up in a circus like that?" Jim asks him. He responds: "Beats me, Jim, but they do." Conversely, but with equal error, the father (William Hopper) of Jim's future companion, Judy, has a very definitive sense of his daughter's appropriate identity, of how she should present herself and behave. He repels her affections at the dinner table on the basis that she is too old to kiss him, his sense of her proper identity is determined by his knowledge of her emergent sexuality and the social mandate that he repress his attraction to her.

Jim's parents have a history of moving their family around at his mother's behest, nominally in order to safeguard the troubled Jim; however, this behavior also exemplifies the unwillingness of parents to grasp the truly separate and invested social existence of their children. In dislocating their son from his social context, Jim's parents further upset his attempts to position himself in any coherent narrative of self. The family's ceaseless relocation is also used to highlight Jim's mother's obsessive-compulsive focus on impression management—her need to defensively reset and recommence her social persona in response to the slightest potentially embarrassing hiccup. Her indifference to Jim as a social being struggling to fit in is underscored by her hypersensitivity to the ostracizing severity of her own social milieu. The parents of this troubled kid haven't grown up themselves.

Ray's film explores in rich and intricate detail Jim's attempts to integrate himself into the cultural environment of his peers and discover a stable social identity. As he walks into the school building on his first morning there, he unknowingly steps across the institution's emblem etched into the flagstones and is staunchly rebuked by another student for his flagrant disrespect. This moment emblematizes youth culture's abstruse, often indecipherable code of conduct—a code that, in order to foster civil communication (let alone belonging), one must clairvoyantly intuit and faultlessly follow. The difficulty of this endeavor is illustrated more fully during a later scene at the planetarium in the Griffith Park Observatory in which students wisecrack about the show from the safety of the darkness. Despite Jim's having carefully measured and imitated the sophomoric humor of the pranksters around him, the classmates disdain his gag as the work of one not yet initiated. With its narration of the Earth's relative insignificance and inevitable fiery expiration, the planetarium show seems to dwarf the problems that anguish Jim and classmate Plato. However, as Jim's scrunched countenance indicates, the show insults the force of his internal torment—the reality of his cultural milieu and the energy he puts into its observance. As it happens, the urgency of Jim's social existence is illustrated when Buzz (Corey Allen) challenges him to a knife fight outside the planetarium and against a backdrop of the city so overwhelmingly below. In this confrontation (absurdly precipitated by Jim's faux pas but potentially resulting in not mere social but actual death), we see that Jim's social interactions are at the forefront of his emotional, but also physical, existence. As he fights with Buzz, jeered on by a multitude of students, Jim seems truly to be in the stars, the rest of the world having receded to the microscopic.

In the more thoughtful and enduring films of the juvenile delinquent cycle, one can see not merely historical artifacts of a social scare,

but also cinema's ability to treat that uncertainty with circumspection and considerable social insight. While these insights remain (in some cases strongly) inflected by the prejudices of their time, they remain surprisingly sympathetic in their exposition and exploration of the era's challenges to childhood—reflecting with detail on young people's social and psychological complexity and, thus, their personhood. However, it is the passage of these dramatic challenges into the horror genre, their reassembly in a form that repressed rather than interrogated the constructed nature of childhood, that allowed the child villain to become such a trenchant and enduring antagonist.

Sowing Bad Seeds: Creating the Child as Monster

Emerging into the midst of the juvenile delinquency frenzy was a screen adaptation of William March's 1954 novel *The Bad Seed*, directed by Mervyn LeRoy (and preceded by a Broadway play at the Coronet Theater, Los Angeles, staged by Reginald Denham and featuring the same cast). Released in 1956, *The Bad Seed* provided a disguised yet—because of that disguise—pivotal engagement with the moral panic over juvenile delinquency, situating the child within the lexicon of horror, where her villainy could be unambiguously and lastingly inscribed. Steven Woodward points to the film as "marking the emergence of the child monster in cinema" (305), while Kathy Merlock Jackson stresses that "never before had such an evil image of childhood appeared on the screen" (112). The word "evil" here is crucial in its totality. Rhoda Penmark (Patty McCormack) is a "proper," ladylike child who parades herself in frilly dresses and dainty shoes and has a taste for the material comforts of her class. She also kills a lot of people—transforming the shocking if recognizable (indeed, sympathetic) delinquency of films like *Rebel Without a Cause* or *The Wild One* into irrecoverable villainy.

In *The Bad Seed*, we see in originary form a number of the hallmarks of the child villain film, from immediate successors like 1960's *Village of the Damned* to 2009's *Orphan*. However, in *The Bad Seed*, the broader societal developments surrounding juvenile delinquency, which are consciously explicated in films like *Rebel* and *Jungle* (including gang culture, educational crisis, the spread of mass media, and rock and roll), are strikingly and tellingly absent. The very choice of a young girl as the villain terrifies through its eclipse of familiar delinquent discourse. John Muncie points out that, historically, "[t]he vast majority of criminology theories . . . [had] focussed on *male* offenders, *male* juvenile delinquents and *male* prison populations. . . . Female deviance was largely perceived as relatively insignificant, given women's under-representation in the offi-

cial crime statistics" (130). Woodward points out that Rhoda's gender undoubtedly works to better conceal her crimes because of the way in which, culturally, "forms of violence are perceived as gendered" (304): not only is Rhoda a child, but she is a girl child, meaning that "the mask of femininity is layered over the mask of childhood" (308). The absence of known signifiers of juvenile delinquency indicates the film's reactionary reembrace of a more recognizable model of childhood focused on innocence and powerlessness—making all the more horrifyingly anomalous the corruption of that model.

For all her gentility, Rhoda, we discover, is the descendent of murderer Bessie Denker, carrier of an innate criminal gene that is undetectable until bloodily evident. This emphasis on a genetic taint is both comforting and confrontational—comforting in the sense that it constructs Rhoda as an aberration that reinforces perceptions of "normal" children and in its confirmation of contemporary child-rearing regimes as faultless; confronting in its suggestion that a bourgeois milieu that disassociates itself from child criminality might still unavoidably be corrupted

Figure 1.1. The dainty child killer, Rhoda Penmark (Patty McCormack), in *The Bad Seed* (Mervyn LeRoy, Warner Bros., 1956), a figure whose horrifying delinquency can only be the result of inherent evil. Digital frame enlargement.

by it (a monster like this can appear anywhere). In the following chapters, I pay special attention to this archetypal child villain's emergence in relation to anxieties surrounding socioeconomic power and a postwar reconsideration of women's social roles. But what deserves immediate note is the film's utter disposal of sympathy for the child and its generalized disregard of social context in its depiction of child delinquency—in effect, its transformation of the juvenile delinquent from a figure of social critique to one of monstrousness.

Partly because of its domestic setting (generally at odds with most 1950s horror) and absence of violence to which the viewer is graphically exposed, *The Bad Seed* is usually treated as a thriller. However, in its removal of monstrosity from the supernatural to the mental, *The Bad Seed* is an early incarnation of what Charles Derry has called the "horror-of-personality" film, exemplified by *What Ever Happened to Baby Jane?* (1962), *Strait Jacket* (1964), and (with incomparable terror and influence on so much of what followed) *Psycho* (1960). Derry points out that while the horror film had traditionally dealt in creations that could be distinguished from the human—physical and metaphysical monstrosities—in the traumatized cultural climate of United States during the 1960s (whose stresses included a rising crime rate, the Kennedy and King assassinations, and the frantically publicized exploits of a number of serial killers), horror villains tended to evoke the violence of the human psyche. In such a context, the ghouls and mad-science concoctions of previous horror cycles seemed to fall into a redundant familiarity. According to Derry, in the 1960s, horror cinema acknowledged that "what *was* horrible . . . was man. It was a horror that was specific, nonabstract, and one that did not need a metaphor. . . . Violence and horror were not explained in terms of science or religion, but in terms of psychology" (24).

Although it predates the tremendous impact of *Psycho*, *The Bad Seed* also roughly coincides with the popularity of the serial killer film, which Peter Hutchings suggests "can be taken as an important vehicle for a fairly broad change occurring in horror from the 1960s onwards, one that involved an increasing stress in the genre on contemporary settings and psychopathological dramas" (53). Like *Psycho*, *The Bad Seed* achieves much of its effect from its location of what is horrifying within what is most cozily familiar, rather than in more remote or Gothic environments (as in *Dracula* [1931] or *The Mummy* [1932]). It attaches horror to a figure at the center of the domestic sphere, the child, moreover (as Woodward points out), the female child. William Paul points out that *The Bad Seed* "effectively brought horror home, domesticating it by locating what is most horrible *within* the family" (270). In this sense, we can see 1960's *Village of the Damned*, which bears the influence of *The Bad Seed*, as a

kind of transitional text between old and new forms of horror, a film in the very course of relocating the horrific from the alien to the commonplace. In this film, a group of children are generated by a mysterious extraterrestrial force that impregnates their mothers. That the alien force that plants these bad seeds is never explicitly revealed to us is telling in its indication that the children themselves, in their inexorable power and defiance, are quite frightening enough. The majority of horror films featuring evil children have continued to couch themselves in verisimilitude to the extent of having as their primary loci wholesome country or seaside towns (*The Good Son* [1993], *Village of the Damned*, *Children of the Corn* [1984]) or domestic environments (*It's Alive* [1974], *Rosemary's Baby* (1968), *The Exorcist* [1973]). And despite being a film about apocalyptic prophecy, *The Omen* (1976) declines the use of spectacular effects and subverts any viewer expectation of casual schlock thrills through the dignified presence of a "serious" and domesticated actor, Gregory Peck. For Rick Worland, *Rosemary's Baby* "culminated gothic horror's absorption into the family structure that ran through the decade" (93). This insistence on domestic settings perpetually gestures to and reinforces the ideologically expected (innocent) child, creating an impure and shocking challenge to what we perceive as the natural order of reality.

As I indicated in the introduction to this book, for Noël Carroll, our response to monsters is consistent with a confusion of accepted cultural categories: they are creatures that violate a culture's understanding of natural order, providing us with not merely a physical but also a cognitive threat. Rhoda Penmark's clandestine bloodlust certainly renders her threatening (one of Carroll's criteria for monstrousness); however, more horrifyingly, she is a child who kills. That is, in its categorical violation, the physical threat she presents is utterly eclipsed by the cognitive one. One of the clearest and most enduring categorical impurities enacted by the child villain is his or her generalized transgression of the boundaries between childhood and adulthood. Through their general behavior or speech, child villains uncomfortably lay claim to a disposition confidently circumscribed as adult. In *The Exorcist*, Regan MacNeil (Linda Blair) impresses her mother (Ellen Burstyn) and doctor (Barton Heyman) with an alarming vocabulary of expletives of which, one assumes, she is appropriately and completely unaware; staring downward into the camera, sustaining his gaze so as to properly petrify the cousin who threatens his exposure, the preteen killer of *The Good Son* (1993) flatly instructs: "Don't fuck with me." The boundaries between childhood and adulthood are the subject of such immense sensitivity that we can be shocked and challenged by the child's mere performance of an adult manner. One of the very seriously presented signs that something is wrong with child

Antichrist Damien (Seamus Davey-Fitzpatrick) in John Moore's 2006 remake of *The Omen* is the boy's ability to make himself a perfectly cut sandwich! Rhoda of *The Bad Seed* intolerably confuses the adult with the child in this respect, refusing to wear blue jeans like the other children and preferring prissily adult fashions. As Mrs. Penmark nervously observes, her daughter demonstrates "a mature quality . . . that's disturbing in a child." Carroll points out that the monster's impurity can be structured by fusion, manifested in "a composite that unites attributes held to be categorically distinct and/or at odds in the cultural scheme of things in *unambiguously* one, spatio-temporally discrete entity" (43). While Carroll is speaking primarily of physical fusions, the certainty and cultural investment in the child as a discrete cultural type ensures that its fusion with the adult will provide a similarly monstrous challenge to cultural categories. Rhoda's unnatural status is foregrounded at the film's conclusion when she is struck dead by nothing less than a bolt of lightning—her pollution of the category of child in fact having become so intolerably monstrous that it is corrected from Above.

Although advertisements for the misunderstood teen films certainly exploited fears of contemporary adolescent violence, in the films themselves the viewer's sympathy for the antihero is clearly encouraged and the adult establishment is criticized. As Johnny is tied up and pummeled by villagers in *The Wild One*, he responds with the astonishing line "My old man used to hit harder than that." Christopher Sandford describes Irvin S. Yeaworth's surprise hit *The Blob* (1958), starring soon-to-be icon of 1960s counterculture Steve McQueen as teen savior, as defining "the late fifties morality tale about the small town that refuses to listen to its teenagers" (78). Through the location of fault within a genetic taint, however, *The Bad Seed* laid the foundation of the depiction of future child villain films by reprocessing anxieties over youth culture and the meaning of childhood into more sensational and less sociologically reflective grids of meaning. While its success might have been driven by juvenile delinquent concerns, *The Bad Seed* dislocated its villainy from that context (and any sociological contemplation it might have encouraged) while supercharging its affective force. *The Bad Seed* pushed aside the more sensitive investigations of childhood and purity offered by the most thoughtful of the juvenile delinquent films. Instead, it revived and relied on the image of the innocent child by brutally contradicting it. In this way, *The Bad Seed* potently transferred to future depictions of children what Joann Conrad, writing on children in the media, has called the "Janus-faced, good/evil" character (185). According to Conrad, through "the dual image of the innocent angel/monstrous child, adults attempt to segregate 'good children' from those 'bad children' who dispel the

fantasy of the perfect child" (185). The film's status as horror is wrapped up with sensitivity to the cultural category of childhood, the extremity of reaction provoked by its pollution. Horror cinema has continued to be the most effective domain for challenges to the idea of the innocent child, challenges that nevertheless reinforce this volatile category.

Providing a more reflective depiction of children anchored in innocent/evil binaries was Jack Clayton's thriller *The Innocents* (1960), which, despite finding its source material in Henry James's 1898 novella *The Turn of the Screw*, neatly complemented the cinematic reassessment of childhood that occurred during the postwar era. Miss Giddens (Deborah Kerr) is employed in her first role as the governess of Miles (Martin Stephens) and Flora (Pamela Franklin), the two young wards of a wealthy, unnamed uncle who finds his lifestyle incompatible with their care. The two children begin to steadily contradict the innocent characterization their new governess had adoringly imagined. Eventually, she becomes convinced that they are possessed by the spirits of the valet and his mistress, the previous governess—a couple given to scandalous sexual encounters within the house itself and presumably within view or hearing of the children. As Merlock Jackson writes, the film "addresses some growing questions of its time. Are we a society that is losing its innocence? Do we expect our children to be better, more innocent than they possibly can be?" (133). The film shows several hallmarks of the child villain, such as distinctive precociousness and an especially uncanny adult speech that unnervingly challenges the adult-child hierarchy—children who speak to their adult interlocutors as intellectual equals or even inferiors. While one hesitates to characterize the children of this film as villains, *The Innocents* partakes of a similarly binary reading of the child. Clayton's film adapts and amplifies the insinuation in James's novella that the specters the governess sees are an expression of her own repressed sexual desire for the children's absent uncle, along with her obsessive desire to protect the children from sexual contamination. Right up to its conclusion, Clayton's film refuses to clarify whether the children's "possession" is not simply a construction of the governess's fear that they have somehow been polluted by the sexuality of the former residents. So unwavering is her angelic vision of the children that compromises to it can be understood by her only as the effects of foreign spiritual forces.

While not as influential as *The Bad Seed*, *The Innocents* demonstrates the positioning of the child within the binary readings the earlier film sets up. The difference is that whereas *The Innocents* encourages the viewer to reflect on the constructed, projected, and potentially overdetermined nature of childhood through the governess's potential insanity, *The Bad Seed* constructs its villain as a perverse aberration of an ideal and

stable innocence that is taken for granted. It is, however, the perverted innocent, and the terrible tension he or she inspires, that took hold in horror films to come.

Conclusion

Shary writes that "by the early 1960s, the public's and the studios' interest in juvenile delinquents had waned, at least for the type of JDs that disrupted school and threatened their parents" (26). Yet concern over juvenile delinquency continued into the 1960s and 1970s, augmented by public worry over the emergence of a hippie counterculture. Writing in 1975, Ruth Cavan and Theodore Ferdinand observed that "[i]n spite of the fact that the proportion of juveniles in the population has been declining since 1970, the percentage who engage in delinquency has continued to increase . . ." (6). Kincheloe notes that "by the end of the 1970s headlines such as 'Killer Kids' and newspaper copy such as 'Who are our children? One day they are innocent. The next, they may try to blow your head off' had made an impact. No more assumptions about innocence, no more surprises" (165). William Paul loosely attributes later films to the troubling visibility of youth culture in the 1960s and 1970s. For him, a film like *The Omen* "confirms a sense of the child as being actually alien to its family," and he notes that "this truth seems to have particular resonance for this period" (326). By this era, anxiety over youth had been funneled into a cinematic form, where it could continue to alarm the social scene with challenges to definitions of childhood while evading reflection on the constructed nature of childhood itself.

In contrast with the teenagers of the juvenile delinquent film, many of whom were played by often irrepressibly adult actors, the child villain in *The Bad Seed* is far less ambiguously a child, and this fact assisted in amplifying the film's disruption of childhood into the horrific. The transformation of children rather than teenagers into monsters was also crucial to the child villain film's perpetuation in light of horror films' substantial teenage audience. In consumer culture, that teen audience was a powerful bloc. *Blackboard Jungle* clearly pinpoints a few thoroughly bad apples within a cluster of contemporary youth; however, as Leerom Medovoi has explained, the film is also subject to oppositional readings that celebrate the volatile youth culture and rebellion that it ostensibly vilifies. For Medovoi, the opening scene's irresistible use of "Rock around the Clock" enlists young audiences against adult authority, presenting "a moment when the implied viewer is most clearly a youth who rocks to the music of delinquency" (158). But if young people became a key cinema demographic in the 1950s, with teens rushing to see juvenile

delinquent films and accommodating their representations through a variety of interpretive postures, the effect of the child villain in horror hinged on his or her construction as thoroughly and intolerably Other. Abstracted out of the social context of juvenile delinquency, the child, in whom the hopes of the status quo are invested, was able to play host to a large variety of anxieties—anxieties we now examine in more detail, beginning with *The Bad Seed* and *Village of the Damned*.