



## **The Terror of Childness in Modern Horror Cinema**

—Max Bledstein

Bohlmann, Markus P. J., and Sean Moreland, editors. *Monstrous Children and Childish Monsters: Essays on Cinema's Holy Terrors*. McFarland, 2015. 278 pp. \$35.00 pb. ISBN 9780786494798.

In “An Introduction to the American Horror Film,” Robin Wood argues that “the true subject of the horror genre is the struggle for recognition of all that our civilization represses or oppresses” (203). Given the predisposition of horror films to give a voice (albeit an often violent one) to marginalized people, repressed groups in Western society are a natural fit for the genre. As a result, women, people with disabilities, and, as is the subject of Markus P. J. Bohlmann and Sean Moreland’s edited volume *Monstrous Children and Childish Monsters: Essays on Cinema's Holy Terrors*, children, have been taking their cinematic revenge on the marginalizing forces of society throughout the history of the genre. Accordingly, Steven Bruhm states in the foreword of this volume that “[m]onstrous destruction restores fairness to an unfair world” (3).

Yet such restoration need not exist solely within the horror genre, as Bohlmann and Moreland explain in their introduction. Rather than limit the focus to horror movies, *Monstrous Children* examines films “which reveal something generative and unsettling by (re)moving, at least momentarily, the two-faced mask (little devil, little angel) that the child in the popular imaginary is normally made to wear” (14). Although Bohlmann and Moreland are careful not to ascribe an overarching narrative to the work of their many contributors, the introduction uses the term “childness,” as opposed to “childhood,” arguing that the latter is “a term connoting membership in a group (children, as defined within a particular historical and cultural moment) and closely linked to a developmental periodization,” meaning that it “is understood as

something one passes out of at a particular moment in one's life, or as something one must set aside in gaining maturity" (15). "Childness," by contrast, understands the child as being "defined through a kind of elusive quiddity, a spectral essence" (15–16). For the other main term in their volume, "monstrous" (and its various forms), Bohlmann and Moreland offer the following explanation: "Monsters are monstrous because they always escape human comprehension; they demonstrate what we do not know, and remonstrate against our presumption to know" (18). Monstrosity is thereby defined through its inaccessibility to human knowledge.

In their volume on monstrosity and childness, Bohlmann and Moreland (somewhat counter-intuitively) resist the prescriptiveness of "childhood" by structuring the sections of their volume according to typical teleological benchmarks associated with coming of age. The authors refer to this structure as "a parodic engagement with the teleological developmental assumptions that have bound childness to 'the child'" (19). I emulate the volume's framework in the structure of this essay, in which I review not only the chapters in Bohlmann and Moreland's volume but also a selection of recent films not taken up in the volume that address the same themes. My filmic examples function as case studies that illustrate the strengths and limitations of the chapters, as well as their applicability to a broader understanding of the depiction of children in horror and other film genres. Bohlmann and Moreland tackle a rich topic, and their

volume offers an important start to a discussion that can be extended *ad infinitum*.

### **Baby Monsters**

"Look Who's Stalking," the opening section of *Monstrous Children*, covers the earliest stages of the life of a "monstrous child": conception and infancy. The first essay in this section, Karen J. Renner's "Monstrous Newborns and the Mothers Who Love Them: Critiques of Intensive Mothering in Twenty-First-Century Horror Films," examines films such as Josef Ruznak's remake of *It's Alive* (2009) and Paul Solet's *Grace* (2009), which depict a figure even more terrifying than an evil child: a monstrous intensive mother (32). Renner argues that these movies show mothers who become consumed by the act of raising infants who cause violent havoc and thereby "condemn these women as embodiments of a dangerous set of attitudes and practices" (28). The monstrous mothers addressed in Renner's essay take care of their violent children at the expense of everyone else around them, including (male) romantic partners (38).

Where Renner looks at mothers, Kristine Larsen, in "When Procreation Becomes Perversion: Zombie Babies," examines how filmmakers create baby characters who may be perceived as monstrous. Larsen looks specifically at newborn zombies, which, she argues, allow filmmakers to address "controversial scientific and ethical issues" concerning modern childbirth (63). Larsen's essay covers assisted reproductive technology (ART), abortion,

and contemporary birth practices, highlighting how horror films convey ways in which each may be seen as monstrous through zombies.

In “‘She Needs More’: The Villainization of Infertile Women in Horror Films,” Brooke W. Edge moves away from discussions of monstrous children to address female infertility. Edge identifies the trope of the monstrous infertile woman, arguing that women “who fall short of that ‘normal’ ability, are made monstrous in an effort to obscure and obliterate a perceived threat to social and physical norms and expectations” (43). According to Edge, infertile women in film are often marked as being self-obsessed due to their strong interest in their careers or their bodies, both of which lead to them being read as monstrous. As a result, infertile women become marginalized onscreen, a condition which turns them into an “extreme, nearly supernatural threat to humanity itself” when they try to use ART (53). Such depictions of infertility “only serve to reinforce the cultural discursive frame of infertile women and their children as unnatural and unwelcome” (58). Edge thereby connects cinematic depictions of infertility with its broader treatment in culture.

### **Case Study: Julien Maury and Alexandre Bustillo’s *À l’intérieur***

Whereas Edge examines the original *It’s Alive* (1974), *Grace* (2009), *The Ring* (2002), and *Prometheus* (2012), Julien Maury and Alexandre Bustillo’s French home

invasion horror film, *À l’intérieur* (*Inside*) (2007), takes the infertile woman to a violent degree unsurpassed by any of the films mentioned in Edge’s essay. *À l’intérieur* begins on Christmas Eve, with protagonist Sarah (played by Alysson Paradis) alone and pregnant following the death of the husband and father of her child in a car crash (in which she, the driver, was injured but not killed). Suddenly, she hears a knock at her door from an unnamed woman (Béatrice Dalle) who knows about both Sarah’s tragic past and her pregnancy. After the woman breaks in, she attacks Sarah’s belly with a pair of scissors and says that she wants the child, kicking off a gory cat-and-mouse game as Sarah struggles to save her life and that of her baby.

As a flashback that appears late in the film reveals, the unnamed antagonist is yet another monstrous infertile woman: her car was hit by Sarah’s crash, and she suffered a miscarriage as a result. Thus, she seeks Sarah’s unborn baby as violent reparation for the women’s painful history. *À l’intérieur* takes Edge’s argument about the monstrosity of infertility even further by turning the female monster against a pregnant woman whose fertility makes her a target. Although Sarah can arguably be said to bear some responsibility for her antagonist’s monstrosity, it is the antagonist and not Sarah who reads to the viewer as the film’s monster. Notwithstanding her victimization, the antagonist’s violent actions onscreen emphasize her monstrosity. She indirectly gets revenge on another fertile woman when Sarah, in her anxious



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and terrified state, kills her mother after accidentally mistaking her for the killer. The antagonist's anonymity emphasizes the film's definition of her as an infertile monster, since she does not even get a name to distinguish her (in the film's credits, she is listed merely as "la femme"). In comparison, although Sarah is named, Maury and Bustillo call attention to her fertility throughout the film through CGI images of the baby in her womb.

The film's gruesome finale pits Sarah's ability to give birth against the woman's desire for a child, as she uses scissors to perform a home caesarean on Sarah. As Sarah lies dead on the stairs, the woman cuddles the baby in her arms, having finally satiated the craving that instigated her monstrous actions. She is *À l'intérieur's* monster, one whose monstrosity results from her failure to give birth. Likewise, Sarah's fertility makes her the sympathetic victim of the film's brutal and unrelenting violence. As Edge argues, infertility becomes a threat to be demonized. The graphic nature of the violence in *À l'intérieur* further emphasizes the grotesquerie of the infertile woman, thereby illustrating Edge's point.

### **Monstrous Frankensteins**

Similar to the opening section of Bohlman and Moreland's book, the second section—entitled "Frankenstein's Kindergarten"—also concerns relationships between parents and their monstrous offspring, but ones that specifically echo Mary Shelley's Gothic novel *Frankenstein*. Colin Yeo examines Frankenstein-esque relationships between arrogant men and their artificial, patricidal offspring in "Doesn't Everyone Want Their Parents Dead? Monstrous Children in the Films of Ridley Scott." As Yeo notes, these offspring can be understood as monstrous due to their artificial origins and their violent inclinations (98–100). Scott complicates the children's violence, however, by presenting it as a "reactionary force" to their fathers' repugnant excesses (103). Scott's films thereby trouble

the monstrosity of childness by framing it as “neither good nor evil” (105). For example, in *Blade Runner* (1982), android Roy Batty (Rutger Hauer) murders his father, Eldon Tyrell (Joe Turkel), but does so in response to Tyrell’s tyrannical behaviour (99–100). Rebecca A. Brown examines a similar moral complication in “Of Radioactive Sprites and Diminutive Tyrants: Hammer’s Monstrous Children.” As with Scott’s child characters, the children of *The Nanny* (1965) and *The Damned* (1963) use aberrant behaviour to fight against cruel parental figures (108). In the process, the children’s actions and their shifting moral significance make delineative terms such as “child” “so malleable that they catalyze the collapse or reconstruction of the heteronormative family” (109).

Children who turn against their creators are also the subject of Sarah Leventer’s “‘My Hideous Cinematic Progeny’: *Rosemary’s Baby*, *Eraserhead*, and *Frankenstein*,” which reads the groundbreaking films of Roman Polanski (1968) and David Lynch (1977) as modern incarnations of the themes of Shelley’s novel. Leventer argues that the two movies channel Shelley through their depiction of protagonists who become terrorized by their creations, who also upend the order of the protagonists’ lives (79). In all three narratives, the offspring embody their creators’ “best hopes, only to descend in esteem to the level of the monstrous, the darker half of the ‘divided self’ trope so prominent in Dark Romantic/Gothic tales” (80). The protagonists’

logical hopes and desires are defeated by “the power of the irrational,” a defeat that comes at the hands of the children of the characters themselves (88).

### **Case Study: Scott Derrickson’s *Sinister***

Whereas in the films Leventer analyzes, the irrational is represented as a singular entity, not one but two destructive forces created by protagonist Ellison Oswalt (Ethan Hawke) go on to destroy him physically and psychologically in Scott Derrickson’s *Sinister* (2012). *Sinister* thereby depicts an arc similar to the one identified by Leventer, further showing the relevance of *Frankenstein* to contemporary horror. Ellison is a true-crime writer who has not had a hit in years, and he moves to a new town with his family in the hopes of researching and writing his next bestseller. His wife and two children do not know that the home they move into is the former home of the subjects of Ellison’s project, a family of five, four of whom had been brutally murdered, while the fifth, the ten-year-old daughter, had disappeared in mysterious circumstances. Neither the culprit nor the missing victim had ever been found, and Ellison seeks to find justice for the victims and revitalize his writing career in order to avoid having to work as a schoolteacher or technical writer.

Ellison achieves neither aim, and instead becomes, as with the characters discussed in Leventer’s essay, victimized by what he creates. His creations upend his rational worldview in the process. As Ellison discovers

too late to avoid his tragic fate, the family he researches is part of a linked series of murders, in which the culprit kills all members of the family except for a child, who goes missing. Similar to the protagonists of *Eraserhead* and *Rosemary's Baby*, Ellison's creation (his research into the murders) comes to terrorize him. Each family is connected through the move into the house of another victimized family, and Ellison soon finds out that it is the missing children, under the influence of an evil deity, who are responsible for the killings. The connections also mean that Ellison, by virtue of moving into the former home of victims of the deity, has doomed himself and his family. His daughter (Clare Foley) becomes the child killer, destroying her father and his rational understanding of the world. Like the children of *Eraserhead* and *Rosemary's Baby*, she is yet another monstrous child who upends the rationalism of her parent.

But even if Ellison's daughter brings about his physical death, another of his creations causes prior emotional anguish: his writing. Ellison is haunted by both the case of the family which he hopes to solve, and his insatiable desire for a perhaps unattainable literary and financial success. As supernatural and psychological terrors take hold of his psyche, the two pernicious forces become increasingly indistinguishable. The "power of the irrational" that Leventer describes emerges out of Ellison's rational world of letters, and vanquishes, as happens with Shelley's, Polanski's, and Lynch's characters, its target's belief in logic (88).

### Adapting Monsters

The third section of Bohlmann and Moreland's book—entitled "The Adoption Papers (Adaptations)"—moves away from discussing a specific phase of childhood to address monstrous children of various ages in films based on fiction and poetry. Danny Gorny's "What About Grendel's Son? Shades of Monstrosity in *Beowulf & Grendel*" argues that, in spite of the deviations Sturla Gunnarson's film makes from its source material, the movie nonetheless provides "an effective reading of the poem" (138). Although Gunnarsson removes most of *Beowulf's* Christian references, adds a character sympathetic to Grendel (Ingvar E. Sigurðsson) named Selma (Sarah Polley), and frames Grendel's violence as revenge for the death of his father (Spencer Wilding), the film remains true to the poem by offering a series of interpretive difficulties regarding the relative heroism and evilness of its two central characters (129). According to Gorny, Gunnarsson's adaptation is itself an astute critical reading of *Beowulf*.

Likewise, in "Bringing Out Henry James's Little Monsters: Two Film Approaches to *The Turn of the Screw*," Fredrik Tydal argues that Jack Clayton's *The Innocents* (1961) and Michael Winner's *The Nightcomers* (1971) act as insightful analyses of James's novella and thus make valuable contributions to the critical discourse surrounding the text. As Tydal chronicles, critics have long debated whether the terrors of the original text lie in supernatural forces or in the imagination of

the narrating governess (144). While *The Innocents* supports both readings, it also provides new insight into *The Turn of the Screw* by highlighting the evil of the children (Martin Stephens and Pamela Franklin) the governess (Deborah Kerr) watches over (146). Similarly, *The Nightcomers* gives credence to the children's (Christopher Ellis and Verna Harvey) contributions to the governess's (Anna Palk) terror, while simultaneously examining in greater depth the lives of Peter Quint (Marlon Brando) and Miss Jessel (Stephanie Beacham), who become the story's ghosts (156).

In "The Monstrous Child: Replacement and Repetition in *The Shining*," Dustin Freeley shows how Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining* (1980) comments on the relationship between Jack (Jack Nicholson) and Danny (Danny Lloyd), the father and son at the heart of the film. Freeley argues that the threat Danny's power poses to his father "both shatters the illusion of innocence and threatens the socially constructed hierarchy within the adult/child dynamic" (161). As happens with many of the monstrous children chronicled in Bohlmann and Moreland's volume, Danny destabilizes the boundaries of childhood by embodying both the innocence of children and the hierarchical power of adults.

### **Case Study: Lynne Ramsay's *We Need to Talk about Kevin***

The essays in the third section of the book tackle the issues of bringing a monstrous child from page to

screen—a challenge faced by Lynne Ramsay's film *We Need to Talk about Kevin* (2011), adapted from Lionel Shriver's epistolary novel of the same name (2003). Neither Shriver nor Ramsay conceals the monstrosity of the titular teenage boy (Ezra Miller), a school shooter—notably, he uses a bow and arrow rather than a gun—whose mother, Eva (Tilda Swinton), reflects on the struggles she experienced raising him. Shriver tells Kevin and Eva's story in the form of letters to Eva's husband (John C. Reilly), exploiting the ability of the epistolary genre to "probe the recesses of . . . characters' minds in complicated depth, exploring with subtlety some of the critical tensions within" (Bray 20). Although Ramsay removes the letters, she nonetheless imbues the film with an intense focus on Eva's subjectivity, trading linearity for impressionism in the interest of providing a composite view of her emotional struggles. For both Shriver and Ramsay, Eva's wrestlings with Kevin's monstrous childness require acute depictions of her emotional responses, and the two turn to contrasting forms of subjective representation, both of which nonetheless lead audiences to confront her disturbed affect. The adaptation of *We Need to Talk about Kevin* raises issues differing from those addressed in "The Adoption Papers (Adaptations)," since Ramsay tackles the challenge of cinematically adapting a highly subjective representation of a monstrous child. Both the novel and film versions of *We Need to Talk about Kevin* thereby make a welcome addition to the dialogue begun in Bohlmann and Moreland's volume.



## Horrors of Growing Up


The book's fourth section—"Troubled Teens and In-Betweens"—examines the horrors of slightly older children, though their monstrosities keep them well within Bohlmann and Moreland's purview. Sharon Packer's "Demon Drugs or Demon Children: Take Your Pick" discusses the fear of "minimal brain dysfunction" (MBD) over-diagnosis, specifically as featured in and commented on in William Friedkin's *The Exorcist* (1973). As Packer describes, the film depicts young Regan (Linda Blair) being hastily and falsely diagnosed with MBD. Packer argues that the false diagnosis "demeans the credibility of the medical profession, and casts doubt on its ability to diagnose MBD accurately" (174). Packer thereby reads *The Exorcist* as a critique of MBD diagnoses and treatments.

More useful medical treatments could perhaps benefit the monsters examined by John Edgar Browning in "Disability and Slasher Cinema's Unsung 'Children.'" Beginning with ancestors of the slasher genre such as *Psycho* (1960) and *Peeping Tom* (1960), Browning identifies the trope of the "Adult Child:" a grown antagonist who evinces "a child-like emotional and behavioral demeanor, inciting terror while pursuing what can only be described as some sort of deranged moral vigilantism" (178). These characters experience moments of trauma at a young age which stunts their development, leading them to terrorize their victims, whose behaviour echoes the Adult Children's tragic pasts (178).


Where these characters become paralyzed, the adolescent girls of Lisa Cunningham's "Violent Nymphs: Vampire and Vigilante Children in Contemporary Cinema" break free, paradoxically empowered by the limited expectations placed on them due to their age and gender. Cunningham chronicles how young, female vigilantes and vampires are "sites of resistance to the hegemonic views of female and child performance that are encouraged in contemporary cultural definitions of 'little girls'" (210). In Tomas Alfredson's *Låt den rätte komma in* (*Let the Right One In*) (2008), for example, people assume that the film's vampire girl (Lina Leandersson) is vulnerable, to which she responds with vicious acts of violence (213). Vigilantes such as Mindy Macready aka Hit-Girl (Chloë Grace Moretz) from Matthew Vaughn's *Kick-Ass* (2010) respond to similar preconceptions in like fashion, as the film comically juxtaposes Mindy's youthful innocence with her penchant for brutality and vulgarity. Although these depictions do challenge dominant understandings of girlhood, their binarism still asks young women to conform to rigid gender expectations.

Debbie Olsen moves away from horror in "Monstrous Mammies in Lee Daniels's *Precious*," which argues that Daniels's *Precious* (2009) depicts "the 'horror' of race, of the black underclass that threatens to spill out into the mainstream, into White middle-class America" (191). Furthermore, Olsen argues that *Precious* uses its eponymous, black female protagonist (Gabourey Sidibe)





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to convey the dual black feminine stereotypes of the Jezebel and the mammy, which restrict her to being either hypersexualized or asexual (191). Since Precious is a teenager, she embodies how these stereotypes can be applied to black females of any age, and how this has a particularly pernicious effect on children (193). Although the film elicits sympathy for Precious's abjection, Daniels portrays white characters as her saviours, suggesting whiteness to be an antidote to the marginalization of black femininity (203). Although Olsen's essay is not the only chapter in the volume that does not look at a horror film, the movie she analyzes and her focus on race nonetheless suggest a lack of diverse representation of monstrous young people in horror.

**Case Study: Benh Zeitlin's *Beasts of the Southern Wild***

Like *Precious*, Benh Zeitlin's *Beasts of the Southern Wild* (2012) similarly features a victimized young black female protagonist (Quvenzhané Wallis). But Zeitlin's film offers hope, inspiration, and pride where *Precious* remains mired in toxic stereotypes, thereby providing an optimistic coda to Olsen's critique.

*Beasts of the Southern Wild* tells the story of the six-year-old Hushpuppy, who lives with her father Wink (Dwight Henry) in the Bathtub, a Louisiana community threatened by an oncoming storm. Although Wink abuses Hushpuppy by slapping her (as Precious's mother does to Precious, albeit to a more extreme extent), Zeitlin complicates Wink's actions by showing how he suffers from illness and his desire to help Hushpuppy survive on her own. His interest in her survival includes him telling her, "You're the man." She also flexes her muscles and he teaches her to kill a catfish for food, displays of strength typically associated with masculinity. Zeitlin thereby troubles Hushpuppy's association with marginalized femininity in a manner surpassing the one-dimensionality of *Precious*.

*Beasts of the Southern Wild* also complicates the "'horror' of race" that Olsen reads in the victimization of Precious by depicting the Bathtub as a

vibrant, resilient community consisting of both blacks and whites. Contributions by a diverse swath of the Bathtub's population to the defense of their community resist readings of the film as a white saviour narrative. Finally, Zeitlin intersperses the story with magical-realist elements such as the appearance of prehistoric aurochs and melting icecaps, thus complicating the film's relationship with realism. Unlike *Precious*, *Beasts of the Southern Wild* offers a positive image of black femininity that transcends reductive stereotypes. Whereas Olsen reads *Precious* as playing on white fears of blackness, Zeitlin offers images of pride and communal resilience. *Hushpuppy* is, in fact, not a monstrous child, but a bold and empowered young woman. *Beasts of the Southern Wild* thereby works in dialogue with *Precious* and Olsen's chapter to show a more positive depiction of a young person of colour.

### **The Monstrosity of the Future**

The two essays in the last section of the book—entitled “Peek-a-boo: Future Monstrosities and Beyond”—examine the representative capacities of the monstrous child when unbound by the constraints of linear temporality. In “*Hanna: The Child as Monster Who Is Supposed to Believe*,” Tamas Nagypal reads Joe Wright's *Hanna* (2011) as a complication of the supposed boundaries between adults and children (245). Nagypal argues that *Hanna* highlights contemporary dissociation from trauma as a result of media over-saturation, since the movie's titular child (Saoirse Ronan) cannot feel fear because she has

been genetically engineered by the CIA (246). Hanna problematizes the borders of childhood through her complex relationship with her adult nemesis, the CIA agent Marissa (Cate Blanchett) (254).

By contrast, child characters discussed in Jessica Balanzategui's “‘Insects Trapped in Amber’: The Mutant Child Seer in Contemporary Spanish Horror Film,” symbolize the collective repression of the horrors of the Spanish Civil War. While only one of the films Balanzategui mentions, Guillermo del Toro's *El espinazo del diablo* (*The Devil's Backbone*) (2001), explicitly focuses on the Civil War, all three evoke it through their representation of children who have been victimized, can see beyond their present temporality, and thereby dig up seemingly buried trauma (226). Accordingly, each film suggests “that the apparently distinct relations between Spain's past and present are much more tangled than apparently undisturbed teleological conceptions of progress, themselves remnants of Francoist discourse, care to acknowledge” (228). Balanzategui traces the origins of children's symbolic capacity in Spanish film to Victor Erice's *El espíritu de la colmena* (*The Spirit of the Beehive*) (1973) and Carlos Saura's *Cría Cuervos* (*Raise Ravens*) (1976), both of which were made around the time of Franco's death and accordingly reflect the fluctuation of their milieu (232). By the time of the more modern films covered in Balanzategui's essay, the iniquities of the Franco regime are no longer an imminent national concern, but their vestiges continue to haunt

Spanish filmmakers. Balanzategui reads the movies as “finally raising and acting out the unassimilated traumas of the Civil War and dictatorship” (233). Although the issues may seem dated, Balanzategui argues that they continue to influence Spanish horror cinema.

### **Case Study: Michael Haneke’s *Caché***

As with the films described in Balanzategui’s chapter, national trauma haunts Michael Haneke’s *Caché* (2005). Haneke examines Franco-Algerian relations rather than Spanish history, and the trauma represented is here again repressed and enduring. The film’s opening, lengthy take is quickly revealed to be a videotape of the home of the bourgeois Parisian Laurent family, which consists of husband Georges (Daniel Auteuil), wife Anne (Juliette Binoche), and twelve-year-old son Pierrot (Lester Makedonsky). Georges and Anne receive the tape on their doorstep as an unmarked package, a series of similar tapes soon follows, and the Laurents cannot locate the identity of their mysterious voyeur.

Although the film leaves the identity of the cameraman behind the tapes ultimately inconclusive, Haneke suggests the involvement of either the Algerian Majid (Maurice Bénichou) or his son (Walid Afkir), who remains unnamed in the film. As Georges explains near the movie’s end, during his childhood his family had taken in the orphaned Majid after French police had murdered his parents. Georges’s parents had at one time intended to adopt Majid, but the young Georges tricks

Majid into decapitating a rooster, so his parents kick Majid out and force him into an orphanage. When one of the videotapes leads Georges to Majid’s present-day apartment, the film suggests that the tapes are an act of revenge on Majid’s part and an expression therefore of the endurance of Franco-Algerian violence.

On the one hand, the tapes appear to take the role of Balanzategui’s “mutant child seer”: they transcend the chronological boundaries of events in Georges and Majid’s past, bringing historical national strife into the present. The inescapable paranoia the tapes fuel in Georges and Anne mimics Georges’s inexorable guilt, as well as the sustained impact of the history between France and Algeria. But Haneke brings his film even closer to Balanzategui’s trope through the implication in *Caché*’s final shot that Majid’s son may have collaborated with Pierrot in terrorizing the Laurents, suggesting, as with the Spanish films in Balanzategui’s essay, the affinity between children and the irrepressibility of national trauma. *Caché* demonstrates that a desire to cope with national trauma through monstrous children, which Balanzategui identifies in Spanish cinema, transcends national borders.

### **The Horror of Childness**

*Monstrous Children and Childish Monsters* explores cinematic representations of children who terrify the adults around them, within and beyond the horror genre. The monstrosity of the children described in the volume,

Bohlmann and Moreland argue, “gives rise to unruly impulses as a form of radical protest against the artificial imprisonment created by a stifling discourse informed chiefly by a combination of repression and projection rather than creation and transformation” (17). The use of the term “childness” allows the contributors to show how these impulses free children from societal constraints, a process facilitated all the more by their (often violent) reactions to restriction. At the same time, as many of the essays argue, monstrous children are restrained by their youth, leaving them caught between childhood and adulthood while transgressing the boundaries of each. As my own case studies have shown, the arguments made by the authors have broader implications across national and generic borders.

Because they merely describe the children’s transitory states, however, the authors of the essays are often kept from pushing toward stronger conclusions. Rather than aiming for more decisive arguments, many of the volume’s essays simply observe the monstrous children’s blurring of lines between children and adults and stop there. In doing so, the essays ignore the most radical possibilities of the horror film for social critique, which, as Robin Wood explains, can present “a period of extreme cultural crisis and disintegration, which alone offers the possibility of radical change and rebuilding” (208). The moderate and measured conclusions throughout

Bohlmann and Moreland’s volume fail to account for such extremity. As my brief reading of *À l’intérieur* shows, for example, the violence of horror can be more emphatic than the essays of *Monstrous Children* tend to indicate.

Nonetheless, the films analyzed in *Monstrous Children* offer strong examples of one of horror cinema’s most persistent tropes. The recent “horror renaissance,” a term used to describe the rash of critically acclaimed horror films released over the last few years—including movies such as *The Babadook* (2014), *It Follows* (2014), and *The Witch* (2015)—has only further affirmed the relevance of horror to the cinematic landscape (Franich). Furthermore, many of the films of the horror renaissance (including the three aforementioned movies) examine the monstrosity of children and young adults, thereby showing the continued significance of Bohlmann and Moreland’s subject matter. As I have demonstrated through my own film examples, the frameworks brought together by Bohlmann and Moreland provide opportunities for critical examination of children in horror films beyond the volume’s scope. My reading of *Caché*, for instance, demonstrates how a trend described as applying to one country can be shown to have international relevance. Furthermore, the use of movies such as *Caché* and others in a discussion about depicting the cinematic marginalization of children helps to show the applicability of the analyses presented in Bohlmann and Moreland’s volume to a variety of cultural texts.

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