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The paradox of powerful children: children as subjects of social fear and instigators of social change in *The Girl with All the Gifts*

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ABSTRACT
Stories often reflect an adult desire to limit child political participation at tension with the hope of their societal liberation. By reading such stories, we can explore the ways in which children are transgressive, and the precise anxieties associated with children as a problematized subject. Using *The Girl with All the Gifts*, a novel by MR Carey, this article examines the child zombie figure and its associated metaphors of the failed paternalist State, the child as a resource for adult exploitation, and the child as an instigator of radical social change. In doing so, I explore how the monstrous child-zombie may be read through a politicized lens to better recognize our preconceived ideas of children.

KEYWORDS Law and literature; children; horror; legal subject; zombies; monsters

'Good morning class': an introduction

The representation of children in literature is often fraught with tropes that may point to children's paradoxical position within society: a paradox in which the child subject of the text is positioned as both a source of adult fear but also a source of adult hope as the instigators of radical social change. This literary paradox brings into question the ways in which social structures and the law serve to control the power of young people, limiting their participation in the public sphere and relegating them to alternative mechanisms of agency beyond traditional political practices. Stories often reflect an adult desire to limit a child's political participation which is at tension with the hope for their societal liberation and its associated symbolism. As Karín Lesnik-Oberstein highlights, in reference to children's literature, the child as constructed in literature carries 'emotional and moral meanings'.[1]

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[1]Karín Lesnik-Oberstein, *Children's Literature* (Oxford 1993) 9.

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These stories may provide a forum through which we can explore 'ideas about children and their alienness in a manner generally foreclosed by a cultural insistence on children's ignorance, innocence and dependence' and all the ways in which a child may be a transgressive creature.[2] As such, these stories often configure children as monstrous, imagining them as destructive forces. They are antichrists, psychics, ghosts, aliens or, in our case, zombies: creatures capable of destroying the world as we know it and presenting radically altered futures.

Penny Crofts and Anthea Vogl highlight that in reading monstrous figures like the zombie through lenses of contemporary, social issues, we may shed light on the precise anxieties associated by the problematized subject.[3] Specifically reading the monstrous child through such lenses may allow us to peer into the ways the 'knowledge of children' establishes functions and meanings of childhood that are expressed in law's regulating forces over children.[4] In doing so, I attempt to, as Marah Guber calls us to do, 'theorise in more nuanced ways about what it means to be a child, to have a voice, and to exercise agency'.[5] Gubur is speaking to a model of theorization within children's literature critique that challenges the field's 'dehumanising and disabling' positioning of children.[6] However, it is not without its potential relevancy to the field of law and literature. Children are most certainly regulated by the law through their quite literal allocation to spaces through family law and custody arrangements; legal doctrines of competency such as doli incapax and the Gillick competence;[7] and restrictions around education, employment and voting ages that arrange their public participation. The law, however, often holds that children are not participants in the production of this regulation and its creation remains an adult practice.[8] Guber calls for a challenging of the production of literature as an adult practice by examining how children can be coproducers and enactors of texts.[9] As is often the practice of law and literature, we may borrow from this framing and apply it to the law to consider the ways in which children may be coproducers and enactors of the law. In reading monstrous children, we may more acutely articulate our anxieties around children as legal coproducers and enactors, perceive the

[2]Andrew Scahill, *The Revolting Child in Horror: Youth Rebellion and Queer Spectatorship* (Palgrave Macmillan 2015) 2.
[3]Penny Crofts and Anthea Vogl, 'Dehumanized and Demonized Refugees, Zombies and World War Z' (2019) 13 Law and Humanities 29, 30.
[4]Lesnik-Oberstein (n1) 27–28.
[5]Marah Guber, 'Risky Business: Talking About Children in Children's Literature Criticism' (2012) 38(4) Children's Literature Association Quarterly 450, 453.
[6]Ibid 452.
[7]Ibid; doli incapax refers to the capacity of a child to appreciate the consequences of a criminal action; see for example in my own Australian context *RP v Queen* [2016] HCA 53 (Aus); the Gillick competency test is used in medical settings to determine if a child is capable of consenting to treatment; *Gillick v West Norfolk and Wisbech Area Health Authority* [1986] AC 112.
[8]This draws on Guber's framing of the critical paradigms in children's literature critique; Guber (n 5).
[9]Ibid.

law's responses to limit children's citizenship and participation, and deconstruct our perceptions of child agency.

I am particularly concerned with the child as the zombie monster and the fears that may be revealed when we examine their narrative purpose,[10] using *The Girl with All the Gifts* as a case study.[11] Initially a short story, *Iphigenia in Aulis,*[12] *The Girl with All the Gifts* is a science-fiction horror novel by M.R. Carey. The novel's popularity went on to generate a film adaptation of the same title and a prequel novel, *The Boy on the Bridge*.[13] *The Girl with All the Gifts* focuses on Melanie, a 'monstrous' child infected with a pathogenic fungus, *Orphiocordyceps,* endowing her with zombie-like characteristics. The novel opens on the military base within which Melanie has lived her short life as a research subject. After infiltration of the military base by human raiders (Junkers), Melanie must travel with a group of uninfected adults featuring a cast of a scientist, two soldiers, and her beloved teacher. The novel contemplates the anxiety regarding children as both representatives of hope in their capabilities to improve the future and social justice issues, and the fear of the changes that these children can bring. It has been read, as Crofts and Vogl call for,[14] through lenses of contemporary social issues, examining environmental anxieties,[15] gender[16] and race.[17] Acting in conversation with such research, conducted predominantly in the fields of literature and childhood studies,[18] this article seeks to translate what the problematized child subject at the centre of texts such as *The Girl with All the Gifts* can tell us

[10]Phillip Cole, *The Myth of Evil: Demonizing the Enemy* (1st edn Edinburgh University Press 2006) 109.
[11]MR Carey, *The Girl with All the Gifts* (Orbit 2014).
[12]MR Carey, 'Iphigenia in Aulis' in Charlaine Harris and Toni LP Kelner (eds), *An Apple for the Creature* (Ace Books 2012).
[13]*The Girl with All the Gifts* (Colm McCarthy, 2016); MR Carey, *The Boy on the Bridge* (Orbit 2017).
[14]Crofts and Vogl (n 3).
[15]For discussions of environmental anxieties see: Scott Eric Hamilton, 'The Girl with All the Gifts: Eco-Zombiism, the Anthropocalypse, and Critical Lucidity' (2021) 32(4) Lit: Literature Interpretation Theory 285; Ildikó Limpár, 'The Environmental Context for Hope and Heroism in Suzanne Collins' The Hunger Games Trilogy and M. R. Carey's The Girl with All the Gifts' in Simon Bacon (ed), *Heroic Girls as Figures of Resistance and Futurity in Popular Culture* (Routledge 2024).
[16]For discussions of gender see M Isabel Santaulària i Capdevila, 'Monstrous Final Girls: The Posthuman Body in Paolo Bacigalupi's The Windup Girl and M.R. Carey's The Girl with All the Gifts' in Katarzyna Paszkiewicz and Stacy Rusnak (eds), *Final Girls, Feminism and Popular Culture* (Springer International Publishing 2020); Robyn Ollett, '"She Would Never Fall, Because Her Friend Was Flying with Her": Gothic Hybridity, Queer Girls and Exceptional States in Helen Oyeyemi's The Icarus Girl (2005) and M. R. Carey's The Girl with All the Gifts (2014)' in Simon Bacon (ed), *Heroic Girls as Figures of Resistance and Futurity in Popular Culture* (Routledge 2024).
[17]Much of the discussions of race focus on the film adaptation, most notably due to the race bending of Melanie. See for example, Emily Ashton, 'Speculative Child Figures at the End of the (White) World' (2022) 47(3) Journal of Childhood Studies 92; Dehanza Rogers, 'Hostile Geographies: Black Girls Fight to Save Themselves and the World' (2022) 15(1) Girlhood Studies 34. Whilst the focus is gender, Ollett does feature some discussion of the novel's anxieties surrounding race; Ollett (n16).
[18]From literary studies see, for example, Santaulària i Capdevila; Hamilton; Limpár Courtney A. Druzak, 'Apocalypse … Eventually: Trans-Corporeality and Slow Horror in M. R. Carey's The Girl with All the Gifts' (2022) Text Matters 304. As examples from childhood studies see; Lauren Ellis Christie, 'The Monstrous Voice: M.R. Carey's The Girl with All the Gifts' in David W Kupferman and Andrew Gibbons (eds), *Childhood, Science Fiction, and Pedagogy: Children Ex Machina* (Springer Singapore 2019); Ashton (n 17).

about the law as a regulator of the child subject and mediator of our anxieties surrounding children. In doing so, it more expressly contemplates what such readings may reveal about the State and its policies regulating children.

In each section, I analyse the relationship between the State, the law and the child through the depiction of the child zombie in M.R. Carey's *The Girl with All the Gifts*. This article focuses primarily on the novel as a rich site of analysis, noting the broader universe in which it converses remains open for further analysis. I start with a brief overview of the child as configured by the State before moving on to an introduction of the zombie sub-genre and the novel. I then consider three thematic anxieties that may be drawn from the child zombie figure and its real-word intersections: metaphors of the failed paternalist State; the child as a resource for adult exploitation; and the child as an instigator of social change. In doing so, I assert that by reading depictions of child figures in literature through a politicized lens, that is through a lens that considers children's agency and the hierarchies of power operating over children, we are able to better recognize our preconceived perceptions of children and address their societal and legal concerns.

'And the little girl fought the monster': the child and the State

William P MacNeil posits that the zombie fiction configures a 'law of desire', that is, 'a desire for a reconfigured law' in which we are privy to 'a radical rethinking of the intersubjective tie': the self as subject in connection with the socio-symbolic.[19] But who, in our examination, is the self undergoing (re)configuration and what are the relational juridico-political modes?

The child, and by extension childhood, could be considered as largely a social construction. That is not to say that children are figments rendered into existence by society, as there is an abundance of social norms attached to the developmental indicators associated with temporal life-stages. Rather the significance that we attach to childhood may be seen as socially constructed. This 'invention of childhood' has been attributed to the sixteenth century, taking on a chameleon quality as it shifted its pattern with our constantly changing society.[20] Philippe Ariès points to the closing of this century as marking an increase in the depiction of children, the portrayal of children rising throughout the seventeenth century.[21] By the mid-nineteenth century, the child as social figure cemented itself as one of mediation: the embodiment of innocence and human potential.[22] To die as a child, to be preserved in an innocent state, was

[19]William MacNeil, 'The Litigating Dead: Zombie Jurisprudence in Contemporary Popular Culture' in Christian Delage, Peter Goodrich and Marco Wan (eds), *Law and New Media* (Edinburgh University Press 2019) 140.
[20]Richard Farson, *Birthrights* (Macmillan Publishing Co 1974) 17.
[21]Philippe Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood* (Jonathan Cape 1973) 40–44.
[22]Susan J Navarette, *The Shape of Fear: Horror and the Fin de Siècle Culture of Decadence* (The University Press of Kentucky 1998) 117.

to avoid the falls of humanity.[23] Horror, however, poses the question – what if death does not preserve a state of innocence, or what if the innocence we seek to preserve is no more than a socially constructed illusion?

Hannah Arendt argues that children and youth are properly ascribed to the private realm and to politicize such a space exposes children, pulling them from the security of concealment within which they could mature.[24] Rather than a site in which power relations and systems of dominance are played out,[25] such an assertion conveys a near romanticization ascribed to spaces of childhood. This association of childhood with innocence, in of itself, may be described as a social construction.[26] Childhood, as Laura Purdy asserts, allows children to be configured as lacking in a 'higher level of moral knowledge' in absence of their life experience.[27] Such a framing serves as a justification to limit children's political and legal participation so that they may acquire moral virtues and the socially desirable level of self-control.[28] We see this mirrored in law and policy, with young people largely excluded from political consultancy, even on issues about them, evident in debates everywhere from social media bans, 'crackdowns' on youth crime and voting ages. Childhood becomes conditioned through parental, institutional and discursive power inclusive of the transmission of stories that are told about and construct the image of children.[29] As such, children could be said to appear in politics involuntarily, simultaneously existing in absence and presence, evoked as a figure across a broad spectrum of political debate.[30]

This political natality is dependent upon the social construction and maintenance of childhood.[31] Exposure to the public and political world destroys that social construction of natality, allowing youth to form and articulate beliefs about how the world operates.[32] In the maintenance of political natality, social structures, and discourses continue to position children as objects of protection.[33] Childhood may be viewed as a spatially and temporally

[23]Ibid.
[24]Hannah Arendt, 'The Crisis in Education' in *Between Past and Future: Six Exercises in Political Thought* (Viking Press 1961) 188.
[25]For discussion, see for example Michael Kimmel, *The Gendered Society* (Oxford University Press 2011).
[26]Farson (n 20).
[27]Laura Purdy, *In Their Best Interests* (Cornell University Press 1992) 33–34.
[28]Ibid.
[29]Daniel Bray and Sana Nakata, 'The Figure of the Child in Democratic Politics' (2019) 19(1) Contemporary Political Theory 20, 24.
[30]Ibid.
[31]The concept of natality is discussed by Arendt in reference to birth as a beginning that forms the potential for initiative and thus in this beginning there is plurality as an essential aspect of the political; Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (2nd edn, University of Chicago Press 1998). In the context of political natality, I am drawing on the work of Jessica Kulynych; Jessica Kulynych, 'No Playing in the Public Sphere: Democratic Theory and the Exclusion of Children' (2001) 27(2) Social Theory and Practice 231, 243.
[32]Ibid.
[33]Jessica K Taft, *The Kids Are in Charge: Activism and Power in Peru's Movement of Working Children* (New York University Press 2019) 56.

separate time in which children form part of the domestic sphere. It may be said that there has been a sacralization of children and childhood through which children should be protected by exclusion from the public sphere and, more specifically, the participation in social justice issues. It is therefore assumed that adults are the protectors, ensuring that children remain in the domestic sphere, untroubled by external social issues.[34] This, of course, assumes that all children are equally afforded the privilege of remaining 'unaffected' by political, social, and legal issues, and that said issues do not have a direct impact on the domestic sphere itself. Socioeconomics are just one of the many external social factors that intrude upon the experience of childhood with the potential to remove a domestic space entirely through displacement and unhousing. Despite the direct impact of such social factors on children, children encounter the significant challenge of dismantling the narrative of objects of protection that has been built around them to have their legal voices taken seriously and viewed as legitimate contributors.

The image of the child has played a significant role in colonial discourses as a figure of delegitimization,[35] strongly linking the framing of children with the Other.[36] Colonized groups have been infantilized, characterizing them as childlike, which facilitates the paternalistic attitudes of the colonizer.[37] This practice reveals colonial assumptions about children, invoking an image of children as incapable and in need of intervention.[38] Infantilization is successful as a method for marginalization and justification of colonial intervention only if children are already socially marginalized and lesser.[39] Subsequently, white-settler engagement with children and childhood is a significant practice for solidifying colonial control. For example, the fragmentation of indigenous communities by removing indigenous children has been significant in raising children as 'citizens-in-the-making' within the colonizer's notions of a 'good citizen'.[40] Robin Wood goes further to position children directly amongst the Other within the horror genre: those which pose a disruption to social order, an abjected element, that is not only an external threat but something to be repressed within the self and outwardly projected.[41]

[34]Ibid.
[35]Ibid 48–49.
[36]Simone de Beauvoir conceptually introduces the Other in reference to the construction of women as 'not men' with man designated as human beings, the positive, and the neutral; Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (H. M. Parshley tr, 1956 edn, Jonathan Cape 1956) 22. Edward Said examines the process of othering in a colonial context in; Edward Said, *Orientalism* (Vintage Press 1979).
[37]Taft (n 33) 48–49.
[38]Ibid 48.
[39]Ibid.
[40]Margaret D Jacobs, *White Mother to a Dark Race: Settler Colonialism, Maternalism, and the Removal of Indigenous Children in the American West and Australia, 1880–1940* (University of Nebraska Press 2009) 25–26, 139.
[41]Scahill (n 2) 4; Robin Wood, 'An Introduction to the American Horror Film' in Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock (ed), *The Monster Theory Reader* (University of Minnesota Press 2020) 111.

Children, for Wood, are an expression of what earlier 'generations repressed in us, and what we, in turn, repress in our children, seeking to mold them into replicas of ourselves'.[42]

The narrative is, again, thus formed that childhood is supposed to be a space of protection.[43] Literature, however, subverts this space. In literature, children are no longer objects of protection or situated in spaces where they can safely develop their independence supported by the guidance of adults. They are situated within a world where the adults around them are represented as incompetent, abusive, or otherwise generally unable to protect them, placing the children in a position in which they must assume the roles of protectors. The subversion of these spaces reveals a crisis in the confidence that adults, and more broadly a society controlled by adults, questioning their capability to protect children as their subjects. It is an anxiety over whether adults know how best to ethically inform and guide a young person's life throughout the spaces of childhood and adolescence,[44] thereby deconstructing the broader social myth of innocence in association with youth by presenting worlds that critique adult ethical legitimacy.[45] In deconstructing this myth, an anxiety held by adults concerning children is revealed: the fear of children as instigators of social change and the hope that children will initiate social change that adults have previously been unable to exercise. We, as readers, are confronted with the ambiguous figure for which the child serves: something adults can shape or an unknown possibility that must be controlled. When combined with a monstrous figure, texts may render the anxious ambiguity of the child with sharper clarity.

'Helen Justineau is thinking about dead children': the zombie genre, uncanny kids and social metaphor

The zombie sub-genre of horror has long been held to be a rich site of social and legal critique,[46] from metaphors of plantation slavery in the twenties and thirties with films like *White Zombie*,[47] to the post-war American consumerism, exploitation, and racial observations of George A Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* in the sixties,[48] to the apathetic identity crisis of the two-thousands with

[42]Wood (n 41) 113.
[43]Shauna Van Praagh, 'Adolescence, Autonomy and Harry Potter: The Child as Decision-Maker' (2005) 1(4) International Journal of Law in Context 335, 335.
[44]Kay Sambell, 'Carnivalizing the Future: A New Approach to Theorizing Childhood and Adulthood in Science Fiction for Young Readers' (2004) 28(2) The Lion and the Unicorn 247, 250.
[45]Ibid.
[46]Victoria Carrington, 'The "Next People": And the Zombies Shall Inherit the Earth' in Victoria Carrington and others (eds), *Generation Z: Zombies, Popular Culture and Educating Youth* (Springer Singapore 2016) 22.
[47]*White Zombie* (Victor Halperin 1932).
[48]*Night of the Living Dead* (George A Romero 1968).

Shaun of the Dead,[49] and the sympathetic zombie marking an evolutionary leap in *Warm Bodies* and *I Zombie*.[50] The sub-genre confronts us with a depiction of the challenges of our own humanity, mirroring generational concerns that both articulate and challenge social norms and legal rhetorics.[51]

Zombies serve as such a powerful figure of critique due to their uncanniness.[52] The uncanny as something foreign and hostile corresponding to the associated familiar is introduced by Ernst Jentsch,[53] subsequently expanded by Sigmund Freud as inclusive of 'everything that was intended to remain secret, hidden away, and has come into the open'.[54] The familiar and unfamiliar nature of zombies challenges the boundaries of social connections established between individuals, heightened in the portrayal of relationships such as the parent–child.[55] They exist beyond the scope of traditional social contracts, beyond the notion of citizen that is fundamental to our social and political structures.[56] They are abject in their crossing, or perhaps complete disregard, for socially constructed borders.[57] The child zombie looks like a normal child who should be a subject of the domestic sphere to be raised to become a good, civil citizen: a future participant of social and political structures. Part of the emotional evocation of the zombie child is, in fact, the fall of a child's future and, by extension, the fall of society's. In *Pet Sematary*, it is what Louis desperately claws for when he resurrects his deceased son Gage,[58] the audience disquieted with the knowledge that whatever may emerge from the grave will not be 'right', will not be a good, civil citizen. Gage is then rendered abject and in doing so breaches social connections by literally destroying his parents. In their uncanniness, in their abjection, such children are not 'real kids': rather, they exist beyond the normal concepts of childhood. They 'grow sideways rather than up', without a desire to become the adults around them.[59] Their social purpose is not one in which they are being raised to be good citizens and so their uncanniness conveys an anxiety in the ability to raise children as good social citizens and construct our legal futures.[60]

[49]*Shaun of the Dead* (Edgar Wright 2004).
[50]Isaac Marion, *Warm Bodies* (Atria/Emily Bestler Books 2011); *iZombie* (Rob Thomas and Diane Ruggiero-Wright 2015).
[51]Carrington (n 46) 26.
[52]Ibid.
[53]Ernst Jentsch, 'On the Psychology of the Uncanny (1906)' (1997) 2(1) Angelaki 7, 9.
[54]Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny* (David McLintock tr, Penguin Classics edn, Penguin Books 2003) 132.
[55]Carrington (n 46).
[56]Ibid.
[57]Cole (n 10) 115; Barbara Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (Routledge 1993) 10.
[58]Stephen King, *Pet Sematary* (Doubleday 1983).
[59]Kathryn Bond Stockton, *The Queer Child, or Growing Sideways in the Twentieth Century* (Duke University Press 2009); Scahill (n 2) 5.
[60]We also see this reflected in the 'frozen in time' cliché of the vampire genre. For example, Claudia in Anne Rice, *Interview with the Vampire* (Raven Books 1976); Eli in *Let the Right One In* (Thomas Alfredson 2008); and Abigail in *Abigail* (Matt Bettinelli-Olpin and Tyler Gillett 2024).

The zombie genre compounds this aforementioned uncanniness by calling into question the reality of the government's ability to protect its citizens through the portrayal of social breakdown.[61] Attacks on the foundations of our society often draw upon themes of justice and morality, pondering the ethics of our governments by showing them at their most extreme. The British society depicted in *The Girl with All the Gifts* is one that has all but entirely collapsed. The military base the children are kept on appears to be completely isolated, with suggestions that it may be the last stand in recognizable government, an anxiety felt by the adult characters that occupy it. This may be what Giorgio Agamben describes as a state of exception: the 'no-man's-land between public law and political fact, and between the judicial order and life'.[62] It is useful in our textual analysis, in making comparison between our fictional British State in *The Girl with All the Gifts* and the real legal States in which we occupy and raise very real children, to consider Agamben's assertion that the state of exception is something that exists 'neither external nor internal to the judicial order' and the notion that the 'suspension of the [legal] norm does not means its abolition, and the zone of anomie that establishes is not … unrelated to the judicial order'.[63] The circumstances of this fictional British State are exceptional, but not unrelated to real Britain's judicial order, and as such, these circumstances give rise to necessity creating its own law, evoking connotations to our own States' claims to laws of necessity that themselves tread the edges of law's thresholds and suspend judicial order.[64] A zombie apocalypse is an exceptional state, but the state of exception is, as Agamben claims, but a paradigm of government.[65] Like many texts of the genre, *The Girl with All the Gifts* conveys the complete inability of the government to protect its citizens, or more specifically to ensure a civil future, and what government is willing to do to judicial order in states of exception.

Beyond fiction, the figure of the zombie has been drawn on in relation to young people and children, often utilized in moral panics around youth culture and used to justify policies regulating young people.[66] For example, the 'zombification' of youth through technology repeats itself with each technological development, most recently embodied in social media bans.[67] Such moral panics reveal an adult anxiety about the future generation's ability to, ultimately, replace them within society. The depiction of the children in *The Girl with All the Gifts* draws upon this anxiety. As the second generation of

[61] Carrington (n 46) 25, 27.
[62] Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception* (University of Chicago Press 2004) 8.
[63] Ibid 28.
[64] Agamben discusses this with conceptual reference to real world examples in ibid 10–14.
[65] Ibid 7.
[66] Carrington (n 46) 25, 27.
[67] Ibid; as an example of such legislative interventions see Online Safety (Age-Restricted Social Media Platforms) Rules 2025 (Aus) (Online Safety).

those infected (Hungries), the children demonstrate social behaviour within the scope of normative standards. They are, however, superior physically to the humans around them. They represent an evolutionary leap,[68] an unknown social development and unpredictable reconfiguration of citizenship. The novel's trajectory moves through the social breakdown into the realization that there will be no recovery for humanity, and it is the Hungry children that will be the heralders of an unrecognizable and entirely new world.[69] It is a shift toward a new society that children and youth will create for themselves.

The Girl with All the Gifts explores the trope of the extraordinary child,[70] also a frequent element of the young adult and horror genre, each with their own unique approach to the trope based on audience. The title of the novel alone is representative of this trope. In the horror genre, the extraordinary child is often positioned as disturbing due to their ability to transgress developmental norms that,[71] ultimately, challenge social structures that are built around children. Texts such as *The Omen*,[72] *Carrie*,[73] *Children of the Damned,*[74] *The Midwich Cuckoos,*[75] and *Children of the Corn*[76] all convey this notion of a gifted, extraordinary child that is terrifying due to the uncanny, and often evil, nature of their extraordinariness.[77] In horror, the exceptional child represents a subversive threat to the social conventions of adult society and is an adversity that adults must control or destroy in order to preserve legal and social order. These children disrupt the repetition, or perhaps more accurately the reproduction, of social, civic, and legal norms.

The Girl with All the Gifts further explores this trope and the challenges these children are representative of to social order. Melanie is not evil. In fact, she actively resists her nature that would otherwise harm those around her, '*has to, mustn't, has to.* She wrestles with a wild animal, and the animal is her.'[78] Like the modern, evolutionary zombie to which as audience we are sympathetic, extraordinary children are paradoxically positioned as potential saviours and threats to our world.[79] It reveals concerns about children as inheritors of our world, the uncomfortable adult anxieties

[68]Carrington (n 46) 25, 27.
[69]Ibid.
[70]For a deeper discussion of the extraordinary child as a trope, see Laura Tisdall, '"We Have Come to be Destroyed": The "Extraordinary" Child in Science Fiction Cinema in Early Cold War Britain' (2021) 1(21) History of the Human Sciences 1.
[71]Ibid.
[72]David Seltzer, *The Omen* (Signet 1976); *The Omen* (Richard Donner 1976).
[73]Stephen King, *Carrie* (1974); *Carrie* (Brian De Palma 1976).
[74]*Children of the Damned* (Anton Leader 1964).
[75]John Wyndham, *The Midwich Cuckoos* (Michael Joseph 1957).
[76]Stephen King, *The Children of the Corn* (Penthouse Media Group 1978); *Children of the Corn* (Fritz Kiersch 1984).
[77]Tisdall (n 70).
[78]Carey, *The Girl with All the Gifts* (n 11) 130.
[79]Tisdall (n 70) 19–20.

surrounding that, and the desire for maintaining adult dominance.[80] Such an anxiety is felt more acutely when it is read in the context of adult treatment of the zombie youths and their corresponding real-world context. This corresponding real-world context and the anxieties evoked will be explored further in the next section in consideration of metaphors of the failed paternalist State.

'Whose children are we': parental absence and the metaphor of the failed paternalist state

Parental absence haunts the horror genre. The rearing of children, and the fear of doing so poorly, is prolific within the genre and fundamentally speaks to our anxieties: both as individual parents at the micro level, but also the macro level regarding the social responsibility associated with child-rearing.[81] The ubiquity of parental absence within this text, and the genre more broadly, serves as the metaphorical representation of justice and its failure to adequately protect young people whilst also functioning as a narrative device to facilitate the young protagonist's exploration of their identity as a future social contributor without the intervention of or, in other instances, the corruption of adult figures.

The State, and by extension the law, has often been conceptualized using the analogy of the parent throughout philosophy and political sciences. The parent–child analogy asserts that 'the State is to the citizen as the parent is to a child'.[82] It equates the concept of the parent as a structural position with legitimized authority in relation to the child.[83] This conceptualization of hierarchy, bound with the evocation of sentiment, reinforces the rightness and good of legal and political institutions.[84] This paradigm of paternalism and the paternalistic government is founded upon the notion that people's liberties are restricted 'against their will for their own good'.[85] The absence of parents within literature conjures a metaphorical representation, carrying various conceptual associations and conveying more abstract associations,[86] of governmental absence. The parent is to the family as the law is to society.[87] Both

[80] Ibid.
[81] See for example Stephen King, *The Shining* (Doubleday & Company Inc 1977); *The Others* (Alejandro Amenábar 2001); *Orphan* (Jaume Collet-Serra 2009).
[82] Susanna Lee, 'Revisiting the Parent-Child Analogy: Implications for Law and Judgment' (2011) 8(2) Law, Culture and Humanities 195, 196.
[83] Ibid.
[84] Ibid.
[85] Ibid.
[86] Jill Olthouse, '"I Will Be Your Mockingjay" The Power and Paradox of Metaphor in the Hunger Games Trilogy' in George A Dunn and Nicolas Michaud (eds), *The Hunger Games and Philosophy: A Critique of Pure Treason*, vol 59 (1 edn, John Wiley & Sons Inc 2012) 47.
[87] Steven W Patterson, 'Kreacher's Lament: S.P.E.W as a Parable on Discrimination, Indifference, and Social Justice' in David Baggett and Sharwn Klein (eds), *Harry Potter and Philosophy: If Aristotle Ran Hogwarts*, vol 9 (Open Court 2004).

may be read as using discipline for misbehaviour as a mechanism of social control, law within the public sphere and the parent within the domestic sphere. Parental absence results in the fracturing of the family unit just as the absence of law results in a breakdown of justice in society. Parental abuse and neglect are what exploitative law is to society, perpetuating structural inequalities.

This parental absence and its metaphorical State embodiments are not isolated to our exemplar text. In *28 Years Later,* Spike's father, Jamie, prematurely pressures Spike into going onto the mainland overrun with zombies, risking his life and causing psychological harm.[88] Spike's mother, Isla, in the late stages of cancer, is cognitively absent. Spike assumes the role of her carer, taking her to the mainland to seek medical treatment, and ultimately brings her to her own voluntary euthanasia. The two parental figures show the differing tensions between the child and parental-State. Jamie ignores Spike's best interests in favour of creating his desired future generation: raising the child he wishes he had rather than the one he does. The objects of protection switch between Spike and Isla, with Isla in her cognitive decline often referring to Spike as 'Da.' In the film's conclusion, Isla quietly accepts that her time has passed, and that Spike, as the new generation, will carve a new future. It is as much a film about a child leaving their known State as it is about a child accepting the absence of their parents.

Within *The Girl with All the Gifts,* the second generation of Hungries are Other themselves but, perhaps more importantly, they are the children of a greater Other that, with the malleability of youth, still have the potential to assimilate. The Other is necessary to the hierarchies of power that the law solidifies – a figure that cannot be recognized ideologically nor accepted.[89] It is through denial or assimilation that social order and coherent hierarchal structures may be maintained.[90] The promise of assimilation, of repressing one's Otherness, is essential to the naturalness of the normative group for it assumes the role of the inherent state of being by which all other states are measured. It is not simply that children must leave the Otherness of childhood to become adult, but that they must avoid all other forms of Otherness by growing up straight,[91] cis, abled,[92] and as white as possible. Failing to do so risks disproportionate legal regulation, criminalization, and coercion.

In the absence of biological parents, the closest parental figure is one of their teachers, Miss Justineau. It is established early in the novel that the other teachers that attend to the children do not express care toward

[88] *28 Years Later* (Danny Boyle 2025).
[89] Wood (n 33) 111.
[90] Scahill (n 1) 4.
[91] For examination of the novel and its queerness see Ollett (n 9).
[92] The prequel, *The Boy on the Bridge,* provides a deeper commentary on Othering and disability through its depiction of autism; Carey, *The Boy on the Bridge* (n 6).

them and are often wary of the children themselves. The soldiers that transport the children from their cells to their classroom do not perceive the children as 'real kids', rendering the children as the sub-human Other necessitating extreme social control, a process echoed in the politics of race, disability, sexuality and gender. Very early in the novel, Melanie expresses a fierce love for Miss Justineau in response to the care she has demonstrated toward her, positioning Miss Justineau as a pseudo-mother. The novel, however, subverts the objects of protection. Melanie does not perceive herself as someone that Miss Justineau is to protect; rather, Melanie sees herself as someone who must protect Miss Justineau, thereby inverting the objects of protection.

The story that Melanie writes for class describes a child, representative of herself, protecting a beautiful and kind woman, representing Miss Justineau, from monsters: 'And the little girl fought the monster … And the beautiful woman hugged her to her mortal soul.'[93] In the reversal of the object of protection, a crisis in the confidence of adults and their ability to care for and protect children is revealed.[94] It shows a child's anxiety akin to the paradox central to this article. Children seek the protection of adults around them but express an anxiety over that adult's ability to best protect them from the social conditions that surround them, forcing children into the position of ensuring the future of the world around them rather than depending on adults and their analogous State to do so.

Miss Justineau and Melanie's relationship continues to demonstrate a tension within these positions. Miss Justineau protects Melanie from exploitation by Dr Caldwell, preventing her death for the purposes of research. Almost immediately after, Melanie saves Miss Justineau from attacks from Hungries and Junkers. After leaving the base, Miss Justineau protects Melanie from the remaining survivors. As the novel progresses, this pattern gradually shifts with Melanie increasingly becoming the protector. This shift works through the trajectory of the child's anxiety regarding a parent's ability to protect them conflicting with the intense desire to be the subject of protection and then full circle to the child assuming their seemingly inevitable role as protector. At the conclusion of the novel, Melanie fully assumes this role of carer: 'I'm coming back. I'll take care of you.'[95] Due to the airborne nature that the infection has taken, Miss Justineau is no longer capable of leaving the airtight, mobile lab they had been utilizing as their base without contracting the fungus. She thus becomes completely dependent upon Melanie for outside resources and, ultimately, her survival: 'Justineau understands what that means now. How she'll live and what

[93]Carey, *The Girl with All the Gifts* (n 11) 19–20.
[94]Sambell (n 44).
[95]Carey, *The Girl with All the Gifts* (n 11) 459.

she'll be. And she laughs through choking tears at the rightness of it.'[96] Miss Justineau accepts this position, this subversion of the objects of protection, realizing the inevitability of change: '[Melanie] Gives her love without hesitation or limit, whether it's earned or not – and at the same time pronounces her sentence on her.'[97] The utilization of sentence evokes the anxiety bound in the paradox of children as instigators of radical legal and social change. It is one that Miss Justineau has both yearned for and been active in facilitating but is constrained by. She is to be the teacher of the second generation of zombies, but this is, however, a society that she no longer fits within, belonging to the children that form the subjects of the novel: a reality that all parents come to know.

Miss Justineau figured as a caretaker of children is made more complex by her backstory. Days before the outbreak, Miss Justineau kills a child in a hit and run. As a result of the outbreak, of the emerging state of exception, there is no investigation into the child's death, no formal sentence of guilt, nor intervention of the law. The child is forgotten by a system that had promised to protect them but is ill-equipped to do so. Despite all her best efforts and intentions, Miss Justineau not only fails to protect children, but she herself is also a figure of harm. Even as she resists it, in escaping any formal accountability for the death of a child, Miss Justineau symbolically benefits from the systems that position children as lower in the relational hierarchy to adults, as the Other.

In a very clear instance of Othering, Sergeant Parks views the children as sub-human and is outwardly abusive toward them. He routinely makes derogatory comments toward the children and, at least on one occasion, leaves Melanie strapped to her chair inside her cell. He views Melanie as a threat to their survival: 'What Parks can see is that the nightmare-that-walks-like-a-girl is wide-eyed and trembling, barely in control of itself.'[98] As the novel progresses and he spends more time interacting with Melanie, he begins to exhibit trust in her, shifting his faith that he had in figures such as Dr Caldwell, metaphorical of previous social norms, to Melanie herself as a figure of the new legal and political future. His character is a representation of the social anxiety described, transitioning from someone who is fearful of the change that children can bring to someone who accepts it and even hopes for it. By the end of the novel, he has a deep connection to Melanie and trusts her completely, indicating that he is willing to protect her from further exploitation by other adults: 'But nothing's going to happen to the kid. You've got my word.'[99] Melanie begins to view him as a fatherly figure and someone present to protect her in the pseudo-family she has

[96]Ibid, 459.
[97]Ibid 459–60.
[98]Ibid 137.
[99]Ibid 352.

constructed within her mind: 'He turns to Melanie, who's watching all this with wide eyes. It must be like seeing Mummy and Daddy quarrel.'[100]

Parks serves as a contrast to Dr Caldwell, who is rooted in her fear of the children and the belief that any change that they would bring is for the worst, clinging to an old world that can no longer exist. By the conclusion of the novel, Parks compares Melanie to the child he never had: 'Marie. She was … blonde. Like you. So if we'd had a kid … '[101] His character marks one of the most significant development arcs in the movement through the representation of this paradoxical anxiety. At the conclusion of the novel, he is instrumental in allowing Melanie to bring about the change that fundamentally alters society through releasing an airborne version of the fungus: 'This stuff in the air … it's the fungus, right? What did we do, kid?'[102] Melanie sits with him as he becomes infected and ensures his suicide: 'Listen … Could you … Kid, listen. Could you do me a favour … Don't worry, Sergeant. I'll do it. I won't leave you until it's done.'[103] His death marks an acceptance of social change that is both feared and hoped for, revealing the tension between the two and its ultimate resolution of acceptance. Whilst the novel evokes themes of paternal absence and the failed paternalistic State, with connotations to the neglect through which children realise their place in political and social change, it also embodies themes of another facet of the paternalistic State: that is, paternalistic State as abuser and exploiter.

'But I secured my children's souls, so pray, my children, for me': the child as a resource and adult exploitation

Throughout the novel, there is an unapologetic examination of children as an exploitable resource for the adults around them to utilize, echoing real world policies. Adults are the ones instrumenting the exploitation of children, situated in positions meant to protect them, representative of the law, the very institution meant to protect its subjects, and social injustices it can perpetuate. It is a plot point commonly depicted within the genre, harkening back to the sub-genre's roots in colonialism and capitalism.[104] In *The Last of Us,* for example, the Fireflies, a resistance organization, trap the child protagonist Ellie to exploit her for a cure, seeking to end the zombie plague and restore, at least to some degree, a democratic civil society akin to what was lost.[105] When we consider the genre's roots in our reading of the child

[100]Ibid 383.
[101]Ibid 457.
[102]Ibid 455.
[103]Ibid 454–455.
[104]For a more detailed discussion see Jon Stratton, 'Zombie Trouble: Zombie Texts, Bare Life, and Displaced People' in Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock (ed), *The Monster Theory Reader* (University of Minnesota Press 2020).
[105]*The Last of Us* (Neil Druckmann 2023).

zombie figure, the connections to colonial exercises of State power over children may be rendered in greater clarity. Indigenous children have been and continue to be subject to State exploitation and abuse as part of the State's broader colonial project, the legal processes of Othering, and the State's crafting of future citizens. The Stolen Generation in Australia, for example, saw the State sanction the removal of Indigenous children from their communities with the goal of 'assimilating' Indigenous children into the white population.[106] In the United States, Native American children were forcibly removed and placed in boarding schools as a means of assimilation, Canada evoking a similar process with residential schools.[107]

At the commencement of the novel, the small act of affection that Miss Justineau shows Melanie by touching her hair is so foreign to Melanie that she struggles to emotionally process it. Melanie's inability to emotionally process expressions of maternalism and care conveys her disrupted state of innocence. Such disrupted states of innocence because of parental absence are representative of a reality in which many children assume the roles of protectors and carers within communities upon the failure of adults to adequately provide them with the social conditions that allow them to experience an uninterrupted space of protection. Melanie has no conscious memory of ever experiencing the conditions that would afford her innocence. It is true of the real world in which the conditions of childhood are innately political, with State as intervener, mediator and, often, contributor.

The domestic sphere is governed by strong pronatalist discourses in which reproduction is encouraged, governed by policies and the structure of work, both paid labour and the division of unpaid, domestic work.[108] Such pronatalist discourses are tightly bound with processes of Othering. In white-settler colonial contexts, government policies and normative structures promoting reproduction of whiteness, either through literal reproduction of more white generations or assimilation, ensures the continuation on white-settler norms. In such white-settler societies, white women bore the role of populating the settled colonies with white children, linked to the expansion of European cultural values, and thereby supporting the State's aims to control indigenous populations through the reproduction and proliferation of a larger, white population.[109] The novel's engagement with the zombie subgenre's colonial roots is less overt compared to its film counterpart.[110] In the novel, Melanie is white; however, she is Black in the film adaptation. The film subsequently compounds Melanie's Otherness and, as Howell and

[106]Jacobs (n 40) 26.
[107]Ibid.
[108]Clare Bartholomaeus and Damien W Riggs, 'Daughters and their Mothers: The Reproduction of Pronatalist Discourses Across Generations' (2017) 1 Women's Studies International Forum 2.
[109]Jacobs (n40) 11.
[110]That is not to say the depiction of race in the novel is unimportant or to dismiss its connotations. For a more robust discussion see Ashton (n 17) 94–5.

Baker highlight, harkens to the 'historical, folkloric connection between zombiism and slavery' and histories of State sanctioned medical experimentation on Black bodies.[111] Thus the exploitation of the children within *The Girl with All the Gifts,* in both its mediums, is metaphorical of broader social exploitation of children as the potential reproduction of social conditions and political resource.

On the base, the children are taken by Dr Caldwell for experimentation, many of which are described as violent, emphasizing the exploitative aspects of their purpose: 'You carved up two children, Caroline. And you did it without anaesthetic.'[112] A doctor is a position typically associated with someone who is meant to protect children, ensuring their health and development, and acting as a key intervener when children experience violence and neglect through mandatory reporting practices. Dr Caldwell, however, subverts this position as someone who is actively exploiting the children and whom they must be protected from: 'My God, you're like the wicked witch in a fairy tale!'[113] She is a coalescing of the metaphor of adult exploitation and the exploitation of the State, subverting a space of protection as corrupt through such manipulation that ignores the positioning of children as objects of protection, her ulterior social purposes core to her actions. Medicine as an institution has been instrumental in defining what childhood is, how childhood is to be done right, and how children are to be protected, significant in the shaping of State policy.[114] Medicine has also been complicit in State-sanctioned violence against Othered children, with conversion therapy and teenage delinquency camps serving as examples.

The State intervenes in the domestic sphere to perpetuate social norms and structures that are, ultimately, in service of the State. It often, however, fails in its interventions to address the political and social concerns of children, for example through the failure of many States to provide robust child-care and paternity-leave policies, to address environmental change that has potential ramifications for the lives of children as they age, and education.[115] They are often mistreated as subjects in adult society or excluded from it entirely.[116] The social prejudices that facilitate mistreatment, and in

[111]Amanda Howell and Lucy Baker, '"Not Yours Any More": The Monstrous-Feminine Bildungsroman of The Girl with All the Gifts' in Amanda Howell and Lucy Baker (eds), *Monstrous Possibilities: The Female Monster in 21st Century Screen Horror* (Springer International Publishing 2022) 87.
[112]Carey, *The Girl with All the Gifts* (n 11) 56.
[113]Ibid.
[114]As an example, Clark, Locke and Bialocerkowski's systematic review of paediatric terminology examines how different terms such as child, are used across Australian health sites: Ramona Clark, Melissa Locke and Andrea Bialocerkowski, 'Paediatric Terminology in the Australian Health and Health-Education Context: A Systematic Review' (2015) 57(11) Developmental Medicine & Child Neurology 1011.
[115]Paul Krugman, *Why Does America Hate Its Children* (The New York Times 2020).
[116]Isaiah Thomas and Andrés Martin, 'Narrative Matters: Adult Anxieties and Prejudice Against Children – Childism in The Twilight Zone' (2021) 26 (1) Child and Adolescent Mental Health 89, 89.

some extremes abuse and neglect, as well as prevent children from social contribution, have been described as 'childism' based upon the projection of anxieties onto the 'Other'.[117] In its abstract, the examination of the State's exploitation of and failure toward children is difficult to process.[118] Literature, however, draws it out of an abstract state and illuminates the anxieties surrounding the problematized subject, in this instance the child, and can aid in conceptualizing the State's monopolization of violence.[119] In depicting a British governmental order on the brink, at the limits of a state of exception, the reliance law has on the State's sanctioning and prohibition of particular violences to ensure legal order may be seen with greater clarity.[120] As Jess Whyte highlights: 'What the state fears in each individual use of violence is the law-making power inherent in it and the possibility that the state will be forced to relinquish its monopoly on this power.'[121] As a medical practitioner and researcher on the military base, researching on behalf of what remains of the British government, Dr Caldwell's violence is sanctioned. Any violence that the children or Melanie may exhibit is unsanctioned, and thus a terrifying prospect for their unsanctioned law-making power.

Dr Caldwell provides a metaphorical representation of the State and its exploitation of children for social purposes, including the perpetuation of structures and norms that continue intergeneration social injustice; this is at the core of the notion of childism.[122] She is rooted in the idea that in holding onto old world ideals and preventing change, that she is doing good: 'Dr Caldwell is trying the save the world, and she feels like she's wearing oven mitts instead of surgical gloves.'[123] She ignores evidence contrary to her beliefs that the children subject to the experiments are more than 'high-functioning hungries'.[124] Her hope is a return to before. Children are not independent social contributors who may be coproducers of the law with their own law-making power, but rather resources to facilitate her desires and, ultimately, return to her social and political ideal: 'It's just Melanie. Melanie is the messenger sent by providence in her last hour to carry her trophies home.'[125] It is not only a failure toward children, but an active exploitation of them; a sanctioned violence used in the re-foundation of law.[126]

[117]Elisabeth Young-Bruehl, *Childism: Confronting Prejudice Against Children* (Yale University Press 2012) 5–9.
[118]Thomas and Martin (n 116).
[119]Jess Whyte, 'Critiquing the Violence of Guantanamo: Resisting the Manopolization of the Future' (2006) 25/26 Arena Journal 123, 123.
[120]Ibid.
[121]Ibid.
[122]Young-Bruehl (n 103) 19.
[123]Carey, *The Girl with All the Gifts* (n 11) 45.
[124]Ibid 56.
[125]Ibid 433.
[126]Whyte (n 119).

Children, however, are to be heralders of a future that she, or more precisely the State, designs.

This exploitation of children in the novel by Dr Caldwell and the broader metaphorical representation of State exploitation reinforces the anxieties experienced by the child subjects as to adults' ability to protect them and to act ethically. This failure comes with children asserting themselves as protectors and institutors of social change when adults fail to adequately do so, echoed in real-world child activist participation, for example in the words of Greta Thunberg:

> You have stolen my dreams and my childhood with your empty words … You are failing us. But the young people are starting to understand your betrayal. The eyes of all future generations are upon you. And if you choose to fail us, I say: We will never forgive you. We will not let you get away with this.[127]

Like real-world youth activists, Melanie comes to understand that Dr Caldwell cannot ensure her protection or that of future generations: 'You tied me to the table so you could cut me up … And you cut up Marcia and Liam. You probably cut up lots of children.'[128] Ultimately, in response to this failure, Melanie seizes the opportunity to ensure a future for herself, and the other children like her, becoming an instigator of radical social change.

'But only if you let them grow up': the child as the instigator of social change

The title alone implicates the child as the subject of anxieties explored within the novels. The subject referenced in the title of *The Girl with All the Gifts* alludes to Melanie as 'The Girl'. The suggestion that Melanie is in possession of 'all the gifts' conjures this notion of conflating anxiety and hope. The title originates from an interpretation of the Greek myth *Pandora's Box*, 'That's Pandora … All the gods had blessed her and given her gifts. That's what her name means – "the girl with all the gifts".'[129] Melanie as the child subject, like Pandora, represents someone who has the power to alter the world but is depicted as villainous for doing so, despite the social conditions existing that force the child subject to exercise their 'gifts' to make this alteration: 'Melanie said she didn't think it was right to blame Pandora for what happened, because it was a trap that Zeus had set for mortals and he made her be the way she was on purpose, just so the trap would get sprung.'[130] The 'trap' is the social circumstances in which children exist that both attempts to limit their agency whilst developing and moulding them

[127]Greta Thunberg, *How Dare You?* (2019).
[128]Carey, *The Girl with All the Gifts* (n 11) 427.
[129]Ibid 12.
[130]Ibid 13.

into active social citizens. Education and child-rearing and the social policies around these operate to give children the skills to participate as active social citizens; however, these are intended for a specific purpose to continue the cycle of intergenerational social norms and practices. These social policies around education and child-rearing seek to limit the agency of children to participate as citizens using temporal and spatial means, shaping children for their intended purposes. For example, schooling is now compulsory for longer periods of time which may spatially and temporally limit a child's ability to be present in public, political spaces. That is not to say that increased education is a bad thing, but it serves as an illustration of structures that confine a child's ability to be active social participants. Further, other policies, such as social media bans, limit children and young people's voices in spaces where politics are discussed that otherwise would be spatially available to them.[131]

The utilization of Pandora in such a way prophesises the conclusion of the novel. Parks and Melanie introduce the environmental factor that triggers the release of the fungus as an airborne pathogen. Like Pandora, Melanie 'opens the box' that irrevocably changes humanity and carves out a radically altered future for herself and peers. She identifies the environmental factor that would initiate the release by reference to her own education and classroom experience. She understands that the release is required to initiate social change as the social conditions that exist can no longer function because of her experiences:

> Because of the war … And because of the children. The children like her – the second generation. There's no cure for the hungry plague, but in the end the plague becomes its own cure. It's terribly sad for the people who get it first, but their children will be okay and they'll be the ones who live and grow up and have children of their own and make a new world.[132]

It is the next generation that will institute the social change that is needed. The 'old world' adults such as Dr Caldwell cling to can no longer exist: 'They'll be the next people. The ones that make everything okay again.'[133] She significantly alters the parameters of her society, something that adults hope will occur and yet are anxious of as it means relinquishing previously held conventions and beliefs. It is significant that it is Parks who is with her when this occurs, a character representative of an adult that moves fully through this tension. He conveys the notion that adults have expectation and anticipation that youth will overthrow them,[134] that children are

[131]For example, Online Safety (n 67).
[132]Carey, *The Girl with All the Gifts* (n 11) 456.
[133]Ibid 456.
[134]Sara K Day, Miranda A Green-Barteet and Amy L Montz, 'Introduction: From "New Woman" to "Future Girl": The Roots and Rise of the Female Protagonist in Contemporary Young Adult Dystopias' in Sara K

positioned as capable of improving world conditions that adults themselves cannot fix,[135] ultimately bringing about social and legal change.

Childhood and adolescence have been described as entailing experiences through which children come to realise the faults and weaknesses of their society, resulting in their initiation of change.[136] Through the exploitation that Melanie has suffered and witnessed at the hands of adults such as Dr Caldwell, metaphorical of the State, she has come to realise the faults of her society:

> But only if you let them [the children] grow up … If you keep shooting them and cutting them into pieces and throwing them into pits, nobody will be left to make a new world. Your people and the junker people will keep killing each other, and you'll both kill the hungries wherever you find them, and in the end the world will be empty.[137]

Ironically, without these social conditions that gave rise to the child as the subject of adult exploitation, Melanie would not have acted in the way she did to fundamentally alter her society. This again comments upon the very social and legal conditions that exist to equip children with the necessary tools to initiate social change, whilst also expressing an anxiety through the limitation of their agency to do so. In this way, she becomes a coproducer and enactor of law.

Accompanying Melanie's actions is the fear of children and their self-determination. The structures around children function to control their identity formation and, ultimately, the political power that they will develop as they age.[138] In State interventions, children may be granted welfare rights but not liberty rights that would give them the opportunity to determine their social futures, including the very welfare rights offered to them.[139] The world in which Melanie has been raised has afforded her rights such as education, but all with ulterior State motivations and no ability to determine her future for herself whilst in the Othered state of child until she rebels against that system and, in an extreme act of self-determination, obliterates what remained of the adult constructed world.

'They'll be the next people': a conclusion

The examination of the child as a figure in literature allows for a lens through which we may gain insights into children's political construction and the

Day, Miranda A Green-Barteet and Amy L Montz (eds), *Female Rebellion in Young Adult Dystopian Fiction* (Taylor & Francis Group 2014) 7.

[135]Ibid; Sambell (n 44).

[136]Day, Green-Barteet and Montz (n 134).

[137]Carey, *The Girl with All the Gifts* (n 11) 456.

[138]Thomas and Martin (n 116).

[139]Ibid.

often uncomfortable mechanisms of law that operate to restrict a child's self-determination. Reading monstrous children may allow us to see how childhood and the child are expressed in law's regulation forces over children. Their monstrosity places them beyond the scope of traditional social contracts that are foundational to our political structures, revealing the contemporary anxieties we hold surrounding children as future citizens.

Themes such as parental absence, children as resources for adult exploitation, and the child as an instigator of social change may reveal insights into the relationship between children, the law, and the State. In the zombie subgenre's depiction of a State in apocalypse, the governmental paradigms surrounding states of exception may be rendered less abstract and we may better contemplate the limits of government action and judicial order. These themes allow for a critique of the State's power to exercise violence over the child Other to ensure and re-found legal order.

These themes also allow us to articulate a paradox in which children are held as sources of adult anxiety, possessing the ability to fundamentally alter social conventions and structures built by adults. In conflict with this anxiety is the hope that children will make these fundamental alterations and do what the adults of the previous generation could not, potentially resolving issues of justice, and founding a new law. It is a tension held in various State policies, social norms, and structures, explored further in literature. In understanding this paradox surrounding children as a source of adult fear and hope as instigators of radical social change, we can begin to comprehend the mechanisms of justice and social institutions that serve to control the power of children, their ability to participate as citizens, and their reasons for why they may seek alternative forms of political participation beyond traditional party politics. It is significant in our ability to recognize and deconstruct perceptions we hold about children and adequately address the social and political concerns of future generations. We may begin to perceive children as coproducers and enactors of law.[140]

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