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*An Examination of Halloween Literature And its Effect on the Horror Genre*

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Sheffield Hallam University  
Faculty of Development and Society

# **An Examination of Halloween Literature And its Effect on the Horror Genre**

By  
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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of Sheffield Hallam  
University for the degree of Master of English by Research

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## Abstract

### **An Examination of Halloween Literature and its Effect on the Horror Genre**

By Benjamin Wylde

This thesis will explore the effect of Halloween narratives in the wider horror genre. This will be accomplished by means of a close textual analysis with novels such as *The Halloween Tree* (1972) and films such as *Trick 'r Treat* (2008) and *Boys in the Trees* (2016).

This thesis will seek to provide answers, firstly, as to how Halloween narratives serve as a subversion of the typical horror formulas and, secondly, why this particular field of study has been ignored for so long. Horror literature and cinema, typically, has the effect of frightening their audience, by creating a sense of fear, unease and morbid dread. But it is my belief that Halloween narratives serve, entirely, the opposite purpose, that by utilizing the morbid and the monstrous it instead works to facilitate comfort and the diffusion of fear. Halloween is a carnivalesque celebration of death in many cultures and by celebrating it the human race derives catharsis in the thought of facing death without fear. Close readings of the novel and films have yielded intriguing results, and seem to confirm my initial suggestion. Despite this, there are few examples of the sub-genre available and no discourse on the subject. As a result, I have been forced to rely on other fields of theory, most notably in horror cinema and gothic and children's literature.

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# Introduction

Imagine, for a moment, that you are standing on the windswept moorlands of Ireland and that it is some two thousand years ago, the harvest season has ended, the shadows are lengthening and what is soon to be the longest and darkest night of the year creeps evermore toward you. There is a torch in your hand that burns brightly, licking at the shadows with yellow embers, your bare flesh is sheathed in animal hide and your face is covered by a cloth mask. This is the festival of Samhain and on this night you will dance and make merry to hold back this darkness as man has done since time immemorial when he set the forest ablaze to keep the night itself at bay.

The significance of this opening paragraph, while seemingly superfluous, is entirely pertinent as it does in fact describe the very basic purpose of precisely why Halloween is celebrated as a festival. Although its names and customs change, the *purpose* nevertheless remains the same, that purpose being that Halloween allows whomsoever celebrates it to familiarise themselves with darkness, death and fear (especially those fears which, more often than not, take the form of monsters). It is my intention to explore the thematic significance of the Halloween sub-genre by means of a close textual analysis of one novel, and three films, these being; *The Halloween Tree* (1972) by Ray Bradbury, *The Halloween Tree* (1993) directed by Mario Piluso, *Trick 'r Treat* (2008) directed by Michael Dougherty and *Boys in the Trees* (2016) directed by Nicholas Verso.

In attempting not only to examine but also to expatiate the subject of this thesis it would be best to first address the single difficulty that I have encountered in the course of my research which is simply that this particular subject remains one that has rarely been brought to scrutiny. In short, there is a distinct lack of academic or discursive material written on Halloween as either a literary or filmic sub-genre. As a result, I have been forced to explore this topic through other diverse fields of discursive thought, most notably in studies pertaining to that of horror cinema but also gothic and children's literature. The ultimate purpose of my thesis is to expound upon the significance of Halloween in both literature and film, to ultimately realize that Halloween is an antithesis, possessing the curious and recurrent effect of creating comfort rather than the typical horror formula that often only instils fear. The texts I have chosen explore themes of life and death, childhood and its relation to death, the subversive function of monstrosity and adolescence. As fictional representations of the holiday these themes are intrinsic to, and recur throughout the Halloween sub-genre and are symptomatic of its history as it is both perceived and mythologised by cultures worldwide. These texts are horror stories, initially and superficially contrived on the surface level to

frighten their audiences. Beneath that level, however, there is something else at work. The deeper connection to Halloween renders these texts more subversive in nature, sensitively exploring the themes mentioned above and exploring a real-world celebration a connection to which is often made with the horror genre, but also has facets that render it separate to those conventions.

The words 'gothic' and 'horror', the latter of which will appear most frequently, will require some defining to provide a basis from which the framework of this thesis could better operate. A part of that framework will be the discussion of genre, how genres are formed and perceived by their audiences and what qualities they are thought to process. It is my opinion that the Halloween narrative, having budded from horror, contains a strain of certain subversive elements that stand in some contrast to the overarching genre.

Noel Carroll remarks that horror stories are a 'protracted series of discoveries', that become increasingly burdened with the desire to understand or to 'know' the nature of a situation or threat that may ordinarily be beyond the limits of human comprehension, that which he terms the 'unknowable' (Carroll, pg. 35). Carroll explains that in this way the mundane is regularly subverted in favour of something which remains fantastically grotesque, or simply horrifically grotesque, and there lies the true pleurability of horror as an athematic to the normal, the ordinary and yes indeed, the mundane. It is quite true that popular modes of discursive thought have certainly entertained the belief that horror narratives perpetuate societal anxieties and fears to such a hyperbolic degree as to be truly unnerving. They re-appropriate common archetypes such as the vampire (which when being represented through allegory becomes a drug addict or an alcoholic), the werewolf (a metaphor for repressed sexuality) and the zombie (a parasitic expression of Western culture which is predicated on material consumption). In this thesis I assure that Halloween narratives are a particular sub-genre within horror and offer a distinct opportunity to render notions of the grotesque, the monstrous, and the perennial dread of mortality as comfortable and well accepted inevitabilities with which an audience may find joy or abandon.

Robin Wood discusses the psychological responses that an audience may have to a horror film. Wood's argument is that repression becomes a factor when attempting to explain why the audience may deny themselves any gratification. Wood references *Repression* (1977) by Gad Horowitz and his definitions of 'Basic' and 'Surplus' repression:

Basic repression is universal, necessary, and inseparable. It is what makes possible our developments from an uncoordinated animal capable of little beyond screaming and convulsions into a human being; it is bound up with the ability to accept the postponement of gratification, with the

development of our thought and memory processes, of our capacity for self-control, and of our recognition of and consideration for other people. Surplus repression, on the other hand, is specific to a particular culture and is the process whereby people are conditioned from earliest infancy to take on pre-determined roles within that culture.

(Wood, pg. 25)

These definitions infer that 'surplus' repression is recriminating and as a result lends itself to the horror genre in that social anxieties become hyperbolic representations taken in the form of monsters and (in some instances) excessive violence, often viewed in such ways as to be considered transgressive or even perverse. Allegory, as another example such as the aforementioned vampires, werewolves and zombies, may receive similar such receptions and may ultimately become an even greater condemnation as they take on forms such as femininity, sexuality, childhood, the proletariat and ethnic minorities all become rendered in an all too monstrous light, demonised and exploited. While such representations are often considered too ridiculous to ever be taken seriously they remain nonetheless harmful and do little to quell anxiety, even if it is only at the subconscious level where such savage things grow. I believe that is entirely possible to apply these things to my suggestion of horror as a comfort, contending that novels such as *The Halloween Tree* serve to normalize the terrifying and to provide a perfect subversion, that the ordinary and mundane become the truly horrific.

Noel Carroll observes the means by which the horror genre attracts its audience. He writes that although a horror film should, ostensibly, be considered repulsive and should subsequently be rejected, there remains an ever present element of pleasurability that exists: 'It obviously attracts consumers; but it seems to do so by means of the expressly repulsive. Furthermore, the horror genre gives every evidence of being pleasurable to its audience, but it does so by means of trafficking in the very sorts of things that cause disquiet, distress and displeasure' (Carroll, pg. 33).

Horror does not only cause disquiet and distress, it remains, perhaps, one of the most diversified genres of film becoming something of a Frankenstein's monster in proportion with horror films that feature so many assorted coalescent elements such as humour, drama, western or science fiction stitched together. It is that diversity which is applicable to this thesis. As I have mentioned already Carroll describes the horror narrative as 'involving the desire to know' (pg. 35). This phrase may serve as a strong indication that this express repulsion is instead to be perceived as joyful, and comforting, something with which an audience becomes familiar and accepts as a convention of the genre that they enjoy.

In attempting to define the horror genre, one must recognize the profound influence of gothic conventions within it. The gothic defines so much of the modern horror genre, Steffen Hantke describes his belief there has been 'little or recognizable variation' (pg. 01) in the horror genre and that 'the same characteristics can be found in Ann Radcliffe, Mary Shelley, E.A Poe, Algernon Blackwood, Robert Bloch, Shirley Jackson and Stephen King' (pg. 01). As Carroll wrote that horror stories are bound by the limitations of established gothic tropes, Hantke concurs and describes this repetition in greater detail:

A discussion of the horror genre, with its roots in the literary Gothic of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, might, for example, focus primarily on thematic genre markers, like the abject, the monstrous, the return of the repressed, or the uncanny. Or it might revolve around stock characters from the Byronic hero to the plucky young heroine he pursues across the fog shrouded heath; around recurrent settings, like the haunted house or the nether regions underneath that house; around motifs like the genre's preference for night time and sublime displays of natural disaster.

(Hantke, pg. 01)

Jonathan Crane, an analyst on the subject of genre, proffers that the establishment of genre is the result of a constant recycling of signs and conventions and that, ultimately, all genres are descended from the genre that preceded it. As Crane writes: 'endlessly revisiting the warehoused past, contemporary genre films are genetic heirs or blood-kin to similar films that made it to the screen first (pg.22).'

The semiology of the horror film is variable, but readily comprehended and easily recognized, at least when put in terms that are similar to Hantke's view. While there is a certain degree of predictability in terms of what an audience might expect from a horror film, there is also evidence that an evolution is taking place, the horror film changing from one form to another. As per Crane's notion of a 'warehoused past', Hantke made a brief list of the gothic trappings that so influenced the genre. From the literary heroes of Byron, Shelley and Radcliffe, to the windswept moorlands, crumbling castles, dark dungeons and gloomy country mansion settings of Poe, Hoffman and Jackson. Their influences in turn are felt in the haunted backwoods and sinisterly suffocating Americana of Bloch and King, and so they have each in turn carried over into film. Colin McArthur explains that there is continuity of imagery over several decades of visual patterns or recurrent objects and figures in dynamic relationships. These repeated patterns are the iconography of genre (1972, pg.24). And so film directors such as Murnau, James Whale and Tod Browning, influenced by authors such as Shelley and Poe, established in the minds of their audiences the monochrome palletted, Transylvanian crypts and cob-web strung hallowed halls of silver screen horror. Their successors would add their own

additions in the form of a modern America beset by monsters that embodied anxieties in the twentieth century; whether it was the chainsaw wielding Leatherface of Tobe Hooper, Michael Myers' silent stalker or Wes Craven's razor fingered child predator. Despite the modernity in the framing of modern slashers, staples which echo the centuries old gothic remain, in the dingy basements, foreboding isolated houses and lunatic asylums.

Gothic conventions persist in the horror genre, but these gothic conventions change. Judith Halberstam writes a definition of the gothic as a 'technology of subjectivity' (1995, pg.02), one that suffers a 'vertiginous excess of meaning... it is ultimately ornamental and extravagant, comprised of its gargoyles and crazy loops and spirals (pg.02).' Halberstam's conceit is that the gothic is an aesthetic, one that lends itself to images and is limited only by one's perception of it, but that it is always changing. One example of this is how the aforementioned silver screen horrors were received by a young audience in the 1950's, a phenomenon which David J. Skal explored in his book *The Monster Show* (1993). Monster movies entered the American home in the 1950's through repeated airings of classic horror films on television and so emerged a growing trend of combining humour and horror. This humour, which Skal declares as the 'sick' comedy of the period, one which children recognize, though at the time was a reaction against the suffocating environment created by senator Joseph McCarthy's America and his political witch hunts. The 'sick' brand of humour was typified by horror hosts such as Vampira, Zacherle the Cool Ghoul and the Crypt Keeper in whose winking gallows humour comic personas presented a world in which the horrors of one generation became the fond joke of the next. More importantly, in hosting horror films and drawing on the gothic trappings: the hosts were often dressed in pre-industrial, black clothing, living in fog shrouded boudoirs within cemeteries, yet were presented as kind, pleasant and even attractive. The horror hosts of the 1950's, and then television sitcoms in the 1960's such as *The Addams Family* (1964) and *The Munsters* (1964), took the tropes and trappings of the gothic convention and made them humorous.

Halloween narratives primarily feature child protagonists and often concerns their attempts to better come to terms with the world and where they best fit in with it (even if it is within a more macabre setting). And although the characters may face their respective challenges with fearful trepidation, they ultimately progress and emerge, transformed, renewed in some way, perhaps having grown up. In the case of *The Halloween Tree*, children not only make up the majority of the characters, but are also the novel's intended audience. Set on Halloween night, the story follows eight boys as they follow their close friend Pipkin to the house of Mr. Moundshroud. What follows is the boy's attempts to rescue Pipkin from certain death, travelling through time and space. Certainly the eight young boys of *The Halloween Tree* ask an endless series of questions, all of which

are answered in their due course. The 'dailiness' of their lives is momentarily halted by a journey through time as they attempt to find a way to help their friend Pipkin who is caught lingering in a state between life and death. L'Engle draws parallels between the protagonists of Bradbury's novel and the biblical figures of Elijah and Jonah. L'Engle explains the notion of sacrifice, 'sacrifice in the old sense of the word: to make sacred' (pg. 44), pertains to the love that each character experiences between the other and of how that love must similarly provide sacrifice in the name of greater sanctity, that being the simple institution of friendship. *Boys in the Trees*, conversely, functions more as a coming of age tale, in which two young men stand at the precipice of adulthood, a numinous experience of their own that blurs the line between reality and fantasy, life and death. On Halloween, two estranged friends journey home, realising truths about themselves, life and the suburban world that they inhabit. The child characters in *Trick 'r Treat* form only one of the four interconnecting narratives that make up the film. A group of children venture out to an abandoned rock quarry, searching for evidence of a local ghost story, that of the 'Halloween school bus massacre', in which a school bus of mentally disabled children were apparently murdered by their driver. The other stories include, a murderous headmaster, a young woman who hopes to lose her 'virginity' and an elderly man who despises Halloween and receives a visit from an otherworldly guest. These examples, however brief, already serve as evidence that the horror genre is capable of utilizing the grotesque, the terrifying and transforming them into something that ultimately works to re-assure their audiences.

A description of what a Halloween narrative entails may prove useful. From what few examples of Halloween literature and cinema exist, I have compiled a list of criteria:

1. The narrative must utilize Halloween not merely as a setting but instead rely upon the traditions (of any sort) that are best associated with the holiday.
2. References to its history may also be made, no matter how obscure they may seem.
3. The theme of wearing masks, both literal and figurative. This may also include a possible subplot in which a character is revealed to have a secret or hidden identity which is exposed or alluded to in the course of the story.
4. The entirety or a part of the plot which revolves around playing games or telling stories.
5. A figure which functions either as a mascot or figurehead for the holiday, such as a supernatural character with the head of a jack-o-lantern. In the event that the aforementioned character does not appear then it is entirely likely that a psycho-pomp or a personification of death will appear instead.

This thesis will be divided into three chapters, which will offer a detailed discussion of the themes that I have just expounded and drawing upon the research that I have compiled. Each chapter will be specifically related to a theme with the subject to serve as its title. One such example of this will be an exploration of the importance of ritual and of how it challenges the notion that horror stories may only be effective if violence and death are without recourse and entirely randomised, the result of a mysterious and un-caring cosmos where laws and ritual supposedly have little or no meaning. To provide another example I will also examine the metaphor of the mask, analysing the importance of how concealed faces (both literal and figurative) are one of the most important motifs in Halloween narratives. The manner by which I intend to analyse each of my texts is a relatively simple one, I will use individual sources to support my argument, applying them where I consider most appropriate and useful. I will work steadily through a series of themes as I have mentioned before, all in order to support my initial idea.

The secondary material that I have selected will be comprised of books and essays written by authors such as Noel Carroll, Karen Coats, Geraldine Brennan, Robin Wood, Harry M. Benshoff, Madeleine L'Engle, Steffen Hantke, Mikhail Bakhtin and Frederic Jameson. My research has been reasonably extensive, though as I have mentioned before the subject of Halloween narratives has been largely ignored in academic discourse. Therefore while these authors have not written specifically on Halloween their ideas and modes of analysis remain nonetheless applicable. Karen Coats for instance wrote an essay on the subject of the psychic integration that occurs in children's literature, of the psychological effect that the conjuring of monsters and villains has on the mind of a child reader which I have found to be particularly useful and has aided me in my own analysis. However, it is not my intention solely to note the usefulness of my sources but also to address what I believe may well be their shortcomings. Noel Carroll, whose thoughts on the marketability of the horror genre have already been referenced in this introduction, provides much in the way of explaining how audiences require the horrific and grotesque often as a means of exploring societal anxieties through hyperbole but often fails to note the comforting effects of horror. I have already explained its capacity to depict monstrosity not in terms of arbitrary definitions such as the 'self' or the 'other' but by a blurring of lines until that separation of man and monster is no longer so well discerned.

Frederic Jameson writes in his article *On Magic Realism on Film* (1986) about both the effect of magical realism and nostalgia in cinema. He notes that, ultimately, films that take place in the past are intended to reflect and confirm modern principles and that they are born out of a desire to exhibit the steady progression of one ideological extreme to another. This is an argument that I certainly had not previously considered and in appropriating it for my thesis it has

conjured an entirely new argument, one that seems especially appropriate when one considers the theme of childhood. *The Halloween Tree* in particular is presented as though the narrative were the recollections of one of the characters, so it follows that this is not merely a story about children confronting mortality but also a story in which an adult remembers the moment when he first faced death and remembering it in a distinctly positive light, the story's purpose is not intended to frighten but to comfort and inform. Halloween in the mind of Ray Bradbury offers a history in which past and present prove to be reflections of the other, one tradition inspires another which, while with some minor differences all serve the same purpose and the customs of bygone eras remain well at work in the modern day.

By far one of the most useful analysts, whose work is, perhaps, more applicable than others is Mikhail Bakhtin. Bakhtin wrote his book *Rabelais and His World* (1965) as a thorough dissemination of carnival and its relevance within Western culture. With particular reference to the humour and folk cultures of Medieval and Renaissance Europe, Bakhtin's primary subject, however, is the work of Renaissance artist Francois Rabelais. As Halloween is a carnival a perspective that offers a thorough understanding of the subject becomes not only useful but an absolute necessity. As Bakhtin deconstructs carnival art, he discovers the subversive power held within certain motifs that portray carnival not only as an annual fancy but also a means of aesthetic catharsis, dressing in costumes and engaging in behaviours that would, in any ordinary circumstance, be considered foul or transgressive. Overeating, excessive drinking, dancing and displays of carnality, are all elements associated with the archaic carnival and masquerade. This thesis will also work from a definition of the grotesque as defined by authors Bakhtin, Timothy Foote, and Phillip Thomson in which the grotesque is addressed both as an aesthetic as a political allegory. Thomson, however, argues that the grotesque is incongruous as it functions between opposing forces of reaction, whether it is the horrific, the comedic or the satirical (1972, pg.03). Thomson argues that, much like Bakhtin, the grotesque is rarely political and is more concerned with parody and satire.

One other connection that I have found between Bakhtin and this thesis is its pertinence regarding the theme of monstrosity. On Halloween images of monsters are displayed, and worn as masks, and so often monstrousness is portrayed not only as the 'other', a creature apart from humanity, but as an intrinsic aspect of human nature. The anonymity promised by wearing a mask presents a singular temptation, to indulge in transgressive behaviours, especially as a common aspect of the holiday are the sexualised Dionysian rituals of adolescent parties.

Geraldine Brennan extols the work of David Almond and Phillip Gross. In Brennan's argument the manner by which games and competitions are depicted in

their respective works serve as a means by which the characters emerge with a greater understanding of the challenges they may face in their adult lives. The means by which I may apply this to my thesis is not only in its connection to my established themes of death and Halloween but also in terms of my analysis of many of the texts that I have featured. A common emerging trope that I have discovered *is* that of games and competitions, the scavenger hunt of *The Halloween Tree*, and all the japes and plots of *Trick 'r Treat*. These all serve a greater thematic purpose, in each instance as an expression of love, and a love letter to the holiday itself, respectively. My argument, then, will be to connect all of the aforementioned various threads and to ascertain the importance of not only the festival of Halloween, but the establishment of the Halloween narrative as a sub-genre of horror.

## Chapter 01: Ritual

Halloween has amassed a myriad of names and incarnations, to say nothing, also, of the many other holidays, found in societies archaic and modern, that bear a striking resemblance to Halloween. In this chapter I will use Lisa Morton's book *Trick or Treat: A History of Halloween* (2012) as a reference guide to describe certain historical facts which Morton believes supports the notion that Halloween stems from Celtic festivities. There is also the presence of Ronald Hutton, another historian who otherwise refutes Morton's claims, however, what is more important to this thesis is how the histories ascribed to Halloween have been mythologised and how the manner by which it is celebrated in the modern day is based more on assumption and hearsay rather than with reference to an actual body of history. The history is contested and while many of the rituals and conventions that one would normally associate with Halloween, such as the offering of edible goods, dressing in costumes and carving vegetables for decoration, may stem from historical tradition they have been preserved in the collective unconscious by a process of mythologization which is popularly associated with thoughts of pagan history. This perception also provides a thematic foundation for the portrayal of Halloween in fiction. Bradbury creates a series of imagined or half-researched historical origins for the holiday in *The Halloween Tree*, moving throughout historical landscapes populated by fantastical suppositions, from Ancient Egypt to Medieval France. Dougherty does not establish a history for Halloween in his film, but rather enforces the notion that traditions are handed down through generations who repeat the same rituals without regard or thought for where they came from. In Verso's *Boys in the Trees*, Halloween is a public holiday without history, a comical scene early in the film actually re-enforces the idea that its history is largely unknown as a character comments 'Halloween is an American invention made up to sell lollies' (2016).

As mentioned previously, Halloween is a shape-changer, one that is continuously evolving throughout the centuries moving between the various cultures and nations. The word 'Halloween' is derived from the Old English Halga, a word which means holy or was reserved in reference for saints or saintly behaviours (Morton, pg. 10), a word which greatly informs the religious significance of the holiday that is often quickly forgotten. But Halloween is often thought to have begun in Ireland as a new year's celebration called Samhain (pronounced Sar-Wen) that was observed between end of the harvest season and the beginning of the winter period. The festivities of Samhain were marked by the offering of harvest foods to the various gods that peopled the Celtic faith, and by the wearing of animal hides so that mischievous sprites such as the Sidhe would mistake the

celebrants for one of their own. It was also believed that on Samhain night it was possible for those who had died during the year to return to the mortal plane. It is from these ancient traditions that one may very well recognize the modern conventions of dressing in costumes and trick or treating, but there was one more tradition that is more suitably pagan than those others, as Samhain was most significantly observed with human sacrifice. The sacrificial victim would be chosen by marking the underside of a piece of cake with charcoal. As one of the most important dates in the Celtic calendar it was considered a great honour to be sacrificed at Samhain (pg. 14-15).

The propensity for telling macabre stories also has its origins with Samhain, as popular tales of horror such as *The Dream of Angus Og*, *Fin Mae Cumhail* and the *Adventures of Nera*. Within a modern context Samhain has many features that would designate the festival as a carnival, not only because the participants would dress in animal skin but also through an association with heavy drinking. This was one of the few times in the year when the Celtic Irish had ready access to copious amounts of alcohol, and so drunken bawdy behaviour became simply another conventional means of celebration (pg. 16). It has, however, been suggested by authors such as Ronald Hutton that Halloween does not, indeed, have its origins in Samhain. In his book *Stations of the Sun* (1996), Hutton argues that another pagan holiday, the affirmation of the Biltam, was treated with even greater importance than that of Samhain, of which Biltam predates. A substantial mythology has been created on the basis that Halloween is descended from the Celtic new year celebration of Samhain, something that is not only a popular conception in the modern day but which also continues to drive its festivities and means of celebration. Fictional representations of Halloween also hang on this precept, and as it is not my intention to resolve the historical debate I shall only acknowledge it and comment that even if Halloween does not, in fact, stem from a pagan celebration then this is of little importance as a substantial mythology has, nonetheless, been created around the idea of its possessing pagan roots.

As Europe abandoned its old religions in favour of the new religion of Christianity there was an incredible confusion regarding what pagan practices were now considered appropriate. The Catholic Church, under the direction of Pope Gregory III adopted the attitude that all those festive rites which could not be removed would instead be re-appropriated. In this syncretism, Samhain proved to be no exception, though in terms of the Gregorian calendar, Samhain took place in the late October or early November period Samhain came to be associated with the Feast of All Saints. Even though the Feast of All Saints was initially celebrated in the spring on the 13<sup>th</sup> of May, it had come to possess the qualities of another holiday, the Roman feast of Lemuria. The combination of Samhain, the Feast of All Saints and now Lemuria would further secure this new holiday as possessing an un-

doubtable link with death. The Lemurian practices of banishing undead spirits from the home at the stroke of midnight might have become similarly integrated into modern Halloween traditions.

A hundred years later Pope Gregory IV would order universal observance of the Feast of All Saints which had now been transplanted to its new date of October 31<sup>st</sup>, though, as Morton suggests the speed with which this was implemented was the result of renewed effort to further stamp out its connection to paganism and to establish it as a purely Christian holiday. In 998 the bishop of Cluny inaugurated the Feast of All Saints in France in order to provide an opportunity to pray for those souls in purgatory. Feast of All Saints was widely celebrated in the British Isles where it was announced as the Festyvall, in which bread was baked for distribution to the poor (pg. 18-19).

In Spain, Dia de los Muertos celebrations coincide with those of All Saints Day and All Souls day, which are celebrated on the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> of November, respectively. All three holidays comprise the Hallow tide, a triduum of Catholic celebrations, of which All Hallows Eve was initially a part, however many Protestant countries have since eliminated the subsequent celebrations. In addition to Ofrendas, Spanish celebrants, most notably in Catalan, perform the *Don Juan Tenorio* (1844) based on the legend of Don Juan.

Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century which not un-coincidentally saw a significant rise in the number of Scots and Irish who immigrated to the United States, the celebration of All Hallows Eve or Snap Apple Night, as it had by then become known, grew in popularity. The reason why British immigration to the Americas is not without coincidence is because All Hallows Eve had become viewed as a holiday of welcome cultural import, one that served as a reminder to ambitious Americans of the wealth and power of imperial England. Its general acceptance as a fundamentally British holiday was an attempt to imitate middle class English gentility, particularly as it pertained to the expansionism of a rapidly growing empire. The perceived middle class construction of Halloween was considered congenial, well suited to the drawing room, especially as its rituals had undergone other changes, ones far from the Bacchanalian excesses of pagan Ireland or the ribald feasting of the medieval period. The more subdued nature of the Victorian Halloween now included more relaxing practices such as sitting by the fire, bobbing for apples, torch bearing and exchange of ghost stories. However, it was in America's rural farming communities that an element of the sinister could still be found. Games of 'Cabbage Stump', in which cabbage stumps were thrown at houses and passers-by encompassed the rougher aspects associated with boyish games. Especially as those games became a staple of Halloween merry-making amongst rustic country children. Common pranks included the adornment of scarecrows

with jack-o-lantern heads. But as the 19<sup>th</sup> century came to an end and these Yankee farmers made a renewed pilgrimage away from their corn rows and into the glittering urban hearts of cities further in search of the American Dream, the nature of these pranks took a definitely violent turn.

Halloween night became synonymous with boyhood mischief, 'reinstating more of the pranking of Irish celebration' (pg. 73). Fashioning weapons such as pea shooters, bean blowers and the 'tick-tack', an item constructed from notched wooden spoons and, when run over windows and fence posts would emit a rattling sound. Despite the apparent innocence with which these conventions are described or might seem to convey, the nights on which these toys were employed would often result in vandalism; windows smashed, fires set, telephone poles sawn down and objects thrown into the paths of moving trains. This placed considerable burden, both on local authorities and city councils, who struggled to pay for the damages incurred and many considered banning Halloween completely. However, as Morton describes, municipal services were eager to avail themselves of their resources both in terms of establishing preventative measures and to provide a more structured environment in which Halloween festivities could be undertaken safely and without the threat of the usual mis-demeanours. As Morton explains: 'Town and civil groups such as the YMCA and the Boy Scouts began to offer boys other ways to celebrate Halloween, including parties, parades, carnivals and contests.' (pg. 76).

Much like in the Festyvall of centuries past, these boys were also encouraged to take up an active role in their communities, donating collected candies and offering jack-o-lanterns to impoverished children. To further divert attention from all prospects of pranking, parents and often schools would arrange 'house to house' parties, during which children would go from home to home begging for sweets. A connection can, un-doubtedly and rather temptingly, be made between the house to house parties and the ancient tradition of disguising oneself as a protection against evil spirits and the offering of harvest goods. The modern trick or treat instead borrows its influence from a German mumming tradition named 'Piltznickel', which in turn became known as 'Bilsnickling', a practice in which costumed participants would move from house to house and beg for food and wine and offer a trade of small 'tricks' in return. Though this was an activity predominantly reserved for young children, it has since been joined by teenagers and adults who convene in more mature settings and, once more in reference to Bacchanalia engage in sexually charged rituals of dance and heavy drinking.

Of course, the single greatest piece of iconography that the Americas have given the holiday is the jack-o-lantern. The fresh cut leers of these large vegetables

are intended to resemble the grimace of a human skull, providing a constant reminder of death, a sort of memento mori. Though the exact origins of the jack-o-lantern remain unknown, apocrypha holds that the lantern is named after a mythological blacksmith named Jack who was able to outwit the devil when he came for his soul. Avoiding damnation but unable to enter Heaven, Jack was condemned to wander the Earth for eternity carrying with him a lit piece of charcoal to light his way. Many variations of the tale persist throughout Europe and are reflective of the lantern's own particular evolution much like the holiday for which it serves as a symbol. Jack-o-lanterns were initially carved from turnips (early greetings cards depicted the legendary Jack with a turnip head). In Scotland carved turnip or swede lanterns were christened 'neep lanterns' and would be carried along as part of a tradition called 'guising' in which children would go once again from house to house calling out "Please help the guises!" (pg. 68). As those same immigrants came from Scotland and Ireland they discovered a festively coloured, already hollowed out gourd that would provide a better substitute than the rather un-wieldy fodder beet that had preceded it. However, Morton explains that the pumpkin bears significance to more than a single American holiday, the pumpkin is also utilized in celebration of Thanksgiving. A poem written in 1850 by John Greenleaf Whittier details the author's distraction owing to prior connection with Halloween (pg.69). The carved pumpkin lantern was further immortalized in Washington Irving's seminal piece of American literature, *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow* (1820), which frequently mentions them in advance of the Headless Horseman's appearance. The short novel displays the more congenial, British celebration of Halloween juxtaposing the archaic and subdued celebrations against the more modern and Americanized means of jollification replete with the symbol that remains an intrinsically American part of Halloween's current and most recognizable cultural identity.

It is intriguing to consider how often fantasy is appropriated as fact. Of how past events can be retold in such a manner as to become mythologised, perhaps in order to romanticize the past, or to simplify it so that past traditions which continue to permeate the present are more easily understood. Whether there actually was a real blacksmith called Jack is not important, it is the flavour of the story that has become preferable to the facts. Frederic Jameson describes a post-modern analysis of films such as *La Casa de Aqua* (1984) and renders the historicism of the text somewhat inconsequential as the 'historical film' does, in fact, present a vision of the past that is skewed by the conventions and sensibilities of the present day. That is to say, that modern attitudes, when retroactively applied to the past, present a compressed and biased view of history, one that becomes reflective of modern outcomes.

As Jameson himself states:

First, they are all *historical* films, although what they offer is not the totalising of narratives of classic realism nor the past as 'lost object of desire' in nostalgia, but a history with holes, perforated history.

(Jameson, pg. 303)

As mentioned previously, the history of Halloween is as varied and perforated as Jameson describes. The present continues to colour the past and so salient details of what is thought to be the history of the holiday work their way into an understanding of it, often simply that Halloween began in Ireland and eventually made its way across the Atlantic. The American animated television series *The Real Ghostbusters* (1986-1991) presents such a potted history in the episode *When Halloween was Forever*, in which a ghostly entity named Samhain (though it is mis-pronounced) appears. The history is described only as having begun in the 7<sup>th</sup> century, of course, an obviously American influence can be observed, most notably by the fact that this supposedly ancient spirit of Halloween is not only personified but is also given a pumpkin jack-o-lantern head. Despite relating Halloween to a specific history and culture that is not American, the episode only appropriates signifiers of American iconism. But mis-appropriation of history is not solely relegated to popular media, Halloween being a rather convoluted mass of cultures and traditions it was inevitable that the perforations Jameson discusses would be made in the fabric of its history. During the eighteenth century there were critical mis-understandings of aspects of Celtic culture, particularly that culture surrounding Samhain. To further muddy the waters of designating the holiday's historical origin, the influence of British military engineer and essayist Charles Vallancey, who in his third published volume *Collectanae de Rebus Hibernias* made several erroneous claims, most notably that Samhain was not in reference to a new year's celebration but rather to a god of the dead. William Hutchinson, a contemporary of Vallancey, made further claims, that the Feast of All Saints was actually inspired by an obscure Roman holiday called Pomona which held some significance in November in honouring Pomona, a lesser goddess of the orchards. Though as Morton explains, 'Hutchinson was probably taking inspiration from poetry; the mythological tale of Pomona and Vertumnus which was much in vogue in the eighteenth century' (pg. 17-18). To be certain, the holiday of Pomona had no bearing upon the Feast of All Saints, but despite the inaccuracies of Vallancey and Hutchinson's writing, and with all evidence to the contrary being both available and presented at the time, the works of both men achieved a popularity hitherto unprecedented that continued to influence public perceptions of Samhain even if it was a perpetuation of false historical information.

That is not to say that Jameson has his use only in identifying revisionism where it has occurred but also to demonstrate how past historical events can be

altered in order to steer public opinion. Vallancey's work came at a time of Irish insurgency against British rule, so his descriptions of Samhain as a boisterous and bestial celebration in honour of some forgotten god of the dead, allowed the British public to cultivate a perception of Ireland, its culture and people as being animalistic and savage. Sensationalising history and mythologizing it can be powerful motivators for how the media surrounding the holiday is received and consumed. cursory understandings of Halloween often create associations of the romantic or the violent in the minds of its celebrants and the influence the manner of how it is perceived and portrayed.

For example, the symbolism of the jack-o-lantern becomes more than just a vegetable death's head in the mind of Bradbury or director Dougherty. Instead of a decoration it becomes a symbol which carries the shades of the past and lights the way into the future. For Bradbury especially, the jack-o-lantern becomes elevated to a fetish, one that is personified in Joe Pipkin. Pipkin is a character regarded with reverence by his friends, celebrated and loved. Pipkin is the catalyst for events in the novel, the sole objective that compels his friends through time to, ultimately, save his life. Children's author Madeleine L'Engle, in her book *Trailing Clouds of Glory* (1985) describes what she perceives as a theme of sanctity in *The Halloween Tree*, one that is comparable, in her mind, to the prophets Jonah and Elijah, in whose anger toward God they were sacrificed. Much like the sacrifices the children offer to Moundshroud, an exchange of one year from the end of their lives to save Pipkin's life. But as L'Engle explains, a sacrifice, in the antiquated sense of the word, means to make sacred and as L'Engle herself comments, 'In Ray Bradbury's *The Halloween Tree* many ordinary things are sacred' (L'Engle, pg. 44).

Amongst these ordinary things is Pipkin himself, heralded as 'the greatest boy who ever lived' (Piluso, 1993), and as, 'Pipkin, sweet Pipkin' (pg. 04). Bradbury inflames the character to such a hyperbolic degree that it becomes almost comical, when perhaps we consider descriptions such as, 'The day Joe Pipkin was born all the Orange Crush and Nehi soda bottles in the world fizzed over; and joyful bees swarmed countryside's to sting maiden ladies... God got up early just to see Pipkin come out of his house.' (pg. 05). Which would make the most sense in the minds of young children, when the importance of one's friends holds sway over all other thoughts of life and death. Because Pipkin is to the children more than simply a friend, he is a jack-o-lantern, a symbol closely associated with the festivities of Halloween and with them all the comforts of childhood. This is further reinforced by the film adaptation, drawing Pipkin in such a manner as to physically resemble a jack-o-lantern; complete with a toothy, grinning smile and shock of orange hair. Through his interactions with his friends in the film adaptation, Bradbury further establishes the devotion that they show Pipkin. An epitomization occurs when the character Jenny exclaims, 'Oh Pip, if I ever lost you I don't know what I'd do' (1993).

Even Pip's name suffixed with 'kin' holds a kind of significance, possibly inferring the 'kinship' among the friends, as the novel features only boys one might also understand it as the bond of fraternity which binds them all together. Pipkin's liminality throughout much of the novel, existing as he does in a state of life and death may also harken back to the legend of Jack-o-lantern, of the trickster blacksmith doomed to wander eternally and unable to rest.

In *Trick 'r Treat* Dougherty utilizes his pumpkin in what is, perhaps, a more comical manner. Drawing upon greetings cards, which commonly depicted small characters with pumpkin heads that were popular in the early twentieth century he is able to cultivate a modern mascot for the holiday. Appearing in the background of each story, the diminutive Sam serves as a constant reminder, and enforcer of the rituals of Halloween and to see that they are obeyed. Dougherty's intentions are, seemingly, to impress upon his audience a commercial figure, one that audiences would make an irrevocable connection to Halloween with. An effort which, despite the film having not yet reached an exceedingly high standard of popularity, has been something of a success. *Trick 'r Treat* has been in avid circulation as the horror based website Fear.net which has produced a series of promotional trailers featuring the Sam character. The popularity of Sam may be due in part to the aggressive retail marketing that is commonplace where any holiday event is concerned, but even amidst the comic books, action figures and keychains one can better discern that the true appeal of the character is not in marketing, but in subversive characterisation. Sam is revealed to not be human but rather a hideous pumpkin headed apparition, one who not only reacts violently to rule breakers but also possesses an assortment of magical powers. Ostensibly Sam does bear some resemblance to the jolly post-card pumpkin men, appearing deceptively sweet and innocent, simply another costumed child until the surface is scratched and his true visage is revealed. Sam provides a small encapsulation of Halloween itself, which is hardly surprising as he is a 'spirit' of the holiday. A graphic novel connected to the film entitled *Trick 'r Treat: Days of the Dead* (2015) insinuates that Sam has been part of Halloween festivities for centuries and a figure of some importance having notoriety in 16<sup>th</sup> Ireland, among the Plains Indians and pre-war America. Even the name with which he is christened, Sam, is a phonetic hyphenate of Samhain, the original holiday from which Halloween stems. But Sam's behaviour, his devilish trickster persona, is also reminiscent of the pranksters whose behaviour dominated Halloween in the 1920s, though Sam's pranks are noticeably more deadly. For example, the inclusion of a razor blade-chocolate bar dagger and a lollipop sickle. Sam's role in the film, however, is not solely to cause terror, nor is it to inspire merriment, it is rather to observe and enforce, occasionally demanding a sugary sacrifice and it is in this way that Sam functions not as some cheerful little mascot but rather like a pagan god.

*The Halloween Tree* portrays the rituals of Halloween in a number of ways, but Bradbury first captures his audience's attention by describing a perfect microcosm of Halloween, specifically one that speaks to a latent sense of nostalgic longing. In the opening passages of the novel Bradbury writes with an almost visceral tone of address, rousing in the reader's imagination sights, smells and images which seem only familiar, they are deeply organic in their illusion as descriptions of a town, its children and their costumes:

The town was full of trees. And dry grass and dead flowers now that autumn was here. And full of fences to walk on and sidewalks to skate on and a large ravine to tumble in and yell across. And the town was full of... Boys. And it was the afternoon of Halloween. The cries behind the locked house doors grew more exasperated as shadows of boys flew by windows. Half-dressed boys, greasepaint on their cheeks; here a hunchback, there a medium sized giant. Attics were still being rummaged, old locks broken, old steamer chests disembowelled for costumes.

(pg. 03-04)

Bradbury creates an indelible connection between childhood and Halloween in the minds of his readers. This is further reinforced by the opening lines of the film adaptation (with both script and narration provided by Bradbury himself) that proclaims 'the greatest night of the year, better than Easter, better than Christmas, Halloween!' (Piluso, 1993). Bradbury allows his readers to incorporate themselves into the proceedings by allowing them to settle within and to experience both the sensations he tries to evoke and childhood memories. Cary Bazalgette and David Buckingham observe that to the adult mind childhood has become a 'distortion of memory', one that is almost impossible to recapture, at least in the more fully tangible sense, therefore it must be done, 'vicariously, through the imagination and, perhaps more commonly, through accepted and conventional ideas of what constitutes childhood' (2011, pg. 73). It is much the same in Bradbury's writing, perhaps even a concise summation of the tone he is attempting to strike, a recollection of childhood that is paired most evocatively with Halloween. Halloween, however, does not recede quite so completely into the past as it is celebrated annually, but as childhood fades, the perception of Halloween changes, more precisely it evolves. Bradbury expresses a desire not only to recapture childhood sensations but also to possess an understanding of why he was permitted those sensations, why he wanted to celebrate the holiday.

With his character Mr. Moundshroud, a strange though still fantastical entity, Bradbury begs the question; why celebrate Halloween?

"Lads look at yourselves. Why are you, boy, wearing that skull face? And you, boy, carrying a scythe, and you, lad, made up like a witch? And you, you, you!"

He thrust a bony finger at each mask. "You don't know, do you? You just put on the faces and old mothball clothes and jump out, but you don't really know, do you."

"Yeah." Said the Devil boy. "Come to think of it, why am I wearing this?"

And all the boys were given to wonder, and touched their own costumes and refit their own masks.

(pg. 31)

This is a question that Bradbury endeavours to answer as the children are transported seemingly through time, visiting ancient Egypt and Ireland, Medieval Britain, France, and 19<sup>th</sup> century Mexico. But the manner in which these historical periods are depicted would seem to infer and un-realistic or quite possibly falsified manner. I use the words 'transported seemingly through time' as Bradbury does not render his 'past' all that accurately, indeed one might even come to the conclusion that the 'past' the children are all seeing is an illusion. Take for instance, the scene in which the children arrive in ancient Ireland and encounter 'Samhain':

"Now lie low!" warned Moundshroud. "The Druid God of the Dead! Samhain! Fall!

They fell.

For a huge scythe came skimming down out of the sky. With its great razor edge it cut the wind. With its whistling side it sliced clouds. It beheaded trees. It razored along the cheek of the hill. It made a clean shave of wheat. In the air a whole blizzard of wheat fell.

And with every whisk, every cut, every scythe, the sky was a swarm with cries and shrieks and screams.

(pg. 70)

The personification of Samhain is yet another example of mythologizing history, Samhain here being portrayed as a monstrous entity raining a torrent of insects from the sky that shout and scream rather than a new year's celebration, which, obviously, does not lend itself to any interpretation of history, but instead become a series of sounds and images. Not so much an interpretation, but an idea constructed now as a sequence that does not reflect coherent reality, rather more of a child's fantasy or nightmare. Bradbury's purpose becomes clear during a short interval in the novel, in which Moundshroud transports the boys to prehistoric times, where they witnesses primeval man set a forest on fire in an attempt to drive back the darkness. As the boys question the relevance of this to Halloween, Moundshroud answers:

"What's that got to do with Halloween?"

“Do? Why, blast my bones, everything. When you and your friends die every day, there is not time to think of death, is there? Only time to run. But when you stop running at long last-”

He touched the walls. The ape-man face in mid-flight.

“-now you have time to think of where you came from, where you’re going. And fire lights the way, boys. Fire and lightning. Only by night fire was the caveman, beast men, able at last to turn his thoughts on his spit and baste them with wonder.”

(Bradbury, pg. 62)

It is not literal representations of the past, or indeed even of the present, that occupy Bradbury’s mind but rather it is the metaphorical, the exaggerated, reality cannot offer the same wonderment as the mind, the imagination can conjure. Bradbury prefers his distortion of memory, his spit and basted thoughts because they permit him, through his fiction, a chance to reshape the world to some degree, to alter history. And as Bradbury underlines his final message, of how each of the traditions of Halloween feed into one another, of how the rituals of trick or treat began with an offering of food for the dead in ancient Egypt, or of how the burning of witches inspire their modern costumery, he fulfils Jameson’s theory that within the present there remains the mark of the past events. The rituals of centuries past are so deeply ingrained that they have become superimposed into the rituals of today: ‘Their reality is itself already, the articulated superposition of whole layers of the past within the present’ (Jameson, pg. 311).

Then again, this past may have some articulation within the present, but what is also true is that this articulation has been sanitized to some extent. Bradbury’s illusions of the past are not entirely devoid of the violence that permeates it such as the witch burnings, but other facets of the past that are ignored include human sacrifice and religious oppression. Ignoring these things also extends to Jameson’s work. Whilst the aforementioned violence and oppression have undoubtedly shaped the holiday as the Western world understands it. There is still a concerted effort to ensure that Halloween does not alienate the youth that enjoy it, that it does not serve as a reminder of human pain and degradation, poverty or wholesale slaughter of people for their opposing belief systems. It is, after all, one of the reasons why the imagery of friendly little rabbits and chocolate eggs presides over Easter celebrations, because the true nature of the holiday, of Jesus Christ’s suffering is not quite as palatable or marketable. Bradbury may make his Halloween weird and with thoughts of death, but it is still in many regards the well marketed Halloween that most Americans are, nonetheless, accustomed to.

Michael Dougherty conjures a veritable microcosm of Halloween celebration and tradition in his film *Trick 'r Treat*. Set in the fictional town of Warren Valley, Ohio, a town where, 'the holiday and all of its strange traditions are taken very seriously' (2008). Through each of its four connecting stories, both the conventions of the holiday and certain attitudes concerning it are addressed and underlined, as for the history of the holiday, that is left largely ignored save for a brief mention on a television screen. *Trick 'r Treat* concerns itself with the holiday only as it is celebrated within a purely modern context, unlike the compressed history of *The Halloween Tree*, which desires to uncover the shades of the past within the present. *Trick 'r Treat* is an appropriation and thorough dressing down of the rituals within a totally American Halloween. There are always shades of the past contained within any annual festivity as we know, the celebrations of the present are always analogous to a past one, but *Trick 'r Treat* operates within more archetypal parameters evidenced by its simple creed that this is, 'the one night when the dead, and all sorts of other things, roam free' (2008).

The film makes use of apocryphal narratives such as the urban legend of the razor blades in the candy in the story of Principal Wilkins, a murderous headmaster, who poisons trick or treaters with the candy he dispenses. This is further evidence that *Trick 'r Treat* does not concern itself with the facts but rather finds the fictions of Halloween much more useful and effective. Of course, the blurring of what is fact and what is fiction is proven just as effective also, such as the 'Halloween School bus Massacre' a children's ghost story which just so happens to be true.

In this way *Trick 'r Treat* becomes defined more by the artistic interpretations of Halloween than by its history. The celebrations glorified by the cultures that embrace Halloween are better reflected in greetings cards, storefront advertisements and television commercials than by the history book and let us not forget those examples of prose and cinema that do not appear here which feature Halloween only as a setting. As Lisa Morton observes, 'Home celebrations have reflected an area and time's belief in religion and the occult, costuming and trick or treat have become irreversibly interwoven with the media, and books, film and art about Halloween have become their own cottage industries.' (Morton, pg. 153).

Morton explains that just as much as the history of the holiday changes continuously, and in turn the media comes to reflect those changes, so too do perceptions regarding the meaning of Halloween. Naturally, different countries and their cultures will have different understandings of Halloween and of how it should be celebrated. The American concern, as Morton writes, regarding Halloween provides an opportunity to, 'indulge fears in an environment that is relatively safe, because it's defined by art and imagination' (pg. 153). *Trick 'r Treat* posits that not celebrating Halloween maybe more dangerous than doing so, as one character

expresses displeasure with Halloween festivities, blowing out a jack-o-lantern and uttering the fateful exclamation, 'I hate Halloween' (2008), which leads to her being decapitated and mounted as her very own decoration. Beforehand, however, the character is shown glancing admiringly at a group of costumed children, the implication being that she perceives Halloween as a celebration intended only for children and utterly fails to recognize its worth beyond the infantile. She is killed for this lack of respect. Another character, Mr. Kreeg, represents a strangely Dickensian element, a Scrooge-like recluse who despises Halloween and consequently refuses to celebrate it. He is attacked by the otherworldly Sam who only relents when Kreeg inadvertently offers Sam a chocolate bar. The purpose of addressing this is to demonstrate that Halloween art continues to support the notion that Halloween should be celebrated while also possessing the power to condemn those parties, religious organisations such as the tracts published by Jack Chick and the politically conservative which abhor it and may even seek to actively prevent its celebration.

*Boys in the Trees* presents a unique cavalcade of Halloween, representing not only one facet of the holiday but multiple ones, which range from the Irish Samhain to the French fairy-tale Little Red Riding Hood. Even in the midst of this ostensible modern and Australian horror, coming of age tale, there are elements which are uncommon for the setting, such as a scene which represents the iconography and traditions of Dia de los Muertos.

*Boys in the Trees* takes place in a nameless Australian suburb and follow two teenage boys as one, Corey, escorts the other, Jonah home on Halloween night. As they go along Jonah proceeds to tell eerie tales, such as that of a local man whose broken dreams manifest as dark, ghoulish figures, or of a young man bullied incessantly at school, who comes to see his tormentors as literal monsters. Stories have always played an integral role in Halloween, and much like *Trick 'r Treat*, fables of the macabre feature heavily in *Boys in the Trees*, the primary means by which the film may reflect the conventions of Halloween become represented. But fear is not the sole intention of these tales, instead they serve an entirely different purpose, to convey the disillusionment and alienating nature of the setting. These stories deliberately force the viewer's mind to blur the line that divides the literal message readily apparent in the narrative from the more figurative interpretation. That is to say, the literal interpretation of this suburbia which is so immediately recognisable in its un-inspired dullness, becomes, figuratively, a place in which broken dreams and empty promises manifest in ways all at once monstrous, supernatural, where there is very little differentiation between reality and fantasy. For example a scene in which Corey observes his desolate neighbours collectively watching television, all in the same manner as shadowy creatures quite literally drain them of life, they are wasting away in front of their television. This theme of broken dreams is the film's second most prevailing piece of didacticism, which is

quite simply that one should not waste one's life on meaningless fantasies and pipe dreams, especially when one possesses the capacity to realise one's own ambition. Corey is a young photographer who aspires to attend university in New York City, but his friendship with the domineering Jango and his shame for having previously abandoned Jonah, in addition to his pervading fear and immaturity prevent him from fully realising his dream. Over the course of the night Corey is able to re-discover the bravery he abandoned in childhood. The film continues with the theme of reaching maturity by demonstrating the bacchanalia of teenage partying. In one such scene teenagers are shown celebrating Halloween by means of alcohol consumption and taking drugs. This form of celebration is treated much like a courtship ritual as the nascent sexualities of the teens become illuminated when each attempts to find a romantic partner, indeed, a subplot concerns Corey's attempts to woo a female friend. Although the manner in which he succeeds in his endeavours, is by earning her respect and understanding not simply by carnality, even amidst the raucous and boyish antics there persists some semblance of order. The wild abandon of Jango's gang is not framed in a manner that suggests a carnival catharsis but rather un-warranted destruction, the acts of cruel little boys, a further fulfilment of the film's theme of maturity. The aforementioned scene that depicts Dia de los Muertos depicts a sudden shift in perspective, one that is decidedly more sombre in tone and a stark departure from the juvenile party ambience. The scene, in which a woman dressed as Santa Muerte sings a mournful ballad is respectful and contemplative, a solemn reminder to both Corey and Jonah of the fleeting nature of youth and life as the camera glances over pictures mounted upon an altar of deceased and elderly relatives.

The stories of *Trick 'r Treat* hold sway because when each is connected to the other they form the micro-cosmic basis of yet another singular suburban town on whose greater thematic identity and importance revolves around the symbolism of Halloween. For Warren Valley Ohio, it is the theme of concealed monstrosity, of how a nightmare can hide in plain sight. But the neighbourhood of *Boys in the Trees* embodies a theme of broken dreams, empty promises and hollow expectations, one that is more intrinsically human in composition than its predecessor, and indeed, one may very well consider *Trick 'r Treat* the predecessor to *Boys in the Trees*. In the final story, Corey is forced to admit his feelings as he has previously refused to protect Jonah from his bullies. The stories now begin to move away from metaphor and instead to rely on thinly veiled analogues, until the moment comes when he can no longer pretend and he is forced to face inevitable realities, both of his own impending future and the realisation of Jonah's death. In Halloween stories provide a necessary distraction from the monotony of life but in *Boys in the Trees*, both Halloween and the stories it inspires become forces through which painful

truths and challenges are revealed and beaten respectively, whilst adolescent tribulations are overcome.

In conclusion, an understanding of what the history of Halloween is often assumed to be was necessary as it serves to establish the body of analysis, the head if you will. Beliefs regarding the history of the holiday provide a discernible basis for following interpretations and when equipped with a knowledge of the purpose of Halloween and where its many traditions might originate. One also learns its thematic foundations, upon which a majority of Halloween films, literature and other forms of media rely. Halloween is always changing, with customs differing according to time period and culture, at least that is the lesson learned from a partially historical perspective. In terms of the fictional it demonstrates how the mythologizing of history affects an understanding of the how and why Halloween is celebrated. The fiction exhibits Halloween custom in a much more standardized and slightly simple manner, demonstrating only western, particularly American, modes of celebration. It is a more simplified shape of Halloween, but one that oscillates between children's trick or treat, a sexually charged bacchanalia, or a merry party complete with banqueting and exchange of stories. In that simplicity, however, there is reflected a sum totalising of each and every understanding of Halloween neatly packaged. But even in those salient features does the fiction find and explore more universal themes of human evil, monstrosity and the fear of death. Channelling these themes through Halloween, the shape of the fiction comes to resemble the shape of its history as the various elements featured in the films or novels come to produce different effects as much as the meanings of the various forms of ritual differ from period to period. That is not to say that the fiction is repetitive or that its representation of Halloween is in any way inflexible despite the similarities that exist between the films. They each represent different aspects of not only Halloween but of the sub-genre, whether it is the bloody gore and straight horror of *Trick 'r Treat*, the juvenile adventure tale that is *The Halloween Tree* or the bildungs narrative of *Boys in the Trees*. In this way you understand that Halloween fiction is just as amorphous as the holiday itself.

## Chapter 02: Masks and Monsters

In terms of metaphors the mask is common enough and convenient enough, and in terms of representation it is simple; the Janus head, the two faced, the double identity. It is the true nature of something that is concealed beneath a façade of cloth, plastic, wood or even flesh, flesh being of particular note, because after all which mask is the real one? The one that hides your face or the one that is your face?

This chapter will provide an analysis of the significance of the mask in Halloween narratives, as well as the depiction of monstrosity and of how both are intimately linked with carnival history, aesthetic and tradition. Masks and monsters are often intimately linked in fiction and cinema, as monsters such as Leatherface, Michael Myers and Jason Voorhees are most famously depicted wearing masks. The mask lends the monster an air of mystery and intrigue and in the absence of facial expression it becomes quite easy to create dissonance between the humanity of these characters and the extra-human evils that they are thought to represent. An example of this would be, in this instance, Michael Myers as a metaphor for middle class suburban fears regarding juvenile delinquency as demonstrated by the opening scene in which a young Michael stabs his sister to death. The image of the mask, ultimately, comes to be the monster's own face as the film does not provide an opportunity for the monster to have an identity apart from its mask. Yet there are many examples in horror fiction, and it is a common feature of the Halloween narrative, that there is a separation that occurs between the mask, the identity beneath and monstrosity in various forms.

This argument will be predicated upon a definition of monsters and the monstrous, as being an abhuman creature often of mythical proportions, or a mode of behaviour that is considered unacceptable or to an illegal and malicious degree. The distinction that must be made between these two states is that monsters may be human in appearance but not behaviour, and vice versa, the reason for this distinction is that to rely upon a definition of abhumanity is to recognize a persistent trait of inherent humanity within the monster. Monsters are never just monsters, cultural depictions of monsters such as the examples featured in this chapter will take note of the various textual metaphors they represent and then apply them to an analysis of each text. This chapter will take note of examples in which monsters become the friends of human children, of how monsters are made an acceptable and comforting presence. Its methodology is based on Halberstam's understanding of the monster in *Skin Shows*, one that portrays it as possessing an intrinsically, if distorted, human form.

Halloween is, and remains, first and foremost, a carnival. The word ‘carnival’ has its root in the Latin expression *carne[m] levare*, the meaning of which is ‘to put away meat’ or alternatively ‘farewell to the meat’. It is generally accepted that in the modern vernacular carnival means ‘farewell to the flesh’, which evokes notions of abandoning or of temporarily casting aside one’s human identity or additionally abandoning inhibition or discernibly human behaviour. It is eschewing social mores in favour of the exaggerated or the grotesque. A time in which behaviour deemed offensive or foolish is celebrated rather than abhorred; drunken rowdiness, practical jokes and a lack of sexual propriety or restraint, are encouraged. Carnival is effectively a form of disturbance, a form of disturbance from which society derives catharsis by disturbing the prosaic and cyclical nature of routine and common perceptions of time and consciousness. Jack Morgan (2002) describes the effect of masquerade in terms that may specifically be applied to the popular horror genre:

Masquerade’s “radical festivity” are of interest in terms of horror in that all deal with the suspension of prosaic time and the establishment of a temporal form in which ordinary social assumptions are in abeyance.

(Morgan, 2002, pg. 133)

There is a notion of the radical that persists more than the merely unusual, there is the presence of speed, a certain fastidiousness of celebration that builds to an unknown climax.

Comparatively, during times of carnival, the respectable veneer of gentile human society gets stripped away, and, as is remarked by Timothy Foote, carnival gives way to an intensely subtle yet irrevocably pervading sense of danger, ‘beneath the frantic surface jollity lay sombre violence’ (1968, pg.135). If Foote is correct then we must return once again to that theme of subversion, and in this instance its application lies in the suggestion that the seemingly innocuous maybe transformed into an event that would instead suggest some terror. It is largely understood that carnival is an opportunity, but an opportunity for what? If the answer is release, as I have proposed, then is it only bright and colourful revelry or the promise of some vague form of transgression. The festivities of Halloween certainly shift often enough in shape and carnival is just as changeable and as a result can offer no definite form. However, there can be no doubt that a certain association between Halloween and violence exists, permeating and colouring common perceptions of the holiday. Jack Morgan notes, the relationship between those things that terrify and those things which provoke laughter creates a joint vision of something vague though still rather uneasy and fearful, setting carnival upon a dangerous precipice of safety or danger:

The dialectal transactions between comedy and horror are manifested graphically in carnival, the surface of which is festive, but which, given a slight shift in imagination, tracks off into the treacherous and transgressive.

(2002, pg. 132)

Horror films thrill and unnerve their audiences in much the same way that carnival can. Carnival serves to remind revellers of the frailty and fallibility of the human condition of its ability (and perhaps even willingness) to submit to lusts, violence, gluttony and inebriation, abandoning the more idealised Apollonian state in favour of the unbridled Dionysian condition. The horror film also serves as a hyperbolic extension of the kind of discord demonstrated by carnival, albeit in a more overt and threatening manner. I have noted already the horror film's tendency to allegorise various prejudices in the name of conjuring anxiety. Horror films and carnivals demonstrate the temporaneous nature of systems and institutions, which may not only collapse but also not provide the safety and security they promise. In *The World of Brugal* (1968) Foote describes his own view of the relationship between horror and carnival. Explaining how, ultimately, carnivalesque imagery provides a suitable context of a genre that relies on imagery that proves as effective in the static dimension as much as it does in the kinetic:

Even when not sinister in and of itself, carnival can create an incongruously fictional context for horror, as it does, for example in the merry-go-round climax of Alfred Hitchcock's *Strangers on a Train*.

(1968, pg. 137)

One other example of this would be in John Carpenter's *They Live* (1988). Which features an America that is exploitatively capitalist and rampantly materialistic, controlled by a literally alien agenda that wear human disguises. Even in that brief synopsis one can discern the obvious parallels: the aliens that wear human guises are manipulating an inherent facet of human behaviour: greed. This film features a vision of two worlds collectively merged together. One world is bright and colourful, the other reveals a grey world in which eye-catching advertisements read out terse commands and civilians wondering the streets are revealed to be horrible aliens. There is also some decidedly pagan imagery in this film as displays of consumerism summon thoughts of offerings of food and human indoctrination into alien society and is therefore much like that of a cult slavishly devoted to capricious gods.

A further remark upon carnival traditions is that for all its ostentatious 'show', carnival demonstrates the repression of the self. For all its suggestions of a

hidden violence, carnival remains a release from the doldrums. Animalistic imagery is often at play in carnival, in masks and costumes that evoke the primal. This is just as much at work in Halloween. In the fur and horns, in the glowing nocturnal eyes and in the fangs and claws, which have become regular features of any Halloween costume. Those things that we borrow from the natural world and better utilize to compose the monstrous. We see the animal once again in the sexual and unrestrained, it may even arrive wearing the face of a demon. It becomes all too appropriate, a more discernible face for what some imagine is already the truth. It is not only to affect a symbolic release but also to expose and identify those aforementioned darker integral parts of the human condition. Those that some people may fear to identify, much less recognize.

The things that we do care to grant names to, those parts of ourselves that stem from the darkest corners of the psyche more often than not are the creatures we take to be our enemies. These names are so familiar and so utterly commonplace that the memory barely requires stirring to think of them; they are demons, they are vampires, they are ghouls, they are werewolves and they are the bogeyman. And try as we might to deny it, they remain not only monsters to haunt our nightmares and make our children scream but are an inexorable reminder of those grim impulses; lust, violence and greed. Much like in carnival, dark desires are externalised, rendered apart from the human body, depicted in the form of masks and grotesque fetishes, costumes that can be removed at will. However, what quickly becomes apparent is what kind of fallacy this truly is. The emotions that I have just described are an ever present and constant facet of human identity. These may well be considered a shadowy series of companions.

In fiction, carnival notions of repression, un-expressed desire and distorted visions of the human body are explored in the gothic. For Halberstam, gothic fiction explores these themes in Shelley's *Frankenstein*, Halberstam explains that the novel 'makes flesh itself Gothic and finds fear to be a by product of embodiment rather than a trick played upon the body by the mind' (1995, pg.28). Halberstam goes on to say that through Shelley gothic fiction is reworked to demand that an object of terror be rendered in forms that approximate the human and that by 'focusing on the body as the locus of fear, Shelley's novel suggests that it is people (or at least bodies) who terrify people' (pg.28). In more carnivalesque terms, the fear of self, of the uninhibited violence and desire for physical contact is well represented in the Creature's expression for both love and vengeance, 'If I cannot inspire love, I will cause fear... If any being felt emotions of benevolence towards me, I should return them a hundred and a hundredfold; for that one creature's sake I would make peace with the whole kind! But now I indulge in dreams of bliss that cannot be realised' (1818, pg.148). This appeasement is a carnivalesque promulgation, a model of human identity drawn and divided between opposing states of emotion

and action. Much like the two opposing states of order and chaos, desire and restraint. It cannot be overstated the inherent humanity of the monster, in *Frankenstein*, we see a vision of the Creature as being more indelibly sympathetic than its literary descendants. Yet, its capacity to disturb still belongs, according to Halberstam, with the fact that it is composed from human body parts, 'the architecture of fear in this story is replaced by physiognomy, the landscape of fear is replaced by sutured skin' (pg.29).

On a more subversive level, David Pinter and Glynnis Byron argue that the Creature's monstrosity must be contested as the true fault and responsibility of the monster's actions lie not with itself but with its creator. 'The Creature's own narrative suggests that Frankenstein's main sin is not his act of creation but his failure to take responsibility for what he produces' (2004, pg.200). Pinter and Byron state that as the monster explores deeper into human society, the more he is rejected and alienation. As a result, Pinter and Byron believe that the purpose of the novel is to address the failings in institutions, 'demonstrations of the corruption of social institutions, including the law and the church. In the story of the De Laceys and the trial of Justine human injustice is repeatedly emphasized' (pg.200). This insinuation is not unlike that of Foote, the surface detail which hides a 'sombre violence' is as relevant here as it is in the World of Brugal, indeed Pinter and Byron describe human society as possessing a 'viciousness' and one that becomes a contaminating force as the Creature 'starts to replicate the very human characteristics that initially repulse him' (pg.200). the ultimate failing then of Shelley's protagonist is the refusal of Victor Frankenstein to accept the abhuman monster as belonging to himself, to reconcile his own imperfections and fallibility. Shelley's Creature engenders greater sympathy from its audience, serving as a metaphor for human isolation and alienation from human society.

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick comments that 'the spatial metaphor of depth from among the gothic conventions, taking that metaphor to represent a model of the human self' (1986, pg. 11). In this way the audience is able to recognize that the monsters from the classic gothic horror fiction of the mid to late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the descendants of Shelley's Creature, resemble inherent human 'monstrousness' but distilled into more obvious and recognisable forms. The experiments of Doctor Jekyll prove as much. His evil half Edward Hyde is depicted as stooped and ape-like, a return to the primitive lacking in social niceties and a sense of morality, most certainly sub-human. Mr. Hyde represents an oppressive Victorian hegemony, grinding down its citizens beneath a heel of repression. And despite the veneer of aristocratic charm that Count Dracula exudes he becomes a metaphor for destructive foreign influence. Much like Sedgwick, Halberstam concurs that the true fear allegorised by any monster is in the humanity of its shape.

A monster can come in all shapes and sizes and different guises. Their categorisation is not limited solely to the horrors of physiognomy. Exploring the functions of monstrosity in children's literature offers a decidedly more optimistic perspective. In the chapter, 'Between Horror, Humour and Hope', from the book *The Gothic in Children's Literature* (2008) author Karen Coats writes in a preface that children are so often faced with monsters and villains in fiction that such obstacles permit a facilitation of solution. A means to overcome that obstacle, to defeat those monsters, to divine a resolution and achieving the ultimate purpose of any fairy story, the happy ending. Coats continues by saying that a monster is intimidating so often because it grows in malignance as a formulation of 'undirected anxieties and fears'. So the monster's dispatchment has the effect of not only confronting that fear but of also permitting 'psychic integration, and to assure the child of happy endings when present trials are overcome' (2008, pg. 78).

If only a thin thread separates humour and horror, then nowhere is that rendered more obvious than in gothic children's literature as they become so uniquely interspersed and juxtaposed. One need not look any further than Charles Addams's series of cartoons *The Addams Family* (1938-88), in which the spine-tingly ghoulish eponymous family with their love of wicked pranks and fiendish games is rendered as poignantly pleasant as any other nuclear family. The true purpose of Coats's chapter, is an explanation of the psychic process of a child's integration with a literary text, and, as has been mentioned previously. In this instance it is the gothic and, more pointedly, stories which are not only frightening but humorous which it would allow the fear to be met more easily. Integration would be achieved at the precise moment when an illustration is glimpsed or a description comprehended, the monsters in all their lurid forms would be fully understood, the abstract and shapeless forgotten. As Coats explains:

Well-made Gothic can fill in the gaps, giving concrete expression to abstract psychic processes, keeping dark fascinations and haunting fears where children can see them, and mingling the horror with healthy doses of humour and hope.

(Coats, 2008, pg. 91)

Of course, monsters not only come to represent an adversary that must be beaten or a fear that must be overcome. I mention this once more, simply because anxiety is so often the thematic pre-occupation in gothic fiction, not only because of the conventions of the genre which dictates that a frightened child must appear within the pages of a fright novel, but also because it creates yet another

stereotypical assumption, that a monster can incite only fear. Monsters can indeed scare children but they can also provide a suggestion, one in which monsters not only alleviate fear but also serve as an intimation of immortality. Children's fiction is full of monsters, the monster beneath the bed and the bogeyman being the most archetypal examples, both deeply mired in shadow, faceless and imminently terrifying, and terrifying precisely because they suggest mortality, not just the dread of being swept off but of being devoured, of meeting death and ceasing to exist. In her introduction to *Frightening Fiction* (2001) Kimberly Reynolds uses Helen Cixous' describe the effect of adolescent fiction as being that of a nascent flirtation with immortality, that supernatural archetypes such as ghosts which, while ostensibly scary, are also an indication of the survival of consciousness after death:

Texts which provide vicarious encounters with ghosts, the undead, and others who exist outside the conventional definitions of life. Seeing a ghost is frightening, but it can also be taken as evidence that death is not the end of the self, and even that interaction with the known world remains possible after death.

(Reynolds, 2001, pg. 07)

Furthermore, Cixous states that horror fiction provides teenagers with a 'rehearsal for an encounter with death' (2001, pg. 07), something which Cixous insinuates a child could not comprehend. Despite the undoubtedly true perception that a child is at least partially incapable of recognizing their own mortality, Cixous would be mistaken in the belief that only teenagers could fully understand such a notion. As an example of how this is demonstrated in fiction is in the emergence and prevalence of the 'monster as child's friend' trope. A child protagonist befriends a monster and there is often some line of dialogue to the effect of 'all is not quite as you imagine it to be'; that is to say that the mythology of whatever monster in question is not rendered in such a manner as to be so threatening as the protagonist (and by extension the reader) initially supposed. One example of this trope is Angela Sommer-Bodenburg's novel series *Der Kleine Vampir* [*The Little Vampire*] (1979-2015) in which a young boy, Anton, befriends a child vampire, Rudiger. Bodenburg explains her intentions as a depiction of vampirism that belies its ordinarily frightening image and to become 'not a bloodthirsty monster, however, but an affectionate little vampire with fears and foibles who will perhaps free children from their own fears' (Gale, 2002).

As an intimation of immortality, it succeeds, not in that Anton is attracted to the notion of eternal life by becoming a vampire nor that he is promised it, indeed the thought of becoming one is repellent as Bodenburg depicts her un-dead as lacking many of the alluring and romantic qualities that became so prominent in 20<sup>th</sup> century fiction. Anton is offered a glimpse of existence beyond the 'conventional definitions of life' as Cixous puts it, but is able to recognize the

element of the horrific that Bodenburt insinuates into the lives of her vampires, their foul smelling breath and clothes and sleeping in rotting mausoleums and pungent coffins. Not only that but also the tragedy that is inherent in depicting child vampires, their inability to grow up or experience romantic love. This allows Anton to better appreciate the normalcy and indeed safety of his own suburban domesticity which promises the comfortable progression of modern life and his own mortality. Another such example is in the 1995 film *Casper*, based on the Harvey comic book series about a friendly little child ghost. It is a film which actually confronts the theme of a child's mortality directly. During a conversation Casper is asked, 'what's it like to die?' to which he answers, 'it's like being born only backward' (Silberling, 1995). The intimation of immortality in this instance does better to confirm Cixous' suggestion that encounters with ghosts would imply the existence of an afterlife. In this film an afterlife is not only suggested but guaranteed. Through the human protagonist, Kat, meeting ghosts, discussing her mother's death and finding a machine which can resurrect the dead, the young audience learns of the fragility and value of life. Casper's description of death is, ultimately, a sensitive one, devoid of trauma or pain it offers a promise of a different sort, that the transition from life into death can be a pleasant one. Furthermore the aforementioned life-giving machine is sought by the antagonist Ms. Crittenden as she believes it will offer her some sort of immortality, as she kills herself to become a ghost one can recognize the frivolity of such an act and of how the character willingly abuses the natural order of life and death. Despite the occasional seriousness of both *The Little Vampire* and *Casper*, their humorous elements are readily apparent, softening the blow of subject matters that is conveyed both overtly and sub-textually.

One other metaphor this also apparent is the monster as oppressed minority or marginalised race. In *The Little Vampire* there is an inversion of the narrative roles occupied by the vampire and vampire hunter, in this instance the vampire hunter becomes a villain persecuting a misunderstood and vilified minority (vampirism is in some way likened to a difference in culture as opposed to a curse) and it is the vampires who are the heroes. In *Monsters in the Closet* (1997), Harry M. Benshoff utilizes queer theory to attest the changes in conventional film narrative that now accommodate and reflect the altered attitudes regarding human sexuality. Monsters can assume forms both innocuous and un-remarkable but that their functionality can change as they experience a reversal of the roles between aggressor and pacifier and of how this is likened to their human counterparts. Especially as the perception of monstrosity changes according to the consumer, children and homosexuals in this instance receive the monster in order to embrace and befriend it, to make it a common ally.

As Benshoff states:

Many of these radically post-modern films capture their own diegetic narratives. Critique traditional models of subjectivity and cinematic structure and (re) present a world without strict dichotomies of self and other.

(1997, pg. 170)

The role of monster and human can conflate and it is possible that the behaviour of humans can be more discernibly monstrous than that of the actual monsters. It is possible that the once perceived harbingers of nightmare could become a defender of children, the monster in the closet as an example. The comic book series *Nightmares and Fairy Tales* (2002-05) issue 05, provides a revisionist perspective of that classic bogeyman. A young girl moves into a new house with her abusive parents and though initially afraid of the monsters in her closet she comes to realise that they intend to protect her by slaughtering her parents. Here the institute of family is effectively inverted, construed now to represent pain and fear whereas the monster offers security and protection.

As we have heard before, children came to tame and domesticate monsters, domesticating typical monstrous archetypes. In films such the Universal Monsters stable: *Dracula* (1931), *Frankenstein* (1931) and *The Wolfman* (1941). Along with the Hammer horror films such as *Curse of Frankenstein* (1957) and *Horror of Dracula* (1958), were circulated on television. They became available as collectable items such as props, models and masks 'turned into cartoons and plush toys for the delectation of children' (1997, pg. 171), with further celebration achieved in bi-monthly issues of EC comics *Tales from the Crypt* and magazines such as *Fangoria* and *Famous Monsters of Filmland* (1958-83). These demonstrations in satire and camp nullified the horrifying intrigue with which cinematic monsters had been long associated, permitting new generations to locate some measure of pathos and humour beneath the grotesque.

Further evidence of how children come to accept the conventions of the gothic horror genre through marketing is also glimpsed in the merchandising furore that surrounds *The Nightmare Before Christmas* (1993) with its assortment of toys, games and costumes (to speak of but a few) that has come to not only proliferate but also to figuratively explode across the media landscape. A celebration of the lyrically gothic that has emerged noticeably from the constraints of the niche and into the mainstream, colloquially speaking, its success and high degree of popularity amongst child viewers have allowed both the film and gothic convention to become accepted as 'cool'.

The relevance that all this has to Halloween is quite pertinent as it becomes quite difficult to separate all that we imagine as horror from this holiday. Monsters have found a home sidled alongside the jack-o- lantern, utterly equalled in terms of

their symbolic significance and importance. And perhaps it is true that archetypal settings such as cob-webbed castles and haunted graveyards are connected only in a tenuous, commercial way. To emphasize, monsters and horror films do not possess an intrinsic connection with Halloween but it has come to be so through forms of marketing. The domesticated monster and its familiarity has created such an interspersal to occur and one that is now impossible to separate, the monster's presence in a Halloween narrative has become a common facet as has the holiday itself being used as an entirely incidental backdrop. Lisa Morton remarks that the 1978 film *Halloween* may accept some responsibility for establishing Halloween as a suburban 'festival of fear' (pg. 179). Michael Myers stalks his victims on Halloween, his own element of monstrosity being plainly obvious it has only the most arbitrary connection to the holiday and yet one cannot help but be reminded of Halloween and all its trappings when one thinks of the character, even as he himself bears no real relation to it. Then again, as has been remarked, the domestic monster does inspire a zeal of nostalgia where the older generations are concerned.

Dan and Pauline Campagnelli write in the introduction to their book *Halloween Collectables: A Price Guide* (1995) that:

Many of us seem to recall another Halloween from another place and time. There seems to be a Halloween from the innocence of our childhood, filled with candy corn and jack-o-lanterns and candy in orange napkins painted with black cats and flying witches. The memory of it gives us comfort...

(1995, pg. 05)

So then monsters become a comfortable and non-threatening reminder of mortality, a protector and even a friend, especially if those monsters have strayed into realms of the domestic, parody and satire. The Frankenstein Monster manifests a noticeable evolution over the course of its film career, beginning as a piteous creature who accidentally murders children to a character that is embraced by children and in whom pathos and vulnerability are recognized by young audiences. In short, children accept the monster as a friend.

One such monster that has not been accepted into domesticity, however, is Michael Myers. An altogether terrifying figure that remains so precisely because of the realism that is evoked in his composition, not only in terms of his being a home invader but of also being a folk devil, a representation of damaged childhood. Myers is innocence besmirched by murderous impulse and the middle-class parent's fear that their own children could turn out the same way. As Douglas Lopeland notes in *Devil's Advocate: Halloween* (2014), *Halloween* features the 'permissive culture of the 1970's' and a 'generation of privileged teenagers in need of being scared straight' (2014, pg. 72). Myers represents middle class America's

fear of increasing cultural modernity in the ever changing social landscapes of the mid-twentieth century and perceived (in addition to being highly exaggerated) deviations regarding alcohol consumption, experimentation with drugs and freer expression of sexuality. These things exist far from realms of the fantastical. Although they retain some feature of the grotesque, they remain firmly grounded in reality (those that exclude all aspects of the supernatural at least). Myers is unlike his slasher peers, other wise-crackers such as Freddy Krueger or Chucky who have both entered the realm of domestic acceptance and celebration. Myers conversely stands as a continuously silent and ever intimidating shape that conveys only terror.

As for the mythical monster, their ability to continue to impart fear may now lie in the juxtapositions of realistic evil with a fictional counterpart, as allegory may no longer prove effective. Monsters must find direct correlations with the true-to-life and conjure real world horrors. The Nazi vampire is an example and an exceedingly simple one at that, a fanged menace in an SS uniform provides new justification for the perception of Nazism as totally objective modern evil. *The Monster Squad* (1987) offers a prime example of this as the character of the Scary German Guy, an elderly man, is revealed to have a concentration camp tattoo, signifying the presence of those real evils in the midst of fictional threats as posed by Count Dracula.

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In applying this theme of masks and carnival to *The Halloween Tree*, there is a particular scene in the novel which is of concern, as the group of boys enter the home of Moundshroud and discover the Halloween Tree. They are confronted by the former regarding their respective costumes and the boys each failing to understand the significance of them. As Bradbury rather illustriously describes a trick that Moundshroud pulls, first appearing to be a floating skull before revealing himself to the boys in a demonstration of the subversive 'frantic surface jollity', which, in regard to this scene serves as an encapsulation of the phrase 'trick or treat', Moundshroud chooses to answer the boy's summons not by providing sweets but rather by providing an example of his preternatural powers to them. 'Trick or treat' is much more so than an expression; it is a suggestion, a suggestion that insinuates a simple choice between granting edible satisfaction to strangers or the promise of something unknown, something innately mischievous, perhaps even dangerous. Nevertheless it is unusually tantalizing. The anticipation of odd pleasures and the surprise which Moundshroud's own trick provokes conjures in the boys exactly that sense of excitement:

"Trick, yes, trick." The boys were catching fire with the idea. It made all the good glue go out of their joints and put a little dust of sin in their blood. They felt it stir

around until it pumped on up to the light in their eyes and stretch their lips to show their happy dog teeth.

(Bradbury, 1972, pg. 30)

Within the text it remains only an insinuation and to the characters it is a thought, only a hint of something far more grandiose. It is perhaps not quite the 'radical festivity' as Morgan describes. The text insinuates that notion of a surface that conceals the hidden depths of human behaviour, where the boys are concerned this 'dust of sin' in the blood could be an implication of the willingness and desire to commit pranks, the notion of hot blood, as Bakhtin remarks is 'a vision of a world catastrophe' (1965, pg. 335) one that is intimately linked with some form of overwhelming effort much like that of bloody struggles such as war or, more pointedly, criminal misdeeds and debauchery. This also rouses to memory Morton's description of the origins of the modern trick or treat convention, an instillation of order so created to quell the violent activity of young boys in an early part of the 1920's in which the celebration of Halloween had become more odious and prominently 'trick' than it was 'treat' (Morton, pg. 76).

Bradbury himself does exhibit some awareness of the subtly transgressive nature of carnival. His writing may serve to remind his audience that the joys of celebrating Halloween do not extend exclusively to notions of sweetness, innocence or, indeed, even harmless-ness. That the excitement of putting on a costume, something which grants no small modicum of anonymity, may serve to inspire more mis-deeds. By his use of the word 'sin' Bradbury does not merely describe any such negative sensations in innocuous terms. With works by both Foote and Morgan making similar references to religion, it is Bradbury who strikes a more distinctly Abrahamic tone as one part of the narrative features the building of Notre Dame Cathedral. The significance of churches is remarked upon within the text in a scene that is decidedly more sombre than the previous jollification that the novel exhibits. Bradbury proclaims a church as a place where 'a running renegade child can hide and seek sanctuary' (1993), but more specifically as a location that is endowed with a specific concept, or more accurately, an idea to support it, which is in this instance: faith. Organised religion plays an integral role in carnival, though most would not credit it, it exists to challenge what is often recognised as the seemingly moral absolutism of scriptural teachings. Dressing as demons, idling, over-eating and un-inhibited sex, all intended to shock and gall the priest men, yet, much like the carnival tents and grounds, a church is reserved for a purpose that is utterly adverse to that of carnival, a place where order, humility and humbleness hold sway. And, as Bradbury writes, a place which holds off fear and nightmare, which encourages hope and fends off the monsters that plague the imagination:

"What's bigger than demons and witches?"

“Bigger churches?” guessed Tom Skelton.

“Bless you, Tom, right! An idea gets big, yes? A religion gets big! How. With buildings large enough to cast shadows across an entire land. Build buildings you can see for a hundred miles.

(1972, pg. 91)

As much as carnival exists to defy social convention within a specific time and location, and to derive catharsis from such controlled chaos. Churches exist to be the very antithesis of chaos, in which one is taught that actions possess consequences which un-ambiguously decide the ultimate fate of the soul.

In both the novel and its film adaptation the children must each uncover both the historical and symbolic significance of each of their costumes. The costumes of the eight boys vary in purpose. Some, such as the devil or Tom Skelton’s grinning skull mask are entirely obvious in their representations of perennial evil and the embodiment of death. But costumes such as the hobo or gorilla are more obscure, yet remain entirely appropriate as the gorilla is a primordial figure one associated with the inherently bestial part of human nature, much like the regressed form of Mister Hyde. The hobo is transgressive in another way, a representation of the ‘other’ that is as much an exaggeration as any other. It is an exaggeration of the ‘material’ bodily principle, a rejection of the financially destitute who are regarded as almost animalistic, often appearing dirty and lacking the necessary social niceties that would otherwise mark them as acceptable. This is remarked upon by Bakhtin, who writes that critical misinterpretations of medieval texts in the nineteenth century understood the asceticism of the period to be a reflection of the future Renaissance bourgeois character. Yet this was not so, the Victorian confusion can be attributed to its own classist prejudices which sought to revile the character of the poor. Instead Bakhtin offers a more utopian notion that humorous and exaggerated images of the poor and homeless were intended to be entirely ironic as they depicted breaking bread with the rich and engaging in further frivolity, demonstrating their universal connectivity as equal members of a human race given to greed and self-serving:

The material bodily principle in grotesque realism is offered in its all popular festive and utopian aspect. The cosmic, social and bodily elements are given here as an indivisible whole. And this whole is gay and gracious.

(1965, pg. 19)

*The Halloween Tree* has no monsters, monstrous figures exist only as costumes. The main characters also remain passive observers to the events they witness signifying what thematic purpose a monster may serve. In *Trick ‘r Treat*,

however, the theme of masks and monsters is juxtaposed much more plainly and capably, complementing each other on various levels of design that bear individual assessment. It would be more pertinent to describe its objectives as one regarding the nature of disguise and not simply masks, as it becomes more intriguing to consider just how the themes are nestled within one another, like a thematic Matryoshka doll. In terms of disguise what becomes clear is that the theme is so intrinsically connected to the body, there are the usual invocations of the animal, costumes which feature claws and fangs, but more specifically the human body, the manner by which it is framed, fetishized, denigrated and destroyed. Disguises in the film exist in a two-fold manner, split between the literal and the metaphorical, the socially acceptable 'front', a projection of normality to conceal the true identity hidden beneath. The character of Principal Wilkins is a much fuller embodiment of this, a murderous headmaster who is every bit the image of bespectacled amiability. And it is this notion of respectability that concerns us, more specifically, it is a middle class gentility that Wilkins exhibits, a further fulfilment of the Rabelaisian carnival aesthetic. Wilkins with his comfortable well lit home and apple-cheeked, curly haired son also fulfils not only the Rabelaisian but also the Rockwellian, being a part of that idealised slice of Americana, the 'surface jollity' coming once again into play. The revelation that Wilkins is a serial killer should hardly come as a surprise, *Trick 'r Treat* is a film which not only depicts the grotesque but also anticipates it in all of its possible forms and seeks it out wherever it may occur.

The punctuation of Wilkins idyllic suburban setting with dark humour is a testament to this, his son's request to make toffee apples seemingly oblivious to the fact that his father is burying the corpses of children or his denunciation of familiar children's character Charlie Brown as an 'asshole' (Dougherty, 2008) only to then be chastised for his use of the word. Much like Lopeland who describes middle class indignation and suburbia in chaos in *Halloween*, director and screenwriter Michael Dougherty also attempts to have his killer be placed within a chaotic suburbia, but rather than be a direct threat to it like Michael Myers he is a product of it, a killer in his well-crafted role of family man and teacher.

What truly renders the film's theme of disguise intriguing is that it is a depiction of the body undergoing various transformations. As Bakhtin notes 'in Rabelais' work the material bodily principle, that is, images of the human body with its food, drink, defecation, and sexual life plays a predominant role' (1965, pg. 18). The transformation of the body in this film extends to both the fantastical and the grotesque, Wilkins himself is subject to two separate transformations, though these are not transformations which occur within his own body but rather are transformations that he is responsible for or are applied to him, and effectively they are transformations by proxy. The first of these is the murder of a young trick-or-

treater whom Wilkins poisons, establishing his initial role as a victimiser but also fulfilling Bakhtin's assertion that 'the most important of all human features for the grotesque is the mouth. It dominates all else.' (1965, pg. 317). Indeed the second scene, which conversely depicts Wilkins in a state of victimisation and this does well to similarly embody the aforementioned concept as Wilkins is devoured by the werewolf girl Laurie. The mouth is established as an element of the carnival grotesque, Halloween being a holiday that encourages the eating of sweet, sugary foods, handing out treats and especially in this film where the definition of the word treat extends further than aluminium wrapped candies. In this film a treat may well be a victim whose death is dispensed through his being devoured. The death of Wilkins' young victim comes about as the result of the latter's eating a poisoned chocolate bar. The boy's childish greed and corpulent appearance have an air of exaggeration, particularly as he stuffs his bloated red face with more and more sweets. His significant girth also lends his death something of a grim irony, to say nothing of just punishment for his earlier smashing jack-o-lanterns and stealing treats. The character also seems strangely reminiscent of the repugnant fat children as exhibited by children's author Roald Dahl. Characters like Augustus Gloop and Bruno Jenkins also convey condemnations of gluttony. The boy vomits a mix of blood and half-digested chocolate, summoning in the mind of the viewer the bowels in turmoil, which stands a close second to the mouth in terms of grotesque artistic appropriation. As Wilkins is devoured by the werewolf women, the close up of Laurie's grisly maw provides the scene with the necessary sense of escalation, women who transform from idealised erotic figures in repose to shaggy furred monstrosities, the juxtaposition of beauty sexuality and hungry beasts also lends itself to 'positive exaggeration, to hyperbolisation' (pg. 317).

A woman that is sexually aroused and who 'unleashes a beast' within herself by exerting her sexuality is a metaphor that is all too obvious, but then again this film anticipates the hidden grotesque. It quite merrily gives away its own twists and turns, the revelation that the women are werewolves is hardly a revelation at all as there are many joking allusions to it long before it happens. Double entendre and wordplay such as 'I ate some bad Mexican', 'It all tastes the same to me' (2008) and even allusions to the story of the Three Little Pigs would seem to relegate the werewolf women's reveal to more of a particularly voluptuous punchline. It is also Laurie's desire to rid herself of her 'virginity', in actuality her first kill as a werewolf, which is her sole motivation throughout the narrative that is further evidence of the film's dark sense of humour. The thought of murder is likened to something as socially acceptable as exploring one's own sexuality.

Bakhtin writes that other features of the grotesque body include the ability to take on a separate life for itself, 'that they can detach themselves from the body and lead an independent life, for they hide the rest of the body, as something

secondary' (pg. 317). This passage refers to specific parts of the body: the mouth and the nose. But the werewolf provides a symbolic anal, a lower half of human nature that is kept concealed. In the film the transformation is depicted as the women removing their own flesh, quite literally tearing of their own skin and stepping outside of it as a wolf, as easily as if they were removing a costume revealing a second body that is free to function in a manner separate from human social and bodily convention. Embracing the feral and animalistic, free to howl at the moon and consume raw meat. Unlike in *The Halloween Tree* in which monstrous figures can only exist as a costume, here the reverse becomes true, it is not a person inhabiting the costume of a monster, it is the monster who is now inhabiting the costume of a person wearing a human face as though it were a mask.

*Boys in the Trees* makes use of the Little Red Riding Hood metaphor itself. Not only does its protagonist, Jonah, wear a red hoodie but the film similarly portrays male puberty as being analogous to a werewolf transformation. As Jonah describes, 'The stench of twisting, multiplying hormones, it always preceded them' (Vallancey, 2016), the effect of the bullying he was forced to endure, he imagines his bullies transforming into wolf-like creatures, complete with glowing yellow eyes, pointed ears, fangs and claws. The latent female vengeance of *Trick 'r Treat* is exchanged in this instance and the werewolf is returned to its former state as a metaphor for male aggression. However, the rage the werewolves' exhibit is not directed at women but rather at men, or rather in violence perpetrated against teenage boys by other teenage boys. Jonah is a distinctly anxious presence, fearful of his own body's transition through puberty into the adult realm, not least because he fails to fulfil a more archetypal masculine ideal that his tormentors, most notably Jango, so obviously cling to. Here the pubescent werewolf is not purely an expression of male aggression but male anxiety, Jonah is not only the victim of bullying but of displacement, an alienation brought about by an intrusive puberty and burgeoning sexuality. Jonah explains his perceptions of puberty in a suitably Rabelaisian manner, one in which the male teenage body seems to mutate and transform into a state of animalistic independence: "I saw skin disappear beneath unwelcome hair. Voices deepen into growls, like a virus it spread. And once that toxins poisons you, you're capable of doing things you never thought you'd do, all in the name of survival."(2016)

An independence which is gained from the more idealised depiction of a child's body, at least as Jonah perceives. The adolescent werewolf seeks its prey in social outcasts, likened to lambs to the slaughter, 'For those that didn't change, didn't have the taste for blood, there was only one thing you could do, run!' (2016). And unlike the lascivious and siren-like werewolves of *Trick 'r Treat* who display their sexuality openly, the 'werewolves' of *Boys in the Trees* are sexually repressed, though it is not heterosexual repression that occurs as the film lends itself to queer

interpretation as the characters Jonah and Jango can both be interpreted as closeted young gay men. Jango is a bully but his own brand of toxic masculinity, his proclamation that in his hometown he is, 'a god here. Weed to smoke, bitches to fuck, fags to bash' (2016), may well stem from internalised homophobia, especially given the character's obvious expression of jealousy when he observes his friend Corey (or indeed any member of his group) giving a girl romantic attention. When Corey attempts to bolster the same façade by repeating Jango's earlier creed, the girl reacts with immediate disdain; she is evidently not fooled or impressed by Corey's affectation. Jango's insistence that he does not wish to leave the narrow limits of his surroundings maybe likened to his comfort within a proverbial closet. Later in the film Jango expresses rage when he is rejected by Corey and proceeds to destroy everything in his room with the exception of a photograph of the two together. The scene conveys the character's anxieties, his unwillingness to submit to the feelings that can only express, and rather explosively, within a small darkened space. His desire to be perceived as the 'big man', the rampant and aggressive heterosexual with little conscience or attachment demonstrates the conflict of many young homosexual men. In effect Jango is every bit the outcast that Jonah is, and it is perhaps Jango's recognition of a part of himself within Jonah that so provokes his bullying nature.

Jonah also displays an attraction toward Corey, their relationship, though estranged, is deeply mired in a past friendship and Jonah relishes the opportunity to spend time with him. The film presents an inversion of Benshoff's analysis of carnival monstrosity which typically holds that queer audiences demonstrate sympathy, and even identification, with monstrous figures. Because, 'such depictions of queer monsters undoubtedly conflate and reinforce certain sexist or homophobic fears within the public sphere.' Benshoff goes on to say that the appeal of carnival to a homosexual audience is an observation of the 'straight' masses embracing the 'lure of the deviant. Halloween functions similarly, allowing otherwise 'normal' people the pleasures of drag, or monstrosity, for a brief but exhilarating experience' (pg. 13). While there is tangible exhilaration to be found in *Boys in the Trees*, it is not one of excitement but dread, Halloween provides an allotted time in which to conceal one's true identity rather than to express it openly. Jango cannot embrace his orientation and so his manner of celebrating Halloween becomes one of mockery and destruction as he feigns heterosexual behaviour and identity. The symbolism of the mask also extends to both Corey and Jango, Corey attempts to imitate Jango by dressing as a wolf. He is earlier reminded by Jango that in order to, 'run with the wolves, you gotta kill a few lambs' (2016). Corey, dresses as a wolf in an attempt to imitate the machismo behaviour of Jango, but as much as he tries, Corey can only prove himself to be a lamb in wolf's

clothing. It is much the same for Jango who, dressed in a clown mask, declares himself a god and can only prove himself to be a fool.

There are other examples of the body grotesque that *Trick 'r Treat* conveys, the subplot regarding the Halloween school bus massacre, for instance. The character Rhonda is depicted wearing distinctive cat's eye glasses, which, in addition to her introverted demeanour and lack of eye contact are further signifiers of her station as an outcast among the other children. Rhonda, who may very well be identified as being a young woman on the Autism spectrum, stands in some likeness to the 'disturbed' murdered school bus children as she is regarded with the descriptor 'Rhonda the retard' (2008). Though there is nothing physically remarkable about Rhonda herself it was worth mentioning her glasses. Eyes, as Bakhtin writes are not typically regarded as a grotesque feature, unless, that is they are eyes that protruded, 'the grotesque is entertained only in protruding eyes, like those of the stutterer' (pg.316).

Though Rhonda has no actual stutter, her vulnerability and general lack of verbal communication would certainly lend itself to such a mononym. The mentally disabled children aboard the bus are likewise stutterers, incapable of even verbal forms of self-defence. Rhonda is regarded with as much disgust as the unfortunate children by their respective abusers, in the case of the children it is their parents, in the case of Rhonda it is the bullying Marcy. The disabled, or mentally handicapped are often regarded as figures of ridicule, their behaviours become a cruel source of amusement in the carnival aesthetic as the lame are made into court jesters to make sport for kings and noblemen. This convention exists even today, the homeless are painted with clownish grins, and their downtrodden state becomes a form of ruin that is hilarious and vaudevillian to the paying spectator. Rhonda is such a figure, a pensive introvert who is quickly made subject to Marcy's cruelty, victimised much like the murdered children at the hands of their own cruel parents. There is also an element of irony, and it exists solely in the fact that Marcy is dressed as an angel and Rhonda, as a witch. It is like that famous image of tragedy and comedy, the angel is tragedy, a mask of beneficence seeming to be kind to the unfortunate but is in fact cruel and heartless, and the witch, who is comedy, is the image of innocence besmirched by the jeering mob who cannot understand that Rhonda is quite inoffensive and, as ever, is rendered the butt of every joke. Unlike the children, however, Rhonda's glasses emphasize her soft brown eyes thus engendering the sympathies of the audience, especially when compared to the darkly hollow eyed masks of the children which greatly imply that element of 'otherness', rendered ostensibly human in shape but are quickly relegated to little more than jabbering wretches that would seem to confirm the prejudice and fear within their framing.

However, it is not often that the victims should be granted the opportunity to punish their (would be) killers. Speaking now solely in terms of the monstrous the film places Laurie in a Little Red Riding Hood costume, this allows the film an opportunity to explore the significance of female werewolves in fiction. The fairy-tale Little Red Riding Hood is one that is often associated with female puberty and the overtly sexual; the red cloak is often thought to be an allegory for the onset of menstruation and the wolf becomes a metaphor for aggressive male sexuality. If these notions are to be entertained then the thought of a young woman lost and alone in a forest pursued by a dangerous predator, and an undoubtedly masculine one at that, Little Red being a woman robbed of all agency with power being granted only to her aggressor. The manifestation of the she-wolf is an attempt to restore agency and sexual strength to a feminine shape, monstrous as it may become. Denis Dudos writes that a common association that the werewolf has is in the violence committed by men against women. Instances of murder in which a woman is killed by a man may be associated with a kind of eroticism and obsession, especially if we are to assume that murderer and victim fulfil a certain hunter and prey dichotomy. Then in terms of werewolfery, and certainly in the words of Dudos 'For a number of American feminists, there is no mystery in the propensity to hunt women, in this vein it is second nature to men' (1998, pg.77). The hunter becomes inextricably male with the 'prey' being female.

Laurie's werewolf clad in her red hood would so deceptively appear to be prey, weak and demure with Wilkins her would-be attacker, vampirically apparelled poised to kill her only to then be killed himself. The werewolf women demonstrate strength and a confident ease with their bestial nature that not even Wilkin's quietly cautious serial killer displays. When they reveal themselves they display their bodies as both lascivious woman and vicious predator. As they dance they strip away their flesh and with it their human identities, exposing the wolf beneath. It is less a strip-tease than it is a pagan tableaux. But more specifically they remove the projection of the weak and defenceless sex object with which they were initially coloured. *Trick 'r Treat's* werewolfism is effective in terms of it being latent female vengeance The murdered children serve a similar purpose, albeit much more juvenile in nature and the nature of Rhonda's transformation is much more figurative. In both cases their transformations is evident by the devouring of flesh and in terms more metaphorical it is the consumption of one form which there produces, or in this instance, yields the transformative effect that is informed by Bakhtinian concepts. The aforementioned 'gaping mouth' not only consumes but is consumed, one mouth after another building upon itself and growing ever larger. The gruesome deaths of Marcy and her cohorts at the hands (or rather, the mouths) of the zombie children are not only a similarly latent adolescent revenge fantasy but produces a change in Rhonda, a renewal of personality, upon leaving

the rock quarry. Rhonda is made a stutterer no longer, indeed she does not speak at all, and while this may be thought of as an expression of shock, the audience will note that Rhonda is no longer hunched in posture nor does she wear her glasses, all evidence of grotesque exaggeration is removed. As Bakhtin writes, 'The grotesque body, is a body in the act of becoming'. The bodies in this film demonstrate steady evolution, one that is often monstrous but even in that the monstrous has its attractive qualities, instilling not fear but confidence. One cannot help but cheer at the deaths of psychopaths or offending children and from it new forms unfold and become apparent. This state of renewal is continual, 'It is never finished, never completed; it is continually built, created, and builds and creates another body' (1965, pg. 317), Laurie abandons her virginity as much as Rhonda abandons her state as 'retard' and stutterer. Furthermore it explains how a victim becomes a victimiser, how butchers are served as meat and of how a witch is proved an innocent and an angel, cruel.

In conclusion, Halloween is a carnival that proffers an opportunity to dress and behave in a manner that exceeds the normal, the tedious in favour of something fantastical, possibly beyond human. For Ray Bradbury a mask represents a forgotten heritage that is waiting to be explored. During the allotted time of Halloween there is a safe space and a chance to play by the rules of a very singular game. And when the game is finished, when the masquerade is over, the participants may retire to their daily lives with their energies expended and desires released. Or, in the case of *The Halloween Tree*, friends saved and lessons learned. In *Trick 'r Treat* a night of Halloween is celebrated with murderous relish, but there is no aftermath, no investigation, no outcry, that is because that within the context of the film an aftermath is not important as there cannot be consequences beyond Halloween night. Each of the characters returns to their lives now that they have been un-masked, stripped of their guises and their behaviours exhausted. In the true spirit of carnival, Halloween antics are contained solely to this one event and its participants shall wait until they are able to be repeated the following year. *Trick 'r Treat* features a carnival in which flesh is defamed, torn and devoured. In its consummation, the body, as Bakhtin believes, is renewed and so the only aftermath that is permitted to occur is a return to the order and strictures of everyday life, until the time comes when the body degenerates once more, assuming its monstrous forms, its un-inhibited behaviours, so that it can devour that flesh once more.

### **Chapter 03: Mortality**

The purpose of Halloween, at the most intrinsic level, is a celebration of human mortality. Across numerous cultural platforms, the various customs and iconography present one sure and single motif, that of the grim, grinning death's head. Whether it is in the fresh cut leers of North American jack-o-lanterns or in the regality of the Mexican Santa Muerte figure, the implication of death is unavoidable. Death permeates every facet of the holiday. This may provide relatively un-complicated explanation as to why Halloween is a subject so seldom explored in either horror fiction or cinema. If this theme of death persists, not so much with the intention to disturb or upset but rather to provide a sense of ease or reconciliation then an audience may not consider it half so effective as the standard horror fare that so seeks to provide that un-ease and only that un-ease. Remember that Halloween is a comfort and as much as it utilizes macabre imagery for the purposes of temporarily relieving prosaic boredom and conformity, then death in Halloween provides an opportunity to familiarise oneself with the thought of one's own mortality. This will be the purpose of this chapter, an exploration of how mortality is framed and represented within the respective narratives of the chosen texts.

Historically speaking, images of skeletons which dance and cavort among their living hosts have served as a constant artistic reminder of the inevitability of death. The Danse Macabre was a popular motif of the medieval period and a considerable remark upon the transiency of life, that is to say, the fleeting nature of it. As for its association with Halloween, its first pairing came in an earlier part of the sixteenth century, though more than a hundred years had passed since the coming of the Black Death, which at its peak had killed more than a quarter of the population of Central Europe. There could be no doubt that as much as the relative jubilancy of the Feast of All Saints remained that it had also become a time of sombre reflection, death in this time retained much of its sting but, in face of a world now fraught with perilous and increasing modernity as the Renaissance advanced, seemed somehow to be much less intimidating. Lisa Morton remarks that the printing press brought about a proliferation of death in art bringing about a 'common obsession' (2012, pg. 20-21). Further 'flirtations', as it were, with death stemmed from its eroticisation. 'Death and the Maiden', also produced during the Renaissance was a variation upon the Danse Macabre with the notion of death becoming a lover. The passing of the seasons is appropriate in that it bears a compacted resemblance to the nature of life itself, as all things must grow, wither and perish, much like the leaves on the trees or the crops in the field. Samhain marked the end of the harvest season which was also the end of another year. It

should, then, be no coincidence that a scythe not only reaps the grain but also serves as the signature tool of the Grim Reaper. The image of a skeleton with a scythe in hand which roused fear with the promise of a death perpetrated in some violence or traumatic circumstances harkens back significantly to the pagan origins of Halloween as a night to end the harvest season but also as a night of sacrifice and when it was believed that the boundary line that separated life and death became blurred.

It is in the Mexican holiday Dia de los Muertos that the Danse Macabre sees what is perhaps its most notable reprisal. The annual celebration, which endures for a period of three days between the 31<sup>st</sup> of October and the 2<sup>nd</sup> of November, features multiple honourations to the dead though the most common remains the gathering of family members around the graves of loved ones in local cemeteries and the lighting of candles. Other such traditions include the baking of the Pan de Muertos, bread that is baked with small candied ghosts kneaded into the dough and its most enterprising convention, sugar candy skulls inscribed with the names of children. Ofrendas, or altars adorned with photographs and the personal belongings of deceased family members along with crucifixes and statues of the Virgin Mary are also common. During this time prayers are also offered to those who had died in tragic circumstances such as accident victims or un-baptised children. The Mesoamerican influence on Dia de los Muertos, such as that of the Mayans and Aztecs is also unmistakable as the addition of Catholicism not only serves as a reminder of the Celtic pagan element found within modern Halloween celebrations but also of the attitudes that are juxtaposed between opposing cultures, toward death and the afterlife.

In Mayan mythology the underworld, Xibalba, was the domain of the death gods, the most significant of which was Mictantecuhtli, a place of fear in which the souls of the dead were humiliated for all eternity and subject to the whims of the gods. Much like the Celtic pagans whose polytheism was abhorred by the Christians, the capricious cruelty of these Mayan gods was ultimately replaced with the merciful and mysterious God of the Catholic Church, though many of the customs of that former culture persisted. Death itself in Maya was portrayed much like a hunt led by the ghostly Wayoub. These 'man hunts' were often thought to be characteristic of animal attacks, vicious and un-remitting. The god Uacmitun Ahau was depicted as a skeleton rather than animal being one such Wayoub. It is likely that the character of the Wayoub inspired Santa Muerte, a skeleton robed in a similar manner to the Virgin Mary, an attempt by the Catholics to conflate and replace the sinister Wayoub with thoughts of benevolence and motherly selflessness.

Of course the fact that both Halloween and Dia de los Muertos are holidays evoked by the changing of the seasons is not without its own significance. As has been described, the Celtic pagans attributed the end of the harvest season to signify the symbolic death of one year and the rebirth into another, though they were hardly the first ancient society to think this. Though they did not have any holiday or celebration which would provide an analogue to Halloween within their own culture, the ancient Egyptians associated the passing of not only the years but also day and night with death. In the narrative of their most revered god Ra, a god of the sun and creator of all life. Ra was challenged by Apophis, a serpent who spread chaos and darkness and consumed the sun god leading his way into the underworld. It was believed that Apophis brought the night itself, the night being a time of rest. The cessation of the daylight hours roused in the Egyptians thoughts of life and death; as a result temples reserved for mummification were built to the west. Bradbury is himself not reticent of these notions having his character Moundshroud remark upon such a significance. Using light and darkness as metaphors for life and death is exceedingly common, resounding in various cultures across the world and it is seldom that the colour black does not come to mean evil or death in some way.

Death in children's fiction is a subject relatively unexplored, though the shadow of death certainly hovers over the language, discreetly inserted into the occasional sentence or exclamation of surprise. J.M Barrie describes his Peter Pan in terms not unlike that of a psychopomp (a mythical entity which escorts the deceased to an afterlife), explaining that: 'he would go part of the way with them so they would not be afraid' (1911, pg. 12). In this way Peter Pan becomes reminiscent of the Greek god Hermes escorting the dead to the afterlife, Barrie further provides him with the fearless proclamation that, 'To die would be an awfully big adventure' (1904). Lewis Carroll terrorizes his girl protagonist Alice with constant threats of decapitation, which are then comically brushed aside as being of no consequence. The relative good and easy humour, along with an appetite for the nonsensical so apparent in the Victorian fairy story is not so recognisable in its more archaic form. The stern didacticism demonstrated by Perrault and the Grim Brothers would seem to indicate a sort of unnaturalness concerning death; such as the waxen preserved beauty of *Snow White* and the *Sleeping Beauty*, the cannibalism of *Hansel and Gretel's* blind witch and Bluebeard, along with the murderous inclinations of the *Juniper Tree's* wicked step-mother. Death in those stories serves as a consequence of cruel action or a murderous plot, so rarely is death serene. Marina Warner observes that these fairy stories create an aesthetic out of fear which then becomes a means of 'strengthening the sense of being alive' (pg. 06). Warner explains that innately frightening narratives may endow audiences with the features of their worst fears and in doing so have become boogeymen (if

only in the figurative sense of becoming) 'pretending to the extremes of violence and aggression, may have become the most favoured way of confronting fear in times of anxiety and disarray' (pg. 16). Karen Coats writes a treatise on the subject of fear in children's literature using Neil Gaiman's picture book *The Wolves in the Walls* (2003) as a subject. Coats explains, 'in this book Gaiman uses gothic convention to dress up a common childhood fear and then dress it down again with humour' (2001, pg. 83). Gaiman's story about a young girl named Lucy who fears that a pack of vicious wolves maybe living within the walls of her home, is not only an exercise in determining, what is often, the irrationality of small children's fears but also in giving a voice to those fears, exploring them in the comically abstract and claiming, 'some mastery over un-founded anxieties.'

While the anxieties in *Casper* are not quite so unfounded, the fear of death and the loss of beloved relatives are certainly not rendered in any terms that could be deemed abstract nor are they so irrational in this instance. The humour that, nonetheless, exists in the framing of the ghosts themselves (becoming a ghost is apparently a common enough occurrence in this world) also conforms to popular archetypal interpretations of ghosts and are exceedingly non-threatening as a result, coming off as entirely silly. What is not, however, is the subject of loss that the film raises, protagonist Kat manages her emotions regarding the death of her mother and it is in meeting Casper and in forming a friendship with the friendly little ghost that she is able to overcome her fear of death and sustain some hope of an afterlife. The narrative of *Casper* seems to fulfil the effect as posited by Coats, of a story that 'plays in the spaces between the quite reasonable emotional anxiety that children (and adults) feel at the threat of loss, and the irrational forms that fear can sometimes take' (pg. 83).

But neither Warner nor Coats says anything with regard to the commonalities of death, of those deaths that come quickly and without suspicion, those deaths caused by illness and accident, those deaths that have nothing to do with the fantastical. As mentioned previously, Casper explains his death as being the result of pneumonia, a death which is devoid of descriptions of suffering, save for the grief of his bereft father. In this way a ghost, even a child ghost, maybe calm and collected regarding their own death, Casper himself does not express great disappointment in the absence of life, only in the absence of certain opportunities such as romance. The theme of death takes precedence in this film where it is accepted with grace, dignity and quiet solemnity, most notably by Kat's mother who has already ascended to Heaven and who is able to guide her still living family, allowing them to find solace. But a question persists, that if death becomes a theme of sole, or at least primary narrative concern especially within children's literature, then what is the manner by which death is depicted and to what purpose?

If the nature of childhood is to be understood as coming to terms with the most primordial of tests and experiences, the stages of various 'firsts' that a child may surpass, then surely the greatest of these is coming to terms with their own mortality. The fact that a child will meet death in some form is unavoidable, such as the passing of a loved one or pet. But literature may provide a more rounded and encapsulated form of contextualisation. That is to say the relative simplicity of children's literature may make it so much clearer. Furthermore it is a symbiosis that emerges, existing between the character(s) and the reader. The effect of the narrative is best proved when their young readers are able to gain sympathy for the protagonist or to apply the situation and the lessons learnt to their own circumstances. In her introduction to 'A Game Called Death' (2001), Geraldine Brennan extols the themes of children's authors such as David Almond, Phillip Gross and Lesly Howarth and explains that games often recur within these novels. If death (or at least the reconciliation to the inevitability of death) is a challenge to be overcome as I have already mentioned, a structured scenario such as a game or a ritual in the best way for a child to 'tackle fear of death, loss or displacement, build their identities and preserve them intact, and, in some cases influence others for their own ends' (Brennan, pg. 93).

Much like carnival there is a catharsis to be gained by permitting the opportunity to experience the fear of death, especially as it is a fear that is, perhaps, too extreme to experience on a day to day basis. By clearing a space or designating a time and or place, setting the rules of the game as it were, the fear of death maybe faced head on, and, so long as the rules are followed, the child can emerge from the game safely and with the necessary recourse is able to re-enter society with some measure of comfort, if insight is gained and the obstacle is overcome. All games, even the most innocuous, contain some element of danger even if it is only imaginary and the threat of death or murder such as *Murderer in the Dark* or *What is the Time Mr. Wolf?* In further parallels to carnival, Brennan writes that games, 'also offer a framework for measuring ourselves against unspeakable challenges and trying out identities that we dare not adopt in life. They provide a safe, time limited structure for accessing challenging fears' (Brennan, pg. 92).

If we are to accept that death is a part of the carnival aesthetic, then we must also accept that skeletons wielding scythes and emaciated corpses are images to be placed alongside those of rowdy revellers, overfed bellies and grotesque masquerade. And if the state of carnival is a combination, a comorbidity of the body and the state undergoing continuous renewal, then surely death is the most ultimate form of renewal, a state of emergence from one life into another. The Egyptians likened their own state of death, all wrapped in linens and carefully preserved, to the chrysalis of a butterfly ready to emerge into a new state of being.

The opportunity to assume a different guise, one that is more fantastical and exaggerated or more idyllic than the simple mundanity of ordinary life that may in some way be a pale imitation of an afterlife. The soul separates from the body to experience whatever variations of a hereafter may or may not exist. And it may be said that the many underworlds and heavens accounted for in this introduction are as colourful as any painted mask.

Games certainly feature quite prominently in *The Halloween Tree*. The adventures of the children begin with an exclamation of, 'Ready, set, Go!' (Piluso, 1993). Blithely unaware of the extent or, indeed, the precariousness of their friend Pipkin's condition, their journey begins with a simple challenge by Moundshroud that in order to rescue their friend they must, 'solve two mysteries in one. Search and seek for lost Pipkin and solve Halloween, all in one full dark blow?' (Bradbury, pg. 39). The nature of Bradbury's prose is exceedingly metaphorical; despite the novel striking a fantastical tone and the magic within its framing it lacks the more obvious measures of exactitude in its language. That is to say, Bradbury does not attempt to ground himself with more concrete mythologies or even locations. *The Halloween Tree* is a novel that seems to exist in areas which are only ostensibly modern and American. The exact time and period are left vague as if the intention is to allow them to inhabit some part of the readers' imagination given to entirely to nostalgia as though the town they read about would better fit within their minds as the towns they themselves lived in as children. The town is introduced with an assononic couplet, 'It was a small town by a small river and a small lake in a small northern part of a Midwest state' (pg. 03). With this Bradbury is able to convey a certain degree of whimsy, one that is slightly reminiscent of children's authors such as Theodore Giesel (Dr. Seuss). Bradbury also places his town strictly within terms that are indelibly connected to children, recall Dan and Pauline Campbell's statement about the nostalgic properties of Halloween, of how, 'many of us seem to recall another Halloween from another place and time' (1995, pg. 05). Bradbury places this description more succinctly into words, his town being full of the common exploits and activities of children; 'The town was full of trees. And full of fences to walk on and sidewalks to skate on and a large ravine to tumble in and yell across.' (pg. 03). A lack of precise location was always irrelevant. Bradbury's town does not exist within any world that could accurately be described as 'real'; instead it occupies a sort of no place, a never where in which the many joys and comforts of idyllic youth hold a permanent sway.

Bradbury warps reality to suit his purposes and creates a variety of nowheres and neverwhens, and this reality warping extends into every corner of the locations that the novel visits. It is not so much that the children are being literally transported to Ancient Egypt, but rather that a version of Egypt is created for the children to see, an Egypt that bears resemblance to old horror movies,

where mummies are constantly being prepared for burial, where tombs open to displaced spooks who freely roam the streets. Bradbury's version of Ancient Ireland and Britain is similarly coloured with images of scythe wielding gods that rain down flurries of insects and chorusing Christians who merrily burn supposed witches at the stake.

To further explain my assertion of Bradbury's text as being largely metaphorical in its construction, I will utilize a study by Walsh who explains that the intention of author Lucy Lane Clifford is also to produce a narrative of deeply metaphorical proportions in *The New Mother* (1882). Walsh states that Clifford's intention is to continually confuse her audience by offering no clear delineation in perspective between what is intended to be either literal or metaphorical. Walsh writes of Clifford's novel that she seems to view childhood in a state of constant flux, one that in the words of Walsh herself is continually alternating and which is, 'produced as a stage between other states of being between a past and a future' (pg. 185). Bradbury is similar, as I have mentioned the novel is never precisely clear as to whether the children have literally gone back in time or if all that they see is merely an illusion. The reader will note that Moundshroud is adept at trickery having previously been able to make himself appear as a floating skull. So often it would appear as though Moundshroud is allowing the children to see the things that he specifically wants them to notice, often being the first to call attention to certain details:

"But," said Moundshroud.

"Notice anything different?"

(pg. 49)

In another example, he describes the intended destination of their travels not as 'the past' or in any specific term, but rather as the, "Undiscovered Country. The place I wanted to show you." (pg. 38). It is with terms such as 'the undiscovered country' that we come once again to the theme of death, for while childhood is in such a state of flux in Bradbury's novel and as authors like Lucy Lane Clifford have described, *The Halloween Tree* does not oscillate just between past and present but also life and death. The past is intended to convey one simple fact that with the passing of time there comes an end to life. And this is not found only in subtext but something stated outright in the text that, metaphorically speaking, the passing of the seasons, night and day all serve as the immutable fact of death's imminence. As Moundshroud sings out;

"Night and day. Summer and winter, boys. Seedtime and harvest. Life and death. That's what Halloween is, all rolled up in one."

(pg. 138)

This novel and its film adaptation feature a story whose purpose it is to acquaint children with thought of their own mortality. The text confronts this, consider in particular the scene in which Tom Skelton attempts to coax the dying Pipkin from within a Mexican tomb;

“Pip!” said Tom behind his mask. “You got to come out.”

“I can’t.” Pip sobbed. “They won’t let me.”

“They?”

But they knew he meant the long line of mummies. In order to get out he would have run the gauntlet between the nightmares, the mysteries, the dreadful ones, the dires and the haunts.

(pg. 128)

While the description of the scene is vague and poorly defined, it is an attempt to define that state between life and death (and the uncertainty and anxiety such a state would naturally create). Bradbury affords the scene a greater tangibility by playing on fears of dark and enclosed spaces. But more than that, the tunnel which divides and separates the dying Pipkin from his friends provides an allegory for, not only death itself, but more specifically the mortal fear and thought of death, which Bradbury has placed most clearly within a child’s perspective. The children take part in a holiday that celebrates death and are surrounded by skeletons in a musty graveyard. There can be no greater signifier of death than those. A frightening setting that is made all the more terrifying when the children find themselves facing the prospect of losing a loved one and Bradbury capably supplies a child’s dread of death:

For Pipkin was crying again, and all the mummies wailing and the night so dark in the long tomb hall that you would sink right through the floor if you stepped on it, and never move again.

(pg. 128)

The insinuation in this passage is also that death is a loss of, not only life but of self, autonomy and perception. The notion that one sinks down into death, unable to leave the graveyard that might have once provided Warner’s aesthetic thrill is now mournful and devoid of mirth or fun. Bradbury is presenting his young audience with the opportunity to come to terms with thoughts of their own demise which is by a means of sacrifice. The sacrifice that Moundshroud demands to save their friend, is a single year from the end of their lives. The game of death, as it is

played in this instance has only one prize to be won, and that is knowledge. The children gain a knowledge of their heritage, the history of Halloween but they have gained knowledge of a more personal and resonating nature, that they must face death and accept it. Bradbury informs these notions with delicacy and sensitivity, he offers no promise of an afterlife but he transplants a thought, a thought that appears in the mind of Tom Skelton. A telepathic conversation that occurs between Skelton and Moundshroud, heavily implies that Moundshroud is himself, a personification of death:

Will we meet again, Mr Moundshroud?

Many years from now, yes, I'll come for you.

And a last thought from Tom:

O Mr. Moundshroud, will we ever stop being afraid of nights and death?

And the thought returned:

When you reach the stars, boy, yes, and live there forever, all the fears will go, and death himself will die.

(pg. 143)

Much like the 'dust of sin', Bradbury summons once more to mind his Christian influence. The conversation between Moundshroud and Tom is reminiscent of a passage within Revelations of the New Testament. In the film adaptation this exchange does not occur but is instead replaced by a much simpler piece of didacticism, albeit one that seems much more forceful and less refined than the novel as it states its objectives much more overtly, as Tom declares, "Maybe, if we face death eyeball to eyeball, it loses its power over us, it can't scare us!" (Piluso, 1993). It is a statement which most certainly lacks in subtlety though, for its child audience it can have an undoubtedly empowering effect, unlike the novels abstraction, the relative simplicity of this statement, one that lacks in condescension and with sincere conviction that maybe held dear as it is passed from child to child.

Mr. Moundshroud is a figure who, much like the very holiday that he champions, is entirely amorphous, amorphous in shape, in objective and in convictions. As mentioned previously, he is a character heavily implied to be some manifestation of death, a psycho-pomp, personifying the end of life. Death is a subject that, as we have discussed, is rarely depicted quite as openly as it is here in children's fiction. I have mentioned already *Casper*, a film in which death, or more specifically coming to terms with the death of a loved one, is a prominent theme and also Barrie's Peter Pan, who serves to escort dead children to the afterlife. We

are told of this this function and it is an intriguing addition to the Pan mythos it is relegated to little more than a passing reference and certainly not one that Peter performs in the course of the narrative. Furthermore, Peter Pan, the impish eternal child dressed in a costume of skeleton leaves, is hardly how one would expect a manifestation of death to look. Death certainly informs the character, however, the death of Barrie's own brother at the age of fourteen served as an inspiration, particularly as Barrie's mother found comfort in the thought that he would never grow up to leave her. Moundshroud is a character comprised of death, of all the little signifiers that one would commonly associate with the morbid; a tall and imposing figure, dressed in a flowing black cloak, his ancient skin dry and wrinkled and eyes that are, 'small pin-points of green fire in little charred pits of sockets' (pg. 21). Even Moundshroud's name, Carapace Clavicle Moundshroud, refers to bones and burial clothes.

When questioned about the nature of Pip's disappearance Moundshroud states that Pipkin is being 'ransomed' by death. Asked if this is possible Moundshroud replies, "Sometimes, yes" (pg. 39). Ultimately this notion of death as being something that maybe bargained or negotiated with proves true as Moundshroud barter with each of the children to save Pipkin's life. Unlike previous examples in fiction where playing a game against a personification of death proves futile such as *The Seventh Seal* (1957). In this instance it is proved successful as death is much more merciful in this iteration, though they are left still with death's surety that now their lives maybe shorter and that someday they will be faced with the consequences of such a decision as Moundshroud exclaims, 'You may not miss it now, but in sixty years, seventy-two or eighty when I come for payment' (1993).

To the children Moundshroud is not a figure that incites fear but rather excitement, leading the children on with the promise, at least in part, that they might save their friend:

"So," said Mr. Moundshroud. "All the more reason for you to come along, lads. If we fly fast, maybe we can catch Pipkin. Grab his sweet Halloween candy corn soul. Bring him back, pop him in bed, toast him warm, save his breath. What say, lads? Would you solve two mysteries in one? Search and seek for lost Pipkin, and solve Halloween all in one fell dark blow?"

(pg. 39)

His language is entreaty, Moundshroud draws the children to him and in his final conversation with Tom Skelton he intimates a greater sensitivity and understanding as he imparts sympathy regarding Tom's mortal fear of death. Moundshroud's voice in this exchange demonstrates a sage solemnity which approximates what is perhaps the novel's single greatest element of his character,

as that of the mentor who teaches children to become comfortable with thoughts of death and, in both his and others love of Halloween, to celebrate life, in particular theirs and the lives of their friends.

There are also other elements of Moundshroud's character that are noticeable within the text, ones that seem to be comprised of other disparate mythologies. As an example, Moundshroud escorts the children in search of a dying companion into other worlds, much like Hades in the myth of Orpheus or the Roman poet Virgil who escorted Dante Alighieri in *The Divine Comedy* (1320). Moundshroud's station as some psycho-pomp or figure representing death is further enforced in a scene from the film adaptation in which Moundshroud presents a business card inscribed with the words 'Time Management'. The deal that Moundshroud shares with the children would seem to have certain features that one would associate with the Faustian bargain. Moundshroud maybe a personification of death, but he is also one of obscure origin and one that apparently cannot cross the threshold of a church. In the film adaptation the character is noticeably more sinister than his literary counterpart; however it is the altruistic nature of the deal that would seem to spare Moundshroud any further implications of the demonic.

It is also worth noting that in the film adaptation a ghostly voice emanates from Pipkin's pumpkin that seems to entice Pip to run further from Moundshroud, echoing a refrain of 'live forever' (1993). The ultimate implication of this is that one cannot out-run one's fate (even if they earn a temporary reprieve) as death is the natural order and any attempt to prolong life beyond its natural limits is an offence to that nature; or that, perhaps, children with little experience of death would attempt to run from it until they can run no longer, or at least until the child comes into some form of assurance that life or consciousness exist beyond death.

As mentioned before, there are puberty metaphors in *Boys in the Trees*, but they do not end with werewolfism. There is a second metaphor beneath it, one that is more elegantly crafted and concerned entirely with death. As Brennan described it begins, fittingly, with games and continues, as per Halloween tradition, with telling stories. Jonah lays the foundation for a game to be played between himself and Corey, a game called Cocytus, which is explained as crossing, 'a veil of sin, and once it is crossed, we leave the mortal realm behind' (2016). Furthermore, Cocytus is a game derived from an Aborigine children's game that was intended to teach them how to avoid specifically dangerous areas of the Outback. Cocytus entreats the protagonists to go on a journey of self-discovery, one that has been explained in an earlier chapter and has the effect of reconciling their estranged friendship, but at the same time exploring their mortality. The film exhibits Brennan's thought that a game of death permits its young participants to build upon their own identities,

Corey and Jonah not only build their identities but are made to assert them against the various tribulations and the apathy of youth.

To begin, death has taken a considerable role in the formation of the young heroes' identities as both have suffered the loss of their respective mothers. Jonah's fascination, and indeed, perhaps, his dependence on drawing from stories as a comfort, stems from his mother who, it is explained feared her own premature death. Later in the narrative it is revealed that Jonah is dead and that Corey has been receiving his stories from a ghost. But it is the thought of an early demise, at least in Jonah's mind, that spurs the thought of seeking companionship and his profound disappointment in an un-sympathetic peer group that rejects and bullies him and further drives him to suicide. For Jonah the comforts of fantasy stories and games provide a form of companionship, one that possesses a significance far deeper than mere friendship. It is instead motherly love and a distraction from the pain of growing up and attempts to integrate into the adult world. Reaching adulthood is, after all, a period marked by profound confusion and frustration. A scene which best illustrates this is a conversation between Corey and his girlfriend Romany on the subject of former friendships. Corey fails to recognize Romany's growing attraction towards him which causes Romany to burst out in a rage at him denouncing his opaque perspective and deriding his failure to mature quickly enough. She rages that teenage boys are stuck, 'with their heads in the trees' (2016), Corey responds that boys do indeed want to grow up but that a part of them does not want to stop 'climbing trees' (2016). The tree has served as a constant symbol connected, universally, to concepts of life and death. Trees in various mythologies such as the Biblical Tree of Knowledge, the Norse Yggdrasil or the Swedish Vardtræl, the 'warden tree' which was believed to grow either from the birth or death of every soul. The 'tree' the title refers to is the idyllic past, the many joys and comforts of childhood. An example of this occurs when, in order to escape the dark and encroaching shades, Corey urgently suggests that they, 'go back where the dreams are true' (2016), before climbing a larger, brilliantly lit tree littered with the toys and playthings of their youth.

As mentioned previously, the stories that Jonah and Corey tell one another ultimately inspire Corey to follow his dreams and ambitions. Corey matures throughout the narrative abandoning his previous nihilism taught to him by Jango, asserting himself and reconnecting with Jonah whom he had abandoned, and learning to embrace life more fully. Daniel Panter writes in *Eco-gothic* (2013), that authors such as Algernon Blackwood, who often utilised naturalistic settings within his stories and would, as Panter suggests, assert a, 'broader view of nature within which these human concerns, become partly trivialised' (2013, pg. 46). The 'trivial concerns' of Panter's view is the transitional state between life and death, and one which Jonah and *The Halloween Tree's* Pipkin have experienced. Indeed the

liminality of both characters continues to lend itself to metaphors regarding a past state and the inevitable future state of death. The ghostly Jonah and Pipkin both concern themselves with childhood happiness, a happiness that must be shattered, or ended by the steady progression of time, Jonah in particular, existing in that state between life and death represents his desire to longer forever caught between childhood and adulthood and of being too afraid to progress forward. It is only when pains of adolescence are reconciled and forgiven that both characters can establish themselves more fully, emerging from the game of Cocytus as firm friends, with Corey able to fulfil his dreams and Jonah able to depart from life into a peaceful death.

Furthermore, unlike Pipkin who earns a reprieve from death, Jonah *must* die. The 'trivial matters' of *Boys in the Trees* are not death but life. The film demonstrates that death is relatively easy; even the personification of death which the film presents is an in-offensive middle-aged man dressed in a white suit who exudes no outwardly threatening guise, but instead sings to the dead. It is much more difficult to face life, to reconcile friendships failed or loves shared, to realize a dream or one's own mortality. To realize that there are real monsters, though they are not werewolves or shadow creatures, but rather the innately human tendency to fail, or to derive pleasure from cruelty, regardless, death is not the hardest part. Ray Bradbury's *The Halloween Tree* teaches the boy within us not to fear death, but *Boys in the Trees* teaches the man within the boy not to fear life and that the truly hard part is simply to live.

Returning once more to the subject of Cocytus, it is intriguing that the film should attempt to appropriate an element of a culture that does not belong to the white Australian in much the same manner that Dia de los Muertos appropriates elements of Mesoamerican culture for its own purposes. What is more intriguing besides is that the figure of death in this film is an Aborigine man wearing a white suit. The typical colour scheme is reversed here as rather than a pallid white face wrapped in a dark cloak, it is a dark skinned man in white coloured clothing. This variation on death's design is one which, perhaps, hints at a post-colonial interpretation of the film. This meeting of cultures, which resounds in the history of Halloween (the Spanish Catholic usurpation of the Mesoamerican, or the British white which currently dominates the Aboriginal), carries with it further implications of the liminal and the carnivalesque. Everything on Halloween exists in a state of in-betweenness: characters such as Pipkin and Jonah are caught in a state between life and death, and protagonists such as Tom Skelton and Corey are ever to be found in a process of self-actualisation, steadily awakening from an un-conscious state wherein they formerly understood little or nothing and now reach for that understanding, grasping for the future and death. And in the midst of all this there are the myriad of cultures which make up the holiday, continually dressed up and

down again in an assortment of guises from Samhain to Snap Apple Night to All Hallows Eve, and in nations British, Italian, Germanic, American and Mexican. The difficulties inherent for the protagonist to discern their identities also become the difficulty in identifying the culture most influential in the composition of Halloween. But death also has a multitude of identities, and in fiction two have been identified in *The Halloween Tree* and in *Boys in the Trees*. Emerging first in *The Halloween Tree* is the wizened sage Moundshroud and then the singing reaper in *Boys in the Tree*, a simple man in a suit, who, unlike Moundshroud does not speak, but merely follows Jonah throughout the night. A strange apparition, one that is rendered an 'other' due to his silence, and also his race. The film juxtaposes this psycho-pomp as being the only character of colour when compared to a cast comprised almost entirely of Caucasian actors. The notability of this concurs with the film's theme of the outsider; Jonah himself is 'othered' not only due to suspicions by his classmates regarding his sexuality, but also by his failure to suit masculine archetypes. Though it may be purely circumstantial, the manner by which Jonah and Corey are distinguished is by the colour of their hair, Jonah has dark, curly hair whilst Corey is blonde. The colouring of the two boys, the light and the dark, gives further credence to this colonialist metaphor. The two are continuously, inexorably, separated by forces which expound their differences, differences which are imagined in terms of station, Jonah is friendless and 'un-cool', whereas Corey is popular. Corey is also perceived as heterosexual, whilst Jonah is condemned for his perceived homosexuality.

The analogy of marginalised race, caught between opposing forces of culture in addition to life and death becomes all too obvious. And so the manifestation of death as a black man that loiters at the corners and edges of white society is all at once poignant and appropriate.

In conclusion, there are scenes in Renaissance art forms in which Rabelais draws from scenes of death which feature the de-crowning of kings amidst scenes of defecation. It is in art that the feudal order is perverted, and the denigration of a figure associated with divine right and the admonishment of un-equal structures within society; the death of a king deluged in excrement is humorous but also of the utmost offence. In *Trick 'r Treat* there are no kings, but there remain symbols of authority, Principal Wilkins being the most prevalent. Wilkins' death at the hands of the werewolf women is intended to be ironic. Wilkins is a sexual predator who is killed by heavily sexualised predators, one of which, Laurie, he intended to victimize himself. The death of Mr. Kreeg is similarly ironic: the character is unpleasant, frightening young trick or treaters and stealing their candy. He seems to reform after he is tormented by Sam but is soon revealed to have been the bus driver responsible for the Halloween school bus massacre. Ultimately he is found and devoured by his zombified former charges. Both characters are established as

figures that incite fear and commit atrocious acts, their deaths are punchlines as the dominant role of terroriser they so wish to fill is undermined, removed quite out from under them and taken by others. While they are left weakened, beaten and stripped of any further agency, the Rabelaisian insult against the state and the king as both neighbour and teacher endure an ignominious and humiliating death and defeat.

The monsters of *Trick 'r Treat* are left unpunished as they are only creatures which are fulfilling their natural inclinations to hunt. For all the audience knows there may be an entire eco-system of supernatural creatures who live and hunt this way, hidden from humanity in plain sight. Contrast this to the machinations of bully Marcy and her cohorts who act out of pure malice in their attempt to humiliate Rhonda. Their punishment, aside from being well deserved, would seem to be the answer to a cosmic joke, the tables turned, as it were. The dead of *Trick 'r Treat* are all guilty of some infraction, in short, there is no character killed that does not deserve it. This would suggest not only a cosmic humour, but also, perhaps, a universal order, after all death is not random nor is it visited upon the innocent. There is no true element of the chaotic within the film despite the violence.

Conversely, *The Halloween Tree* depicts a cosmology in which shifts in certain cultural practices and an understanding of one's own mortality are intrinsically linked where Halloween is concerned. In order to understand Halloween at all, the children must first understand that death is inevitable. Halloween is a celebration of death, and that, as one Halloween ends and another is celebrated the next year. Then, like the passage of the years or the transition between the seasons, in its constant cycle of life and death, death and re-birth. This is explored in a relatively gentle manner as the children learn the lesson played much like a game and under the supervision of a mysterious mentor that imparts wisdom where the children lack. Moundshroud could hardly be called a king, nor is he deserving of any kind of humiliation, but the character does approximate something representing a divine order as it is implied that he is a personification of death. Unlike the harsh and un-yielding depictions of the Grim Reaper, Moundshroud is an excitable though gentle presence that is capable of offering comfort and, at least, some guarantee of life after death. *The Halloween Tree* itself serves as an extension of that metaphor, being adorned with many jack-o-lanterns that represent centuries worth of Halloween celebration, and, it is implied, the souls of the dead. Nature once again conveys the analogy, a microcosmic understanding of life and death. A tree blossoms, then withers and dies. But so long as stories are told, histories are remembered and celebrations change, then they are given renewed life and so the Halloween tree can blossom again.

## Conclusion

The purpose of this thesis was to explore the significance of the Halloween narrative, as well as to further establish Halloween as a significant and coherent storytelling strand within horror, and to expound upon the cultural significance of Halloween festivities in literature and cinema. In attempting to establish this conceit, I have made connections, often tenuous in nature with other modes of discourse to further explore the textual metaphors in *The Halloween Tree*, *Trick 'r Treat* and *Boys in the Trees*. As there exists so little discourse on the subject of Halloween and as there are so few texts to analyse, my task was not an easy one. There is a marked lack of novels, television programmes and films that actually exist which explore the cultural importance of Halloween, especially when in reference to a wider sphere of horror study.

Throughout each chapter I have remarked that the Halloween narrative is subversive in nature. It draws upon a wealth of horror and gothic tropes and conventions but with the effect of settling fears and diffusing tensions. In each story, terror becomes subverted by humour or by a series of games and stories which, when enacted or told by their characters, have the effect of providing resolution to trials and challenges. The gothic qualities that are inherent in the Halloween narrative enable the sub-genre to transform aspects of the over-arching horror genre by the subjective qualities (such as those remarked by Halberstam) that are inherent in both. The Horror genre is regularly transformed and influenced over time by its audience, tastes, contexts and time periods, in much the same way that the gothic has. The Halloween narrative, conversely, draws upon gothic nightmare fantasies and archetypal monster staples and its own enduring mythologies and histories to create a unique contrast in which terror within the narrative is perceived as joyful and comforting.

Halloween narratives continue to reflect the more subversive facets of the horror genre. In these films monsters are indelibly abhuman caught between states of monstrosity and humanity, that challenge perceptions of 'self' and 'other' and where a constant reversal of roles that subvert expectation and render monsters and humans mirror reflections for one another. Death is made and rendered entirely non-threatening, such as the depiction of the psycho-pomp Moundshroud as a mentor figure, one who facilitates a child's understanding of the afterlife. Both *Boys in the Trees* and *The Halloween Tree* utilize themes of mortality to explore cultural longevity and not only cultural anxiety.

In making the connection between horror cinema and children's media, there is a study by Kimberly Reynolds in her introduction to *Frightening Fictions* in which she explains that horror fiction, when intended for a child audience, renders horror safe and comfortable. The reason that I endeavoured to examine the

discourse surrounding children's literature is because of the prevalence of texts that both concern children as the protagonists and are intended for children. Not only does this connect to the theme of liminalism that has appeared previously, as the bildungsroman narrative that *The Halloween Tree* and *Boys in the Trees* utilize reflects the notion that adolescence, being caught between childhood and adulthood, is analogous to the state between life and death, but, it is also how a child audience affects readings of a horror text. Much like Skal, Reynolds suggests that children alter the effect of horror to be one that enables a sense of security: 'Whereas traditionally horror has been characterised by the drive to leave readers uneasy and fearful in the face of uncertainty – Did they happen? Has the threat been vanquished? – much of the fiction now sold as horror and with a juvenile audience in mind is notable for the sense of security is ultimately engenders. Instead of ambiguous endings, the closure of these novels is typically a disclosure in which what was thought to be inexplicable is explained, what seemed dangerous and menacing is made safe and often even comfortable.' (2001, pg.02)

Reynolds suggests that a child's text is devoid of the ambiguity usually intended for an adult audience and so horror must have a resolution. This is exemplified most strongly in the Halloween narrative, as resolution is also a necessity, not only for children but also for their grown-up counterparts. This ensures that a swift and decisive conclusion is reached by narrative's end. Further reflections on the importance of a child audience is, in how gothic horror conventions have become popularised in marketing and merchandising campaigns. In films such as *The Nightmare Before Christmas*, and *Coraline*, along with other aforementioned examples such as the *Addams Family*. Children have brought about a decisive change in the perception of those conventions, by the gleeful humour of the horror hosts, comic books and magazines which celebrate the monster and horror film as though it were a much beloved celebrity in *Famous Monsters of Filmland*.

Halloween narratives allow their audience a more unique perspective on the horror genre, viewing it in such a way that is a surprising contrast to their previous conceptions. As I have mentioned before, there is a distinct lack of texts and coupled with the lack of discourse it is hoped that this thesis may provide an impetus towards further study of the Halloween narrative in the impending future.

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